

# DISSERTATION

Titel der Dissertation

“The 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow  
and the Soviet Artistic Reaction to the Abstract Art”

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Doktorin der Philosophie (Dr. phil.)

Wien, im Oktober 2007

Studienkennzahl laut Studienblatt: 8606505  
Dissertationsgebiet laut Studienblatt: Kunstgeschichte  
Betreuer: Univ. Doz. Dr. Dieter Bogner



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Twelve years ago I happened upon a dissertation which inspired me to write my own Master's paper which ultimately pointed me in the right direction for this dissertation. My Master's kept the idea going around in my head: "There must have been an artistic reaction to the 1959 Exhibition in Moscow" until I could begin researching.

In this context I would like to thank Liz Wollner-Grandville, who so spontaneously thought of the right person: John Jacobs and his wife, Katja who gave me so much information, enthusiasm, references and people to contact. I would like to thank Jack Masey and Martin Manning for their help in finding the information I needed in the last legs of my work at the State Department on the 1959 Exhibit.

I am thankful to Konrad Oberhuber for reminding me that I am not getting any younger and regret that he was unable to read my dissertation. Walter Krause who was present at my Master's exam I am grateful to, for jumping in and taking over after Konrad Oberhuber passed away, especially because it is a memorable way for me to complete my studies at the Art History Institute here in Vienna.

I would like to thank my "Dr. Vater", Dieter Bogner for Anatoli Golubovski's telephone number. In Moscow Anatoli Golubovski and Irina Alpatova were essential in getting the information I needed to make my point clear. Without Tatjana Shevchenko I would never have found that first Soviet article, Inna Cherkasskaya the first translation and if Tessa Syzsykowitz wasn't in Moscow I may never have made it there.

I would especially like to thank my husband, Gyuri Fodor for his dedication and patience, allowing me the time necessary to finish what I had wanted to start ten years ago. My children Thomas, Sasha and Hannah were especially generous in giving up their time with me in order to let me travel, explore, research and write – thank you! My interest in the history and politics, the spiritual and the complexity of art could very indirectly be traced to my grandfather Hugo Hartnack who had such a strong interest in art history but became a doctor instead and of course my mother, Wilhelmine Hartnack who told me stories about him.

Finally and foremost this dissertation is for me and for my dad, Erich Franz Schimps who made me understand why it is so important to go the length to write a doctoral paper and who took the time to send me every book or article I was unable to get here in Vienna.

## THE AMERICAN SIDE - INTRODUCTION

Links between cultural cold war politics and the success of Abstract Expressionism are by no means coincidental, or unnoticeable.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between Abstract Expressionism and the United States Information Agency has been discussed in art journals since the seventies. It was Max Kozloff and Eva Cockcroft who made the art world aware of the connection of art and the CIA in the form of the USIA. Serge Guilbaut went into detail on it in the 1980's in his book entitled: *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Frances Stonor Saunders celebrated her success in discussing the subject in her acclaimed book on the cultural cold war entitled *Who Paid the Piper?* The role of the CIA and art has clearly been established as well as much of its secret activity during the Cold War.

An exception to these secret dealings was the American National Exhibition which took place in Moscow in the summer of 1959. The *New York Times* as well as many newspapers across the US and in the USSR openly discussed the Exhibition -- it was not a covert exhibition.

The Soviet-American Cultural Agreement signed in 1958 started an official cultural exchange bringing not only Soviet students to the United States but also dancers and musicians and in exchange the US also sent students, Jazz music, and artwork there. As part of the Agreement the two countries agreed to present national exhibitions to each others people. As part of this official cultural exchange the Soviets would erect a mini-Moscow at the Coliseum exhibit hall in New York City and the American government would create a simulated "Main Street USA" in the Soviet capital city.<sup>2</sup>

The United States and in this case the United States Information Agency (USIA) was

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Cockcroft. "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War". *Artforum* 12.(June 1974):39-41.

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay Pollock. *The Girl and the Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and the making of the Modern Art Market*. New York: Public Affairs. 2006. P. 343.

determined to show the average Russian what life was like for his or her American counterpart. Research had shown that most Russian's were more interested in what American's wore, how they lived, what they ate rather than in the newest technological advances.<sup>3</sup> The government therefore decided that top designs, photographs, architecture and art were to be the highlights of this Exhibition. The time was ripe for such an exchange. Nikita Khrushchev had already opened the gates to the Soviet Union. The Pablo Picasso exhibit had taken the young Soviet citizens into the spheres of modernity. Discussions on modern art, literature and music and their development were essential for the Soviets and part of their day to day routine. With the exhibit of modern Western art at the Pusckin Museum in Moscow, for example, discussions were held after hours directly in front of the art work displayed. The American magazine *America*, published in Russian for a young Soviet audience, had already found a broad interest and Jazz music had entered the country via radio broadcasts.<sup>4</sup> With the Khrushchev *thaw* anyone who could come to Moscow from July 25 to the end of September 1959 was witness not only to America's most modern appliances, make-up, soft drinks, and books but also the development of art within the United States.

And come they did. An average of about 20,000 people came to the American National Exhibit each and every day. Not only to see the seven screen film "Glimpses of the USA" designed by Charles and Ray Eames or Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome which housed several exhibitions but also Edward Steichen's "Family of Man" photo exhibit or exhibits from Disney and IBM, but also to see the artwork (sculptures and paintings) displayed.

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<sup>3</sup> Walter L Hixson. Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War 1945-1961. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1997. P.161-2 . George Allen who was charged with overall responsibility for the national exhibition noted that 'the interest of the Russian people in things American – in anything foreign, but particularly in things American.'

<sup>4</sup> Jazz music was not new to the Soviet Union. It had been popular there in the 1920's and 30's, but was being rediscovered much in the same way as non-objective art within the country.

The American art exhibition which was part of the American National Exhibition consisted of artwork selected by a committee appointed by the U.S. government. This group of experts chose sixty-seven paintings and sculptures to represent Realism, Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in America. The pieces chosen were as a whole to represent the tolerance and diversity within the American democracy. The Exhibition was not a clandestine CIA organized show, as some of the goings on in Paris, Berlin, Italy and Austria at the time. The United States wanted to make a clear statement to the Soviet public: America stood for democracy and tolerance, for diversity and advancement, for freedom and the right to create. It was not necessarily the case within the United States at the time – most of America was not interested in abstract art, but for the “cultural mandarins” and the CIA in particular, Abstract Expressionist art “spoke to a specifically anti-Communist ideology, the ideology of freedom, of free enterprise. Non figurative and politically silent, it was the very antithesis to socialist realism”<sup>5</sup> and this complied with the image America had chosen to promote.

The American National Exhibition was placed on the Sokolniki grounds, a fifteen minute metro ride from the Kremlin, in the midst of Moscow. The organizers had anticipated a total of approximately 250,000 visitors over the two month period. As it turned out over two and a half million people came mostly from Moscow but also from as far away as the Ukraine, the Baltic regions and other outlying Soviet republics.

Overwhelmed by the number of visitors each and every day, the curator of the art section enhanced the viewing with guided tours, explanatory tapes and a fully-illustrated exhibition catalogue – all in Russian. Upon leaving the show the visitors could write down their comments in a guest book. Some of the comments specifically

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders. Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War. London: Granta Books. 1999. P.254

made reference to the contemporary art work displayed. There were those shocked by the new style in art and others who made more positive comments about the show.

The Soviet press and Vladimir Kemenov in particular wrote a one page article tearing the exhibition to pieces calling it “fruitless”, setting abstract art equal to the destruction of art and artists in general, and criticizing especially the Abstract Expressionists work. Parts of his article were reprinted in the *New York Times* shortly after it had appeared in Moscow’s *Sovietskaya Kultura*. Ironically the Soviet official view especially of the Abstract Expressionist art on display strengthened its standing within the United States.

The questions that seem eminent are whether this exhibition had any influence on the artists in the USSR at the time. What was going on in the art scene within the Soviet Union up until then and did anything actually change? If so, how? Was Socialist Realism really the only form of art accepted by the government? How did art develop and who were its proponents? What outer influences caught the artists’ attention? Was this particular exhibition important at all and if so for whom - the Soviets or the Americans or both?

This dissertation should answer these questions as well as give some background information on the American and Soviet sides, in order to fully understand what happened in 1959. It should give a better understanding of how vital outside influences are to artists – to help them develop their own style and in so doing represent not only their country but also a generation.

According to interviews held, several Soviet artists who attended the show recalled that the Exhibition changed the way they viewed art – their own creations as well as the new advances around the world. In the years that followed Soviet artists became more experimental and worked together to free themselves from the strict official style of art which they were taught at art school. They worked at home and displayed

their artwork primarily in private flats. They met at coffee houses and discussed new trends in art; they looked at magazines in order to further orientate themselves on the international scene and despite all odds, painted and sculpted.

The Soviet artists response to the show culminated in an exhibition shown in the exhibition hall adjacent to the Kremlin, the Manezh in 1962 which was denounced by Khrushchev and finally forced certain artists even further into the underground – the artist work to be shown privately and bought privately. These shows were shut down as well, one to two hours after their opening by the secret police. Non-realist art continued to be viewed as a “bourgeois deviation”. Despite the ban on contemporary non-figurative art in the Soviet Union, the artists were promoted by their supporters. Their artwork should be viewed as a continuation of the Russian tradition in non-objective art of such artists as Malevich or Kandinsky. And it was Picasso, Leger and especially Abstract Expressionism that brought the artistic impetus to continue in a style that had ultimately been initiated by Russian artists.

It will become apparent why The American National Exhibition was so vital to the Soviet artists at the time. There were many covert activities initiated by the CIA but through the cultural exchange agreement this monumental Exhibition was covered in newspapers and in television. The secret missions of the CIA have been discussed at length by other authors. In this very open exchange with the United States the Soviet Union did not have an unsubstantial role in allowing the influences to pull Soviets into believing what America could be. In order to better understand America’s role as well as the Soviet’s role in creating abstract Soviet art, it is necessary to divide this paper into two major sections: the American and the Soviet.

It will be necessary to describe briefly specific spiritual movements within the United States in order to establish their importance for the abstract art and its development within the United States. Then certain aspects of the artist’s development as well as

the art market in America will be discussed. These are an essential aspect of the artists' promotion and explain in part why they were actually chosen for the Exhibition. The political climate of that era within America must also be described in order to understand the mood, the conditions and the confines within which Abstract Expressionism became such a powerful movement in art. Essential here is how abstract art was used as a political weapon during the Cold War. Then the American National Exhibition will be presented and what was exhibited, where and how with an emphasis on the art work displayed. With this a picture of the political and cultural aspects of United States during that period of the Cold War will be created.

Thereafter, the second section will be introduced. The political situation within the Soviet Union must firstly be described in order to comprehend the environment in which the artists there lived and worked. It is also important to establish the difference between what was happening in the art scene of the United States and the Soviet Union at the time. What follow will be the background of Russian art, its development in becoming Soviet art as well as when the Exhibition came to Moscow. The Soviet response to the American National show will be laid out and how specifically Soviet artists continued their work, who supported them and for which reasons. Finally the impact of the American National Exhibition will be discussed and how the artists continued with their work, how the Supreme Soviet reacted and what this meant for the Soviet art world.

In writing this thesis I was able to expand on my Master's paper which touched upon the 1959 exhibition. I was able to bring together my personal interest in the Soviet-American connection in art, history and politics. In researching this paper, I was not only confronted with the complexities of modern art as such, but also with its relationship to the powerful and the government. As is common knowledge, art does not pop out of the wood-work, but has a background, a reason, a purpose: in the case

of the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, I will show that American Abstract Expressionism fulfilled a specific purpose. In the case of Soviet artists it actually aided them in finding their abstract roots, reaching back and finally creating new Soviet art which went on to inspire new forms and functions.

It is not my intention to celebrate “the triumph of American painting”<sup>6</sup> but rather to show the inherent need for the new and the different. To demonstrate that outside influences are necessary in order to expand on what is already there. To show that against all odds the Soviet artists wanted to be influenced, wanted to see what was “out there” and wanted to show the world that they were part of an international trend.

It is also my intention to show that Soviet art today has its own inherently Russian background, art that is not necessarily widely known, because the collectors are primarily non-Soviets and spread all over the world. Many of the artists who lived and worked in the Soviet Union emigrated as soon as they possibly could, creating a gap in the historical development of art within the Soviet Union. Interestingly enough, the United States has the largest private collection of Soviet non-conformist art dating back to the late 1950’s and up to the 1990’s.

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to fill the gap in the historical development of Soviet art, but rather to demonstrate that Russian art continued its development from the early part of the twentieth century and that the American National Exhibition gave artists otherwise segregated from contemporary art visual impetus to continue in their own style.

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<sup>6</sup> Irving Sandler. The Triumph of American Painting. New York: Praeger. 1970.



CHAPTER 1A  
SPIRITUAL TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON U.S. ART

Russia and America are the only two nations....with a sense of manifest destiny and self-identifications as “chosen people”.<sup>7</sup>

Several trends, which took place in the United States starting as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, had an influence on the artwork of the Abstract Expressionists. These are America’s Manifest Destiny, Transcendentalism and finally the influences of Theosophy. Although the first two are American phenomena of the nineteenth century, they continued to play a role in the mindset of American society. Manifest Destiny and Transcendentalism are part of the high school curriculum taught to every schoolchild in the U.S. to this day. Theosophy is a more universal spiritual movement which had an impact not only on Americans but also on Europeans and on Russians. The leader in theosophical circles stemmed from Russia. Helena Blavatsky not only had an influence on Russian art but especially influenced Vasilii Kandinsky, who in turn had a strong influence on the young American artists who saw his work displayed in New York.<sup>8</sup>

Reaching back a century from when the Abstract Expressionist art went to Moscow in the form of the American National Exhibition and looking at the basis of certain trends, ideas and philosophies seems perhaps superfluous in establishing the concept that Soviet artists were influenced by American art work yet when looking at the introductory quote from Soviet born designer Vladimir Paperny it becomes viable that these had not only an influence on the American art scene of the mid-twentieth century but that they should be considered in fully understanding the 1959 American National Exhibition.

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<sup>7</sup> “Cold War Hot Culture”. Introductory words to Festival in Las Vegas in 2001 to commemorate the 1959 Exhibition in Moscow.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Hughes. *Shock of the New*. New York. 1990. P. 310-311. It was Solomon Guggenheim’s assistant, Baroness Hilla Rebay who was a rather eccentric European of Theosophical persuasion who bought the Kandinsky’s for the Guggenheim Collection and which were there for artists to see – and they had quite an impact on Jackson Pollock for example.

Much like in the Soviet Union which will be discussed later, America seemed to be a “repository of sublime landscape effects” from the forests to the expanses of its plains. The author and proponent of Transcendentalism, Walt Whitman described: “that vast Something, stretching out on its own unbounded scale, unconfined, which there is in these prairies, combining the real and the ideal, and beautiful as dreams.”<sup>9</sup> In his book, *Shock of the New* Robert Hughes brought together the landscapes which as depicted on canvas were “showplaces of Romantic American consciousness”. The countryside and the mountains portrayed the vastness, the depth and ultimately the greatness of the untouched America. Artists like Albert Bierstadt, Frederich Church or Thomas Moran concentrated on the light in the landscape: its most spiritual aspect. In these depictions, there are no cities, no animals, no action of any sort, no specific weather effects: nothing moves or is moved. There are no figures (except an occasional tiny onlooker) and the painters did not paint an abstraction, they were not novel in their style but they created a state of contemplation through the expanse depicted.<sup>10</sup>

In writing, Transcendentalism had three great emissaries: Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In America of the nineteenth century the woods, rivers, oceans and plains made up most of the country. The vastness of this nature not only seemed overwhelming, it was stronger than any new American trying to conquer it. Yet it was also in nature that one could find the truth in life, the meaning of oneself and become one with God. In his experiment, put into a book and entitled *Walden*, Thoreau conveyed the joys of two years spent in the woods by

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, Robert. *Shock of the New*. P. 311. – direct quote from Walt Whitman.

<sup>10</sup> This also important, because these types of works were included in the 1959 Exhibition in the last minute in order to balance the abstract art exhibited by Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Walden Pond.<sup>11</sup> Along similar lines, Ralph Waldo Emerson described the American ideal of “Nature”:

In the woods, is perpetual youth. With these plantations of God, a decorum and sancticity reign, a perennial festival is dressed...In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, --no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.<sup>12</sup>

The simplicity and tranquility of nature was juxtaposed to the rage of the civil war, to the new buildings being built with iron grid and to the industrial revolution.

Transcendentalism was in effect a new faith, formed within the confines of a country looking not to Europe but within itself for a stronghold.

In the early part of the twentieth century and to this day schoolbooks are filled with these very American ideas, the art dealer Alfred Stieglitz, for example, was formed in the mould of American Transcendentalism, Georgia O’Keeffe repeated transcendentalist ideas in her artwork.<sup>13</sup> (fig. 1) Jackson Pollock was a great worshiper of Walt Whitman’s ideas and visual depiction of the vastness of the land. For these artists Nature itself was enough. The complexity behind each work would parallel that of the philosophy of Transcendentalism, which was a mixture of puritanism, deism, naturalism, and platonic philosophy of the Romantic Movement. The transcendentalists believed in the superiority of intuitive to sensory knowledge. Transcendentalism was the common interest of painters who, with Kandinsky formed

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<sup>11</sup> Colliers. Volume 22, Page 292. “The clarity and power of the writing are almost unmatched...It influenced the work of such divers writers as Tolstoy, W.B. Yeats and Ernest Hemingway. *Walden* is one of the most widely read American classics.”

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, Robert. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*. New York: 1997. p.146.

<sup>13</sup> Hughes. *Shock of the New*. P. 313: “...her concern for images of light-filled , unbounded space, virtually abstract but still recognizable (in the division of sky and earth) and landscape, was as pantheistic as any of Kandinsky’s *Improvisations*.”

the Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* in 1910 and it was a part of the Bauhaus thought and practice.<sup>14</sup>

This was a welcome concept for many artists in the forties and fifties of the twentieth century when artists looked within themselves because the horrors of the II. World War “there was no rival to the testimony of the photograph”.<sup>15</sup> Willem DeKooning distorted the human body but Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still turned away from figurative depictions. They used large fields of color to convey their inner message. Rothko felt: “It was with the utmost reluctance that I found it (the figure) did not meet my needs” and “Whoever used it mutilated it”—referring to the horrors he had heard about and seen and which his fellow human beings had suffered during the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> Instead Mark Rothko and the other artists working at the time searched within themselves and their paintings mimicked the contemplative mood found in the landscape paintings of the mid nineteenth century.

Manifest Destiny was born in the same period as transcendentalism. In his description of American art, Robert Hughes maintained that Manifest Destiny played a role in the depiction of the landscape, which was mostly shown as stress-free and that “its God is an American God whose gospel is Manifest Destiny. It is pious and full of uplift”.<sup>17</sup>

The term Manifest Destiny was coined by the young journalist John L. O’Sullivan in his newspaper commentary on the annexation of Texas in 1845. The idea was brought before Congress by the young journalist William Gilpin. It was defined as American’s inherent right to “move west” – to explore and usurp territories which were new and unknown. To go where no one had before and thereby expand the borders of the

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Hughes. *Shock of the New*. P.304. Here Hughes goes into detail as to how Transcendentalism effected the artists in Germany at the time.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* P. 298.

<sup>16</sup> James E Breslin. *Rothko: A Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1993. P.171

<sup>17</sup> Robert Hughes *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1997. p. 140-1.

United States.<sup>18</sup> Manifest Destiny was by no means just a whim or simple idea. It was the belief that the westward colonization of America was not only a right but truly a sacred duty. It was manifest, obvious beyond all argument that the American empire must expand beyond the Mississippi and not stop until it reached the Pacific.

American landscape painting reflected this urge to move west, “Westward Ho!” by Emmanuel Leutze, which was sent to Moscow by President Eisenhower, in an attempt to neutralize the abstract artwork, is such an example. (fig. 2) Although Robert Hughes termed it a “catchphrase” in his book entitled *American Visions*, it was widely rejected as a philosophy when first defined.<sup>19</sup>

Yet without a doubt, every schoolchild from Cody, Wyoming to New York City was confronted with this wholly American identity which found its way into schoolbooks across the country. As emphatic as it was depicted in Frederic Remington’s paintings, it was carried over into the Western movies of Hollywood. It was the ideological basis for the annexation of Texas and the occupation of Oregon as well as taking California. A century later it would be the basis of America’s first step on the moon as well as for its justification for infiltrating the Soviet Union with American Jazz, new technologies, and abstract modern art.

The final focus of identification that filled American souls from the turn of the century to this day was Theosophy. A spiritual revolution moved from Russia through Europe and into the United States – taking the same path many emigrants took during the late nineteenth century. The prophet of Theosophy, Helene Blavatsky believed that matter was the enemy of spiritual enlightenment. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was an upsurge in popular publications on Eastern

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<sup>18</sup> This was only relevant for white males of European heritage.

<sup>19</sup> It was more an idea put into a phrase that was shamelessly used to set forth American expansionism especially used in newspapers – perhaps it was a “catchphrase” for journalists at the time and politicians who picked it up to promote westward expansionism.

mysticism. Between 1883 and 1903 eight editions of “Esoteric Buddhism” and its theosophical interpretation were printed.

In 1875, Helena P. Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in New York City which rather quickly reoriented itself eastward. The Theosophical Society moved its headquarters from New York to India in 1879. From the mid-1880’s onwards, the society attained notable popularity in England, America, Europe as well as Russia. Blavatsky started with spiritualism then turned toward the cabala, hermeticism, and European occultism – in the end Indian religions became of increasing importance to the Society.<sup>20</sup> Important here is the influence this movement had on the Russian artist, Vassili Kandinsky, who in turn had a strong influence on the work of the abstract artists working in the United States in the twentieth century.

In his essay “Esoteric Culture and Russian Society” John E. Bowlt states that the primary reason why Blavatsky and Steiner were so highly reared in Russia was that “the Symbolists had been repeating similar things for several years” and that there was an “occult vogue in Saint Petersburg salons”.<sup>21</sup> Vassili Kandinsky read the German translations of Leadbeater’s texts and was familiar with Blavatsky’s ideas.<sup>22</sup> The concept of nirvana was of great importance to him and was reflected in his writings as well as in those of Malevich. Nothingness or the zero of forms represented energy. Liubov Popova, for example regarded painterly forms as vehicles of energy in different degrees.<sup>23</sup> One of the central concerns of the modernist artists in Russia was the exploration of non-objective painting, an exploration that found its most elegant conclusions in the improvisations of Vassili Kandinsky, the Suprematism of Ivan

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<sup>20</sup> The German Rudolf Steiner and the English Theosophists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater were leaders of the movement in their countries.

<sup>21</sup> Maurice Tuchmann, The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1980-1985. Los Angeles: Abbeville Press. 1986. P.173.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 222. For the Theosophist Blavatsky and Steiner, developments in nineteenth-century science, particularly atom theory, supported the dematerialization of matter and interpretations ranging from spirit as “finer matter” to matter as “condensed spirit”.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P. 176.

Kliun and Kazimir Malevich, the architectonic paintings of Liubov Popova or the Constructivist paintings of Aleksandr Rodchenko.<sup>24</sup> Of all these artists it was only Kandinsky who kept a consistent interest in the psychic phenomena and adhered to the fact that both scientists and occultists were needed in the investigation of the creative process.

Kandinsky was an especially important new impulse for the young abstract artists in the United States a half a century later. Through her acquisitions for Solomon Guggenheim, Hilla Rebay, who was also an active Theosophist created direct access to Kandinsky's art in New York City (see fig. 3). Many of the Abstract Expressionists were familiar with Kandinsky's spiritual ideas, as conveyed not only through his writings but also clearly reflected in his paintings.<sup>25</sup> The American artists, in turn, looked for their own spiritual background – finding it most often in the primitive (fig. 4). Two Jungian principles which were also widely known in the late thirties and early forties and which seemed to underline the spiritual were: that myths are archetypal forms that codify basic human experiences and that conscious and unconscious are interfused.<sup>26</sup> The unconscious, the spiritual, the higher, nirvana were often what artists like Jackson Pollock or Mark Rothko were moving towards in their paintings.

The concept of an inherent right to move into undiscovered territories, of nature being reflected God and God being in everything from the smallest insect to the tallest tree, and the spiritual being reflected in colors and forms were to change the way artists in the United States worked. They moved away from the form to the formless in an attempt to depict an emotion or elemental feeling or the indescribable unconscious.

Each individual artist did this in his or her own way, with his or her own personal

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<sup>24</sup> Camilla Grey. The Russian Experiment in Art. London: Thames & Hudson. 1962. P.158ff.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Harten. iqueiros/Pollock Pollock/Siqueiros. Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. 1995. P271: In 1928 Pollocks High School Teacher made him aware of the Theosophical teachings. He was very impressed by these ideas. At this time he met Philip Guston. Became aware of Diego Riveras work and took part in Communist meetings.

<sup>26</sup> Carl Gustav Jung. The Integration of Personality. New York: Farar & Rhinehart, 1939. P.53 and 91.

definition. Viewed as a collective their art was to demonstrate to other artists, and this meant in each and every exhibition shown throughout Europe in the late 1950's, as well as the Moscow Exhibit in 1959, that it was possible to approach art from a different perspective. The rest was up to the interpretation of the individual.

As *Time* magazine reported on one European exhibition, abstract expressionism left no doubt:

that in the US an artist is free to pursue his personal vision and interpretation. The hope of the US show is that this unique message of freedom will make its way through the bewilderment.<sup>27</sup>

Judith Barter maintained that abstraction took on whatever meaning its viewers intended. It was possible to be admired for this – there were not just individuals who appreciated this kind of artwork but a government that was to become an avid supporter of it.

It is essential to have looked at these past ideas in order to counter what Emily Genauer reported in 1958 and what many individuals wrongly believe to this day, that: “the United States is thought of as a country without a past”.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Americans at Brussels: Soft Sell, Range and Controversy” *Time*, June 16, 1958. P75.

<sup>28</sup> Emily Genauer. „Will Advanced Art Serve U.S. Abroad?“ *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*. March 23, 1958. P.14.

## CHAPTER I B ABSTRACT ART, PATRONS AND ADVANCEMENT

Modern art is here and it is here to stay. Today, practically all museums, collectors, critics, dealers, and the general public accept modern art as a characteristic manifestation of our time just as they accept all other modern forms of our daily existence, transportation, sound transmission, heating, housing, plumbing, industry and the New Deal... The First Municipal Art Exhibition was planned primarily to remove all class labels, to bring all American contemporary art under one roof. There are, in my estimation, only two kinds of art, good art and bad art.<sup>29</sup>

Abstract Expressionism took shape during the Depression and came closest to an avant-garde nucleus between the end of the Second World War and the early fifties. Phillip Guston and Jackson Pollock who knew each other from High School in Los Angeles, grew up at a time when the Ku Klux Klan membership had reached over five million, blacks had no or very few rights and over half the population was unemployed. James Brooks spoke of the “comradeship of poverty” felt by his generation, and it was true that a shared sense of exclusion muted individual differences and created a very loose social cohesion.<sup>30</sup>

In the early years, the social relationships among the artists took various, shifting forms, some of them organized and professional (The Ten; the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors), some of them professional but not organized (the Rothko/Gottlieb myth project), some of them professional and institutional (the painters associated with a particular gallery like Art of This Century or Betty Parsons or Edith Halpert), some of them spontaneous and social (the group around Milton Avery; the “uptown “ and “downtown” groups). But these clusters were not necessarily fluid; they contained personal jealousies and aesthetic differences, and individual friendships (Newman and Pollock; Ossorio and Pollock) which sometimes cut across fluctuating borders. Both the loose alliances and some of the strong

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<sup>29</sup> Lindsay Pollock. The Girl with the Gallery. New York: Public Affairs. P. 183.

<sup>30</sup> James E. Breslin. Mark Rothko: A Biography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1993. P.244

friendships among these artists first began to crack in the early 50's, well before any of the painters reached financial success, and well before any of them, except Jackson Pollock, had attained a significant public reputation.<sup>31</sup>

The development of these individual artists has been discussed in literally thousands of books, articles and papers. Here the development of the United States art market is seen as a relevant factor in creating Abstract Expressionism as an inherently American art form.

It was during the depression years in the 1930's and 1940's that American artworks generally sold at already established galleries for around \$100 a piece. *Time* magazine reported on an exhibit in 1934 where Bernard Karfiol, Charles Sheeler, Peggy Bacon, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Marquerite Zorach, Niles Spencer and others were selling at low prices. The "American artists had to rely on the American public" at this time.

"Foreign markets" were "closed to him".<sup>32</sup> Great supporters of the young artists in New York were Solomon Guggenheim with his curator Baroness Hilla Rebay, Peggy Guggenheim when she came to the United States, Nelson D. Rockefeller and his mother Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.<sup>33</sup> Yet the support was limited. The art work did not reach the layman – the general public, although this was one gallerists ultimate goal. Edith Halpert worked on getting her artists shown across the United States in smaller towns and not only on the East and West coasts, but also in the Mid-Western part of the country.

In New York, Alfred Barr Jr., Director of the Museum of Modern Art wanted the museum, which did not have a permanent collection at the time, to start collecting and so he initiated two exhibitions from which artworks should then be purchased. From

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<sup>31</sup> Breslin. p. 345.

<sup>32</sup> Pollock, P. 192. For the first time in its history, Seligmann Gallery had a contemporary US Show priced from \$10-\$250; Valentine Gallery had works from \$50-\$75, Ferargil Galleries sold works by unrecognized painter from between \$5-50 dollars and the Downtown Gallery sold works at \$100.

<sup>33</sup> Georgia O'Keefe and others were commissioned to decorate the toilets.

his Amsterdam-Berlin-Moscow trip in 1927 and 1929 as well as his trips to Paris, Barr had an exceptional knowledge of what should be considered modern. After seeing so much contemporary art in Europe he posed the question “Will any of it come into the American museums?”<sup>34</sup> With this statement his fear is expressed that the museum would turn into a gallery if it did not work on creating its own collection.<sup>35</sup> In the spring of 1936 Alfred Barr Jr. opened the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

He wrote on abstract art and politics in the exhibition catalogue. Within its pages, Barr made the connection between Futurism and Fascism, between Surrealism and Communism. He reminded the reader that for the Nazi regime, “abstract art” was ‘Kunstbolschevismus’<sup>36</sup> and that nine of the artist in the exhibition represented (Kandinsky for example) had already left Germany. He concluded: “this essay and this exhibition could well be dedicated to these painters of squares and circles, as well as to the architects influenced by them, who had to suffer from the philistines in power.”<sup>37</sup>

Later that same year, Barr showed Fantastic, Surrealist and Dada works at the MOMA. Artists such as DeChirico, Tanguy, Ernst, Picasso, Duchamp, Klee, Kandinsky, and Chagall were exhibited. The MOMA purchased three reliefs by Jean Arp, a canvas by Giorgio de Chirico and several works by Max Ernst, also works from the late twenties by Miro and Tanguy.<sup>38</sup>

In 1939 the MOMA opened in a new building with the exhibition: “Art in Our Time”. For this exhibition Alfred Barr put together “all living arts” of our time “regardless of

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<sup>34</sup> Alfred H. Barr Jr., „Dutch Letter“, *The Arts*, January 1929.

<sup>35</sup> Joan Marter. *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 2007. P. 207:He made a diagram for his idea of what the private collection should contain.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Louis Ferrier, Editor. *Art of our Century: The Chronicle of Western Art 1900 to the Present*. New York: Prentice Hall Press. 1988. P.348.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. He was of course referring to the Russian artists who worked in Germany.

<sup>38</sup> The funds for these works came from Mrs. Rockefeller

style”.<sup>39</sup> He was able to bring together many European artists who had already left Europe.<sup>40</sup> It was then that Barr, in the catalogue for the exhibition called Kandinsky “the first and most important of the abstract Expressionists.”<sup>41</sup> Later this statement by the utmost authority on modern art within the United States would be put into a historical context. Only two decades later Abstract Expressionism would be hailed as an American phenomenon.

Just a few years after Barr set out to create a permanent collection for the Museum, the basis for its permanent collection already existed. With the help of Mrs. Lillie Bliss, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller and Mrs. Simon Guggenheim and their generous donations to the purchasing fund of the museum, the collection included among others works by Matisse, Kandinsky, Henri Rousseau – classic modern European art.<sup>42</sup> The American artists needed to look elsewhere for collectors as there was no one who spent enough money on their work to help any of them to get through the year. In the late 1930’s, museums across the country as well as affluent collectors were more interested in the modern and contemporary art created in Europe, specifically Paris.<sup>43</sup> The owners of corporations were perhaps more open-minded and innovative than museums in the United States and in the 1930’s used visual arts to promote consumption (see fig. 5 and 7). Few actually understood the wider impact that art patronage could have but still supported the arts. As some degree of prosperity returned to the United States in the late 30’s, large corporations emerged as patrons of

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<sup>39</sup> Ferrier. p. 380. . These facts are important for establishing the connection between Alfred Barr Jr., the MoMA, the CIA, the Rockefellers and Abstract Expressionism. See Stonor Saunders chapter entitled “Yanqui Doodles” for more detailed information.

<sup>40</sup> Hitler’s rise to power in 1933; The Bauhaus closed; In 1937 was the Entartete Kunst show in Munich; the signing of the German-Soviet pact in 1939 had all lead to the exodus.

<sup>41</sup> Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Art in Our Time*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1934. n.p.

<sup>42</sup> That year the museum bought Pablo Picasso’s *Les demoiselles d’Avignon* for \$28,000

<sup>43</sup> Harten. P.275: In 1940 the members of the American Abstract Artists Group which was founded in 1936 blocked the entrance to the MoMA with the question „How modern is the Museum of Modern Art?“ – protests were because American abstract art was essentially still ignored by the Museum. P.275.

visual arts.<sup>44</sup> This patronage was also connected to the protection of individualism in the face of totalitarianism, artistic expression associated with such freedom and the role of American business as the pillar of a democratic society.<sup>45</sup> In his essay on “Freedom and Culture”, John Dewey wrote:

It has not been customary to include the arts, the fine arts, as an important part of the social conditions that bear upon democratic institutions and personal freedom. . . . Even those who call themselves good democrats are often content to look upon the fruits of these arts as adornments of culture rather than as things whose enjoyment all should partake, if democracy is to be a reality. The state of things in totalitarian countries may induce us to revise this opinion. For it proves that no matter what may be the case with the impulses and powers that lead the creative artist to do his work, works of art once brought into existence are the most compelling of the means of communication by which emotions and opinions are formed. . . . (and) all have been brought under regulation as part of the propaganda agencies by which dictatorship is kept in power without being regarded by the masses as oppressive. . . . Emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public opinion than information and reason.<sup>46</sup>

The artist Stuart Davis who was known to express his ideas openly, believed that the future oriented values of modernism and consumption should lead to the formation of a natural partnership between commerce and the aesthetic avant-garde.<sup>47</sup> Davis was already working in an abstract style when nationalistic, regionalist art had been severely criticized for its glorification of the “volk” element and its parallels to fascist propaganda (see fig. 6). As Hitler spoke out against non-figurative art and the Nazi threat affected artists throughout Europe, regionalism in the United States was being challenged by internationalist views. What that meant was that because Hitler was for figurative art it was set equal to fascism, thereby automatically making abstract or non-figurative art acceptable or necessary. With the clear distinction that modern

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<sup>44</sup> Gretchen Simms. *masters* p. 21ff.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Barter. *The New Medici: The Rise of Corporate Collecting and the uses of Contemporary Art, 1925-1970.* Dissertation 1991. P.62.

<sup>46</sup> John Dewey. *Freedom and Culture.* New York: Putnam’s Sons. 1939. P.9-10.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Davis was an ardent believer that modernist art was the cultural and visual language of contemporary capitalist democracy. He found business to be cosmopolitan and international when pursuing commercial purposes, but reluctant and insecure when seeking true cultural creativity because of the commercial insistence that art be utilitarian. See Stuart Davis in Harper’s: “What About Modern Art and Democracy?”. December 1943, P16.

avant-garde art was unacceptable to the fascist dictator, businessmen such as Henry Luce, Walter Paepke, Thomas Watson and artists such as Stuart Davis or Ben Shahn came to realize that the United States would have to engage in world conflict.<sup>48</sup> With the fall of Paris in June 1940 the destruction of personal freedom, democratic society and cultural creativity had been felled.<sup>49</sup> The leftist art-critic Harold Rosenberg made the public aware that internationalist, modernist art – Cubism, Surrealism, Dadaism – as well as concepts of democracy and freedom were gravely imperiled. He wrote all of this in the magazine which had been created upon Trotskyite lines, and related the information to people with leftist inclinations – this was directly opposed to what the readers were generally used to reading. In Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* the fall of Paris was directly linked to the role New York inherited in shaping modernist art and the center of the art world shifting from Paris to New York.

Henry Luce, the publisher of *Life*, *Time* and *Fortune* magazines was quite aware of America's new role and in 1941 he exclaimed to the world that the rest of the twentieth century would be "The American Century".<sup>50</sup> He argued for full involvement in the war to save democracy and freedom but above all to assure American global hegemony afterward. He aligned American commercial interests with the concepts of freedom, democracy, and capitalism. He also gave the American masses a centre-page spread of Jackson Pollock in the August 1949 issue of *Life*.<sup>51</sup>

Abstract painters such as Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Willem de Kooning, or Arshile Gorky were urban, first or second generation immigrants,

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<sup>48</sup> Politicians led by President Roosevelt also understood this idea.

<sup>49</sup> Harold Rosenberg. „On the Fall of Paris“, *Partisan Review*, December 1940. P. 441.

<sup>50</sup> Henry R. Luce, „The American Century“, *Life*. February 1941, pp. 61-65.

<sup>51</sup> Stonor Saunder. P.266-7. She maintains that it was Alfred Barr who persuaded Henry Luce to change his editorial policy toward the new art, telling him in a letter that it should be especially protected, not criticized as in the Soviet Union, because this, "after all, was 'artistic free enterprise'". Henry Luce was also a MoMA trustee.

intellectually aware and informed about international politics. Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb decided it was time to leave the leftist oriented Artists' Congress and they founded the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors which opposed Stalinism. In the first manifesto of the group, they condemned Communism and Fascism equally and pronounced them dangerous threats to personal freedom.<sup>52</sup> In 1942 the links between modernism, democracy and capitalism were openly debated by contemporary artists.

Abstract Expressionists rejected rationalism and materialism and emphasized the act of creation and ironically, this was precisely what appealed to big business in America. The progressive corporate managers, who were interested in art as ideology, increasingly saw modernism in general and Abstract Expressionism in particular as the aesthetic counterpart of the unfettered individualism which was undeniably a part of the American value system.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, conservative businessmen like Henry Luce or Walter Paepcke, who had opposed the New Deal, were hostile towards Socialist ideas and became interested in this very modern American art.

Container Corporation of America used works by Willem de Kooning or Ben Shahn to sell their products as early as 1944 (see fig. 7). By 1946 the artwork of artists such as Stuart Davis, Morris Graves, Karl Knats, Jacob Lawrence, Mark Toby<sup>54</sup> and others were used to make an important cultural statement. Very few captions were used and the semi-representational and geometrically abstract pieces were viewed as cultural symbols. In terms of art it was big businesses throughout the United States that first started collecting Abstract Expressionist works. Besides using them for advertising, they bought the artwork and hung them in their factories before they came into their executive offices (fig. 8). Container Corporation of America, Chase Manhattan Bank

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<sup>52</sup> „Statement of Principles“: Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. 1940

<sup>53</sup> Barter, P.69

<sup>54</sup> All artists which would be shown in the American National exhibition in 1959 in Moscow.

and Neiman Marcus, American Motors, or Corning Glass were examples.<sup>55</sup>

Magazines such as *Business Week* or *Fortune* reinforced the links between abstract art and the business establishment in such articles as “For Prestige Sake” or “Bikini” (see fig. 9). The articles were aimed at elite management and the journalists on the subject aligned abstraction with a social and intellectual superiority.

With the increased affluence in America, the number of art auction sales tripled between 1939 and 1945, while private art sales tripled in one year, from 1945 to 1946. New York art galleries increased from a mere forty at the beginning of the Second World War to 150 by 1946.<sup>56</sup> This was due in part to the number of artists who had fled Europe and had come to America. The United States welcomed them with open arms. Artists like André Breton, Andre Masson, Max Ernst, Lipchitz, Tchelitchev, Ozenfant and Matta Echaurren came to New York (fig. 10).

In 1942 Peggy Guggenheim, who had also fled Europe due to the war, opened her Art of this Century gallery where she not only showed Kandinsky, Miro, Klee, Arp and Masson but also searched out young talents like Rothko, Gottlieb, Motherwell, Baziotes, and Hoffman. In 1944, the MOMA showed “Twelve Contemporary Painters” including several canvases by Jackson Pollock. By the time Peggy Guggenheim closed her doors in 1947 there were the young dealers Betty Parsons, Charles Egan and Samuel Kootz to take her place and such established dealers as Edith Halpert continued showing the abstract artists she had been representing since they started working as well as the work of young black artists.<sup>57</sup>

A change had occurred over the years and especially during the war which showed that collectors of art were becoming more interested in American art and especially abstract American art. Studies were conducted in 1944 and 1945 to show what

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<sup>55</sup>Simms. Masters paper. p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Pollock. P. 344-345. Of the artists she represented at one time or another over half of them made it to the American National Exhibition in 1959, including the young black artist Jacob Lawrence.

collectors were buying and who exactly was collecting. The collectors proved to be under forty-five, middle class and 62% of them were businessmen. They preferred art that imparted a feeling of “expressive”, “dynamic motion”, art that was progressive and up-to-date.<sup>58</sup> According to one public opinion expert, the war production effort had transformed business into “a democratic institution” much like the free press, free churches, free education and free radio. Elmo Roper discovered that the public looked to business for examples of citizenship, patriotism, and even welfare and philanthropy.<sup>59</sup> Abstraction seemed politically safe. It was said to be about form, color and shape. It did not reflect poverty, war, social injustice or rural values. The term abstract expressionism was first brought in connection with the New York School by Robert Coates in the *New Yorker* when he wrote about an exhibition with Hans Hofmann: he is “one of the most uncompromising representatives of what some people call the spatter-and-daub school and I, more politely have christened abstract Expressionism”.<sup>60</sup> The term “abstract expressionism” was first used in May 19<sup>th</sup> issue of *Der Sturm* and was described by the artist Oswald Herzog as “complete expressionism; it is the purity of formation, a physical creation of the spiritual, the formation of objects devoid of the concrete object”.<sup>61</sup> In writing this Herzog paraphrased both Vassili Kandinsky and Hans Hofmann who were fellow students of Anton Azbe’s in Munich in the 1890’s. As Helen A. Harrison noted in her essay on Abstract Expressionism:

If Hoffman represents a direct ideological link between the European formulation of Abstract Expressionism and its later reemergence in the United

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<sup>58</sup> Barter p.71-72.

<sup>59</sup> Elmo Roper, “The Public Looks at Business”, *Harvard Business Review*, March 1949 : Vol. 27, P. 164-74.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Coates, “The Art Galleries: Abroad and at Home”, *The New Yorker* 12, no. 7. March 30, 1946. 29.

<sup>61</sup>The direct quote from the magazine *Der Sturm*, May 1919: „ Der abstrakte Expressionismus ist das Gestalten des Geschehens – des Lebens an sich; es ist Gestaltung in Gegenwart. Der Künstler hat bei seiner Intuition keine Vorstellung von Gegenständen. Leben fordert nur Gestaltung. Er läßt Formen entstehen, die Träger seines Erlebens sind und sein müssen. Nichts ist Willkür, alles ist Wille. Wille ist Kunst.“

States, where he began teaching in 1930, Kandinsky provides a more tangible aesthetic precedent.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, abstract expressionism was not an authentically American movement, moreover, it originated in Germany by a Russian artist who studied in Munich and was exhibited in the United States and especially in New York.

What is important here is the vagueness of description, the vacillation in historical context of style and ultimately the changes in attitude towards American art. Abstract art clearly had its roots in Europe, but through the interpretation of young American artists and the social and economic situation within the United States at the time, it developed into an American art, one of the most powerful art movements that have ever existed (fig. 11).

The artists in the United States looked beyond what they had learned in school to the work of artists who came from communist backgrounds or Russia or Paris or Germany. Because of the war and the artists who came to the US, but also the background of each individual artist, a new and very exciting art developed. This has been established by others and does not need to be further discussed here.

What is essential in establishing the basis of American Abstract Expressionism and its later influence on Soviet artists is that it was first supported by corporations to represent a free and democratic America. That many young professionals saw something inherently American in the work that was being made; that the government supported the artists and that generally collectors of art as well as museums looked to Europe for their collections. It was not the museums that first noticed the new, young international group of artists working in the United States – this was a similarity we

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<sup>62</sup> Marter Ed. P.196 ff. Referring to the exhibitions at the Guggenheim and at the MOMA. Barr called Kandinsky “the first and most important of the abstract Expressionists” in 1934 for the exhibition “Art of our Time”.

will see with Soviet Union, although for very different reasons and with an ultimately different effect.



## CHAPTER I C POLITICS AND ART

To understand why a particular art movement becomes successful under a given set of historical circumstances requires an examination of the specifics of patronage and the ideological needs of the powerful.<sup>63</sup>

The political climate within the United States changed over the time-period when most of the artists, who were represented with their work in the American National Exhibition, became established artists. The constant battle with Communism – being an asset to the United States or a threat, within or outside the country was felt not only by the artists, but by every single American, especially during the McCarthy Era (1947-1953).

Because the artwork sent to Moscow in 1959 was so important in establishing an image of America and this image was created by the Central Intelligence Agency in the form of the United States Information Agency, it would seem relevant to discuss the sway in politics and art from Roosevelt's WPA until the time of the Moscow Exhibition. Many of the controversies which occurred during this period had been previously laid out and discussed in Frances Stonor Saunder's book *Who Paid the Piper*. She uncovered many covert activities which had not been revealed before and she also dedicated one chapter to the Abstract Expressionists, yet she did not cover the Moscow Exhibition of 1959. The reason for this may be that the 1959 exhibition was reported about in newspapers across the country and was not considered a secret CIA mission at all. The avant-garde's self proclaimed neutrality was what ultimately led private organizations and government agencies to enlist it in their tug-o-war with the Soviet cultural expansion.

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<sup>63</sup> Eva Cockcroft „Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War“ *Artforum* 12 (June 1974) P.39..

Government interest in art began during the Roosevelt Era with The New Deal period and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which replaced the ERA in 1935 and administered the greatest relief program in United States history. The program had a tremendous effect on the United States as a whole, as well as on young and more established artists throughout the United States. The action taken by the Democratic President created what proponents called “a more democratic economic and social system”.<sup>64</sup> President Franklin Delano Roosevelt introduced the social security system in 1935, created the United States Housing Authority in 1937 to lend money to local government housing agencies, and by enacting the second Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1938 and the Fair Labor Standards Act in the same year he established a minimum wage for workers.

What did all this mean for American artists, art consumers and especially for the contemporary artists? Simply put, during the years of the depression artists were paid to paint for the government. Their artwork covered public buildings which were seen by hundreds and thousands of people each and every day. As discussed in the previous chapter, they also met many other artists with similar interests, made friends and were influenced by those working with as well as around them. They helped each other on projects and were introduced to working on a large scale, as murals were generally created for post offices, airports and the like.

The Federal Arts Project, FAP, was part of the WPA, a division of President Roosevelt’s New Deal relief schemes from 1933 onwards, which by its end in 1943 included thousands of artists amongst its eight and a half million employees. Almost every major Abstract Expressionist already active in the 1930’s worked for it as some point. The “Project”, as it was then known as, provided vital support to these artists

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<sup>64</sup> Collier’s Encyclopedia. New York: Macmillan Educational Company. 1986. Vol. 20. P.207

and the government was open for different styles but figurative painting was officially preferred.<sup>65</sup>

The WPA was suggested to President Roosevelt by the artist George Biddle, who was on a first name basis with him as they had studied together at Groton and Harvard. In fact, Biddle suggested that the government pay artists to make murals in government buildings. Roosevelt agreed, and by November 1933, over a million dollars were transferred to the Treasury Department for this purpose.<sup>66</sup> A new agency was established with a mandate to help artists all over the country, from the most conservative academic to the most adventurous abstract. Edward Bruce became the head of the new agency and was most inclined to conservative art meaning he liked art that celebrated the American spirit and a school of art called “American Scene”.<sup>67</sup> Galleries were generally opposed to this as they felt “quality” was being set behind the subject matter, but Bruce was not directly involved in choosing the artists. It was the art critic and former museum curator Holger Cahill was in charge of making these decisions. Juliana Force who was close to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, was put in charge of the New York office.<sup>68</sup> She maintained that there were “over three hundred fifty painters and sculptors of first rate importance” who were “desperately in need of jobs.”<sup>69</sup> The artists would get a \$34 weekly check as well as free paints, brushes, canvases and other art supplies.<sup>70</sup> Artists like Dorothy Varian, Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis, Joseph Pollet, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Charles Sheeler and William Zorach were among those who

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<sup>65</sup> David Anfam, p.53. Most narratives of the social history of the Abstract Expressionist painters have this group bonding in rejection and poverty in the late 1930's and 1940's then splitting apart once they arrived at success in the 1950's. Yet the notions of an original closeness among these gifted, ambitious, and ego-strong painters amounts to a myth, one first spread by the artists themselves, nostalgically recalling a youthful feeling of community, forever lost.

<sup>66</sup> Pollock, p.186.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ferrier, Editor. *Art of our Century*. New York: Prentice Hall Editions. 1988. P.347.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 187

<sup>70</sup> James Breslin has them earning 60\$ a month on average. pp.119ff.

received funds from the start. The less established artists profited especially from the WPA because they tended to have more irregular gallery sales than the more established ones.<sup>71</sup>

The artists were assigned to paint the walls of government office buildings everywhere in the country. Mark Rothko did a sketch for a potential mural, see figure 12. In Washington D.C., the mural at the Department of Justice was done by Broadman Robinson and Arshile Gorky created the mural *Aviation: Change of Shapes Subjected to Aerodynamic Constricts* for the Newark, New Jersey Airport, which remained close to abstraction in its style and has long been destroyed.<sup>72</sup> One that survived was by James Brooks, *The History of Flight*, circa 1935 at the Marine Aviation Terminal at La Guardia in New York, in which abstracted images are interspersed with machines of flight (see fig. 13). In 1936 there were already 5,200 artists all over the country working on the project. Not only did the government support the painting of murals, but traveling exhibitions went to hundreds of venues in small towns across America. Exhibitions were shipped to Community Arts Centers in Columbia, South Carolina; Knoxville, Tennessee or St. Paul, Minnesota for example.<sup>73</sup> In this way original artworks were actually going out and reaching the average American in an unprecedented manner. These regional shows were important not only in getting young American art shown across the country, they were essential in educating the masses and establishing a publicity machine for the Federal Arts Project. Some gallerists used the FAP lists in order to select those artists who they would in turn represent in their area.

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<sup>71</sup> Breslin. P. 121: "Among the painters and sculptors taken on by the WPA were Milton Avery, William Baziot, James Brooks, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Philip Guston, Lee Krasner, Louise Nevelson, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, David Smith" and eight of the nine core members of The Ten.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Auping, *Arshile Gorky: The Breakthrough Years*. Texas: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. 1995. Pp. 35-36.

<sup>73</sup> *Time*. December 9, 1940. 32,000 artists showed works in 1,600 exhibitions across the country. In places like Portland, Oregon museum attendance jumped from 75 to 400 daily.

The government became active in aiding the arts on a broad scale within the United States for the first time. They did not support European or solely realist artwork but rather they supported every single American artist who was able to get on the project, no matter what his style. If accepted into the program, the government allowed artists to continue working in a time when it would have otherwise been impossible for them to support themselves.<sup>74</sup> The WPA projects began to slow down by 1941 as the effects of the Depression began to wear off and galleries and collectors, either private or public had to take over where the government left off. Artists organized themselves in small groups often drawn together by shared political and aesthetic convictions and had to face the new reality of being up against a very limited market that was virtually closed to American art.<sup>75</sup>

During the Roosevelt Administration, which ran over four terms the Communists were first considered America's ally and then their enemy. They helped the U.S. end the II World War and after the Yalta conference with the Soviet Union they were co-initiators of the Cold War. Everyone in the United States was confronted with the utopian concepts of Communism, either directly or indirectly. According to Stonor Saunders many young people, including the young artists who worked on the Federal Arts Project were becoming increasingly involved in left-wing politics. Foremost amongst them was Jackson Pollock who in the 1930's met the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siquieros and was involved with his Communist workshop.<sup>76</sup> Adolf Gottlieb, William Baziotos and others were Communist activists. The association with

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<sup>74</sup> The government had no control over what the artists did with the canvases, brushes or paints they received. Here the artists really worked however they chose.

<sup>75</sup> Discussed in previous chapter – the Museum of Modern art primarily bought European art when it first started its collection despite protests from the American Artists Association and federation.

<sup>76</sup> Harten.P. 270ff.

Communism would become quite important in the years following the Roosevelt presidency.<sup>77</sup>

Many of the artists began to be politically active during the 1930's. Their leftist ties were already established. Yet in 1939 when the pact between Hitler and Stalin was signed many intellectuals looked for a new place on the political spectrum. They wanted to be part of an independent, anti-Stalinist left wing organization. The Committee for Cultural Freedom and Socialism, which sought to combat fascism and communism both at home and abroad, was especially involved. The founder of the group was an affiliate of *Partisan Review* which had become a favorite forum for political discussions and for those who wished to reconsider the relations between art and politics.<sup>78</sup>

Artists involved politically were Mark Rothko, Milton Avery, Adolph Gottlieb, Lewis Mumford, Ilya Bolotowsky just to name a few. Stuart Davis was the president of the American Artists' Congress which was in communist hands. He and close to thirty other artists were disappointed by the politicalisation of artists' debates culminating in his resignation in 1940.<sup>79</sup> The artists involved were clearly opposed to the Soviet invasion of Finland on the one hand, but also disappointed in the Congress' quiet support of fascism. Motherwell, Bazliotes, Calder and Pollock were members of the American Committee of the Committee for Cultural Freedom.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Stonor Saunders P.253-4.

<sup>78</sup> Serge Guilbaut. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1983. P.38-9.

<sup>79</sup> Gerald M Monroe. "The American Artists' Congress and the Invasion of Finland," *Archives of American Art Journal* 15 (1975). P. 15. In a letter to the *New York Times* on April 17, 1940 he stated: The American Artists' Congress...was founded to oppose war and fascism and to advance the professional interests of artists...has revised its policy of boycotting Fascist and Nazi exhibitions...The congress no longer deserves the support of free artists. He and others joined Meyer Schapiro with his Trotskyite leanings in founding the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. Their purpose was the promotion of the free progressive art in America – void of political interpretations.

<sup>80</sup> Stonor Saunders. P. 277. "Ad Reinhardt was the only Abstract Expressionist who continued to cleave to the left, and as such he was all but ignored by the official art world until the 1960's". He was also the only Abstract Expressiounist to participate in the March on Washington for black rights in August 1963.

After June 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked Russia, the American Communist Party changed its attitude towards the war and openly supported sending US troops to Europe to defend democracy. The institutional structures dissolved leaving the artists less concerned with social issues and more with themselves. Artists were less likely to join a group as they didn't want to be labeled politically in one way or another.

With the death of Roosevelt, Vice-President Truman took office. The years of his presidency and the following Eisenhower years when the political climate in the country moved so far rightward that the 1945-60 era has since been termed "The American Inquisition". It was a time of major political changes within the United States; a time of "The Great Fear" when conformity reigned, hysteria over the supposed threat of Communism was pandemic and surveillance or repression pervaded the fabric of culture.<sup>81</sup> Truman for one was a conservative lover of art, as Saunders describes in her chapter on Abstract Expressionist Art entitled "Yanqui Doodles", and in his view, he was not unlike most Americans at the time.<sup>82</sup>

President Truman reacted to modern art negatively and the same time he was considered a "new liberal". His administration and the United States Information Service along with the Museum of Modern Art under its director Alfred Barr Jr. were involved in the promotion of avant-garde art. Serge Guilbaut's found: "This is where the true force of the historical contradiction" came into play.<sup>83</sup> The President acknowledged the importance of art, its political role so to speak, but rejected the art which was being created in America at the time.

In 1947 the Republican Congressman George Dondero announced that "all modern art is Communistic".<sup>84</sup> His attacks on the arts continued and others claimed that

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<sup>81</sup> David Anfam. Abstract Expressionism. London: Thames and Hudson. 1994. p. 106

<sup>82</sup> Stonor Saunders P. 252.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> In Serge Guilbaut's book he is listed as Senator from Michigan and as saying "modern art equals communism" P.4

“ultramodern artists are unconsciously used as tools of the Kremlin”.<sup>85</sup> By the late 1940’s Dondero’s protests were successful in forcing the withdrawal of State Department exhibitions like “Advancing American Art, a selection of seventy nine progressive works including artists like Georgia O’Keefe, Adolph Gottlieb and Arshile Gorky, which was scheduled for Europe and Latin America. The exhibit did make it to Paris and Prague and the official rationale behind it was “to dispel for the foreign audience any notion of the academic or imitative character of contemporary American art”.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, the paintings which had been purchased by the government for this show were sold at a 95 per cent discount and the idea that avant-garde art was un-American had been established.

When we look back at these events a serious conflict becomes apparent. Big business and the CIA viewed abstract American art as an asset – either in terms of commercial promotion or in advocating freedom of expression abroad while much of America, represented by Dondero and McCarthy begrudged such freedoms at home. According to many conservative Americans, artists who had ties to leftist parties in the past had no right to represent the United States either nationally or internationally. In a sense they took a stand against art, much in the same way as in the Soviet Union – by making it belong to the other (communist in the case of the U.S.A.).<sup>87</sup> While some criticized paintings by Jackson Pollock as “melted Picasso” others celebrated it as “the triumph of American painting”.<sup>88</sup>

Ironically, it was Arshile Gorky who had come from a socialist country to the United States and made the remark that Socialist Realism was merely “poor art for poor

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<sup>85</sup> Stonor Saunders, p. 253.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. P.256

<sup>87</sup> later we shall see how the Soviet Union denounced Abstract art as being Capitalist or American.

<sup>88</sup> The title of Irving Sandler’s book “Triumph of American Painting” which appeared in 1970 never discussed the actual situation and success of American Abstract Expressionists – merely the individual artists and their background. In the first chapter he makes us aware that the Depression was a troubled time. It was a time when political discussions took on such importance among artists that it really became impossible to ignore. Serge Guilbaut went into more detail on the political aspects of this period.

people”.<sup>89</sup> This, at the same time when he, along with all the Abstract Expressionists were supported by individuals such as Clement Greenberg who edited the magazine *Partisan Review* from 1941 to 1943 and which was founded in 1934 on Stalinist lines. Many abstract artists had ties to leftist organizations, but at the same time they were being bought by businessmen and their artwork was being used by the government to promote what was inherently American – freedom in art.

The question that must be posed is what was Abstract Expressionism – truly American art representing freedom or fascism, communist art based on that of the first Abstract Expressionist and Russian artist Vassili Kandinsky? Were the painters in America communists or advocates of democracy? Was this reflected in their artwork and did it pose a threat for the United States?

With his paper entitled “The Social Bases of Art” which Meyer Schapiro read to the Artists Congress, art was a reaction to the social conditions under which it was produced. According to Schapiro the artists’ only obligation was to demolish the illusion of freedom and individualism by aligning himself with the proletariat in revolutionary action. Although many of the artists close to Schapiro were affiliated with the Trotskyites in the thirties, their emphasis became the apolitical nature of art, whose purpose was to be to defend the interests of artists and the democratic way of life<sup>90</sup> and not a political position. In fact seventeen artists who were members of the congress publicly announced their secession stating that the congress worked along Stalinist lines and they believed these could damage the “cause of free art”.<sup>91</sup>

Serge Guilbaut saw Abstract Expressionism triumph in 1948 and wrote:

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<sup>89</sup> Anfam. p. 54.

<sup>90</sup> Guilbaut. P.40-41.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. P.40. It was printed as a letter in the *New York Times*. “17 Artists Bolt Artists’ Congress”. The artists were: Milton Avery, Peggy Bacon, Ilya Bolotowsky, Morris Davidson, Dorothy Eisner, Parla Eliosoph, Ernest Siene, Hans Foy, Adolph Gottlieb, Louis Harris, Rennee Lahm, Mark Rothkowitz (Rothko), Manfred Schwartz, Jacob Gelter, Jose de Creeft and Lewis Mumford.

It was this freedom, existential as well as essential, that the moderns (Barr, Soby, and Greenberg) defended against the conservatives (Dondero and Taylor). Abroad, this domestic battle was presented as a token of the freedom inherent in the American system and contrasted with the restrictions placed on the artists by the Soviet system.<sup>92</sup>

American art had “triumphed” and it “stood for the difference between a free society and a totalitarian one”.<sup>93</sup> Yet there were still plenty of politicians and masses of Americans apposed to the artwork representing the United States in the exhibitions sent abroad.

*Life* magazine had shown abstract art and its successes over the years (see fig 11), Peggy Guggenheim was an advocate, the MOMA in New York, as well as many museums across the country had works in their collections, and the government felt it stood for “freedom”. Yet Americans in general had not been convinced. In her article “Abstract Expressionism, weapon of the Cold War” Eva Cockcroft wrote on the exhibition *The New American Painting* organized by the MoMA which went to eight European countries between 1958 and 1959:

Links between cultural cold war politics and the success of Abstract Expressionism are by no means coincidental, or unnoticeable.”<sup>94</sup>

Not only the exhibits that crossed Europe but especially the exhibition in Moscow and the official Soviet response finally established Abstract Expressionism as a truly American art, an inherently American phenomenon.

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<sup>92</sup> Guilbaut. P. 201.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Eva Cockcroft. P.39.

## CHAPTER I D THE AMERICAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION

The exhibition “America” that took place in 1959 where the American dream was for the first time revealed to the Soviet citizens as a combination of fantastic consumer goods and expressionist art....The exhibition “America” turned out to be a Trojan horse given by the Americans to the Soviets.<sup>95</sup>

The American National Exhibition was the most ambitious project implemented after the signing of the East-West cultural exchange agreement in 1958. It was inaugurated the same year by the United States and the Soviet Union. The agreement itself was a step toward the understanding between peoples which perhaps more than on a governmental level depended on the hope for a continued co-existence. The American Exhibition and the Soviet exposition in New York, both set for simultaneous exhibition time in the summer of 1959 were to present the full panorama of contemporary life in each country.<sup>96</sup> The American National Exhibition which was to take place in Moscow was arranged under the auspices of the United States Information Agency (USIA), founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953 to promote American values and culture abroad.<sup>97</sup> President Eisenhower had always “envisioned a people-to people exchange” and this form of exchange fit into what the president had envisioned.<sup>98</sup>

The Exhibition was the outcome of several governmental departments working in cooperation with private corporations, all coordinated by the United States Information Agency and its director George V. Allen. The overall exhibition designer

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<sup>95</sup> Svetlana Boym at the „Cold War Hot Culture“ Festival in Las Vegas in 2001 commemorating the American National Exhibition in 1959 in Moscow.

<sup>96</sup> Marilyn Kushner. “Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959” in *Journal of Cold War Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 1. Winter 2002, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Pollock, p. 342.

<sup>98</sup> Yale Richmond. *Raising the Iron Curtain*. The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2003. P.14 Although the president envisioned these exchanges with less government involvement. In fact bypassing governments.

was George Nelson. George V. Allen appointed the businessman Harold Chadwick McClellan as general manager of the fair.<sup>99</sup>

The two official standing committees, the Advisory Committee on the Arts of the Department of State and the Advisory Committee on Cultural Information of the USIA nominated a four man committee solely for the selection of art for the Exhibition. This committee of selection was comprised of Franklin C. Watkins, a conservative painter, as Chairman; Lloyd Goodrich, Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art; Henry R. Hope, Chairman of the Fine Arts Department of Indiana University; and Theodore Roszak, sculptor. The appointment of these individuals was announced by the White House in February 1959 with the approval of President Eisenhower and the meetings that followed were held at the Whitney Museum. Because the American and Soviet expositions were to concentrate on each countries most modern advances, the arts committee decided to show works on the contemporary level, not going back to the nineteenth century, but ultimately limiting the pieces to the twentieth century. The committee felt the modern art exhibited by the United States could be bewildering for the Russian public, so they decided to show works from 1918 onwards and only one work from one artist, since there were so many contemporary artists to choose from. They wanted to cover the “chief trends and viewpoints of the past thirty years, from the early New York realists and painters of the American scene, and the American pioneers of modern art, through . . . the abstract expressionist school.” This meant that the works would go from the realism of Hopper and Wyeth to the pure abstraction of Pollock and Rothko.<sup>100</sup> See Appendix A for a complete list of the works that ended up going to the Exhibition in Moscow.

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<sup>99</sup> Hickson. P. 162. McClellan was CE of Old Colony Paint and Chemical Co. of Los Angeles and former president of the National Association of Manufacturers.

<sup>100</sup> Lloyd Goodrich. “Paintings and Sculpture from the American National Exhibition in Moscow” Whitney Museum of American Art. 1959. P.3.

Lloyd Goodrich stated in the exhibition catalogue of art shown at the Whitney upon its return from Moscow, that:

...the committee feels justified in saying that this is the broadest, most balanced representation of recent American painting and sculpture so far shown abroad by our government.<sup>101</sup>

At the very first meeting, the committee was informed that they would be responsible for planning the show and that their decisions would not be questioned on the artistic level. Which meant their decisions on the works of art selected would be final and would not be subject to any sort of change for non-artistic reasons. This reassurance was essential at the time because so many government planned exhibitions for Europe and the United States prior to this exhibit had been cancelled in the last minute. The members on the committee were prepared for some sort of repercussions from the extreme right within the art world and from Congress because the fact was that the shows (four of them) had been cancelled in the twelve years before, due to alleged political backgrounds of the artists. The attacks on the artwork and the shows had been instigated by a small minority of ultra-conservative artists and actually mostly sculptors who wanted to prevent a broadening of official art policies by the government in order to keep their monopoly on public spending.

On Saturday, May 30, 1959 articles appeared in newspapers listing the artworks that had been selected for Moscow. The timing of the announcement was by no means a coincidence. On Monday, just two days later, the crated cargo was put on the *SS Finnsilor* and was ready to be shipped to the Soviet Union.<sup>102</sup> On June third, just a few days later, Representative Francis E. Walter, a Pennsylvania Democrat and Chairman of the House committee on Un-American Activities, charged the House that:

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Lindsay Pollock. The Girl with the Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Making of the Modern Art Market. Public Affairs. 2006. P. 344

of the 67 artists chosen for the exhibition in Moscow, 34 – a fraction more than 50 percent – have records of affiliation with Communist fronts and causes. Of these 34 there are 12 whose records appear to be relatively inconsequential . . . . This leaves 22, or one-third of the 67 artists, with significant records. . . . It is repulsive to me that a U.S. Government agency should glorify so-called artists who stand for nothing that this country represents.”<sup>103</sup>

Francis E. Walter subsequently wrote to Secretary of State Herter asking that the works of the 22 artists be eliminated from the Exhibition. He went on to say the “Mr. and Mrs. America” had flooded him with letters, outraged over the choices.

Conservative artist Wheeler Williams, president of the American Artists Professional League whose major professional accomplishment was a memorial statue of Senator Robert Taft in Washington DC testified that the selections were “childish doodles”, “scribbles”, “crudely drawn”, and a “discredit” to the United States.<sup>104</sup>

President Eisenhower was questioned by May Craig of the Maine Press Herald on the artwork at the July 1<sup>st</sup> presidential press conference. Stating that the House Un-American Activities committee had opened a hearing that same morning on the type of art being sent to the Moscow Exhibition she wanted to know how the President regarded the work. She mentioned a picture that depicted an American general in the most “unflattering way” and stated that the artist had said “generals of the armies are a continuation of the class struggle”. This was a figurative painting by Jack Levine’s entitled *Welcome Home* (see fig. 14). The president stated that he was aware of the controversies behind this particular picture depicting a general gorging himself at a lavish dinner, and viewed it as more “lampoon” than art.<sup>105</sup>

Her question or rather request in the end was to ask the President if he would not review the presentation to make sure that it truly represented the American public to

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<sup>103</sup> Goodrich, P. 4

<sup>104</sup> Pollock, P. 348. See also Kushner, P. 15: “During the hearings, Williams characterized Pablo Picasso as a “trivial artist”. And Wheeler Williams as cited in HUAC, “The American National Exhibition”, pp. 911 and 915: Here he dismissed Jackson Pollock’s painting in the Moscow exhibition *Cathedral*, as ‘just a meaningless scribble. It is the worst doodle that you could imagine on a telephone pad.’”

<sup>105</sup> UC Santa Barbara files: transcript of the President’s conference on July 1st, 1959.

the Russians. The President answered with a flat out “no” and then went on to say that “this is exactly the way the thing is done”. He continued by stating that the authorization for the fair and the furor about the art which was really a “relatively minor sector” in a very huge affair was unprecedented. “My goodness” he says “the art is down in two fairly small rooms and the exhibition is all over two floors.”<sup>106</sup> He went on to say that Mr. Allen was responsible for the art and he appointed a committee which “was made of curators of art museums, and I believe one of them was a president, and I believe another one was an artist, and so on.” A footnote was added to the transcript of the conference listing the individuals involved. The President said that the people had one criterion which was “that there would be no art, no piece of art or painting that went over to Moscow except those produced since 1918, since the First World War.” He then told the reporters at the conference that he would not be the censor “for the art that has already gone there”. He maintained that what should be shown at such an exhibit should be “what America likes” – and that was precisely why such a committee had been chosen.<sup>107</sup>

In an article appearing in the *New York Times* by Sandra Knox in July 1959 it is stated that the selection of art was made by the jury that the USIA had selected. With this uproar about the great number of contemporary works included in the show the American Federation of Arts sent a letter pointing out that the art was precisely “the kind that thousands of informed Americans not only like but are buying today.” This was a clear response to President Eisenhower stating that the collection should include art “that people like”. Sandra Knox had also written in the *New York Times* that the

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<sup>106</sup> As described above, the artwork was actually upstairs not downstairs – or above the floor with the house and the floor with books.

<sup>107</sup> UC Santa Barbara files: Notes on the Presidents conference. 1959. See also Kushner: “Had it not been for Eisenhower’s personal intervention, Congress undoubtedly would have forced USIA to cancel or make drastic changes in the exhibition. P. 17.

committee commended the President for allowing the exhibition to stay the way it was originally selected – without removing the contemporary works.<sup>108</sup>

The selected curator of the Exhibition, Edith Halpert leapt to the defense of Jack Levine's art and newspapers printed her rebuttal. In referring to the president's own art and his personal choice in art she stated: "That's his privilege. Some people think his paintings aren't so good either". Her statement made front page news in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, and several other U.S. papers.<sup>109</sup> This was to have repercussions on her visit to the Soviet capital -- positive repercussions. The selection committee sent President Eisenhower a telegram reiterating that the art chosen was "not Communistic, negative, or un-American" in any way. They went on to say that the Exhibition would present the best and most vital aspects of American art "of our time".<sup>110</sup>

In his attempt to neutralize the very modern works selected for exhibition while still showing all of them, the President had twenty-six additional paintings loaded onto a plane to Moscow – just three days prior to the opening of the exhibition in Sokolniki Park. These were paintings dating from the eighteenth- and nineteenth- century including Gilbert Stuart's celebrated portrait of George Washington and a bronze bust of Abraham Lincoln (fig. 15). These pieces were not exhibited together with the modern artworks, giving them a different weight at the show. In fact they were shown one floor below, in an area where bookshelves full of books were located – books the exhibitors were hoping the Soviet public would pilferage them.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Sandra Knox. "President Hailed In Dispute On Art: Refusal to Censor Exhibit at Moscow Fair Praised by Selection Panel." *New York Times*. July 3, 1959. P.7

<sup>109</sup> "USIA Defends Choice Of Art Display Curator" by the Associated Press in Washington Evening Star. July 9, 1959.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Interview, John Jacobs, Press-officer of the Exhibition. Jan 2007. Interview with Jack Masey May 2007. Yale Richmond. P. 136ff. Discusses the role of the books and authors under the cultural exchange between the 2 countries. Stating that "books played an important role in the westernization of the Soviet Union..." More about this in Chapter IIC

The publicity created through the press caused a public controversy seldom equaled in matters concerning art up until then. Editorials and cartoons appeared in papers from the Atlantic to the Pacific (fig. 16). Headlines like *Communist Slanted US Exhibit* or *Is This US Art* could be found in many papers. But a considerable proportion of the press, especially leading papers in larger cities, supported the President's stand and pointed out the consequences of censorship.<sup>112</sup> Edith Halpert received threatening phone calls following her comments on the art displayed. Upon her arrival in Moscow she was surprised to realize that her discourse with President Eisenhower had also made the Russian papers.<sup>113</sup> In fact a group of Russian newspaper men wanted to know what happened to the woman who had fought with the President – she simply said “I am that woman”.<sup>114</sup>

The exhibition space covered 400,000 square feet of the Sokolniki grounds – that equals about two city blocks or 1,500 acres (fig. 17).<sup>115</sup> At the center of the exhibition space was Buckminster Fuller's geodesic aluminum dome which housed eight exhibitions, including the ones on space exploration and on nuclear research (fig. 18). Behind it was an open space where many exhibitors demonstrated their products, but also where sculptures like Lachaise's *Woman* was placed (fig. 19). Corporations like IBM for example set up their objects inside the exhibition hall directly behind this space. IBM's fact storage device called RAMAX<sup>116</sup> was a repository for millions of pieces of information and this particular exhibit piece was a magnet for Nikita Khrushchev who came about five times prior to the official opening.<sup>117</sup> The RAMAX knew the number of babies born each minute and the number of university students studying Russian at any given time. There was a large scope of companies who each

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<sup>112</sup> Lloyd Goodrich. P.4-5.

<sup>113</sup> Pollock, p. 349

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 353.

<sup>115</sup> USIA records. Hixson P. 163. Hixson states that the location was the initial stumbling block for the exhibition. McClellan rejected the Soviet Unions offer of Gorkii Park and two other locations

<sup>116</sup> Hixson refers to it as RAMAC

<sup>117</sup> Personal interview with John Jacobs.

paid an exhibitors fee in order to show their newest developments at this exhibition. Each of these expected to get in touch with Soviets who would be interested in their products – the Soviet Union was a potentially vast market for any American corporation (fig. 20).<sup>118</sup>

The fine-art exhibit (painting and sculpture) and the consumer goods exhibit were shown together in a 4,000 foot long glass pavilion just behind the dome. The modern art was located on the second floor in four cubicles of the building. With the help of six men from the Pushkin Museum, the curator put up the exhibition in four days. According to Edith Halpert: “the space was inadequate” and presented a challenge to set up in the short time given. The sun came in through the great glass surfaces casting irregular patches of sunlight across the walls. The metal ceiling was hung with colored panels that seemed to cast a glow on the artworks – there was no lighting.<sup>119</sup> Edith Halpert had been chosen for putting the show together for several reasons: she was well known due to her art gallery in New York and her involvement in bringing unknown artists to venues across the United States; she was a “supreme Saleswoman” and a “gifted organizer”<sup>120</sup>; she had visited the Soviet Union just one year prior to the Exhibition; she spoke Russian; she offered to pay for her flight herself. But she was primarily chosen because she had years of experience putting together shows in the United States. As stated earlier, she was also one of the curators of the Exhibition and 21 of the 48 artists shown in Moscow had also been represented by her at one time or another. When the USIA felt they had to defend their choice they stated these facts

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<sup>118</sup> Pepsi-Cola, which distributed free Pepsi was the most successful as in 1971, twelve years later, it was allowed to sell its product in the Soviet Union in exchange for introducing Stolichnaya Vodka to the West.

<sup>119</sup> Pollock, p.350.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. P.345.

and that Mrs. Halpert knew “the Soviet cultural officials” and that she would “instruct guides as to how to describe the art”.<sup>121</sup>

In the end, she was successful in bringing the show together before the Soviet Prime Minister and the United States Vice-President strolled through the building. With the help of the Archives of American Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, Lois Bingham and Lawrence A. Fleishman as well as the Meriden Gravure Company 400,000 completely illustrated catalogues with Russian texts were produced in time for the opening. Lloyd Goodrich wrote the introductory text and each artist was depicted as well as the work he was represented with in the Exhibition. Detailed information was given about each artist including where they had exhibited in the past.

The effects of contemporary art at the American National Exhibition as Edith Halpert recalled were enormous (fig. 21 & 22):

...the show was open to the public and in they came in an avalanche, not only those who intended to visit the art exhibition but others who were pushed in forcibly by the crowds. We had the largest captive audience. They couldn't move in or out.<sup>122</sup>

She did not necessarily expect this because the official send-off was by-passed by Vice-President Nixon in his historic tour of the exposition with the Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev. In the end the modern art show was, according to reporters, one of the chief features, along with the Circarama, the color TV studio, the Family of Man, the book exhibit, the fashion show, and the automobiles.

After the onslaught of viewers the first few days it was necessary to admit the public in shifts and to put up guard rails. It was impossible for Edith Halpert to give the gallery talks she had planned, she answered questions instead. For the duration of the exhibition she had a daily routine during which from 1pm to 3pm she transformed the exhibition into her own art debate, limiting admissions to artists, academics,

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<sup>121</sup> “USIA Defend Choice Of Art Display Curator”, Washington Evening Star, July 9, 1959.

<sup>122</sup> Pollock. P. 351.

architects, and others in related fields. When the Sokolniki grounds had been closed for the evenings the discussions continued. It was then that artists smuggled their illicit, unsanctioned artworks in for her evaluation. In her statement after she had returned home from the Exhibition, Edith Halpert said she was impressed to find that so many young artists were painting experimentally and applauded the fact that it was “abstract”.<sup>123</sup>

After her departure, Richard B.K. McLanathan, director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, took over as guide and expanded on the explanatory features by producing tape recordings in Russian which were played in the galleries and at the outdoor sculpture show as well as by other educational activities.

From the sessions held first by Edith Halpert and later continued by Richard McLanathan emerged some of the most unexpected and rewarding responses from the Soviet public. Among professional artists there was a surprising amount of interest, understanding and even knowledge of contemporary American art, acquired not from originals but from reproductions. American books and magazines, scarce in the Soviet Union had often been photographed by those who had access to them, for distribution to their colleagues. It was in these small group sessions that the most valuable results of the show were achieved, according to the committee which had put the show together as well as those present at the exhibition.<sup>124</sup>

There was an unforeseen amount of simple curiosity, sincere desire for explanation and human friendliness from the Russian visitors which truly overwhelmed the American curator. The visitors’ book recorded comments which reflected the viewers “open-mindedness”, their “thanks for the opportunity to see something new” and even their “enjoyment” of the exhibit but these favorable comments were either signed

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. P. 322

<sup>124</sup> Lloyd Goodrich. p.7.

illegibly or by visitors from the satellite nations.<sup>125</sup> This will be discussed in more detail when the Russian side and their specific response to the show are analyzed in Chapter IIC.

The American National Show received great international as well as internal recognition through the live television broadcast of the conversation between Vice-President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in their “Kitchen Debate” as well as in newspapers and magazines. Due to the relationship between abstract art, jazz and freedom of expression it is relevant to bring an excerpt of this debate (fig. 23 and 23a). During the debate, which, as stated above, was broadcast live, Jazz music played in the background.<sup>126</sup> Nixon began by telling Khrushchev he did not particularly like Jazz, but his daughters did, making it the music of the younger generation. Khrushchev responded that he didn’t like it either. Khrushchev and Nixon stood in the kitchen of a ranch style house. After Khrushchev studied the \$14,000 house with the washing machine and claimed that this kind of home was well within reach of the average working-class family. Khrushchev went on to say that if Nixon thought “the Russian people will be dumbfounded to see these things” he would be wrong. “In America” he claimed “if you don’t have a dollar – you have the right to choose between sleeping in a house or on the pavement.” He set America equal to capitalism and “inhumanity”. Nixon responded to the attack by saying: “We do not claim to astonish the Russian people. We hope to show our diversity and our right to choose. We do not wish to have decisions made at the top by government officials who say that all homes should be built in the same way.” Nixon attempted to

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<sup>125</sup> Lloyd Goodrich. P.6. and Archives of American Art; Also the USIA publication of the visitors’ book reveals the illegible signatures. They also reveal that not all of the comments were positive, in fact many visitors found the art shocking.

<sup>126</sup> See Saunders. Jazz had been a “weapon” of the CIA used in its work in creating a positive and powerful image of the United States as a free and open country. Many countries criticized the US the oppression of blacks – this helped change that image along with more positive roles for blacks in the American film industry. See Alpatova p. 29-38: It had a powerful effect on the Eastern and Soviet youths. Jazz bands popped up in Cafes and a form of Soviet Jazz was developed.

bring out a certain equality between the two countries and that the United States could learn from the Soviet Union and visa versa, but Khrushchev felt he was being challenged by Nixon's words and went into the defensive. He also challenged Nixon by saying he doubted this broadcast would be shown in the United States.<sup>127</sup> From his extensive briefings and introductory discussion, Nixon knew what Khrushchev's interests were and purposefully "swerved away from the art exhibition".<sup>128</sup>

The United States worked very hard at creating a vivid exhibition that would be truly gripping for the Soviet audience – as one American commented: "I was very proud and patriotic" at the show.<sup>129</sup> They pulled together some of the most stunning work by American film makers, designers, craftsmen and artists to give a positive image of its country -- with socially diverse and responsible aspects giving the Soviet citizen the feeling that life is good in America. It was the first chance to formally and with enthusiasm convey that the United States was not only about money, it was also about every single American citizen – everyone had a kitchen with the newest technological advancements, all sorts of books were easily accessible to everyone and there were people who truly liked modern art. The American public not only enjoyed listening to classical music but modern music like Jazz; they didn't only go to the museums to look at figurative art, but they also liked abstract and non-figurative art. Diversity and tolerance of the "other" was the key here and the government as well as every single company involved mustered up every ounce of energy to spell this out to its audience. What is interesting for us is that although the art exhibit was tucked away in the back part of the second floor of the huge exhibition space, it received so much press. With so much emphasis put on the artists communist background the surveys taken by the United States Information agency showed that among the 924 questions asked by the

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<sup>127</sup> Quotes taken from notes on the original television broadcast.

<sup>128</sup> Pollock, P.351. Also presidential records – Nixon's trip to Moscow and Poland.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. P. 350.

Soviet public, the questions on art were ranked on place 10, equal to the amount of questions asked on economic security. More questions were asked of the guides on Jazz music.<sup>130</sup> One of the questions asked was “What explains the impulse toward abstract paintings and sculpture”.<sup>131</sup> Over thirteen percent of all the questions asked were on American art or music.

The American National Exhibition put freedom and democracy on display in the Soviet Union. After being briefed on important issues and information the seventy guides who went along for the duration of the Exhibition were free to talk about what they wanted to, be it private or political in nature. They answered questions from whoever asked them. This very personal exchange made the greatest impact on the Soviets and ultimately brought progress in the exchange of the two countries so ardently involved in their Cold War. The Soviet Union had started the exchange of ideas and had allowed the Americans to show not only automobiles and the newest make-up, but abstract art in a country where Socialist Realism had reigned for decades.

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<sup>130</sup> USIA Office of Research and Analysis. Visitors Reactions to the Exhibit in Moscow: A Preliminary Report. September 28, 1959.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p.44.



## THE SOVIET SIDE - INTRODUCTION

The ‘Doctors’ trial, Stalin’s death, confusion in the country...the Twentieth Congress, romantic hopes of the ‘Thaw’ – it was a stormy time. It was the time of the new discovery of strange culture of the 20’s. It was also the time of the first exhibitions of Western art: beginning from Picasso’s exhibition which led to the reconsideration of all stable values of our lives. The artist himself was becoming an object of his own study. Picasso and the element of game in his art, Pollock, Mondrian, Nicholson, Pasmor –all this material was ‘chewed’, analyzed and with a great difficulty digested. Sometimes it was a dramatic turn from the past ideas and beliefs. This drama is a distinctive characteristic of our generation from that of the present.<sup>132</sup>

In contrast to the artistic freedom enjoyed in the United States, the USSR had reversed course in the 1930’s, shifting from the wide variety of styles that flourished throughout the Russia in the 1920’s to a single state ordered style – Socialist Realism, a strictly narrative, representative style used to portray politically approved subjects. Consequently, by 1959, very few Soviet citizens knew much neither about their own Russian art which dated back to 1922 nor about the developments in international art during the three preceding decades.<sup>133</sup>

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 1932 the Communist Party Central Committee passed a resolution “On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organizations” and all existing organizations in those fields were disbanded. It was at this time that Socialist Realism was declared the “fundamental style” and over the next fifteen years assiduously promoted.<sup>134</sup> Realism was not enforced immediately thereafter and the formal endorsement of Socialist Realism did not result in the immediate pronouncement of a single theme. However it did not take long before the government started to rid itself of those artists who deviated from the “approved” style. There was

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<sup>132</sup> Y. Zlotnikov in Irina Alpatova “Other Art: Moscow 1956-76”. Moscow: 1991. P. 35.

<sup>133</sup> Winifred Mulligan. “The US National Exhibition, Moscow 1959” in What’s Going on in Russia, October 2004.

It needs to be stated here that Russian art can not be set equal to Soviet art. Soviet art is defined as that art which was created within the 15 Soviet Republics after the Soviet Union came into being in 1922 and until under the leadership of Boris Yelzin these 15 states were dissolved and Russia again became a country in and of itself.

<sup>134</sup> Paul Johnson. Art: A New History. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 2003 P.710.

acceptable art and unacceptable art as clearly defined by the authorities, rather than strict regulations as to what Socialist Realism should be. The works which were excluded from exhibitions or no longer officially acquired and could lead to problems with the authorities were spelled-out and put into main groups: political art, religious art, erotic art and “formalistic art”.<sup>135</sup>

By 1936 the head of all Soviet art became the All-Union Committee for Artistic Affairs. Art purges took place across the country affecting every artist not wholly conforming to the newly introduced restrictions. Both Andrei Zhdanov, the Secretary of the Central Committee in charge of ideological affairs and Aleksandr Gerasimov, president of the Soviet Academy of Arts stressed the Soviet mission in art: to be simple and obvious enough to be understood by everyone and in this an aid to advancing Communism. Later, in 1949 a second such purge was aimed mainly at Jewish artists. During both purges the artists were faced with death or imprisonment and the removal of their artworks from the Soviet Museums.<sup>136</sup>

In *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, a Moscow newspaper with wide circulation, which was echoed in the French *Les lettres Francaises*, Soviet art critics voiced their belief that it was time “to think about other objectives in order to avoid stagnation in Russian paintings”.<sup>137</sup> As bold as this article was and the far reaching voice it beheld, no one – not the Soviet artists nor the West – had any illusions about the ability of the Soviet government at the time to free itself from the “weight of Socialist Realism”.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Rosenfeld, Alla and Dodge, Norton. *From Gulag to Glasnost*. P.38. “The purge of the “formalists” in the arts began with attacks on the composer Dmitrii Shostakovich (1906-1975) and other ‘slovenly artists’. By 1939, ‘formalist’ artists had become virtually nonexistent in the Soviet Union.” In 1941 when Stalin became chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, Socialist Realism became the only accepted method in art and the Soviet avant-garde was finally forced completely underground.

<sup>136</sup> Johnson. P.712.

<sup>137</sup> Ferrier P. 459.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

With Stalin's death in 1953 and the end of the Korean War, a few more years were needed for the changes of the Khrushchev *thaw*<sup>139</sup> to become felt in creative circles. Tensions eased and in the spring of 1956, following the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, such artists as Ullo Sooster, Boris Sveshnikov, and Lev Kropivnitsky returned from confinement<sup>140</sup>. As a result of the Central Committee's resolution "On Overcoming the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" passed that same year on June 30th, the exclusive right to the status of individuality, which had been usurped by the Party's upper echelons, lost its earlier "infallibility". For the first time since Stalin, the creative intelligentsia had a chance to decommunalize, to cease being solely the "ancient choir" in a typically Soviet "optimistic tragedy."<sup>141</sup> The internal cultural and political ease which took place also had its effect on the Soviet people throughout the Soviet Union in the years that followed.

Khrushchev and his administration proved more lenient than the country would ever experience again until Gorbachov. The ruling class and especially Khrushchev gained confidence in their own country especially due to the technological advances the Soviet Union had made. This was one of the reasons the USSR allowed the United States to physically enter its borders as tourists, as students, as professors as well as with the Exhibition in 1959. With the first successful intercontinental ballistic missile launch from Plesetsk in late July of 1959 and the Soviet military preparation to station two R-7 missiles at both launch facilities there a strong symbolic action had been established: the Soviets finally had the ability to launch a nuclear missile attack on the

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<sup>139</sup> The term *thaw* stems from the book published in the United States in 1955 and in *Sovietsky Pissatel* in Moscow in 1954. Ilya Ehrenburg, the author of the book, was the most well known Soviet author in the West at the time. He was a newspaper correspondent of an American press service and had been writing since the outbreak of the First World War. He spent time in Vienna, France, Spain and traveled extensively in the United States.

<sup>140</sup> Alpatova. P.23. Arcady Steinberg and A. A. Rumnev were also "rehabilitated" – freed from the camps.

<sup>141</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge..P.82.

United States.<sup>142</sup> This military success should not be underestimated in the Soviet decision to allow the United States entry into its borders. The Soviets were also moving into the West, as it was an exchange which had been agreed upon and the USSR was expecting to see more technological advancements from the United States. The Soviets were hoping to look at, examine and replicate what the Americans had produced. As we have already learned, the United States had other plans, but the Soviet Union and Khrushchev were not privy to these.

The military strength allowed the Soviet leaders to be more lenient in cultural matters. They were also aware of the radio stations broadcasting from stations in the West towards the Soviet Block. This was generally allowed and only interfered with during “hot” episodes such as the uprising in Hungary in 1956. As critical as the Soviet Union made itself out to be through their own articles and broadcasts about American music and art, we now know how important it was for the Soviet people and those of Eastern European countries to listen to Music USA or Voice of America which in the mid-50’s started playing Jazz and Dixieland from its transmitter in the direction of Scandinavia.

The Cultural Exchange Agreement signed by the Soviet Ambassador to the United States Georg Zarubin and President Eisenhower’s East-West specialist William Lacy was in fact initiated by Khrushchev and the Soviet Union. With it came the exchange not only of Soviet students studying Science and Technology at American Universities and Americans coming in study groups to the Soviet Union, it also brought with it exchanges in music, literature and dance. The International Youth Festival in 1958 and the American National Exhibition were only two events of many which the exchange ultimately brought.

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<sup>142</sup> Fursenko and Naftali. *Khrushchev’s Cold War*. New York: W.W. Wharton. 2006. P.243. In 1957 the missile was used to put *Sputnik* into space yet it needed more engineering to become a nuclear warhead. In comparison with the U.S. arsenal the force of these missiles was tiny.

Yet Khrushchev's reforms also brought with them a form of the manipulation of ordinary life. What this meant was that the average citizen and the creative individual were no longer seriously threatened by deportation to prison or labor camps. Having a certain position politically or creatively, brought the privilege of foreign travel, the chance of good jobs or promotions, access to universities or special institutes. These were the standard means by which the KGB maintained its social discipline. While rightly condemned as inhuman by dissidents and by the country's critics, this was, by Soviet standards or indeed by the traditions of tsarist Russia, a soft repression.<sup>143</sup>

The art world also changed through the new influences which were allowed to come in: Western tourists, radio, the magazine *America*, exhibitions and exchanges.

Intellectuals and creative individuals came together in the Soviet Union in order to discuss not only the new styles of the West but also the Russian heritage in art and its historical significance.

To comprehend the influence that the 1959 American National Exhibition and specifically the abstract art had on the Soviet art critics, on the general population and especially on the artists it is essential to remember that these were not Westerners. In order to understand what happened in 1959 and the effect the Exhibition at Sokolniki Park had we must examine the background of those individuals who walked through the gates of the American show.

The following chapters will outline the political changes and its effect on artists and the society as a whole. They will cover the changes from pre-revolutionary Russian to Soviet art and its effect on the artist community. Then the official Soviet and the unofficial Soviet reception of the American National Exhibition can be covered and ultimately the role it played for the future of Soviet art.

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<sup>143</sup> Martin Walker. The Cold War: A History. New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1993. P.271.



## CHAPTER II A POLITICS IN THE USSR AND ITS IMPACT ON ART

Art belongs to the people. Its roots should be deeply implanted in the very thick of the laboring masses. It should be understood and loved by these masses. It must unite and elevate their feelings, thoughts and will. It must stir to activity and develop the instincts within them<sup>144</sup>

It is general knowledge that politically the Soviet Union had an entirely different background than the West, and especially than the United States. In an average encyclopedia like Colliers the former country was described in great detail and one could find that “although the Soviet Union” used “forms such as elections, institutions such as legislatures, and words such as ‘democracy’” that were “used in the West, these all” had a “very different meanings in the Soviet Union.”<sup>145</sup>

Richard Pipes gave a detailed account of the Russian Revolution and how the Communist Party became the sole decision-making center of the Soviet state. Pipes showed that: “From the instant he seized dictatorial power, Lenin proceeded to uproot all existing institutions so as to clear the ground for a regime subsequently labeled ‘totalitarian’.” This type of regime, unknown to history before, imposed the authority of a private but omnipotent “party “ on the state, claiming the right to make all decisions on organized life without exception, and enforcing its will by means of unbounded terror.<sup>146</sup> The Cheka was established as a surveillance system to keep foreign and suspected “class enemies” in its sight and set up detention camps, interrogation centers and all other apparatus needed by an efficient secret police. It was the forerunner of the KGB and its “zeal and cruelties were unsurpassing”.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> VI Lenin. On Literature and Art. Moscow 1967 pp. 250-1; quoted in Christine Lindey. P.33.

<sup>145</sup> Colliers Encyclopedia. New York: 1986. Vo. 22, P. 596.

<sup>146</sup> Richard Pipes. A Concise History of the Russian Revolution. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1995. P.392.

<sup>147</sup> Philip Longworth. The Once and Future Empire from Pre-History to Putin. New York: St. Martin's Press. 2005P.239. Richard Pipes calls it “the main agency of terror” founded in 1917.

When looked at on paper the general features of Soviet law of crimes against the person and against property appear similar to the law of Western countries. But crimes against the Soviet state differed in at least two important respects from the West; prior to 1958, these were termed counterrevolutionary crimes. Firstly by merely speaking against the Soviet political and social system, if done with the intent to weaken the Soviet power, was considered a crime. Secondly, cases of espionage were tried by the military courts and not civil courts. The maximum term of deprivation of freedom was fifteen years and the death penalty existed for treason, espionage, sabotage, murder of officials committed for anti-state purposes.<sup>148</sup> Yet Soviet Russia had no laws to guide the crimes against the state or ordinary crimes and citizens were tried by judges lacking in professional qualifications for crimes that were nowhere defined.<sup>149</sup> In the end, the actual differences between Soviet law and that of Western countries made it difficult for each to weigh a statement made by an official office and therefore created challenges in communication which went beyond the language barrier.

Lenin's cultural policies displayed relative liberalism compared with his political and economic practices. In fact directly following the Revolution there was "a great feeling of celebration" in the artistic community.<sup>150</sup> Yet by 1922 many prominent intellectuals were deported to Germany in attempt to rid the country of "bourgeois ideology".<sup>151</sup> Stalin's cultural policies were more severe. In the end "the nation ripped out its soul as Stalin's purges extended to the dreaming classes, to the poets, writers

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 596ff.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Pipes. P220. "The principles *nullum crimen sine lege* and *nulla poena sine lege* 'no crime without a law' and 'no punishment without a law' – which had traditionally guided Western jurisprudence (and Russia since 1846) went overboard." And this was Lenin's intention! In 1922 he gave Soviet Russia a Criminal Code and instruct the Commissariat of Justice to provide a "justification of terror...The court is not to eliminate terror...but substantiate it and legitimize it..."

<sup>150</sup> Francois Le Target. Chagall. New York: Rizzoli. 1985. P.12.

<sup>151</sup> Richard Pipes. P.332.

and artists”.<sup>152</sup> The four decades of war, revolution, and purges under Lenin and Stalin cost the country some sixty million lives.<sup>153</sup>

In light of the dramatic changes throughout the country in social structures, creative and spiritual life and in order to fully comprehend the background of Socialist Realism as well as the un-official art created within the Soviet Union it would prove important to go back to the changes that started with the Russian Revolution. With Lenin and the Bolsheviks taking control, the ensuing civil war and the forced dismantling of the outdated feudal system which had existed until then.<sup>154</sup> The historical facts must be outlined in order to understand in what sort of climate art was created – in order to grasp what the Khrushchev *thaw* meant for the peoples of the Soviet Union and specifically for the artists.

Prior to the Russian Revolution the country’s social and economic bases was on the feudal system with some one hundred million peasants living in rural areas and only about one million in urban areas as full-time factory workers. The country did not have strong lateral ties and the citizens were neither bound by a strong economic interest nor by a sense of national identity. When Lenin came to be in control he introduced economic measures in early 1921 to curb the social and economic crises facing the country due to changes incurred through War Communism, yet they proved to be a severe setback. It was in that same year that an extreme drought led to 20 percent crop failure ultimately leading to 33.5 million people in Russia and the Ukraine being afflicted by famine. By 1922 the population had decreased by 12.7 million people whereby 5 million died due to famine.<sup>155</sup>

Lenin had studied closely Clausewitz’s *On War*, and applied the teachings therein to politics. As in war, the objective was not merely to defeat the opponent but to destroy

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<sup>152</sup> Martin Walker. *The Cold War: A History*. New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1993. P.278.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. P.279. Whereby 20 million lives were lost in the II. World War alone.

<sup>154</sup> Richard Pipes. P.233 and p.321.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. P.356 and 402.

him. This meant firstly to deprive him of an armed force and secondly to dismantle all of his institutions, yet if he refused to submit, it should lead to physical annihilation.<sup>156</sup>

Although he was close to Trotsky, Lenin relied increasingly in the running of Party affairs on Stalin. In 1922 Lenin had Stalin appointed General Secretary. At the time Stalin was also a member of the Politburo and Orgburo and the combined positions gave him a unique power base.

When Stalin gradually took over after Lenin died in 1924 he continued the destruction Lenin had introduced in the country. The forced reforms and the initiation of the first five year plan in 1929 brought an increase in urban population from 1930 to 1937.<sup>157</sup>

The number of ethnic Russians rose and the number of Ukrainian and Kazakh populations fell sharply in these years. According to Philip Longworth, there was an ultimate major loss of population which should not be ascribed solely to genocide but rather it should be understood as “the consequence of mistaken policy, ruthlessly implemented” and with this he meant the move to collectivization of farms in order to avoid famine.<sup>158</sup>

Between 1931 and 1932 again over five million people died of starvation in the Ukraine, yet Stalin continued his plan to modernize the Soviet Union with impressive new buildings that went up, canals built, underground stations as well as new infrastructure under construction. At times consultants from the West were hired or contracts let to Western countries, but often the regime would use media manipulation to assign the blame for failures of industrialization or they would try and execute

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid. P.118; The principle guiding Lenin was a dictum rather casually pronounced by Marx in 1871.

<sup>157</sup> *Colliers*. Vol. 22 P.595ff. This reflected the strategic plan to shift the centre of gravity towards the east.

<sup>158</sup> Philip Longworth. P. 245

prominent Party men because the “public was ever eager to see those in authority diminished”.<sup>159</sup>

The chief benefit of Stalin’s economic transformation of the country was the large quantities of military equipment and military capacity gained. The Second World War brought more deaths but the Soviet Union also gained land and military prestige. With the end of the Second World War Marxist internationalism proved to be a potent power in the exchange with countries like Egypt, Afghanistan and Cuba who became Soviet clients. The Soviet regime offered both a model for overcoming backwardness and help for peoples oppressed by other imperial powers. On the whole the Soviet government had not only acquired a reputation for providing for the public in terms of social and material prerequisites: they had homes and jobs; they could afford medical care and legal assistance but the country gained military power that proved its strength to the West.

When looking at the cultural life in pre-revolutionary Russia, the heritage was based on two distinct elements: Slavic folklore, the creative oral tradition of a largely illiterate population and the formal written culture of two small, gifted social groups, the aristocracy and the intelligentsia, the critical intellectuals. Both groups were considered the heirs of the ancient culture of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and were sophisticated interpreters of Western European culture. In some ways analogous to educated Americans of the nineteenth century, these Russians considered themselves to be on the periphery of general European civilization.

The Russian Revolution, generally considered a dividing line for historians, was when Lenin took over and could mould the culture of the new Soviet state with coercive military methods.<sup>160</sup> Following the Revolution in 1917 an ideological opposition to the “capitalist” West sometimes produced a fear of “bourgeois” Western influences,

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. P.252.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. P. 238.

but – and this is important here - neither Soviet artists nor the Soviet public stopped deriving aesthetic and creative stimulation from Western cultural experimentation.<sup>161</sup> In fact creativity and art thrived the first few years following the Russian Revolution with Chagall, Kandinsky, Rodchenko and others acting as teachers – there was at first great optimism about what Communism would bring. With “The Revolution in Art” in 1919 the people declared that “the art of today, and also tomorrow, refuses any sort of content. True proletarian art will be that which, in wisdom full of simplicity, will succeed in breaking with everything that may be defined as purely literary...”.<sup>162</sup> Yet, as stated above these artists, close to 120 in all, either left of their own free will or were exiled from the country by 1922 if they did not willingly change their avant-garde, abstract style. Figure 24 shows an avant-guard exhibition that took place following the Revolution and fig. 30 an acceptable abstract artwork from after 1918. Art changed from the creative process in and of itself to something which should be understandable for the general public and should propagate the leaders, the heroes of the Soviet state. It had been Vladimir I. Lenin who declared:

...its roots should be deeply implanted in the very thick of the laboring masses. It should be understood and loved by these masses. It must unite and elevate their feelings, thoughts and will. It must stir to activity and develop the instincts within them.<sup>163</sup>

The artists created their work, be it a novel, a play, an opera, a ballet or a painting or sculpture for the government. For the government clearly meant for the people – as the government existed for the Soviet people. This was the government line, upheld by Stalin to the extent that his portrait and the portraits of the history of the Soviet Union had to bring with them a euphoric feeling of Soviet pride to the public – artists had to adhere to these regulations or be abolished. Abolished in this case meant killed or sent to camps where they would work until they died. Such a portrait would have

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<sup>161</sup> Colliers. Vol. 20 . P620.

<sup>162</sup> Le Target. P.12.

<sup>163</sup> VI Lenin quoted in *On Literature and Art* (Moscow 1967) pp. 250-1

been something like “Dawn over our Homeland” by the artist Fedor Shurpin, depicted in figure 25.

Within the Soviet regime the cultural task was initially conceived by two diverging groups. The one, a self consciously “proletarian” group, wished to eliminate past culture. Vladimir Mayakovsky was the most famous and productive individual of this group and tried to create an entirely new culture. The opponents of this group were the “uplifters” and Maxim Gorky their most well known spokesman. This group sought to disseminate as widely as possible the best examples of Russian and world culture.<sup>164</sup> During the 1930’s Stalin also consolidated government power over the arts, a force that grew ever more constricting until Stalin’s death. The Stalin purges in the later 1930’s, comparable to Hitler’s death camps in numbers of people killed, were highly destructive of talent and expertise in every field imaginable.

The 1932 decree of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party suspended all avant-garde artistic associations and created one single organization with a subsidiary for each individual state. The date of promulgation was April 23, 1932.

With it the Union of Soviet Painters or The Union of Artists of the USSR came under the direct control of the Party. At that time the Academy of Arts, responsible for the education of Soviet artists and society as a whole, was under the direction of Isaak Brodski.<sup>165</sup> The following statement and the decree itself brought an end to the avant-garde groups in the Soviet Union: “the liquidation of the exploiting classes in the Soviet Union and the moral unification and solid politics of the Soviet society are proof of the pointlessness of the existence of associations in art and literature.”<sup>166</sup>

Soon thereafter, under Stalin, the avant-garde magazine on which many abstract

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<sup>164</sup> Gorky, the ideologist of “social truth” justifies the new Academism through its being “popular”, saying it will respond to the demands of a new and larger public who have the right to have its own art – in a socialist country.

<sup>165</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P. 42. “One of the early goals of the Academy was ‘to combat formalism, naturalism and other features of contemporary bourgeois decadent art’.” See also “Piataia Sessia Akademii Khodzhestv SSSR”, *Iskusstvo* 3. 1953. P3.

<sup>166</sup> Jean-Louis Ferrier Ed. P. 314.

Soviet artists had worked, *Lef* was terminated. During this time the Academy of Arts of the USSR was established under the cultural head Andrei Zhdanov in 1947 and the Museum of Modern Western Art which housed the former private collections Shchukin and Morozov and which had been closed since the beginning of World War II was liquidated.

According to Elena Kornetchuk the first steps to initiating control over the arts came with Lenin, the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AkhRR) and a lack of control over this organization. Full control over the arts was brought into life with Stalin's first Five Year Plan. Control was exercised through the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, the Academy of Arts of the USSR, and the Union of Artists of the USSR.<sup>167</sup>

It was not until after Stalin died that the nation began to examine what had been done in the name of revolutionary ideology and the succeeding decade witnessed enormous ferment in all areas of Soviet cultural life. The names and works of the victims began to be rehabilitated and artistic work from other countries was no longer so narrowly proscribed. The events following Stalin's death and especially those which took place under Nikita Khrushchev, especially those which directly or indirectly affected artists and artistic circles during that time period are essential here.

Khrushchev's "secret speech" in 1956 with the denunciation of Stalin and delivered in a closed session to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Part of the Soviet Union on February 25. It is general knowledge that elements of this speech soon made its way out of the confines of the Kremlin and into factories, kolkhozes, universities and schools. Khrushchev's acknowledgement of a "historical fissure"<sup>168</sup> led to more open criticism and a more liberally inspired leadership. These measures had a direct impact on the Soviet society as a whole. For example, direct political protest was still

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<sup>167</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. PPs 36ff.

<sup>168</sup> Mike O'Mahony. *Juvenile delinquency and art in Amerika*. [Art on the Line](#) 1/2004. p.4

dangerous but it no longer necessarily led to the loss of or liberty of life. The speech becoming public knowledge was feared to undermined the regime's legitimacy and in Hungary (October 1956) just that happened. Crushing the uprising in Hungary temporarily strengthened the Stalinist "old guard".

In June of 1957 Khrushchev persuaded the central committee to condemn the presidium's majority faction, the so-called "anti-party" group. They received more humble posts but were not exterminated physically as they would have been under Stalin's regime. At this time also millions of slave laborers were quietly freed from camps, rehabilitated, and given jobs or pensions. Moscow's Kremlin, the embodiment of government secrecy, was opened to tourists. Travel restrictions were slightly eased, but jamming of foreign broadcasts continued. A set of revised "basic judicial principles" brought improvements in 1958, although law was still regarded as a political instrument and heavy penalties faced those convicted of minor offenses.<sup>169</sup> In art, Socialist Realism remained the official doctrine, yet as early as 1950 Georgii Malenkov, speaking for the Central Committee of the Communist Party, called on art critics to speak out more boldly than before. This note of moderation was followed in 1952 by another statement by Malenkov, in which he lauded the virtue of what he called "critical realism": in practice this meant little more than a reining in of the tendency toward emotionally weighted idealization, but even this should be regarded as a significant step at that time.<sup>170</sup> Mikhail Suslov, the Party's chief ideologist and arch-conservative, attacked the theory of *beskonfliktnost* or non-conflict, finding that Soviet art had become "sweet and empty". He maintained that the lack of conflict depicted in art had created a stagnant form of art.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> In 1961 the death penalty was reinstated and many executions were publicized.

<sup>170</sup> Angelica Zander Rudenstein. Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection. London: Thames and Hudson. 1981. p.43.

<sup>171</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P.44. See also G. M. Malenkov. Otchetnyi doklad XIX S'ezda Partii o rabote TsK VKP (b). Moscow: Gospolitizdat. 1952. P73. This will become more relevant when

In 1953, on the very day that Stalin died, Malenkov affirmed the principle of “long co-existence and peaceful emulation of two different systems – capitalist and socialist”.<sup>172</sup> This was followed by Anastas Mikoyan’s attack on those who ignored foreign achievements and refused to study them, a few months later, could be interpreted as a more open stance to Western accomplishments: in the art world and otherwise.

The first four post-Stalin years showed a clear attempt to define a new Party line in the field of the arts. The art establishment and its officials were clearly reevaluating Socialist Realism. Artists who had been attacked in the 1940’s as committing formalism such as Arkadii Plastov (1893-1972) or Martiros Sarian (1880-1972), Aleksandr Deineka (1899-1969), or Pavel Korin (1892-1972) could no longer be criticized for the work they had made. This showed that there was a general thrust toward a broader interpretation of Socialist Realism in art. Although still officially dictated, art was allowed to be a bit more experimental and that “innovation in form was necessary when it augmented the approved content”.<sup>173</sup>

In 1958 Khrushchev initiated the cultural exchange agreement with the United States hoping to not only bring an exchange in the arts but also to bring new technological advances into his country. When he visited the United States for the opening of the Soviet Exposition in New York City in 1959, he brought his family with him and made an extensive trip through America. Upon returning from this trip Khrushchev was filled with a new enthusiasm for the future of his country, for communism and for Soviet-American friendship.<sup>174</sup>

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discussing the effect of the American abstract art which entered the Soviet Union in 1959 and thereafter.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P47.

<sup>174</sup> Furstsenko and Naftali. P. 241. To a crowd of officials at the Moscow Vnukovo Airport Khrushchev cried out “Long live Soviet-American friendship!”

In 1959 and 1960 Khrushchev attended UN General Assembly sessions and the Soviet self-confidence was bolstered by an improved defense posture. The space program with the Sputnik I (launched in October 1957) was closely linked to the military buildup but the successful launch of the first R-7 missile, a nuclear missile, symbolically proved the ability to launch a nuclear attack on the United States. Within the country there was an expanded demand for consumer goods, especially household durables.<sup>175</sup> The general public felt certain changes happening and it was reflected in the fact that for example a minimum wage was introduced in 1956 and the working week was shortened. This was a suggestion of the only female member of the Kremlin who also felt that the government should increase family allowances to allow women to have more children.<sup>176</sup> Simple changes like these altered the every day life for many people working in factories as well as in the cities. The political changes in the country also brought about a remarkable freeing of cultural life, especially among the younger generation. What this meant was that there was a change in the political and cultural environment in the Soviet Union felt by everyone, from artist to laborer. According to Mike O'Mahony from the University of Bristol these changes brought about the development of two vaguely defined groups – the “liberalizers” and the “conservatives” – who were represented, although cautiously in different official publications. They tended to polarize around hopes and fears: hopes for a better, freer future for Soviet culture and fears of what might happen to their country and their government as the unifying but restrictive bonds of Stalinist controls were loosened.

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<sup>175</sup> Refrigerator production, for example leaped from 49,000 to 360,000 between 1953 and 1958. Output of television sets clothing and footwear increased to a similar extent. Housing construction spurted and then fell back partly due to the competing demands of defense. Houses were generally prefabricated and architectural styles less grandiose and more functional.

<sup>176</sup> Furtzenko and Naftali. P.193.

Most prominent Soviet intellectuals and artists, as well as their followers, found themselves vacillating between the hopes of one group and the fears of the other.<sup>177</sup> The changes in the Soviet Union created the opportunity for the West to bring its culture to a country thirsting for Western and especially American ideas. Yet for the government and the more conservative Soviets these influences were not necessarily viewed as something especially positive. In fact young people acting in a way that was unfavorable or different from the norm were termed ‘stiliagi’ and not looked upon with much favoritism. The *New York Times* reported on the connections between American culture and Soviet youths:

Dancing in restaurants and similar gathering places has been prohibited in Leningrad for the last two years chiefly as a measure against ‘*stiliagi*’ .... However, they continue to appear in streets and even in restaurants where jazz is played....  
*Stiliagi* are not quite hoodlums or hooligans as the Russians call them, and cannot be normally dealt with as criminals. But they have caused difficult social problems for Communist leaders.  
...they get together at homes or at their factory club rooms and dance. Some have picked up Western music on their recorders.<sup>178</sup>

The so-called *stiliagi* or Zoot-Suiters<sup>179</sup> of the Soviet Union, which were not criminals but were people interested in Western music or musicians like Louis Armstrong and Bing Crosby which came to them via *Voice of America*. By 1958 Moscow’s youths began to gather around the newly erected monument to Vladimir Mayakovsky on Gorky Street where poetry and music evenings were initiated. Significant in this case was that Khrushchev and others within the party valued these events, viewed them as anti-Stalinist and therefore they could be viewed as a weapon which could still be used strategically against the still present pro-Stalinist opposition: they were accepted to a certain extent.

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<sup>177</sup> Colliers. Vol. 22. P. 621.

<sup>178</sup> *New York Times*. April 1, 1956. 15.

<sup>179</sup> These Soviet youths were described as early as 1949 in the satirical journal *Krokodil* as parasites of society and later as being corrupted by Western influences.

Another influence on the young Soviets was the magazine *America* which had been created by the United States Information Agency. The magazine was first published in post war Stalinist Russia but discontinued in 1950. It was reintroduced in 1956 following the events of the Twentieth Party Congress. The magazine emphasized a positive upbeat image of American scientific developments, social welfare and cultural activities. Music and the visual arts were given particular priority as were illustrated articles on fashion and youth culture (fig. 26). As discussed earlier, these magazines were extremely popular among young Soviets and shared amongst artists. In exchange for the 50,000 copies to be distributed in the Soviet Union, the magazine entitled *USSR* written for an American public was distributed within the United States. Because *America* and *USSR* were magazines developed and produced on a political level they must be viewed as a political instrument. Although the Editor-in-Chief in 1959 did not regard what he was doing as propaganda in the traditional sense, moreover as a way of “informing” the Soviet public of what America was all about, the magazine did reach the public and many admit it had an impact on them.<sup>180</sup>

The artwork shown within the *America* magazine and the fact that it was accessible to the general public as it was sold at kiosk stands around Moscow prove its relevance here. Such American emissaries of art as Alfred Barr Jr., known to the intelligentsia in Moscow because of his visit in 1928-9, addressed the young Soviet public. By addressing the readers he brought up the roots of contemporary art and especially its Russian background.<sup>181</sup> In 1959, coinciding with the American National Exhibition, *America* published the first in a series of articles specifically introducing the artists David Smith, Alexander Calder, Arshile Gorky and Jackson Pollock for example with many large illustrations. A major function of these articles was, no doubt, to present contemporary art to the Soviet public. In 1960, the magazine ran an article entitled “A

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<sup>180</sup>Personal interview with John Jacobs, January 2007.

<sup>181</sup> Is Modern Art Communistic in *New York Times Magazine*, 14, Dec. 1952

Mecca of Modern Art: The Museum on Fifty Third Street” (fig. 27). Here membership and self-sufficiency were highlighted with its 25,000 members paying \$18 a year it was a very popular place. A series of photographs with visitors viewing the works underlined this claim. These points have already largely been discussed in previous chapters, what is notable here is that these types of articles and this magazine was allowed to be distributed throughout the Soviet Union.

The fact that this magazine was allowed to be sold within Moscow would actually underline the fact that the political regime was allowing its artists to have some visual contact with the outside art world. The artist, anyone who bought the magazine in fact could see what was going on beyond their closed borders.<sup>182</sup> This was a major change to what had gone on prior to Khrushchev’s time when there was no exchange with the West.

Yet the government concurrently ran articles against the lover of modern art. In the September 1960 issue of *Komsomolskaia Pravda* an article ran which told the story of how an innocent interest in modern art could turn out to be exploited by enemies of the state.<sup>183</sup> This was not an unusual article in that it pointed out the dangers of

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<sup>182</sup> Personal Interview with Jack Masey. According to Jack Masey people at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow could see how the magazine was delivered to a KIOSK stand and within a short period of time the magazines were gone – taken by the KGB was suspected.

<sup>183</sup> Mike O’Mahony. *Art on the Line* 2004/1 p. 10. The article is reprinted:” Here is one sad story. It began in the Hermitage. Three young people – a student in a Leningrad Higher Educational Institution, his brother and a comrade – talked in a loud voice about modern painting, making disrespectful remarks about old masters. They were approached by a foreigner. He introduced himself in Russian as a tourist and an art lover. They started talking about the latest trends in painting and sculpture in the West. Seeing the young peoples’ interest, the foreigner began to talk at length about American expressionism and promised to get reproductions of several works. That is how they became acquainted. The foreigner asked his new acquaintances to be his guide through the city. No, he did not try to recruit them as spies and did not talk about his hatred for the Soviet Union. All he did was to probe cautiously, in conversations that skipped from art to politics and from politics to art, for the opinions of his new acquaintances, and sensing their dissatisfaction with the fact that we have no abstract artists or extravagant jazz and that rock n roll is not being danced here, told them in a casual way about the ‘advantages’ of Western democracy and freedom. As the guests were leaving he asked the student’s permission to give their addresses to a friend of his. They had not the slightest inkling at that time that they were dealing with foreign intelligence agents. The friend of the ‘art lover’ brought the brothers American magazines and books with contents hostile to us. Following him, more and more new foreigners, all speaking excellent Russian, began appearing in the home of the brothers X... The villainous bog towards which the ‘art lover’ had paved the first footsteps was sucking the young people deeper and deeper.”

coming into contact with foreigners and their hatred for the Soviet ideas, what was unusual was that they were sucked in by an 'art lover' and in a museum. The fact that magazines and books could steer a seemingly innocent Russian away from Soviet ideology and into the trap of Western democracy and freedom was novel. The article quite possibly was directly referring to the magazine *America* and the dangers of the pictures and words within the cover. If the young Soviet steered clear of foreigners and their influences they would not be in danger of democratic indoctrination.

A political person in the upper echelons of the Communist Party and quite contradictory to these articles was Ilya Ehrenburg who had become politically involved under Stalin. He was the initiator of the Picasso exhibit which took place a few years prior to the American show, in the years 1956 and 1957 in Moscow and Leningrad. Ehrenburg was more aware of the positive response of the younger generation both to the show and to Western modernism in general. He was a pro-modernist who had spent much of his career as a foreign correspondent in Western Europe and drew specific attention to countless European modernist artists. He was essential in first bringing outside, Western artistic influences into the Soviet Union after Stalin. In fact the impact of the Picasso exhibit was exceptional on the young Soviet artists and as Vladimir Slepian recounted in the article "The Young vs. the Old":

the most numerous spectators were young people who, excited by the discovery of a personal and revolutionary art, filled the hall from morning till evening. Right there...discussions were held on such subjects as aesthetics, trends in painting, and the status of Soviet art...After the exhibit closed in Moscow, young students on their own initiative organized discussions about Picasso and about modern art in general.<sup>184</sup>

Although it may have been Picasso's communist ties which aided in getting the exhibition shown and many of the works were in Soviet museums, the fact that this kind of art was exhibited demonstrated a change in governmental policy. The

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<sup>184</sup> V. Slepian, The Young vs. the Old in *Problems of Communism*, May/June 1962: 57

exhibition was in honor of the artists seventy-fifth birthday and half the show was drawn from the artists own collection in France. In addition other modern artists, interestingly those with left-wing sympathies were shown at this time in Moscow as well. Among them were the painters David Siqueiros and Diego Rivera. The popularity of all of these artists amongst Soviet youths certainly had more to do with their radical style than their political ambitions.

During the *thaw*, there was greater tolerance towards ideologically ‘neutral’ themes and there were changes of emphasis: for example, more attention was given to urban topics and to domesticity in art and the depiction of political personalities was stressed less than before. A painting like ‘Daughter of the Soviet Kirghizia painted by Semen Chuikov’ would have adhered to the party line in that it depicted Soviet reality in an optimistic light (fig.28).<sup>185</sup> Abstraction was lawful but only if it was used in the decorative arts, graphic art or the like – but not in painting. The artists who painted abstract were not necessarily regarded as anti-regime artists in a political sense, but given the totalitarian thought-control aspects of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, anybody who didn’t fit into the framework that was dictated by the government was in effect against the government. The political climate actually helped create an intense collegiality amongst the unofficial artists which the government at times encouraged and at times tried to break up. The KGB was very active in keeping the artists’ apartments under close observation. A Soviet rule was in place which was to keep most any group from meeting or expanding, which was that a citizen away from home could stay in a city for only three days.<sup>186</sup>

Certain studios presented the opportunity for young artists to exhibit their artwork without membership in the Artists’ Union. Studios such as Eli Belyutin’s, beginning

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<sup>185</sup> Christine Lindey. Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962. New Amsterdam Press: New York 1990. p.48.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. P.76

in 1958 had exhibitions of abstract art. The government would use such exhibitions and studios as proof of their tolerance of contemporary abstract art and that the Soviet Union did not engage in artistic censorship.<sup>187</sup>

The Minister of Culture of the USSR was Yekaterina Furtseva<sup>188</sup> and although some collectors held her actions in high esteem, because at times she praised the contemporary art in her country to foreign guests on the other hand, the complex ideological and political issues posed by non-objective art made it impossible for these types of works to be shown in the Soviet museums.

Because the Khrushchev regime gave with the one hand and took away with the other, the period proved as a rather confusing or unclear time for the artists: Socialist Realism was still the official style, but “other” art was tolerated for a time – in fact artists were allowed to exhibit; artists were no longer killed or sent to labor camps for their beliefs or depictions – instead they were locked up in insane asylums; Democracy and anything American was vilified – yet Jazz via radio and American art was allowed, tolerated; the Cultural Agreement had been signed and many more foreigners came to the Soviet Union – yet it was dangerous to talk to them.

These hot and cold signals were confusing to the general public as well as to artists. They were allowed to paint, without fearing for their lives, but there were no official spaces to display their work; they could paint, but had difficulties buying supplies; they could view foreign contemporary abstract art, but were not able to continue in this fashion – not openly and by no means would they be exhibited in a museum as these foreign artists were; by no means would their government send their abstract works abroad as a demonstration of the countries tolerance and diversity. In other words: art which did not adhere to the concept of what art should be or what a work

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<sup>187</sup> Ekaterina Dyogot. P 6 of 29. University of Las Vegas papers. 1990.

<sup>188</sup> Fursenko and Naftali. P. 193. Mentioned earlier she was in fact the only woman member of the Kremlin.

should represent, was simply not considered art and therefore did not receive financial support from the government. Because the government made these decisions for the artists, they were forced to work privately – receiving help from friends and family. Often the friends in the art field were their family: as was the case with the group around Oscar Rabin.

Artwork which did not adhere to the official government lines was given the term “unofficial” or “nonconformist” by people primarily outside the country. These terms were not used by the government or by the artists who created them, but they “could not help but carry a political dimension, since the ‘un’ and the ‘non’ depended for their definition on the existence of a politically sanctioned official and conformist art to which this alternative was opposed”. In fact it is not exactly clear when or how the terms „unofficial“ and „nonconformist“ came about to describe Soviet contemporary artists. The first public use of the word “unofficial” in this context was by Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead for the exhibition at Berkeley in 1967 entitled: *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union* printed by University of California Press. “Nonconformist” came later and was preferred by the artists themselves, especially after an open-air exhibition in Moscow in 1974-5. The exhibition at the New Trejakov Museum called the art “other” art, staying away from potentially political terms.<sup>189</sup>

The first Congress of Soviet Artists elected a decidedly liberal board of directors to the Artists’ Union in 1957, forcing out a number of hardliners who had been enforcing fidelity to Socialist Realism.<sup>190</sup> The dissident, nonconformist or unofficial artists never formed an ideology against the state assigned artistic style. According to them their protest was aesthetic or psychological in nature rather than political. One artist described it as follows:

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<sup>189</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P. 49.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. P. 50.

The ways in which we resisted the machine that was bringing about a total neutrality were by no means proclamations, demonstrations or secret pacts, but rather apolitical art. It now seems strange that the opposition to the Great Power was jazz or the way we dressed.<sup>191</sup>

Art was created for the people and assigned by the Supreme Soviet, the government being the representative for the public since Lenin made his statement about what art should be. The government was therefore responsible for the rules and regulations set up to create what the people liked to see and these were to be adhered to by any artist given an official job, be it a painting for a museum, for a bank, for an office building, for the underground and so forth. The artist's aesthetics did not necessarily follow the guidelines assigned by the state and these particular works were not viewed as official. In fact, art created separately from a given assignment was a private piece of artwork and not meant for the public to see. Artists wanted to change this government attitude towards their artwork and their challenge was just beginning.

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<sup>191</sup> L. Gurevich and E. Andreev, *Leningradskii andergraund. Nachalo* (Leningrad:Leningradskaja Gallereia, 1990) p. 8. From Gulag to Glasnost. P. 294



## CHAPTER II B ARTISTS DEVELOPMENT FROM RUSSIA TO THE USSR

Soviet painting, sculpture and music have...attracted attention...although not as much as literature. Although official painters have turned out what is generally regarded as a dreary mass of insipid canvases and statues, there is clear evidence that Soviet painters have also eagerly absorbed some of the exciting contemporary experimentation of the West. "Modern Art" is just as provocative and anger-inspiring a topic in the Soviet Union as it is in Western Europe or the United States, with its attackers and defenders, but experimentation by painters and sculptors has been more timorous than that by writers.<sup>192</sup>

The Soviet art scene of the late fifties and early sixties of the twentieth century did not pop out of the woodwork and it was not based solely on what limited forms the artists learned at the Academies or the exhibits viewed at museums. The overlay of the cultural superstructure and the economic base was different and variously successful throughout<sup>193</sup> the country. The history of art in the Soviet Union has its own complex background, differing from that of the West in so many ways that it has rarely been attempted to discuss it in any form of detail. In reading Philip Longworth's *Russia: The Once and Future Empire from Pre-History to Putin*, the picture becomes graspable and the cultural identity of the Soviet Union as a whole was explained as something which had been in constant movement from the pre-Tsarist time onwards. What this meant was that "an artist of Tatar descent raised in Uzbekistan, trained in Moscow and St Petersburg, would influence and encourage a new generation of avant-garde artists in Kazakhstan", for example.<sup>194</sup>

When concentrating on the art scene in the greater Moscow area we will inevitably come in contact with artists from all over the Soviet Union and those students from Moscow in turn would move and influence other artists in other parts of the country.

Due to the size of the Soviet Union and the countries incorporated therein after World

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<sup>192</sup> Colliers Encyclopedia. New York: 1986. Vol. 22. P. 623

<sup>193</sup> Taken from John E. Bowlt who was paraphrasing Karl Marx in defining the complexity of the Russian empire.

<sup>194</sup> Marter., Ed. p. 89.

War II, it would be difficult to discuss all the different styles and advances made by each.

What is essential here, is establishing that Russian art did not cease in the 1930's due to the introduction of Socialist Realism. There was certainly a change from the well-known Russian art to the Soviet style as the Soviet Union continued to gain in the number of Republics, finally being a country of fifteen Republics. The artists within the country continued to evolve, creating their own inherently Russian style or that of the Republic they belonged to with or without the support of the government, and that has continued to this day. There is not one simple compact style in the country, but rather complex ones with cultural influences from every region of the Soviet Union influencing the artists in varying and distinctive ways.<sup>195</sup>

Prior to the period of restrictions originally introduced by Lenin, there was a continuous amassing of collections of western European art and services of foreign artists, architects and artisans rendered to set the tone for and give a lead to Russian taste. Douglas Cooper reminded us that with the outbreak of the First World War, the modern art movement in Russia gained new strength following the return of Russians from Paris and Munich. There was a will to nourish a purely Russian art form based on Russian sources and influenced by the West.<sup>196</sup> Liubov Popova and Nadezhda Udaltsova had direct contact to Le Fauconnier and Metzinger in the summer of 1914 in Paris and upon their return to Moscow their artwork reflected the Parisian Cubism they had studied. Vladimir Tatlin had been so impressed by the Picasso's he had seen at the collector Serge Shchukin's home, that he went to Paris to meet the artist. There he saw Cubist works of guitars and still-lives – yet upon his return to Moscow he

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<sup>195</sup> Every artist, every person is influenced by events or in different ways. This was also the case of the artists in New York – labeled in so many ways but each artist created their own distinctly different work depending on how and by what they were moved.

<sup>196</sup> Cooper, Douglas. p. 158. Here he describes how Rayonnism was described by Larionov, who developed it as a purely Russian synthesis of Cubism, Futurism and Orphism. Mayakovsky classified it as “a Cubist interpretation of Impressionism”.

created purely non-representational works. What this tells us is that different artists were affected differently by the artwork they saw. They created their own style based on what they had seen and how they evolved as artists.

The spiritual aspects of Russian art also dated back to the period prior to the edict of Socialist Realism. In fact, during the first decade of the twentieth century, Russian artists began with their denial of the representational element in order to convey what they perceived as a universal, “non-objective” or “inner” reality. The Russian pioneers of abstraction, Vasilii Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich and Mikhail Matiushin were among those who equated art with the expression of spirituality. In his 1911 essay *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky identified an “inner necessity” in art, based on “moral and spiritual atmosphere”. His book was published 1911 in Munich by Piper Verlag just one year after he painted his first abstract watercolor. In this phenomenal book he posited that after “an era of materialist trial and temptation...the soul is being reborn again”, giving the artist of the future a justification for painting abstract, so that he might reject the physical and “serve the *spiritual*”.<sup>197</sup>

Malevich discovered that “pure form” and “intuitive reason” could transform the material world when he painted his *Black Square*, now at the New Tretyakov Gallery. In 1913 he wrote: “We have arrived at beyond-reason.” At the first exhibition of Suprematist<sup>198</sup> art in 1915, Malevich chose to hang his painting high in the corner of the gallery, like an icon in the traditional place of honor in a Russian home (fig.29). Malevich used the square, rectangle and other geometric forms on “the basis of a new language”.<sup>199</sup> For him the key to Suprematism lead outside the limits of cognition and the freedom of earthly materialism. He used the shape of the cross in his paintings, for

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<sup>197</sup> Vasilii Kandinsky. *O dukhovnom v iskusstve*. Presented at the All-Russian Congress of Artists in Petrograd. Dec. 1911-Jan.1912.

<sup>198</sup> Tuchman. P. 408.

<sup>199</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P.261

example, to symbolize the death of painting as such.<sup>200</sup> In 1923 he maintained that: “Science and art have no boundaries because what is comprehended infinitely is innumerable and infinity and innumerability are equal to nothing.” The artist and poet Mikhail Matiushin and Pavel Filonov were members of the Union of Youth which among other things discussed theosophical ideas as well as Indian philosophy. Filonov named his group World Flowering which anticipated the future time of cosmic unity. Mikhail Matiushin joined the group in 1914.<sup>201</sup>

John E. Bowlt wrote about the creative wealth and the diversity of the Russian avant-garde in his essay entitled “Esoteric Culture and Russian Society”. He noted that the artists Filonov, Kliun, Mikhail Larionov, Malevich and even Rodchenko began their careers as Symbolist painters. The Russian avant-garde as such was an “outgrowth” of Symbolism and that the concepts of abstraction, concentration of monumental or synthetic art, the aspiration to create a new language of expression and the therapeutic potential of art, referring to themselves as mystics in “no uncertain terms”.<sup>202</sup> These artists and the ideas of Helena Blavatsky had a strong spiritual influence on the Russian art scene, underlining the “spiritual” heritage of Russian art: the pervasive belief in the negation of referential subject matter and representation for the sake of pure form. In 1914 the voices of Helena Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner could be heard loud and clear in the ideals, writings, lectures of the Russian artists. Avant-garde artists were interested in nothingness: “before us has arisen the task of creating a form out of nothing”.<sup>203</sup> The two concepts of spiritual and nothingness are not necessarily contrary but spring from the unclear definition of the mystical. What is noteworthy is

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<sup>200</sup> Camilla Grey. P.240-241. Malevich said this at the time when he was the Director of the Vitebsk School of Art and Lissitzky met him shortly thereafter. This was during the first four years of the Soviet regime. Malevich had taken over Chagall’s post at the school, calling his artwork dated.

<sup>201</sup> Tuchman. P.409.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* P. 167

<sup>203</sup> Tuchman. p. 174. Ivan Kliun maintained this in *Tainy prooki akademiko* (Secret of the academician: Moscow 1915 printed 1916) which was in “Primitivvy xx-goveka (Primitives of the twentieth century) from Alexei Kruchenykh, Ivan Kliun and Kazimir Malevich.

that these concepts existed long before the Soviet Union was formed. They were documented and depicted, available in libraries, accessible to the curious or interested individual during the Soviet Regime.

By the time Socialist Realism was the exclusive artistic style in Soviet culture much of the energy that had been created by the avant-garde and those idealist philosophers of the early part of the century had died out or were no longer young enough to teach. Kulgin died in 1917, Butkovskaia, Evreinov, Gurdjieff, Kandinsky and Ivanov emigrated and with them went the community that had supported and investigated esoteric ideas. Popova died in 1924, Bely and Matiushin in 1934, Malevich in 1935 and the true abstract works of artists like Kliun, Lissitzky or Rodchenko only lived on in private collections. The artists themselves returned to a figurative aesthetic or were allowed to transfer their talents to photography, posters or stage design (fig. 30).<sup>204</sup>

What was left was essentially not easily accessible.

In 1962 Camilla Grey wrote an exceptional book about the “Russian Experiment in Art”, getting much of her information from the collector George Costakis who allowed her to research at his home. She also searched out archives at various museums and conducted personal interviews with artists in Paris, London and New York. She began researching in 1957 and with the opening up of the country she was able to travel in and out of the Soviet State and research relatively freely on Russian art of the past. She was the first to do such extensive research on the art work behind the iron curtain, working with archives then little known in the West.<sup>205</sup> Her book covered the Great Russian artists until 1922 and she ends her book by stating that:

all over Western Europe artists were fired by the experiment of Communism which was so courageously being worked out there; ...artists looked to Russia

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<sup>204</sup> Zander Rubenstein. P. 42.

<sup>205</sup> Camilla Grey was married to the artist Oleg Prokofiev, brother of the composer Serge Prokofiev. She had little financial support in her endeavors, but Alfred Barr Jr. supported her morally and in writing to him in 1962 she stated that she had consulted every catalogue of the early *avant-garde* exhibitions at the Tretyakov.

for the realization of their ‘new vision’, for in Communism they saw the answer to the sad isolation of the artist from society which the capitalist economy had introduced.<sup>206</sup>

This aspect of Russian art – the new political utopia set to action had an affect on the general public as well as the artists not only in Western Europe. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was elemental in creating Soviet art of future generations.

The footnote to this statement is essential in comprehending the fact that the new movement did not necessarily act as a catalyst for “new” styles. The text revision to the above statement reiterates the fact that this great experiment came to an end in 1932 with the great dissolution of all art groups outside the official Union and the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Writers, where Socialist Realism was formally adopted as the only acceptable style.<sup>207</sup> In other words, although Western European and certain American artists were fired by the experiment of Communism, the artists in the Soviet Union were put under strict laws as to how art should be portrayed or what specifically should be portrayed. The freedom in the West no longer existed in the Communist Utopia of the Soviet State – in fact, it was not a utopia at all.

With the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers the concept of realism became firmly embedded in Soviet art. Artists were to produce “a true, historically concrete depiction of reality in its Revolutionary development.”<sup>208</sup> Those that lent themselves to this style were generally disregarded in the West because it seemed old fashioned to paint in a figurative style and art had progressed since the early *avant-garde* created in Russian and the West in the early part of the twentieth century. Socialist Realism therefore, became an art form which was interesting for the Soviet government but for the West, the Russian advancement in art essentially ended in 1932.

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<sup>206</sup> Grey. P.276.Rudenstein p.46: “In Europe and America the impact of this publication was enormous: it transformed the arcane interest of a few diplomats and experts into a keen, more widespread curiosity. The reemergence of paintings from the former Shchukin and Morozov collections at the same time gave rise to the intriguing notion that the hidden collections in the Soviet Union were more important than the visible ones.”

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. Grey. P. 295

<sup>208</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P. 273.

Andrei Zhdanov spoke of the “romanticism of a new kind, a revolutionary romanticism” at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. This new romanticism was certainly not derived from alchemy or Yoga but it still contained “a glimpse of tomorrow”.<sup>209</sup> Art was still allowed to contain an element of religious belief in the Communist ideal and the *new* body. Socialist Realism was believed to return a certain sanctity to art and literature, an element of divination which many avant-garde artists tried to avoid.<sup>210</sup> The new religion was Communism and its representative was Socialist Realist art because it could be easily understood by the masses.

According to Alison Hilton who wrote about Russian art from 1956 onwards in her essay on: *The spiritual tradition in the new Russian art* “one answer to the repression and frustration...for many creative artists was to ‘live within the spirit’.”<sup>211</sup> This was therefore not only the case with the artists working in the teens of the Twentieth century but also with those who lived and worked as artists at mid-century when they were confined to the rules of the government. In other words, the spiritual in art did not cease merely because outside rules were set up but also because the emphasis changed as to how art should represent and for whom art should be created. The spiritual factor lived on and abstraction was one way of expressing one’s inner self without giving away too much information to the outer world. The ideas which had been established at the turn of the century and in the early teens of the twentieth century were no longer officially taught and were also not widely known in Soviet circles, the spiritual factor was still there, just for different reasons and in a different

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<sup>209</sup> John Bowl. *Russian Art*. p. 293: this is a partial translation of Zhdanov’s untitled speech.

<sup>210</sup> See *Lef*(Left front of the arts) in 1924: no. 4 p. 27-8. the artists wrote an anti-mystical statement with Razval VKhUTEMAS (the collapse of the Higher State Art-Technical Studios)

<sup>211</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P.263 with reference to V. Patisiukovs essay on the artists “Eric Bulatov and Edward Shteinberg” in *A-Ya3* (1981):14.

manner. Many of the artists looked inward, seeking their own private serenity<sup>212</sup> or they turned to Christianity and Judaism as an alternative to Communism.<sup>213</sup>

Socialist Realism dominated from 1934 to 1956. A fundamental consensus about core values in art reigned through the end of the 1950's and included visual quotation, collective authorship and viewers, and the rejection of criticism. Painters, sculptors, graphic designers, writers, and others faced the difficulties of a Soviet culture, as it had developed under Stalin's totalitarian state, which offered no means for the development of personal talents or for the artist to engage with the outside world in a constructive or meaningful way – they were isolated. Because mass-produced items were few and the market insignificant very few other influences reached the Soviet artists and it was only with the changes that Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech brought about, that a gradual and limited relaxation came about. This meant among other things, that artists no longer had to fear for their lives when creating un-official (or un-exhibit able or other) and non-socialist Realist works yet official art policies as a repressive instrument remained in force until 1989. For the first time since the edict of 1934 artists and the public at large was able to have contact with Western civilization. The West was allowed to infiltrate the Soviet society with ideas, music and artwork not comprehensible up until that point in Soviet history.<sup>214</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, artists had to adhere to the style dictated by the state. If they did not they were viewed as criminals against the state. The artists' crimes were that of committing social parasitism, committing abstract expressionism

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<sup>212</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P299. He mentions Mikhail Kulakov who included substantial references to Zen Buddhism, investigating and depicting concepts such as "cosmos" in 1959. He maintains that "abstract painting held an ecstatic, transcendental power, and both attempted to use it as an allegory of the ostensible disorder of the universe – controlled by its Creator in the same way that the painted composition is controlled by the artist."

<sup>213</sup> examples of artists to use religious elements in their art are: Kulakov, Vinkovtsky, Zubkov, Nikolai Vechtomov, Evgenii Mikhnov-Voitenko, Igor Zakharov-Ross, Eduard Shteinberg and Evganii Shvartsman.

<sup>214</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P. 49. Michael Scammel writes that: „Khrushchev understood the perniciousness of the Iron Curtain, and one of his first acts was to open up channels through which Soviet intellectuals could begin to receive information about Western intellectual and cultural life.”

or that they gave art to foreigners for export or exhibition. The “export” phenomenon of the art was not banned outright during this period, but tolerated only to a certain extent. During this period of the *thaw*, artists were mostly put in insane asylums<sup>215</sup> or not allowed to buy paints or canvas if it was known that they were not working on an official artwork – a commissioned piece.<sup>216</sup>

It is important to note that as opposed to the thriving art market in Paris and later in New York, for example, no galleries or museums of modern art existed until after the Khrushchev speech in 1956. Exhibition spaces and the art market as a whole could in no way be compared to those in the West.<sup>217</sup> In fact, the underground nature of art in the late fifties and sixties reflected the absence of neutral exhibition spaces as well as that of outside viewers. The spaces provided were given by the government and were therefore also government controlled. The Ministry of Culture under Furtseva had in fact instituted a commission system to improve the economic status of the artists and to encourage them to create more new artwork. It also decreed that specialized stores be opened for the sale of paintings, prints and sculpture. This decree established what were, in effect, art galleries and Soviet art was sold publicly for the first time since the Stalin era had begun. Art was, for the first time since the Stalin era had begun, viewed not only as a form of propaganda, but also as a consumer item.<sup>218</sup>

Because the decree was directed at those artists participating on government funded artwork, the small and cramped communal apartment was the studio for any and all artists creating work unacceptable as art by the Supreme Soviet. The private

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<sup>215</sup>Ibid. P.86. “Madhouses became laboratories for the forcible ‘re-education’ and re-formation of aesthetic views. As had once been the case in Stalin’s camps, in the asylums communal experiences were reinscribed: along with doses of insulin, patients received injections of communal psychology.” The artist Afrika (Sergei Bugaev) having passed a month in a psychiatric hospital in the course of executing an artistic action informed the critic and theorist of Russian culture Victor Tupitsyn that he had “nowhere before experienced such a degree of imperativity to merge with the communal body”.

<sup>216</sup> John McPhee. *The Ransom of Russian Art*. Noonday: 1994. Throughout the book there are several references to artists who were threatened and sometimes killed for their activities as un-official artists. Notably Minas Avetissian in Yerevan and Ruhkin in Moscow.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. p75. and Dyogot, Ekaterina Russian Art p. 5 of 29

<sup>218</sup> Zander Rudenstein. P.72ff.

apartment doubled not only as studio but was the exhibition space, as well as the museum of modern art (the Costakis home for example or Abram Filipovich Chudnovsky, Yakov Evseevich Rubenshtein, Alexandr Miasnikov or Dmitrii Sarabianov). The buyers were generally a close friend, another artist, an intellectual but more often a foreign diplomat secretly visiting the artist's home or having the artist exhibit at an embassy, according to Ekaterina Dyogot.<sup>219</sup> The work they bought was:

not a product so much as tangible evidence of suffering; its value was ethical rather than financial, absolute rather than calculable, in closed culture which lacked any physical or intellectual space for comparison.<sup>220</sup>

Dyogot wanted to make the point that each artwork created as un-official art was truly a testament to the time in which it had been made but also of the place in which it was made – this is of course not unusual as all art is a testament of time and place. What makes Dyogot's statement so interesting is the fact that due to the conditions in which these artworks were created – the cramped space, the secrecy of creation and most often the loss of international concepts made the smuggling of the art into the West unique.<sup>221</sup> The West did not have access to what was happening in the Soviet Union – there was lack of resources rather than lack of interest.<sup>222</sup> Those who were able to go to the Soviet Union and get in contact with young artists, such as Norton Dodge, were excited and enthusiastic about the developments in art which they were able to witness.

Artist interviews, exhibitions and events that took place within the Soviet Union between 1956 and 1976 were documented to a great extent and kept primarily by the

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid. P.45. Even Mrs. Llewellyn Thompson, widow of the American ambassador was able to view the art work of young contemporary artists at a private apartment.

<sup>220</sup> Ekaterina Doyogot. P. 5 of 29. University of Las Vegas. 1990.

<sup>221</sup> An exception is Norton Dodge who made a point not only to bring out 9,000 pieces of abstract works during the Cold War, but to make exhibitions possible of Russian art in the United States.

<sup>222</sup> Yale Richmond P. 14. "Soviet ignorance of the United States was abysmal...American knowledge of the Soviet Union was not much better." Serge Khrushchev, Nikita's son put it this way: "It is hard for us now to imagine how distant we were from each other and how little we understood each other."

interviewers and witnesses themselves. Through the exhibition catalogue dated 1991 and entitled *Other Art: Moscow 1956-1976* presented at the New Tretjakov Museum in Moscow, the picture becomes clearer as to the art produced as well as the diversity of styles present in the country dominated by Socialist Realism. With the help of Irina Alpatova's notes and interviews it was possible to examine what the Soviet artists experienced and why the American National show and other influences surrounding the show changed the way the artists worked. We will see that the information which seeped through to the artist via radio broadcast, magazines or exhibits changed the way the Soviet viewed the process of creating art. It will become clearer as to how the American National Exhibition in 1959 affected the artists in Moscow and surrounds afterwards.

An aspect of the cramped living quarters was the communication that took place between the individuals living so close together. We must consider the way people lived in the Soviet Union and realize how radically it differed from the West. By looking at the essay "Nonidentity within identity" by Victor Tupitsyn in which he describes that:

...city apartments became as populous as anthills and beehives. Such *uplotnenie* reached its climax when two or three different tenants had to live in one room. Families of every variety, belonging to various social, national, and cultural-ethnic groups, were forced to live together in a single communal body. Toilets, showers, and kitchens became the laboratories of this 'great experiment' in mass communalization. Thin walls and partitions afforded no guarantee of what Westerners call 'privacy'. The inhabitants of the communal *thermae* were at once 'prison guards' and 'inmates' in their relations with one another. Neighbors, from whose 'love' there was nowhere to hide, denounced each other to the secret police in mutual surveillance.<sup>223</sup>

This type of living afforded very limited space to paint, sculpt or store that which was created. An essential element of this type of living was the spoken word: the constant communication or lack thereof with those so close by. Communal speech was how it

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<sup>223</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P.64-80.

is termed. Tupitsyn recalled that this language of the Soviet *kommunalka* was unique. As opposed to the West almost everyone lived in communal dwellings, these *kommunalka* and everyone talked about what interested them to those close to them. (fig. 21) Speech was essential in surviving the communal experience. Speech often took the place of shopping, driving, rushing someplace, even working because there was nothing financial to gain by working; there was no need to rush, there was nothing to buy. Time was spent going to museums, exhibits, theater, and ballet and talking about these.

The artistic language of the alternative Russian culture, rooted in its communal heritage, seemed so ambiguous to the foreign eye. It would certainly explain why certain art groups formed – families and artists who lived together in very close space who became *ersatz* families. It could also bring greater understanding as to why literature was so important in the Soviet Union, why it was the traditional keystone of Russian culture and the arena in which most of the important battles were first fought and the leading instrument of change. A significant part in the transformation was of course played by the visual arts in the early sixties of the Twentieth century. The fact was that artists and authors, scientists and astronauts, sculptors and poets discussed new and old ideas as well as the established ones very intensely. The language, the interests, the spoken word was essential in establishing something new.

The fact was that literature was more widely accepted and publicized within the Soviet Union than paintings or sculpture. The West also learned more about Soviet writers and it was during this time that Boris Pasternak, whose novel *Dr. Zhivago* was refused publication in 1956 by the magazines *Novy Mir* wrote a selection of poems which were consequently decomposed. The following year, the almanac “Literaturnaya Moskva” was cancelled because a group of ‘disgraced poets’ were amongst the authors. In the end *Dr. Zhivago* was printed by a foreign printing

company and Boris Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize of literature. Six days later the Swedish Academy received a telegram from him with a refusal to accept the prize.<sup>224</sup> This example is used to demonstrate that all aspects of the arts were still under the watchful eye of the government.

The Soviet State made the ultimate decision as to whether a piece of literature was published, deserved to be heralded and if they felt deceived by an artist, he would be verbally threatened or would no longer be viewed as an artist – he would be exiled within his own country.

When artists and those interested in what was going on didn't meet in apartments they met at cafes such as at the Mayakovsky house, or the "Artisticheskoye" café (actually called Rotonda) just opposite the Moscow Academic Arts Theater (MKhAT). Young journalist, musicians and actors would also come. Artists at this time also went to the Library of Foreign Literature specifically to look at books or magazines with pictures of contemporary or modern international artwork. For the artists it was an important time for talking, comparing and discussing.<sup>225</sup> In fact these elements should be considered when viewing Soviet artwork because talking and discussing were abstract. The abstract word could not be pinned down as the written word or a painting with figurative elements. Abstractions contained personal or vague concepts which remained unclear to the politicians or the secret police. Ironically, and as discussed in earlier chapters, this was also the strength of abstract art as was determined among others by the CIA in the United States: it was quite obvious that such artwork could be understood as an asset or as a threat.

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<sup>224</sup>Ekaterina Morozova. P.29. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1958, just eight days after Boris Pasternak had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature a resolution had been passed by the General Assembly of Moscow writers "On Depriving the Betrayer Boris Pasternak of Soviet Citizenship" where upon Pasternak signs a letter to N.S. Khrushchev stating "I am linked to Russia by birth, all my life and work...Leaving Russia equals death to me. Therefore I am asking to annul this extreme punishment.

<sup>225</sup>Personal interview with Leonid Bazahnov, a young artist at the time and today the Director of the National Center for Contemporary Art in Moscow. Moscow, March 9, 2007.

Two artists, Yuri Sobolev and Yulo Sooster<sup>226</sup>, who had come from Estonia to Moscow in 1956, studied pictures of works by Max Ernst and Rene Magritte intensely and soon started working in a surrealist style.<sup>227</sup> (fig. 32) These two artists were associated with the publishing house “*Znanie*”(knowledge) and their “surrealist circle” was based on the absurdity of any links between cause and effect. Members included the future conceptualists Ilia Kabakov and Victor Pivovarov as well as Vladimir Yankilevsky who drew and painted expressive pieces on mutations of humanity and automation, abstraction and figure. Yulo Sooster repeated Freudian symbols and motifs in his paintings like eggs, fish, and juniper bushes. In artwork created shortly after the American National Exhibition his work was abstract. Later his style changed and he moved away from abstraction.

The Soviet artist had two fundamental requirements of himself: the first was to stay clear of collectivity or the socialist element and the second was to avoid the figurative or realism in art. Vladimir Slepian, who had come from St. Petersburg to Moscow, demonstrated to a group that he had successfully achieved this balance in 1957. He used a vacuum cleaner to create abstractions.(fig. 33) In an interview in 1996 I. Kules recalls:

...at first for me Slepian was a mere nightmare, not painting at all. I'd never seen anything like that. ... It was pure abstraction. That was my first impression. And then he started talking and everything changed. I had to learn everything from the beginning and now according to completely different principles.<sup>228</sup>

Slepyans flat in Trubnaya Street became a place of pilgrimage for Moscow artists longing to see his as well as Oleg Tselkovs artwork which Slepian brought from

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<sup>226</sup> also written Ülo Sooster or Ullo. He also spent time in the Gulag.

<sup>227</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P. 26. They studied these artists in books and magazines as no exhibits were made of these artists. Sooster came to Moscow hoping he would have more contact with Western art. His early works are Surrealistic in style, later he turned increasingly towards abstraction.

<sup>228</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P. 24. In an interview with Andrey Erofejev. He went on to say that Slepian's idea of a picture: “The organic form was his ideal. He was a professional, a graduate from MSKhSh (Moscow Art School), and things one learns there are impossible to forget even if one wants to. ...He was a very informed person: he had his own sources from which he drew the information.”

Leningrad<sup>229</sup>. According to Yuri Zlonikov “It seemed that everyone was there”. Professors from the Polygraphic Institute, like A. D. Goncharov, artists from the Lianozova group, artists Ernst Neizvestny or Vladimir Veisberg. Slepyan also used fire and hoses to make abstract art but with a group of people around watching while all of this was occurring. Many of the artists who were there to see what Slepyan was doing rejected figurative representation because they wanted to rid themselves of all “excessively human” expression.<sup>230</sup> “Abstraction became the banner of individualism.”<sup>231</sup>

The artists Birger, Levinstein, Moroz, Osenev, were all students of the Moscow College of Fine Arts and snuck out of their classes to attend lessons by Vassily Yakovlevich Sitnikov. His studio was located in his six square meter bedroom, where he would give lessons to whoever was interested. He would start by asking: “How does one draw?” and answering “you must draw in your mind. That is I teach to draw by vision, by imagination...you must forget the line: even forget what it is.”<sup>232</sup>

In order to get an idea of the cramped space in which the artists in the Soviet Union worked, remember the bedroom of six square meters and then there were students watching. The teacher lecturing would then, for example take a half-sheet of paper and pin it to a large drawing board. He then squeezed a little bit of black oil paint onto the palette, took a shoe brush, spread the paint smoothly on and kneeling on the sofa began to wave with the nearly dried brush before the white sheet...in five minutes a delicately tinted curl appeared on the white sheet.” The students could see deep and light space. Then he would ask the students to do it as well. They would work like this

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<sup>229</sup>Ibid. P25. In being asked if he thought his work was exceptional for Soviet painting, Oleg Tselkov recalled: “They were simply inconceivable: a spit into its soul, so to speak.” and in regards to Slepyan’s style: “Slepyan bought twenty bicycle pumps, several boxes of paint, squeezed the paints into the pumps and began to pump the paint out onto the canvas. That was art for him.”

<sup>230</sup> Doyogot. P. 8 of 29. Yuri Zlotnikov quoted therein.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. Interview with the artist Y. Vedernikow. p. 27

for hours.<sup>233</sup> Needless to say, this type of teaching, this approach to art differed greatly from the official method taught in which content played such an important role. Form and subject could not be separated when considering content.

Figurative art and specifically folksy styles of Russian peasant art was popular during the Khrushchev years. This meant the students had to master the human shape in all its forms and use it to portray Soviet values. This was not unlike what was taught at art schools in the United States at the time and what most Americans preferred to look at, as opposed to the abstract paintings enjoyed by a small number of advanced thinkers.

Eli M. Belyutin started teaching at the Moscow Polygraph Institute, which was also called the Studio of Improvement of Professional Skills in 1956.<sup>234</sup> The Studio School which was under his direction passed over to the protection of the Committee of Graphic Designers in 1958. In his opening speech, Belyutin pronounced his conflict with Socialist Realism on the one hand, but also made clear that he remained faithful to the politics of holism.<sup>235</sup> He later headed the first private educational institution in the history of Soviet art where his students went on collective field trips to work in the area around Moscow. Among those who taught or learned there, were: Vladimir Yankilevsky, Victor Pivovarov, Boris Zhutovsky, Ernst Neizvestny, Lev Zbarsky, and Sophia Shiller. Later, especially after the 1959 exhibit, it would be

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Elsewhere I have found this called the Institute of Improvement of Qualifications of Graphic Arts Workers.

<sup>235</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Editors. P.81-82. "In his speech at the opening of the Studio, Belyutin had criticized the 'wingless realism' of official art. Instead, he called for a 'passage through the entire worldwide history of human culture, including modernity, so as to analyze the most diverse methods, the principles of decorativeness and expression – Egypt, the Renaissance, the prehistoric epochs, the present day –to pick out the very best with the aim of taking all of it as arms'. As this quotation makes clear, even though Belyutin was at odds with Socialist Realism as a system of representation, he nonetheless remained faithful to the politics that lay behind the rhetoric of official art and defined it as the sum total of humanity's creative daring."

Belyutin who expressed the strongest support of the Abstract Expressionist style and specifically taught it to his students.<sup>236</sup>

Outside of Moscow, but still connected to the Moscow style was the Lianozovo group. This group actually got its name from a small train station near Moscow – the train station where the artist Oscar Rabin lived with his family in a post-war one story barrack. The members of the group were Rabin’s family and close friends. (fig. 34) They included his wife Valentina Kropivnitskaya’s parents: Yevgeny L. Kropivnitsky and Olga Potapova; Valentina’s brother Lev Kropivnitsky; Oscar Rabin and his friends N. Vechtomov, Vladimir Nemukhin and his wife Lydia Masterkova. The poets Igor Sergeyvich Kholin and Genrich Veniaminovich Sapgir also belonged to this group.<sup>237</sup> Oscar Rabin was one of the ideologists of this group as well as a future leader of the Moscow unofficial art movement. His works were less abstract and more along the lines of critical socialist-realist with depictions of bleak suburban barracks. Lev Kropivnitsky worked abstract following the American National Exhibition changed after 1962. (fig. 37 and 38). It is important to note that in the case of this group, as with the Abstract Expressionists in the United States, the members did not share a similar aesthetic position. What united them was that “their art was the opposition...the reversed side of the mythologies of Socialist Realist art.”<sup>238</sup> Lydia Masterkova, Vladimir Nemukhin and Olga Potapova were among the first to make a move towards abstraction, at a time when “abstraction” was, by some, considered something quite frightful and shameful. Tupitsyn stated that Nemukhin and

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid. P.300. Clearly, the work of Belyutin and his closest disciples, such as Petr Valius and Boris Zhutovsky owes something to the Action Painting of Pollock.

<sup>237</sup> Yevgenii Kropivnitsky was also a poet.

<sup>238</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P.28.

Masterkova shifted in their artistic style toward Abstract Expressionism “after an exhibition of American art was shown in Moscow”.<sup>239</sup>

Many artists throughout the Soviet Union began to work in an abstract style after 1959 and it is reflected in their artwork but these artists didn't suddenly begin working in an abstract style. They studied it in magazines; they talked about it in great detail – it was the art of the West. These artists were already working towards abstraction: Nemukhin's first experiments with semi-abstract compositions date back to as early as the late forties. (see fig. 35 and 36) Shortly after the American National show he worked abstract. It was later that his style changed and he became best known for his still-lives with playing cards, fighting cocks and fragments of card tables. Nemukhin also added cuts to his canvases in the style of Lucio Fontana, although in most cases they were illusory they were sometimes real. The changes that occurred in art, specifically certain abstract elements, came after the influences of the American artists physically entered the country.

The Lianozovo group attracted other underground artists, poets and writers such as Ilya Ehrenburg, S. Rikhter, B. Slutsky and A. Skira (Skira was a publisher) who would compare, talk and discuss at their home. Lev Kropinitsky recalls

These were the years of multiple experiments, endless arguments and the births and coming to awareness of the new artistic views and positions. Each one of them was creating oneself. Each one of them began from his or her own experience, his or her own vision and view of the world. ...It was not very easy. The tradition of Russian painting was lost. Somewhere, a long way behind, they could still sense the faint reflections of the 1920's. But it was obvious that it was not good enough....<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P.82. Here he dates the exhibition with 1958 – which others in the book have done as well. This is an error, because the exhibition was in 1959 – there was no exhibition in the Soviet Union of specifically American art in 1958.

<sup>240</sup>Ekaterina Morozova. P. 29; “By the way” Kropivnitsky continued in the 1965 interview “some of them had the same teacher. It was Yevgeny Kropivnitsky. He was an artist of the older generation. He was born in 1893 and studied with the famous masters – Serov and Korovin. However he still had a young soul and preserved a remarkable capacity for work and an infinite love for art” (he spoke about his father,).

It is once again important to note that the abstract work by Russian artists like El Lissitzky, Mikhail Matiushin, Gustav Klucis, Pavel Filonov, Kazimir Malevich, Marc Chagall and the like were not shown in museums. Artists could only view them in the homes of private collectors like George Costakis for example.<sup>241</sup> It was only after 1959 that these artists were exhibited at the Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow. For most artists the history of the Russian avant-garde was reduced to Robert Falk, Vladimir Favorsky and Artur Fonvizin because to a certain extent these artists were accepted by the Soviet government and therefore could be shown to students. A meeting place for those artists who had survived the Stalinist persecution and young artists interested in experienced Russian artists was at the poet and artist A. A. Steinberg's house in Tarusa. Tarusa was a small town on the Oka River about one hundred thirty kilometers from Moscow. B. Sveshnikov also settled in his house. By 1960 Tarusa had become the center of artistic life. D. Plavinsky settled there and A. Kharitonov was a frequent visitor. Steinberg's house in particular was a "citadel of the young": a village hut full of books, carved wooden sculptures, Steinberg's and Sveshnikov's paintings on the walls.<sup>242</sup> Artists such as V. Vorobyov and I. Vulokh and V. Konevsky were influenced by the Tarusa House of Culture. These artists were young students at the State College of Art and were thrown out after their summer at Tarusa because they were suddenly viewed as "professionally unfit". Steinberg was not a professionally trained artist. He focused his attention on the Expressionist tradition of French painting and artists like van Gogh and Vlaminck. He later developed an interest in religion and metaphysical concepts which he expressed with

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<sup>241</sup> Costakis would hide these abstract works if an official visitor came. He had paintings under his bed, stacked on shelves etc. and would merely replace what was hanging on the walls.

<sup>242</sup> Ekaterina Morozova P. 30. A.D. Sinyavsky, a writer who lived in Tarus was a historian of literature born in 1925. He was arrested in 1965 for the publication of books in the West and sent to camps in 1966 for seven years. Today he lives in Paris.

meta-geometric shares. These existed also on the edge of the Russian Symbolists and the visual ideas of Kazimir Malevich.

The artists Eduard Shteinberg, Lev Nusberg, Francesco Infante, and Viacheslav Koleichuk and their so-called Movement Group maintained the traditions of the 1920's (fig. 39 and 40 and 49). The group focused on the propagation and development of the Kinetic Art. Two individuals who also steered away from abstraction were the following two artists and their students: Vladimir Sterligov in Leningrad and Mikhail Chernyshov in Moscow. Chernyshov studied the legacy of geometric abstractionism in Western periodicals, laid these forms atop the visual kitsch of communal life – from Wallpaper to clippings from magazines with representations of tanks and airplanes and a peculiar Pop Art resulted. He, for example, found a new way to look at the forms and shapes that had been given in the early part of the century (fig. 49).<sup>243</sup>

These artists as well as those tending more towards abstraction looked for depictions of artwork created by free-thinking artists who were not confined to the rules of Socialist Realism. Each one was searching for a different way of looking at art, of working on art, of creating art. One artist who exhibited with Oscar Rabin in 1957, Ernst Neizvestny said: “We needed new forms of expression.” and demonstrated that with his sculptures, (fig. 41)<sup>244</sup> Artists organized exhibitions of their work so that others could see that there was a private art scene and not only the official assignments of the state. The artists motivated each other this way and their work got out there to a small public.

In 1956, at a time when two Georgian KGB members were executed after their trial in Tbilisi and Soviet tanks opened fire at peaceful demonstrations in honor of Stalin's

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<sup>243</sup> His work was exhibited in Berkeley, California in 1988. An exhibition catalogue was printed in Russian. I am in possession of this catalogue.

<sup>244</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P.14.

death in Georgia and the revolution shook Hungary, the artists Vadim Sidur, V. Lempert and N. Silis exhibited at the Academy of Art of USSR, the Second Exhibition of the students of Eli Belyutin's studio also took place<sup>245</sup> and the Picasso exhibition took place at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. Picasso influenced certain artists work and was clearly the case with Eli Belyutin (fig. 42). In that winter Alexander M. Rodchenko died.

The following year brought the United States Information Agency's magazine *America* back to the Soviet Union which was published in Russian solely for a Soviet public. As previously described, it was printed along the lines of *Life* magazine, large format with lots of pictures. At this time it contained especially many pictures of young abstract artists, reported on Jazz, the American lifestyle and was studied by many young Soviet artists (fig. 26 and 27).<sup>246</sup>

In 1957 an exhibit of applied arts was shown at the State Lenin Library, with over two thousand works of young contemporary artists. The Moscow Union of Artist Exhibition Hall showed over a thousand artworks of young artists. The State Pushkin Museum exhibited contemporary Italian drawings and prints. The party controlled Union of Artists of the USSR was formed at the All-Union Artists' Congress and united various artists with completely different artistic styles and groups. Membership to the Union was essential in order to practice as a professional artist. The ideas of the Russian art of the past; of Cubo-Futurists, Constructivists and Supremacists were labeled "formalistic" and their works were taken from the museum walls and put into

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<sup>245</sup> These artists included: M. Aslanova, B. Belov, E. Belova, M. Borodin, R. Butenko, S. Bychkov, T. Volovik, L. Gagarkina, L. Dat'ko, N. Zakharzhevskaya, L. Zobern, T. Kotsubey, V. Lazarevskaya, N. Lobanev, L. Morozova, L. Mushtakova, V. Nazarov, E. Novitsky, N. Orlova, G. Petushkova, A. Remennik, I. Trophimov, A. Chernenko, Chernikov, H. Yatskevich (according to N. Moleva)

<sup>246</sup> Personal interview with Leonid Bazahnov, Director of the Museum of Contemporary arts in Moscow.

storage. At the same time, modern Western art was viewed simply not allowed with its “bourgeois” and “reactionary” qualification by the authorities.<sup>247</sup>

Moscow was the host of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Youth Festival in 1958 which turned out to be a meeting place for young people from the West, Soviet Europe and Asia. According to Vitaly Skuratovsky who was there, the young people from Western countries who came to this exhibit were naïve about the living conditions of the host country. There was an ardent exchange of ideas and a feeling of freedom not felt so clearly before.<sup>248</sup>

There were over 4,500 works of art by young artists from fifty-two countries. The quality of these works was uneven, but the essence of the show was somewhere else: it was about meeting and talking with people from other countries, about talking and showing and looking at life differently. What was important about this exhibition for the Soviet public and the artists of course, was that young people were able to openly, freely and officially learn about the latest developments in the West.

The profusion of styles, the vitality of imagination, the variety of experimentation, and the sheer freedom and exuberance of Western artists was overwhelming to the Soviet artists.<sup>249</sup>

Crowds of foreigners could be seen in the streets everywhere in Moscow. There were a lot of Americans among them. A live Jazz band played – it was like a Jazz festival with many musicians from the United States, Great Britain, Poland and Italy. The artists and public in general were able to see more and communicate more with foreigners than at any time they could remember. Skuratovsky, in referring to this festival also said: “...freedom like a plague is contagious and spreads quickly with a close contact....many people were affected and ‘infected’ by these ideas.”<sup>250</sup> Vladimir

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<sup>247</sup> Western art had these labels put on them in the late 1920’s.

<sup>248</sup> Vitaly Skuratoysky in Ekaterina Morozova. P. 22.

<sup>249</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P. 49.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. Vitaly Skuratovsky in Alpatova. P. 16-17. Ekaterina Morozova. P. 22 . On P. 21: In an Interview A. Erofejev asks V. Rokotyan “Valentin Rokotyan, are you sure that this exhibition organized in your apartment was the first ‘flat exhibition’? VR: “I don’t know, perhaps, things like this had already been done before (in 1955). Though it is difficult to imagine. As far as we are concerned we were not organizing ‘flat exhibitions’. We were successfully deceiving our party committee by

Nemukhin who later became an influential figure in the unofficial art movement said that in seeing this work, in coming into contact with so many foreign and Western artists the Soviet spectator was able “to recognize in foreign artists their own selves and their own strivings.”<sup>251</sup>

It was also at this time that a typical Soviet and quite illegal phenomenon was taking place in Moscow: the illegal flat exhibitions. At George Costakis one could see Anatoli Zverev’s works (fig. 43); V. Yakovlevs at the young composers apartment A. Volkonsky; a young art historian I. Tsyrlin showed the works of L. Masterkova (fig. 48), D. Plavinsky and later M. Kulakov; S. Richter showed D. Krasnopevtsevs monochrome still-lifes and Nina Stevens showed Vasilii Sitnikov, D. Plavinsky and later Vladimir Nemukhin (fig. 35). George Costakis certainly played an important role by collecting and showing works of the earlier Russian avant-garde alongside works by contemporary artists. Yet it was the role played by new collectors such as Alek Rusanov, Evgenii Nutovich, Nina Stevens, Leonid Talochkin, Alexander Glezer and Tatiana Kolodzei which proved so important in the showing and the buying of young contemporary Soviet art.<sup>252</sup>

The exhibitions were well visited by other artists and at times by interested diplomats. In terms of flat exhibitions, these were of course cramped and the artists branched out and when a collector did not buy and exhibit their work, they showed it outdoors and sometimes, rarely at embassies. The sale of works to foreigners increased and in the 1960’s even became an economic factor that played an increasingly important role in the infrastructure of communal modernism. As the buyers were accredited journalists or diplomats in Moscow they, for the most part, acquired works of small dimension so

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organizing unsanctioned exhibitions at Moscow University.” This started just after the Festival in 1957 and ‘our work was stopped’.

<sup>251</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P. 63. See also the Archives of Alexander Glezer and Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer. Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union. London: Secker and Warburg. 1977.

P.89.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

as to export them safely in their suitcases. From this practice the term “suitcase style” was created and denoted the modestly scaled artworks designed for export.<sup>253</sup>

These years when Khrushchev ruled the Soviet State there were signs of opening and then there were clear reverberations of the old Stalinist regime – it was a constant giving and taking away. From the descriptions given it becomes clear that there was a quite vibrant art scene. There were various groups of artists and exhibitions held and discussions on what was new and interesting for the next work created. This information was not publicized or published, but neither were addresses or telephone numbers.

The artists who worked in and around Moscow when the American National Exhibit came to the city literally pilgered there to see what was going on in the America art scene – up until then it was really only second-hand information that they had received. The youth festival did not show the work of the heralded Abstract Expressionists. This would be the first chance to see the actual works of renowned American artists. Artist they had heard about and were of course curious as to why they were so important, so interesting and so different. Many of the established artists and teachers had grown up during the suppressive era in which Western art was shunned and as previously described, declared illegal by the government. Yet Khrushchev changed all that by allowing the cultural exchange of artists and artwork.

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<sup>253</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P.89.

## CHAPTER II C THE AMERICAN NATIONAL SHOW

If, until this point, alternative artists had oscillated between the Scylla of communality and the Charybdis of Social Realism, denying each the presumption of authenticity' then ...the myth of Western modernism came to incarnate authentic reality. In the USSR, which lacked the sociocultural context necessary to understand its contradictions, this mythic modernism was never able to go beyond the romanticized biographies of its heroes or the limits of pure aesthetics....a positive side of the exchange between East and West was that Soviet artists were able, finally, to become acquainted with paradigms of individual authorship apart from the communal setting, paradigms devoid for the most part of the authoritarian individualism of the Party elite.<sup>254</sup>

The initiation, installation and general attendance of the American National Exhibition have been described in a previous chapter. The visitors of the Exhibition, and as has been established it was over 2.7 million individuals who came, ultimately had the final word on the American's goal of shocking the Soviet public with all the objects that interested the United States in 1959. It was not possible to receive access to the KGB files in order to assess the Soviet official response to this exhibition. Therefore personal interviews and interviews taken by others as well as documents made available by the United States government – translations of comments by Soviet visitors and other insight into the Soviet response, as well as articles written in Russian for the Soviet public are used to portray the Soviet reaction to this unusual and explosive exhibition.

A comment book was not only placed at each exhibition stand for the exhibiting corporations to use, there was also one placed at the exit hall, prompting the viewers to jot down their general response to the Exhibition. A machine taking up positive or negative votes on the exhibition was also placed conveniently close to the area where the visitors left the Sokolniki grounds.<sup>255</sup> In the end, the favorable votes tallied up to

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<sup>254</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P. 85.

<sup>255</sup> John R. Thomas. "Report on Service with the American Exhibition in Moscow". March 15, 1960. California: The Rand Corporation. P.17. "At the end of the day we made a practice of removing the sheets containing the comments made during the day. This was done to forestall the rifling of the sheets

85% and the favorable comments to over 65%. In a ranking of most favorable and most unfavorable comments, put together by the United States government from those written down by the Soviet visitors, between one and twenty art was on place nine as most favorable and on second place as most unfavorable. The comments themselves were much more mixed and the negative comments were generally signed clearly – as if the individual knew the KGB would be looking at the comments made, most often those who wrote favorably about certain parts of the exhibition signed illegibly.

According to the United States State department report on the Exhibition, the comment books and voting machines only represented “a tiny fraction” of all the visitors. In other words there were only 15,000 citizens who used the voting machines and 2,000 who commented on the Exhibition out of a total of close to 2,700,000.<sup>256</sup>

These two sources should therefore not be ignored, but the guides’ information on what the Soviets actually said to them and what the Soviet visitors has said over the years in personal interviews on the subject should outweigh the previous.

According to the US government surveys taken, “five things were spectacularly popular” and these were the guides, the Family of Man photographic exhibit, automobiles, color television, and Circarama.<sup>257</sup> Interestingly enough and essential here, there were quite a few comments on the artwork displayed. The American government translated these comments and filed them at the State department. The guides and American personnel present felt the Soviet visitors were exceedingly interested and curious about the United States and asked questions in regard to what interested the American public. This was determined from the reports given by the seventy five guides on the premises after the exhibition had closed. In this report the

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which had taken place overnight on some occasions, perhaps by Soviet design.” – he is implying that the KGB went through the comment books and therefore these were removed daily by the Americans to avoid any further interference.

<sup>256</sup> “Visitors’ Reactions to the American Exhibit in Moscow: A Preliminary Report”. United States Information Agency Records: Office of Research and Analysis. September 28, 1959. P.2.

<sup>257</sup> “A Review of the American National Exhibition in Moscow”. July 25-September 4, 1959. U.S. Information Agency Records.

visitor's "extent of approval" in answering the question "Was the Exhibit a success?" answered "Unquestionably yes."<sup>258</sup>

According to the guides the second highest level of criticism was on the abstract art displayed.<sup>259</sup> But when these guides were asked which exhibits should remain for future exhibitions, art was unanimously included. The guides just felt there should be more clear explanations for the visitors. The sculpture on the other hand should be removed or radically improved according to the guides.<sup>260</sup> The curator and also guide through the art exhibit Edith Gregor Halpert and later Richard McLanathan were literally overwhelmed by the curiosity and interest shown by the Soviet visitors, especially that of young people and artists. They reported that most of the day and each and every day of the Exhibition the art section on the second floor of the main pavilion was overcrowded with visitors looking at the artwork. The sculpture on the other hand was placed outside between the pavilions without much explanation or guides to discuss the pieces displayed.<sup>261</sup>

In terms of the comments in the comment book, some of the negative comments on art, translated by the US government were:

1. Our people have realistic taste in art. Do not show us the abstract art again. You had better keep it at home and use it on ranches to scare off crows.
2. It is necessary to forget the national dignity of one's people, of one's country, to be able to exhibit this filthy and revolting abstract art.
3. The Exhibition is not bad. The automobiles are good, but your abstract art is foreign to us and causes smiles and even laughter.<sup>262</sup>

The more positive comments on the artwork were as follows.

1. I have verily seen her democracy in art.
2. I was much interested in automobiles and the imitative art. Sincere thanks to the guides who gave a correct picture of life in America.

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<sup>258</sup> "Visitors' Reactions to the American Exhibit in Moscow: A Preliminary Report". United States Information Agency Records: Office of Research and Analysis. September 28, 1959.P.i.

<sup>259</sup> "Visitors Reactions..." p.18. Criticism of art was second after "not enough technology"

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p.21.

<sup>261</sup> Personal Interview Neil Thompson: Sam Driver and Claire de Saint Phalle were also guides through the art section, both are deceased.

<sup>262</sup> "Visitors Reactions to the American Exhibit in Moscow" p.27.

3. The exhibition was very good. I liked everything, the architecture, paintings...as so forth.<sup>263</sup>

The tickets for the exhibition were so much in demand that they were sold on the black market but at times they were also available at common kiosk stands in and around Moscow for the duration of the Exhibition.<sup>264</sup> There was a daily quota of ticket-selling imposed by the U.S. Exhibit authorities (50,000 per day which would have meant 2 million in total). Over two and a half million visitors were counted by the time the exhibition came to a close.<sup>265</sup> According to the US authorities the attendance should not necessarily be regarded as a criterion of popularity of the exhibit.

Perhaps the visitors taking a small tangible token with them – a “znachki” or to be more precise, a small red-white-and-blue lapel button that was given out to most visitors would be a better indicator.<sup>266</sup> All of the “znachki” disappeared before the close of the exhibit. Over three million pamphlets had been printed by the U.S. government, which were also handed out but in the last few days the exhibitors found that these too had run out (fig. 44). The Exhibition grounds were clearly depicted and described in the pamphlet (fig. 45) complete with a picture of the U.S. president and an introductory statement from him to the Soviet public, all in Russian.

The large exhibition hall which housed most of the government exhibits as well as the corporations showing their newest products had a section with books and the organizers hoped that the books displayed there would be taken as such a “znachki” or tangible token. These were set in shelves for anyone to pocket if they wished,

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<sup>263</sup> “A Review of the American National Exhibition in Moscow: July 25-September 4, 1959. United States Information Agency report.

<sup>264</sup> Personal interview with Jack Masey – he read to me the response of Soviets to an interview by Niel Thompson in Los Angeles, California in 2005. John R. Thomas P23: The tickets nominally priced at one ruble or ten cents were selling for as high as 50 to 75 rubles on the black market.

<sup>265</sup> Personal interview with Neil Thompson. According to the guides and entrance personnel as well as a Soviet student interviewed there was an enormous demand for tickets. People also pushed their way in or due to the crowds merely walked in without a ticket.

<sup>266</sup> Ralph K. White. P. 1. Jack Masey also mentioned this in the interview with him.

surrounded by the art work selected by President Eisenhower in the last minute. Those works should have neutralized the more radical contemporary works in the floor above. Many of the books were confiscated by the Soviet government and many were taken by the public, just as the exhibitors had anticipated.<sup>267</sup>

According to John R. Thomas, who worked for the Rand Corporation of California and was present at the fair: “The best way to assess the impact of the Exhibition on the Soviet people is to refer to the comments made by the visitors and the reaction of the regime.”<sup>268</sup> He points out that a number of Russians told him that they hesitated to enter more favorable comments in the comment books since “others” would be looking over their shoulders on assignment from the regime. The visitors went so far as to suggest that the exhibitors set up boxes under lock in order to encourage “freer expression”. The exhibition was “subjected to severe and sometimes vicious attacks in the Soviet press”, criticizing the show.<sup>269</sup> But they were unable to “work out a consistent line” in their critique. According to Thomas this was evident from the contradictory nature of the criticism directed at the exhibition. “Thus, in one breath, it was declared that the Exhibition was displaying wares beyond the reach of the average American and, in the next breath, that the Exhibition was showing nothing that the Russians did not already have.”<sup>270</sup>

Another method of blurring the impression that the exhibition might make of the visitors, the regime decided to “mount a massive propaganda campaign to counteract the potential appeal of” the Exhibition. Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Georgi

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<sup>267</sup> U.S. Information Agency documents and personal interview with Jack Masey. Also Grover, Preston. “Soviet Officials Haul Out 30 Books From U.S. Fair Just Before Opening. “Washington Post”. July 25, 1959. A total of 10,000 books including duplicates were shipped to Moscow. The plan was to look like a well stocked American book store. The Council which chose the books with librarians and specialists tried to “emphasize the freedom and vitality of the flow of ideas” in American life as well as the “broad availability” of books of all types and points of view. Also John R. Thomas: Several thousand books were missing at the end of the first few days of the Exhibition, including bulky Sears catalogs. p 24.

<sup>268</sup> Thomas. “Report on Service with the American Exhibition in Moscow”. March 15, 1960. California: 1960.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. p 17ff.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. p.19.

A. Zhukov, head of the ministry of cultural affairs planned a Soviet campaign of “counterpropaganda and agitation”. The CPSU (The Soviet Communist Party) authorities sought to discredit the exhibition and planned additional cultural events (shows, festivals, exhibitions, public festivities, carnivals and amateur art shows) to be staged in Moscow at the same time as the U.S. national exhibition.<sup>271</sup> One such festivity was a fair located just outside the entrance to Sokolniki Park. Their fair included the latest models of Soviet cars, refrigerators and other wares, but no art. As was already mentioned, the regime also assigned agitators to harass the guides with embarrassing questions about the racial problems in America or on health insurance for the average American as another means of lessening the impact of the Exhibition. The article dated September 1959 in the *Washington Evening Star* from *The New York Times* reporter Osgood Caruthers shed light on the importance of the art work displayed at the exhibition:

A vigorous debate on United States art, abstract and otherwise, has reached a climax at the American National Exhibition as it nears its close Friday. “What good is abstract art?” “Did a monkey really win first prize in an American art contest?” “But who would hang that on the wall in his apartment?” “Why do they paint negative things?” These are some of the questions one hears from Soviet art connoisseurs and the uninitiated who stream by the thousands daily through the exhibit of paintings and sculpture on the second floor of the glass pavilion. The extraordinary thing is that more and more Russians themselves are answering the questions, and openly defending the exhibit.<sup>272</sup>

He went on to describe that “the excitement” about art “waxes around the modern works. Loud guffaws and jeering gestures are hurled at paintings like Jackson Pollock and Ben Shahn. But many visitors study these paintings carefully...”.<sup>273</sup> An American guide found that he could speak about the artwork in “the most complicated intellectual and philosophical and technical terms” whereby he received an

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<sup>271</sup> Hixson. P. 185-187.

<sup>272</sup> Osgood Caruthers, *Washington Evening Star*. “Russians at U.S. Fair Debate Abstract Art and Right to Like It”, September 3, 1959.

<sup>273</sup> Caruthers, “Russians at U.S. Fair...”

“extraordinary response” and the Soviets themselves took over and often explained the works to other Russians, “echoing his own words.”<sup>274</sup> What this tells us is that although many did not know what to do with the artwork displayed or were put off by it, the abstract art was also accepted by many – even defended. According to the Americans and those in charge of the exhibit, “this part of the fair” is “a cultural highlight”.<sup>275</sup> At times more than fifty people would be crowded around one abstract painting asking the guide questions or discussing it amongst themselves.

According to Ralph K. White, who undertook a study for the United States Information Agency as Assistant to the Director of the Exhibit, Harold C. McClellan, the reaction to the art exhibit showed an “extreme”.<sup>276</sup> The art exhibit ranked high by some criteria but less by others. Where there were special guides to explain the pieces and in this case the paintings “which were much more adequately explained” according to Mr. White, the negative responses were much fewer.<sup>277</sup> He also pointed out that:

a distinction should ...be made between the general public and the artists of the Soviet Union. While the general public reacted negatively to the more experimental paintings – as the general American public probably would have - the paintings apparently made an indelible impression on many Soviet artist and intellectuals as a welcome change from the constraints of ‘socialist realism’ and of Soviet conformity in general.<sup>278</sup>

Later we will go into more detail about how the Soviet artists viewed the show after we have discussed the official Soviet view of the Exhibition - that which was printed for the broad Soviet public, or for those who read the paper in Moscow. After the exhibition had been open for over a month Vladimir Kemenov wrote an article on the

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<sup>274</sup> Richard McLanathan says this in Caruthers article. Also in AAA/Smithsonian papers.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. Caruthers. According to Caruthers abstract art was condemned and impressionism as well as degenerate, bourgeois, formalist, cosmopolitan, subjective and negative, but he also says that “One does not hear so much of an attack on or defense of the idea that “socialist realism” as a defense of the idea that those who like it can have it and those who like other forms of expression should have their choice.” In other words all forms of art should be accepted!

<sup>276</sup> White, Ralph K. p.4.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> The Rand Corporation also printed a Report on Service With The American Exhibition in Moscow dated March 15, 1960 with the response to the show.

art displayed at the exhibition. Many other articles were published on the exhibition within the city limits of Moscow and Kemenov's article did not cover the whole show, it focused specifically on the artwork shown. It is essential to look at how the official Soviet response was and if this influenced the artists, who came to the exhibition, saw the artwork and told their friends about it.

Vladimir Kemenov, the Soviet art historian, art critic and a member of the Academy of Fine Arts of the USSR as well as member of CPSU, former director of the Tretyakov Art Gallery, Deputy Minister of Culture of the USSR from 1954 to 1956 and permanent representative of the USSR at UNESCO was known to be a "stalwart of the Soviet school of "Socialist Realism".<sup>279</sup> With the very prominent political positions he held, one could presume that his review of the art shown at the American National Show would be everything but positive. He was not the only one to write about the show, but was especially important because he was well known and his article covered a whole page – with depictions of the "capitalistic waste".

In *Sovietskaya Kultura* his article entitled "The Modern Art at the Exhibition" appeared on August 11th and depicted several abstract works of art and denounced especially these (fig. 46). Kemenov divided his article into four sections: "Realist direction is weak and narrow"; "American Surrealists"; "Fruitless Abstractions" and "The Mythos of Many and of the Freedom of the Individual". In the first paragraphs he listed all the artworks and artists missing from the exhibition – rather what the Soviet public would miss and which "formalist" works were displayed.

From the first sentence of the article, his attacks were focused on the artwork and the curators and specifically Lloyd Goodrich, who was responsible for the catalogue printed in Russian that accompanied the exhibition. Kemenov found it disappointing

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<sup>279</sup> Daniel Clifton. "Dispute over art flares in Soviet" in *New York Times*. June 28, 1955.

that works by Rockwell Kent<sup>280</sup> or William Gropper were missing from the line-up of American painters (fig. 47). Instead works with “dirty colored spots and deformed lines” were displayed. He felt it impossible to find a coherent connection between America’s nature, its people and their work in this “meaningless chaos” in the art displayed.<sup>281</sup>

He continued, that he did not want to say anything against Mr. Goodrich, yet in his attempt to “bring the quality of openness and vagueness” to the Soviet people which seemed to be so similar in this, “our airy century”: the large format of the works shown and the feeling of space reflected in Americas expanse he clearly missed the point. Kemenev went on to annihilate each and every word Goodrich wrote, saying that it certainly was a strange way of showing the Soviets, the America they had heard so much about and that it became clear through what was shown that there was no place in the United States for realistic art.<sup>282</sup>

There were ten realistic works and he wrote that these were interesting, among them: Thomas Hart Benton’s “Boom-Town” done in 1928 and Charles Berchfield’s “Stroll” from the same year or Alexander Brook’s “My Son Sandy” – clearly those works which depict scenes that are recognizable and would belong to the “old school”. His critique is on the large formats of Robert Motherwell, William Baziotos, Mark Toby, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Stuart Davis and others who literally pour down upon the viewer with their lack of content and their dirty colors – these strange works and the sculptures exhibited outdoors with their meaningless titles are quite

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<sup>280</sup> Rockwell Kent had exhibited in Leningrad at the Hermitage in 1958. He visited the Soviet Union many times, including in 1959. He was highly reared by the Soviets. Both of these artists painted in a figurative and realist manner.

<sup>281</sup> *Sovietskaya Kultura*, August 11, 1959. Translated by Halyna Batko In 1936 William Gropper along with Stuart Davis, Max Weber, Philip Evergood and others signed a letter published in the *New Masses* in support of the recent Moscow trials which tried some of the most prominent Soviet intellectuals including Trotsky. In the eyes of the Soviets Gropper was a “good guy”. Gropper, along with Rockwell Kent, Joseph Hirsch and Philip Evergood were considered socially-critical figurative painters in the United States.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

shocking for the viewer. But the viewer should not look for a reason why these pieces were chosen, “let the author of the catalogue, Lloyd Goodrich explain: Abstraction he wrote... demonstrates a certain dislike for reality and specifically that of human depictions... abstract art can reach deeper meanings...”<sup>283</sup> – Kemenov believed there was a serious gap here between the viewer and the artist: one which could not possibly portray any meaning, because there was no meaning in the abstract art shown at the exhibition. He equated abstract art with the annihilation of art and artist.<sup>284</sup>

Kemenov continued his criticism of Goodrich, quoting him and then on the artwork he selected: to Pollock who should have left the paints for what they were normally used -- for painting cars. Abstract Expressionism had an anti-artistic character, he declared. In his article he named just about every single artist exhibited and why his or her particular work was an abhorition. In concluding his vehement critic on the show, Kemenov declared that these works are like pictures in an insane asylum. He closed his article by stating that the viewer would not want to see art in abstract “painting” or sculpture. In this his deep contempt for the ugly grimaces in esthetics that the Abstract Expressionists brought with them, the people of the new socialist society were not inclined to the formalist art of the United States.<sup>285</sup>

Kemenov, with his reputation in the Soviet Union and the United States as a prominent figure and his lengthy article brought America and Abstract Expressionism together, called it “fruitless” and said it reflected the capitalist America. No subject matter, no soul. He found:

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<sup>283</sup> Kemenov. Translated by Halina Batko

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> “Formalism” defined in the Dictionary of art terms, published in Moscow in 1965 (*Kratkii slovar’ terminov izobrazitel’nogo iskusstva*): “reactionary trends in art and aesthetics, connected with the ideology of decaying capitalism.” This same dictionary defines “reactionary formalist art” as including “such styles and movements as Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, Surrealism, and Dadaism... All these different formalistic trends are based on the separation of form from content and on the superiority of form over content.” On pages 177-78 of this dictionary one can also find the statement that the “fight against formalist art is the primary goal of Soviet art.” Kemenov’s line about the “ugly grimace in esthetics” made the *New York Times*.

The bourgeois art specialists find it fitting to label abstraction... 'freedom of the artist's creative individuality' and use it as evidence of the 'great variety' in modern art. The reactionary circles in the USA encourage abstraction. The realist artist meets with difficulties in selling his paintings or in organizing such exhibitions.... Abstract art is excellently suited to the Maecenas-multimillionaires, the patrons who control museums. After all, it detracts (sic) people's attention from the difficult problems created by the hard life under the Capitalist conditions of reality.<sup>286</sup>

He criticized the realistic work as narrow and weak, attacked Lloyd Goodrich again and again for his choice of art and especially his support of the Abstract

Expressionists. His attack was long and detailed and he set capitalism equal to the decay in art – this decay culminating in drip paintings. Kemenov and *Sovietskaya Kultura* as well as other press literally “hammered out an anvil chorus of criticism of the United States exhibition”.

Yet the Russian public kept coming, kept crowding into the Sokolniki grounds anyway.<sup>287</sup> Newspaper headlines in Moscow read “Don't be misled!” or “What the exhibition conceals” or “All that glitters is not gold” referring to the glittering aluminum dome by Buckminster Fuller.<sup>288</sup> With these kinds of articles, referring to all aspects of the Exhibition, the one that had the greatest impact with portions of it being translated and published in the New York Times was the one page article on art by Vladmir Kemenov. In the provinces of the Soviet Union the fair was not even mentioned. Upon examination by the U.S. government, nothing appeared in the papers of fourteen provincial capitals on the Exhibit. The people that came to the Exhibition and this can be understood through personal interviews because some said they were passing through or they had come upon oral recommendation.<sup>289</sup>

Looking at the comments by artists working in the Soviet Union at the time, it would appear that they were not affected by Kemenov's article in the way the government

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<sup>286</sup> *Sovietskaya Kultura* August 11, 1959. Translated by Halyna Batko

<sup>287</sup> Lloyd Goodrich p. 4.

<sup>288</sup> “Exhibit Gets Bad Press But Reds Still Pour In” by the Associated Press dated July 30, 1959. The Soviet newspapers listed are Izvestina, Komsolmol Pravda, Soviet Fleet and Trud.

<sup>289</sup> Neil Thompson telephone conversation June 2007.

had hoped. As Y. Zlotnikov said, referring to the Exhibition: “Young Soviet artists looked up to Western art and romanticized American painting.”<sup>290</sup> They knew that articles in the newspapers could only be viewed as political jargon and most of them saw the irony in it. Abstraction was the direction many artists had already started striving towards. Prompted by the Picasso exhibit, the International Youth show in Moscow and the *America* magazine articles many individuals were open for the overwhelming American art on display. The artist Michael Chernyshov recalls the exhibit as follows:

Let’s come ... to the Art Pavilion in Sokolniki. Rothko showed his ‘Old Gold on White’. This delicate, ‘European’ work was in a sharp contrast with Gottlieb or harsh DeKooning. I did not like Albright. I remember Baziotes, Tomlin, Fritz Glarner and, of course, Pollocks’s ‘Cathedral’. After the exhibition I collected all issues of ‘America’ with articles about art and reproductions of paintings. I can remember very well an Arthur Dove picture – ‘Abstract Interpretation of a Windmill’ (I suspect the American editors gave their own title ‘for coherence’). Lee Mullican and Stuart Davis’s harshly coloured work were also there. I copied all these works, enlarged them upto one meter and hang above my desk. My parents loved it....In one of the issues I saw George Braque’s painting ‘Philodendron’: I loved the name of it but no one knew what it meant.

The second hot point of the exhibition was the boulevard, next to Gaston Lachaise’s sculpture. It was a huge woman: her forms were respected and discussion was not that violent.<sup>291</sup>

For not being interested in art, Chernyshov certainly remembered a great deal of artists’ names and after the show went to study them in *America* and copied them to hang up in his apartment. He recalled what shocked the public, surprised them, and

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<sup>290</sup> Ekaterina Morozova p-38.

<sup>291</sup> Ekaterina Morozova P 38-39. Chernyshov goes on to describe that: “In 1959 painting was not yet that important for me: I was fascinated by ‘Electra-225’, ‘Bonneville Mist’, ‘Impala’. The trick that worked for everyone was also a red ‘Corvet’: it was spinning around on a large circular pedestal in front of excited crowds. Once I even saw smiling Nixon there: he came to Moscow for several days. ‘Ramak-305’ answered numerous questions: the visitors took pieces of punched tape away with them as souvenirs: You had to work with your elbows where cans with ‘USA’ written at the bottem were produced and given away. The ... Cola lovers were queuing at the Round Pavilion. It was free and you could drink as much as you wanted. Many of us appropriated the American style of clothes, hair cut, etc. After the exhibition, I, like many other youngsters from Gorky Street began to wear a white T-shirt underneath a dark shirt, had my hair ‘crew-cut’. It was funny to meet people looking just the same in the streets....Krushch (Krushchev) went to Amereica then and they often showed the life of the Americans on television. That’s why we knew what to wear...”

interested them. His description of the exhibition paints quite a different picture than Kemenov with his critique in the newspaper.

Another artist, Aleksei Tiapushkin was, according to John Bowl, “perhaps the strongest abstract artist of the non-conformist movement.” He had seen Abstract Expressionist painting at the Exhibition as well and it was reflected in his work (fig.50).<sup>292</sup>

What is important for us is the contrast between the official view of the show, that which was revealed in the Soviet newspapers, the comments given in the comment book placed at the exit of the show and finally the way the artists themselves expressed their view of what they saw and how they reacted to it. There were also some interesting repercussions in the art world due to the exhibition and these must also be looked at as they again portray the more official side of the Soviet reaction to the exhibition. But again they also reveal the epic effect it had on the artists living and working in the Soviet Union.

That same year Eli Belyutin was fired from the Polygraphic Institute with the following reason:

Eli Belyutin is a bright representative of contemporary expressionism. His art and teaching methods stand in direct opposition to Soviet art. There is not [sic] place for abstraction in Soviet Higher education! The members of the committee think that abstraction propagated by Belyutin shakes the grounds of Soviet art.<sup>293</sup>

See fig. 51 for the style the Institute was referring to. The staff of the Institute was no longer able to allow Belyutin to teach. According to Jane Sharp this was “an

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<sup>292</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge Edts. P.297 Bowl also maintained that he had looked through Camilla Gray’s book on Russian art or seen it at Costakis as well.

<sup>293</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P.40. Alpatova. Vol. 1.P. 67. In Marter, Joan Ed. P.87 I find the same text translated as follows: E. Belyutin is a bold representative of contemporary expressionism. His art and his method of teaching completely contradict Soviet art. There is no place for abstraction in Soviet institutions of higher learning! The members of the committee believe that any further activity by Belyutin in the dept. may lead to the complete liquidation of that valuable work which the head of the dept. A. D. Goncharov has conducted. The members of the committee believe that abstractionism, of which Belyutin is a propagandist, uproots the foundations upon which Soviet art is built, and which they are obliged to protect, with all their force.”

immediate consequence of the American exhibition”.<sup>294</sup> This did not stop Belyutin from teaching though and he was not sent to an insane asylum or labor camp. In fact just a few months after his removal from the Soviet Institute of Higher Education his studio artists took part in their fourth collective trip to Krtasny Stan for summer school. One hundred and eighty artists participated. During that year his flat in Bolshaya Sadovaya became a meeting place for artists and writers. These included P. Kuznetsov, S. Lebedeva, A. Myasnikov, Y. Rubenstein, I Erenburg, Ryurik Ivnev, E. Fradkina, G. Storm, I. Kholin, G. Sapgir, some artists from the Italian and Polish Embassies in Moscow as well as the Studio artists.<sup>295</sup>

A few months later the head of the Visual Arts Department and teacher of foreign art, Ilya Tsirlin was fired from the VGIK, which was the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography as well as from “Iskusstvo” the publishing house “art”. As a student of his recalls, “he brought in his personal books in order to show the students examples of cubism, surrealism and abstraction” because officially the Fauves were the last group of artists who were allowed to be taught at Russian Higher education.<sup>296</sup> It becomes clear why he was dismissed – he allowed his students to look at (not actively paint) forms of artwork which were not officially allowed.

Despite these kinds of restrictions or dismissals or perhaps specifically because of them the students and some of the teachers were driven more than ever to work in an abstract style. They also saw the necessity in looking at the international art scene – if not in their hometown, then in books or magazines. The fact that Eli Belyutin’s studio exhibited every year at least once proves the vehemence with which these people wanted to make a breakthrough in the art scene in the Soviet Union. The teacher and

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<sup>294</sup> Marter. P. 87. There is no actual proof here that this is why Belyutin was dismissed. As we shall see, he was still allowed to teach and his students were numerous. He was also allowed to exhibit as were his students – he was merely dismissed from his position at the Moscow Polygraphic Institute. For this paper it would be convenient if it were in fact the case.

<sup>295</sup> N. Moleva in Ekaterina Morozova. P. 40.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. P. 42. The student was Galina Manevich, wife of Edouard Steinberg.

the student wanted the strict laws surrounding abstract art to be loosened to the extent that their work would be accepted as art, not only as a decorative piece of work or graphic art. The number of students varied in Belyutin's group exhibits and in 1961 a group of artists called themselves *Vialeprom* and exhibited where they could. Some members of this group were N. Blagoveschun, V. Burmistrov, N. Vishnya, A. Grevtseva, N. Guseva, I. Dobronravova, I Zakharova, V. Zubarev, Z. Kostryochenko, Y. Merkind, S. Muratov, A. Nedachin, A. Nyurenberg, S. Pestel, I. Ruditskaya and L. Sedakova.<sup>297</sup>

Belyutin's and Tsirlin's students came in contact with Western abstract art as well as the Russian avant-garde up until the 1920's. They were very interested in learning any new approach to art and perhaps with Garry Coleman at the American National Exhibition and his demonstration of the drip method which became so well known as Jackson Pollock's new American Abstract Expressionism they found just what they were looking for.<sup>298</sup> What is important to note is that the artists did not lose sight of who they were, Soviet citizens with Russian or Ukrainian or Armenian or Estonian background. They saw, discussed, and digested what they had seen and they went on to create new Soviet art.

I've always been a Russian Orthodox and also studied ...Russian culture...I thought and I still think that a Russian person will be all the more Russian if he or she knows more about other cultures including that of the West.<sup>299</sup>

The Soviet artists needed outside influences in order to create their own style and the American National show set impulses that helped the artists realize they were doing something, albeit illegal in their own country, but widely accepted – even supported in the West. Whenever possible they surrounded themselves with people who would

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<sup>297</sup> This is according to N. Moleva's catalogue which appeared with the exhibition (type written).

<sup>298</sup> At the American National Exhibition there were many different people demonstrating various things. I have come across this description of Garry Coleman in several publications. While going through the files at the Department of State in Washington D.C. I was unable to find any reference to him.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with Alexey Kozlov begun by Vassily Aksyonov in 1977. Alpatova p48 of translation.

help them have more self-confidence. *Samizdat*, or self-publishing was one of the main ways of keeping artists, musicians and poets working. It allowed each individual to share their ideas with others and in that way allow each to develop their own personality: their own style. It was dangerous though, because if any “suspicious” books were found in one’s flat, that person living there as well as those visiting would be regarded as a criminal.<sup>300</sup>

Despite these very clear threats, I. Tsirlin showed Lydia Masterkova’s works in his flat in 1961 and Ely Belyutin was allowed to exhibit in Paris at the Galerie Lambert as well as in Poland. Belyutin organized an exhibition of 434 works at the City Committee of book, graphics and poster artists. They were his Studio artists and N. Moleva wrote the text to the catalog. The first edition of *Taruskiye Stranitsy* or the Tarusa Pages, a magazine of literature and art came out. Tarusa had become a very special center for the arts which was later broken apart due to Soviet criticism. The *Mayakovka* or square in Moscow where many gathered was also closed down but the exhibitions, readings and music continued in private flats. The *Mayakovka* was of great importance because it is there that the relatively small artistic community tried to reach the layman. Madame Fride’s flat was one of the new meeting places and the conversations in her solon became bolder. In many ways 1961 was considered “a good year” in artistic circles and for the first time Soviet Rock bands were allowed to perform publicly.

Most of 1962 also brought many exhibitions of young abstract artists. Belyutin again organized various shows and Igor Kholin’s flat became a meeting place for artists. American Jazz musicians came for a jam session with Soviet musicians. American journalists were present. But the fall of this year brought with it the Cuban Missile crises or as the Soviets called it the Caribbean crises. And at the end of the year the

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<sup>300</sup> Ekaterina Morozova . P.50.

Exhibition took place that would change the path taken by many of the artists since 1956.



## CHAPTER II D THE INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN NATIONAL SHOW

The viewer does not Stay Indifferent. Yesterday at the Exhibition of Young Artists... This exhibition signifies the triumph of the Leninist policy in the field of the visual arts.<sup>301</sup>

Khrushchev initiated a cultural exchange between the two super powers, opened the borders to the Soviet Union and allowed the American National Exhibition as well as the Picasso and Leger exhibits to take place at Sokolniki and the Pushkin museum or the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian avant-garde exhibit at the Mayakovski house<sup>302</sup>. After 1959 more and more artists worked abstract. Belyutin taught the style he saw at the American National Exhibition adamantly and his students willingly picked it up. It was the newest and most exciting form of art. With Khrushchev's opening, the general *thaw* attributed to him, artists, and especially unofficial artists working in and around Moscow made a major mistake in 1962.

The events which lead to their miss-orientation have in part already been explored: the artwork, literature and music created which was not officially accepted, the great interest in Western arts and more open discussions about abstract art as well as many un-official exhibitions of artwork not acceptable to the Supreme Soviet. There was

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<sup>301</sup> Efremov, G and Evganyev O. *Pravda*, December 3, 1962. The first page of the article "Art Belongs to the People": The right policy in art is the Leninist policy of party-membership and communist ideology. The great art of socialist realism was brought up precisely on the firm base of this kind of policy, which has nothing in common with either a kind, all-forgiving liberalism or with a rotten, sentimental manilovschina.... The pseudo-innovators turning their backs on life, struggle and labor of their people, they blindly chase Western fashion, desperately trying to imitate the rotten formalist art, which essentially and deeply alien to our experience, aesthetic ideals and our ideas of the beautiful and beauty. Socialist art, our people categorically reject abstractionism, which some, although very few, people suddenly decided to imitate without noticing its reactionary, anti-social essence. In the same way socialist art decidedly and firmly rejects the unjustifiable imitation of the low rank bourgeois composers by some of our musicians (there are not many of those either), who are prepared to reduce all Soviet music to the thundering boom of jazz."

<sup>302</sup> Rosenfeld, Alla and Norton T. Dodge Edts. P.86: "In the visual arts,, from 1960 to 1968 there was a remarkable series of exhibitions and evening programs at Moscow's Mayakovsky Museum dedicated to the artistic heritage of El Lissitzky, Mikhail Matiushin, Elena Guro, Gustav Klucis, Pavel Filonov, Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, Vasilii Chekrygin, Larionov, Goncharova, George Yakulov, Olga Rozanova and Marc Chagall. The artists who vistied these exhibitions were able to familiarize themselves with the history of the Russian avant-garde, which – to the surprise of many—could not be reduced the the three F's: Robert Falk, Vladimir Favorsky and Artur Fonvizin.(footnote 12)

one last exhibition which caused a great uproar and may have also played a part in what happened at the changing of the year from 1962 to 1963.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1962 the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny came to a session of Ely Belyutin's art students – the so-called Studio artists. He watched them work for hours and later asked if they would take part in painting the interior of the Physics Institute, where his sculptures were to be placed. In order to get an idea of what it would look like, the artists decided to mount a joint exhibition. Shortly thereafter, on the evening of November 26<sup>th</sup> the exhibition was opened. The walls of a small room with a high ceiling were almost completely covered with paintings of the same size (20 x 104cm). According to L Rabichev: "it was a rather unusual sight: free, expressive, transformed, wild, brightly colored, spontaneous, sometimes heavy or emotionally charge, figurative and abstract paintings...everyone shared the same feeling that something extraordinary was taking place."<sup>303</sup>

The plan was to take the paintings down again the next morning since the celebrating had gone on all night. When Vera Ivanovna Preobrazhenskaya and Lucian Grobkov arrived the next morning, three foreigners equipped with photo equipment were standing in front of the door. Because their visit was not expected the young artists called Belyutin and let the foreigners into the building. When Belyutin arrived the journalists, which the foreigners were, asked if this sort of art was permitted in the Soviet Union. He replied very sincerely, yes. Belyutin believed in the reality of the future commissions because he had experienced such an exceptional time in the Moscow art scene since 1956. After the journalists left, they went ahead and dismantled the exhibition.

The next day a few television channels across Europe as well as in the United States showed that "Abstract Art" was being shown in "Bolshaya Kommunisticheskaya

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<sup>303</sup> Alpatova. P. 12

Street”. Shortly thereafter at the press-conference given by Mikoyan and the Soviet diplomatic mission, in Cuba, one of the three hundred foreign journalists asked: “Is it true that abstract art is allowed in the Soviet Union?”<sup>304</sup> The diplomats and politicians called the KPSS, the Communist Part of the Soviet Union to try and get the question answered. No one knew the answer. Boris Potseluyev – an instructor at the Moscow Committee of the Party tried to find answers. He telephoned L. Rabichev to find out more about what happened at the House of Teachers. Potseluyev called Belyutin in order to find out more about the exhibition. After finding some of the art work displayed Potseluyev and the Moscow Committee asked Nina Mikhailovna Moleva, and L. Robichev and Gedda Yanovskaya to have the works ready because they would be shown to the Party leaders and the Government the next day at the Manezh. It was a direct order, not a suggestion that was being made.

According to Nina Moleva: “on the first floor, following the request of the head of the Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Part D. A. Polikarpov, Eli Belyutin repeated the ‘Taganka exhibition’ in its entire volume.”<sup>305</sup> In separate rooms works were displayed by Yury Nolev-Sobolev, Yulo Sooster, Valdimir Yankilevsky as well as the sculptures by Ernst Neizvestny (fig. 52).

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1962 at the Cavaliers Room in the Central Exhibition Hall Nikita Sergeyeovich Kruschchev inaugurated the exhibition of the Artists Union which was to celebrate thirty years of Socialist Realist art. At the Manezh, the former stables located very close to the Kremlin, over two thousand canvases were exhibited. The exhibition included successful painters from the first half of the twentieth century such as Sterenberg, Falk, Drevien, Petrov-Vodkine, Kousnestov and for the first time the works of certain young independent artists. As was stated earlier, on the first floor paintings were exhibited by Sobolev, Yankilevski, Joutovski, Neisvestny and a large

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<sup>304</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. p. 13.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

selection of works by painters from Eli Belyutin's studio. The First Secretary agreed to go to the top floor and have a look at the "new art" by young painters and although the Artists Union had declared its self objective, they actually wanted to win the Party over – they wanted their abstract works to be accepted by the government as the Americans accepted their abstract artists.

In viewing the works Khrushchev stopped before one canvas and asked: "Who painted this picture? I want to talk to him. What's the good of a picture like this? To cover urinals with?" The artist, Boris Zhutovsky was then berated. Khrushchev went on "You're a nice-looking lad, but how could you paint something like this? We should take down your pants and set you down in a clump of nettles until you understand your mistakes. You should be ashamed. Are you a pederast or a normal man?... We aren't going to spend a kopeck on this dog shit. We have the right to send you out to cut trees until you've paid back the money the state has spent on you. The people and government have taken a lot of trouble with you, and you pay them back with this shit."<sup>306</sup> (fig. 53 and 54) Viewing the painting by Boris Zhutovsky, Khrushchev went on to say: "You are stealing from society. You are a parasite. We have to organize our society so that it will be clear who is useful and who is useless. What right do you have to live in an apartment built by genuine people, one made of real material?" (fig. 55) The artist defended himself by saying: "These are just experiments. They help us develop." And Khrushchev: "Judging by these experiments, I am entitled to think that you are pederasts, and for that you can get ten years. You've gone out of your minds, and now you want to deflect us from the proper course. No, you won't get away with it...Gentlemen we are declaring war on you."<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> McPhee. P.78.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. P. 79.

Khrushchev was not known for mincing words and bringing all his impressions of the “new” art together he insisted: “People tell me that I am behind the times and don’t realize it, that our contemporary artists will be appreciated in a hundred years. Well, I don’t know what will happen in a hundred years, but now we have to adopt a definite policy in art... We won’t spare a kopeck of government money for any artistic daubing... As long as I am president of the Council of Ministers, we are going to support a genuine art. We aren’t going to give a kopek for pictures painted by jackasses.”<sup>308</sup>

He sincerely meant every word he had said, in fact these words turned out to be the start of more serious restrictions put on un-official artists. According to an MIT report in 1965 by Priscilla Johnson and Leopold Labedz entitled “Khrushchev and the Arts” his comments on the artwork exhibited at the Manezh “proved to be the signal for the most far-reaching crackdown on the creative arts in the Soviet Union since the Zhdanov purge of 1946-48”.<sup>309</sup> Artists were sent to both prison camps and mental hospitals in the first crackdown. Those belonging to the Barracks School were committed to around twenty mental institutions.

Khrushchev had never been an admirer of abstract art and this was widely known. The question that arises is what got into these artists? What were they thinking? Had it really been the United States government support of the Abstract Expressionists that led to this serious misunderstanding of their own system? Did the artists really believe that the Soviet State would recognize their artwork?

Following the events at the Manezh there were several meetings of the Party and Government leaders with arts intelligentsia in Moscow. These meetings were documented through article appearing in *Pravda*, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.p. 78

<sup>309</sup> This anti-intellectual drive was known as Zhdanovshchina named after Andrei Zhdanov who initiated it. These were often chauvinistic and anti-Semitic. Hundreds of Scientists and scholars but also artists were sent to labor camps or shot during this purge.

*Sovetskaya Kultura*. Articles with titles like: “For ideology and Conviction in Art” or “The Artist’s Duty” or “Abstractionism and Freedom of Creativity” or “The Unmistakable Taste of the People” or “To teach and to Bring Up”.<sup>310</sup> By reading the titles it already becomes clear that these articles were directed strictly against the work of the un-official artists, especially those painting abstractions.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December at an assembly of the ideological committee of the CC CPSS young artists, writers, composers, cinema and theater workers came to participate in the discussions held. The issues of ideology in art as defined for the Soviet arts intelligentsia by Khrushchev and other leaders of the Communist Party and Soviet Government during their visit to the exhibition of Moscow artists on December 17<sup>th</sup> were discussed in detail.<sup>311</sup> Further discussions were held and finally the Moscow Section of the Artists Union chose to cancel the classes held by Ely Belyutin.

The outcome of the discussions, publicized in magazines and newspapers in Moscow were stricter regulations on the art and artistic community. Through the exhibition at the Manezh and the governmental viewing of young and more experienced abstract painters, Khrushchev personally admonished the artists and asked for less leniency towards the work created. In *Communist* No. 1 an editorial article appeared entitled “To Create for the People Is the Artist’s Highest Task” stating that the exhibition was an attempt to rehabilitate formalism with the organizers “lack of ideological conviction”. The author continued:

The defenders of formalism must realize how far-reaching their position in art can be. In our society, which is building communism and which values people’s interests above everything else, individual lawlessness, disorder and anarchy are unacceptable. To encourage or just to allow such tendencies to exist means to agree in advance that someone has a right to weaken and undermine our social order.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> For more titles see Ekaterina Morozova p. 19.

<sup>311</sup> Vassily Aksyonov, Bella Akhmadulina, A. Govorov, Evgeny Evtushenko, E. Isayev, R. Kazakova, V. Kotov, Bulat Okudzhava, Roert Rozhdestvensky, D. Starizhov, Y. Surovtsev, V. Firsov, V. Chivilikhin were some of the critics present at the discussion (alpatova p. 20)

<sup>312</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P. 22.

Similar comments could be found in *Pravda* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in January 1963. The “thaw” of the late fifties of the twentieth century were beginning to look like “the first autumn frost” with artists taking on the role of the governments most “hated enemies”, as Gennady Aigi called them.

When looking at the paintings created by the artists....it becomes very evident that this artwork is not on the same level as the artwork by such emissaries as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Arshile Gorky or Adolph Gottlieb. The materials as well as the general living conditions in which they were created did not come close to what the artists, especially those in New York, experienced at that time. The Soviet artists could not possibly be viewed as equals to the artists working in the United States in the late forties to late fifties. What is important, essential here is that the Soviet artists were influenced by one exhibition – an exhibition where they could view first hand the artwork created in a country albeit considered their arch-enemy, intriguing beyond anything else in the world. A country they had won the Second World War with and had just almost started the third one against.

The Soviet-American Cultural Exchange agreement and the exchange that took place between the East and the West from 1958 onward, created a change that was vital to the art world in Moscow. Not because they could be considered the followers of the Abstract Expressionists, but because artists throughout the Soviet Union could envision something other than the style dictated by the Supreme Soviet. The feeling alone, “that something was allowed excited everyone” was enough to keep the artists going.<sup>313</sup> But the fact that abstract art was not only allowed in other countries, it was supported by their governments led to “struggles for renovation” within all levels of society. L. Ilyichev proclaimed that artists were “the property of the people”, in other words that the artists was there to serve the people in the name of Communism, these

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<sup>313</sup> Ekaterina Morozova P.22

individuals continued to work in the tradition set by such artists as Kandinsky and Rodchenko or Malevich with the American artists reminding them of their heritage. In this way he reminded the Soviet creative intelligentsia of these Russians and their great influence on the international art scene in decades past.

Although L. Ilyichev told the artists that the Central Committee was “satisfied with the development of our culture” he reiterated that the ideological responsibilities had grown, telling the artists that he (the government) had received letters questioning the future of the development of art in the country.<sup>314</sup> The authors of the letters, he insisted he received, were protests against formalism – against abstractionism. He may have had a point when he exclaimed to the large assembly of artists that “they force the socialist realists to step aside and defend themselves”.<sup>315</sup> But just like in other countries around the world, he was also quite accurate in telling these artists that the “innovation cannot be understood by the people”. Finally he made his point when he said that artists who created abstract works of art, literally questioned Lenin and the Twenty Second Party Congress – this would be equal to questioning the highest authority on art. In the Soviet Union there was no higher authority than Lenin. In questioning Lenin, the artists were not only going against what had been dictated, with Eli Belyutin as their leader they obviously wanted to “insult and humiliate” Soviet traditional artists such as Repin. Nikita Khrushchev joined in and exclaimed: “This is pornography, not art. I am sick of it! Even the abstract scribbling is declared an end”. Ilyichev told the crowd that abstraction was “fading even in the West” and here he may have had a point because by 1962 Andy Warhol had already created his soup can and “Marilyns”, Roy Liechtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg were becoming more popular. The point that abstraction was fading was used as an

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid. P.23.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

argument to stop creating.<sup>316</sup> This, of course, was exceedingly hard for the artists to take. Eli Belyutin openly questioned his newly acquired style: “How did I become a leader of empty art?” and honestly tells everyone that neither he nor the rest of the artists knew how their art reached the West.<sup>317</sup>

The internationally renowned politician, art expert, and author Ilya Ehrenburg, who was also present, said:

Lenin used to say ‘I do not like Mayakovsky’, but he never forced his opinion onto others....But when someone is looking for a language, do we immediately have to stop him from talking?...I saw the Belyutin’s students – they can’t paint. They have good intentions, but have no skill...We must not exile them: they are Soviet people...Falk is an old thing, if you look at the right one’s old works, you’ll find much more in them...Take my books of that time: I can’t read them...We ask – be more careful with young people. They do not know what horror is...Do not hit them in their heads...it’s got nothing to do with Khrushchev’s name...I hope that Nikita Sergeevich will show his tolerance...The personality cult came to its end, but the nuts and bolts have stayed.<sup>318</sup>

This declaration that the past had past and although not everyone liked the work of these artists and especially the head of the government did not approve, this still was no reason to force the artists to work differently, to think differently or leave the country.

Upon this clear statement, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev asked permission to make a speech. He declared that:

We should not jail them, but we should put them into mental institutions...They hate people...This is an animal hatred of the enemy of the Soviet Society...I know that after the Manege a lot of gossip spread around: this is a new march against the searching intelligentsia...We’ve received a letter: ‘Do not let 1937 happen again’,<sup>319</sup> and further ‘We were happy to see the exhibition – that was the first exhibition after the time of those, who murdered in camps or starved to death...’The authors of the letter do not want to go against the Party, but they do, objectively – they do! They are trying to

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<sup>316</sup> Whereas in the West it did not mean this at all. Abstraction and Popart stood side by side without any problems.

<sup>317</sup> Ekaterina Morozova P.23.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. P24.

<sup>319</sup> Signed Vladimir Favorsky, Ilya Ehrenburg, Vitaly Kaverin, Sergey Kononov, Konstantin Simonov, Yury Zavadsky, S, Chuikov, Dmitry Shostakovich.

present Lunacharsky and Lenin as believers in the idea 'Let all flowers grow!'...The formalist tendencies today are also spreading...<sup>320</sup>

This clearly showed Khrushchev's attempt to underline the fact that whoever went against the party-line was not only an enemy of the state, but was insane and should be put into an asylum and cured of his or her malaise. As had previously been determined, the individuals should not be killed or sent to labor camps but sent to insane asylums because whoever created such work is also evidently mentally instable. At one point he even determined that all of these artists should perhaps be exiled to Cuba in order to get the others, those who remained back in line with the dictates of the government. The President of the Academy of Arts, Vladimir Serov found that there were serious discrepancies in the visual arts and that "Evgeny Eutushenko and Ilya Ehrenburg made a mistake...Abstractionism is not just a form, but an ideology in art...Abstractionism is an ideological category..."<sup>321</sup> The discussion continued along these lines - the artists fighting for their rights to express themselves however they chose, because in this they could develop, change, and progress while the party adhered to the guidelines created by Lenin stating that art should be understood by the people and the heads of state did not understand their abhoritions who could. Khrushchev closed the discussion by reiterating where this deviation in creativity had come from and why it could not possibly be tolerated:

We shall not support this movement... We can tolerate the coexistence only between countries and not inside a single state!...If they stand in the same row with us, we shall not remember them... We compromised with Kennedy, there cannot be such a thing within the country.<sup>322</sup>

The Cuban missile crises or Caribbean Crisis was in the minds of everyone present and it was an unmistakable picture Khrushchev was painting – abstract art was dangerous for the future of the Communist ideology. It had been openly stated for all

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<sup>320</sup> Ekaterina Morozova p.24.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. P.25.

to hear and it was also printed in the newspapers in order to reiterate the fact that abstraction was a deviate that would not be supported or tolerated by the state because it was considered a political threat. A political threat because according to the Soviet Supreme it had come from the West, was “decadent”<sup>323</sup>; a fissure of Capitalism and could destroy the delicate structure of Communism if it was officially allowed.

Interestingly enough, and a question which remains in the mind of Jack Masey to this day, artistic designer for the United States Information Agency, is that the Soviet Union continued to allow abstract American art to be exhibited within its borders. In fact that same year, 1963, there was a traveling exhibition of a graphic abstract American art which went to Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, Jerevan, Armenia and to the cities Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>324</sup> Irina Alpatovas research showed that abstract Soviet artists continued not only to work but also exhibit throughout Moscow.<sup>325</sup> Many artists depended more intensely on others for their art products – those who had official positions and could obtain paint, brushes and canvases from the government. They used cardboard, wood and other waste-products to work on and generally kept quite about what they were doing.

The artists also found collectors or more precisely the collectors found them: individuals who believed in this “other” art, intellectuals and diplomats, interested foreigners who continued to buy the work of artists in the Soviet Union up until Gorbachov’s *perestroika* allowed the artists to sell their work on the open market. Collectors such as Norton Dodge or Alexander Glezer who showed a specific interest in the development of the art community in the Soviet Union as well as many other individuals working for embassies in Moscow and interested in art, continued to purchase artwork which had been driven even farther into the

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<sup>323</sup> Khrushchev also uses this term to describe abstract art – the art he saw at the exhibition in the Manege.

<sup>324</sup> Personal interview with Jack Masey.

<sup>325</sup> Alpatova or Ekaterina Morozova P. 26 onward.

underground to survive. To a large extent the most representational works from this period are scattered around the world in South America, Canada and the United States.

The artists styles developed, changed with time and the abstract elements that remind us of the abstract art displayed in 1959 begin to fade after 1962. In the work of Lev Kropnivitsky one can follow the influence of the Abstract Expressionists easily – with his first abstractions in 1959 and after a time his style changes (fig. 37 and 38). Eli Belyutin is more difficult as the dates on his paintings were added later and are inaccurate; his recollections are inconsistent and unreliable.<sup>326</sup> Looking at some works created prior to 1959 and then afterwards, they do reflect a change in his style – but there are some strong Picasso elements mixed with those by artists from the American National Exhibition (fig. 42).

At the second meeting of the Party and Government representatives with the art intelligentsia at the Reception House in Leninskiye Gory in 1963 when Ilyichev said: “Abstraction is fading even in the West”, he had a point, it was.<sup>327</sup> By 1962 such artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol were already becoming popular. Pop-Art had come upon the art scene in the West.

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<sup>326</sup> From personal interview with Bazhanov and Alpatova in 2007.

<sup>327</sup> Ekaterina Morozova. P24. Ilyichev said this at the second meeting of the Party and Government representatives with art intelligentsia at the Reception House in Leninskiye Gory in January 1963, referring of course to what happened when Khrushchev went to the exhibit at the Manezh.

## EPILOGUE

...The last person we expected to encounter in Moscow was an eighteen-year-old who knew more about the New York artistic scene of the moment than either of us, although we had been intensively briefed on the latest developments in the New York art world in preparation for the trip to the Soviet Union...

...His comprehension of art was remarkable for one so young.<sup>328</sup>

The design director of the American National Exhibition, Jack Masey said that neither he nor any American will ever really know how the Soviets viewed the Exhibition created for them. He said “we will never know what they thought.”<sup>329</sup> As he spent a great deal of time in the Soviet Union and dealt with them on a day to day basis, he may have had a point: we can never really know what someone thinks and one should never make a generalization about a group of people – Soviets, Soviet artists, Soviet government. Here we have examined the development of the art scene in the United States and the Soviet Union in an attempt to establish where art in either country was coming from during the Cold War.

The American National Exhibition has been described in detail and the response of the public as well as the government has been discussed. Some of the artists working at the time voiced their view of the show and to which extent it had an effect on them. Others expressed the new impulses in their art work. I think that with the information given to us by former Soviets, through articles written for the Soviet public and the general public's enormous curiosity towards the American people, we can still come fairly close to what the Soviets thought of the Exhibit in 1959. When individuals recall an event with such clarity and with such enthusiasm as many did the American

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<sup>328</sup> Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead. *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union*. Berkeley: 1967.

<sup>329</sup> Personal interview with Jack Masey in May 2007. Ilja Ehrenburg said something very similar in his book *The Thaw*: ‘You say yourself that you don’t understand the way we live. Even if you spent some time here, if you looked at how I work, and saw what makes us happy or indignant, you would still understand nothing. It is a different world, it is altogether different.’

Exhibition in Moscow close to fifty years after it happened that experience must have had a profound effect on them.

Looking at the history of American painting and that of the Soviet Union with their very different backgrounds, varied development and controversial yet rather ambiguous reception, as well as their influence on one another historically it becomes perceivable that the American National Exhibition in 1959 would have had a considerable impact on the Soviet creative community. Being able to view the popular Western abstract artwork in person was certainly different than seeing depictions in a catalogue. The change in the artists' attitude towards their own artwork as well as their artistic style testify to the fact that the art work displayed at the American National Exhibition not only changed the way artists in the Soviet Union worked but also changed the way some of the artists reflected upon their own inherently Soviet art. In perusing great art books of this century, covering the styles that existed, the Soviet Union is generally left out entirely and if represented at all, it is as a very short chapter on Socialist Realism, being the official style and not much else happening until the late eighties with Gorbachov's *perestroika*. "The very expression 'Twentieth Century Russian art' has rarely been used throughout the course of the century, and the phrase 'Soviet Art', which supplanted it, lacked all geographic and temporal coordinates" wrote Ekaterina Dyogot in her introduction to *Russian Art in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century*.<sup>330</sup>

In the past few years some books have appeared on art during the Cold War era with reference to the art of this period in the Soviet Union. But in general the artistic developments of Soviet art seem to end in 1922, as Camilla Grey did in her book on the Great Russian art movements. According to Dyogot's text "the most authoritative texts on Russian art in the second half of the twentieth century published in English

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<sup>330</sup> Ekaterina Dyogot. P.1 of 29.

are:” Margarita Tupitsyn’s *Margins of Soviet Art*, Boris Groys translated *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin (The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond)*, and Alla Rosenfeld and Norton Dodge’s *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*.<sup>331</sup> Besides a few small exhibitions further development of Soviet art has been negated, neglected by the art world with the explanation that nothing existed there besides the official art scene. In contrast, the American Abstract Expressionists have been discussed in thousands of articles, chapters and volumes with great value given to the specific details of their rise to international reverence. The origin of their descriptive name, the philosophical, spiritual, and political background of most of the artists involved have been picked apart by art historians and well as the layman in attempt to understand the success of the movement. Their artwork has been hailed from California to Japan. The two most expensive paintings in the world today are a Jackson Pollock and a Mark Rothko before the work of Van Gogh, Rembrandt or any other work of art. The difference between the art scene in the United States and the Soviet Union undoubtedly arises out of the very physical location of where each was formed. New York had admitted many tens of thousands of people from Europe who were threatened by the political calamity of the Second World War. New York turned into a virtual breeding ground for future artistic changes. While at the same time, the Soviet Union was killing and imprisoning its own people – this before, during and after the Second World War. Many creative impulses were simply annihilated or if they were lucky their initiators fled the country. This continued until Stalin died in 1953. With Khrushchev coming to power and with the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 things changed for the citizens of the Soviet Union – the artists for example no longer had to fear for their lives if they swam against the tide and many were

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<sup>331</sup> Dyogot. P.28 of 29.

immediately released from labor camps. Another elemental difference between the two localities was the amount of information allowed to enter the Soviet Union versus the constant stream in the United States and especially New York. There was a distinct change within the Soviet Union when the cultural exchange agreement was initiated.

When viewed from a western perspective, there was a distinctly old-fashioned feel to Soviet art (fig. 56). Even the modernism of the Khrushchev years looked antiquated in comparison to an Andy Warhol (fig. 57). It was this, above all, which prevented the western art world from considering Soviet art to be anything more than ‘aesthetic curiosities’. Like much of western popular art, it was considered to be retrogressive and then dismissed for the consequent inability to be expressive of the age.<sup>332</sup>

Socialist Realism was created for an audience, a large majority of which had been propelled from near-medieval living conditions into the nuclear age within the span of only three decades. Compared to the crudities of their grandmothers’ old fashioned *lubki*, the perfect, polished illusionism of Vladimir A. Serov’s Lenin could not have signified up-to-date, urban sophistication (fig. 58).<sup>333</sup>

Soviet art reflected the ethos of its day, partly because it was old-fashioned. The society was profoundly conventional. School children wore frilly white collars over black smocks, sex was never mentioned publicly, and social relations were correct and formal. To the western sensibility, Soviet mores appeared almost quaintly antiquated. In the late fifties, Alexander Werth wrote about Soviet life:

Outwardly, Soviet life is extremely decorous, almost ‘Victorian’: on two occasions in the Moscow subway I was tapped on the shoulder by scandalized-looking citizens because, sitting with my legs crossed, I show an inch or two of bare leg.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Christine Lindey P. 62.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. P.63.

Interestingly it was during the late 1950's that the USSR began to feel greater parity with the West. Many of the larger cities were being rebuilt, its *sputnics* had conquered outer space and its *cordon sanitaire* of Eastern Europe proved its military strength was paying off. The Soviets no longer felt the need to conceal their inferiority complex, moreover they boasted superiority. With the Soviet Union's strength, the arts also moved into a more relaxed phase, this meant that artists had more freedom than before to create what they wanted.

Back in 1911 when Vassili Kandinsky first published "On the Spiritual in Art" he posited that "the search for the abstract in art" existed in opposition to "the nightmare of materialism". What he was referring to then was that an artist had to work in opposition to the noise around him in order to create "inner peace" and in order to be able to reflect his "inner necessity" to create.<sup>335</sup> Donald Kuspit maintained that in understanding Kandinsky's essay it became evident that abstract art must be "in opposition" in order to create the "Stimmung" or mood it had set out to emanate. It is quite useful to use this definition to describe the similarities and at the same time the differences between American abstract art and Soviet abstract art.

When the American National Exhibition was held in Moscow it could be said that the art that was sent there was in opposition to that which most Americans enjoyed viewing. It was especially during the McCarthy Era that abstract art was considered art in opposition – in this case political opposition. Yet, when the CIA and the government of the United States decided to use art to promote America's value system, America's open-mindedness and its democracy abstract art could "no longer" be considered "an oppositional art" using Kandinsky's definition. It was heralded by

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<sup>335</sup> "On the Spiritual in Art" appeared in 1914 in Russia: „O dukhovnom v iskusstve“ in *Trudy Vserossiiskogo sezda khudoznikov v Petrograde*(Proceedings of the All-Russian Congress of Artists in Petrograd) P. 47-76. This Russian version was read by Nikolai Kulbin at the congress in December 1911 in Kandinsky's absence.

state and private institutions as well as very influential individuals.<sup>336</sup> The conflict which arose was that American Abstract Expressionism was in fact an art of opposition within the country, but as it traveled the world in order to promote “freedom” it could have been viewed as an art accepted by the government and therefore conventional. Because Abstract Expressionism was a shock for so many people, including the Soviets, because it was considered “formalism” it was still an art of opposition.

In the Soviet Union all art which did not adhere to the rules outlined by the Supreme Soviet and which was not Socialist Realism was intrinsically in “opposition” until Gorbachov’s *perestroika* in the 80’s. In the Soviet Union abstract was formalist and therefore against that which Lenin prescribed as “art”. Artists not working for the State, whose art was not enjoyed by the greater public, were in by definition in “opposition” and therefore what they created was not art at all – or as Kandinsky defined it was “abstract”.

Interestingly, art in America in the 40’s and 50’s of the Twentieth Century was viewed as an art of “opposition” due to being linked to Russians like Kandinsky or the ties to one of 500 organizations listed on the McCarthy list of Communists. In the same token the Soviet abstract art of the late 50’s and early 60’s was tied to the capitalistic and materialistic American influences – it did not follow the line of Socialist Realism dictated by the State.

It is paradox that the nation which was seen as dangerous, with such subversive ideas as revolution, godlessness and the emancipation of women, should have been the one which perpetuated a conservative, conformist high art, while the USA which preached Christian values, the profit-motive and other traditional ideas, should have cultivated a high art which spoke of dissent. “Yet the voice of dissent in fact sang on within the

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<sup>336</sup> Cockcroft. “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War“. P.39-41.

Soviet Union, while the free and subversive cries of western artists were contained within manageable boundaries.”<sup>337</sup>

The American National Exhibition gave those within the United States, those Americans who followed the newspapers, those who were confronting right-wing critics’ a greater degree of confidence. Abstract art was not only chosen to represent American’s taste (in general) it was also one of the more popular sections of the entire show.<sup>338</sup> According to Charles Vetter, an official at the exhibition, the impact of the diverse styles was seen as a stimulus to immigrate to America rather than a confirmation of the virtues of Communism as many Americans had feared. The addition of paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century created a reaction that the conservative and anti-Communist politicians in the United States had not expected. Vladimir Kemenov understood it as a clear statement: “it...is a result of the extremely negative reaction of the public to abstract art.” He felt the organizers of the show “had to straighten matters out in a hurry and, in one way or another, present the realistic art of their country.”<sup>339</sup>

In fact, many of the Soviet visitors were confused that American legislators referred to abstract art as Communist art because the official Soviet press condemned these same works as the degradation of capitalism.<sup>340</sup> Kemenov proved to the public that Khrushchev was not alone when he described abstract, non-representational works as “terrible”.<sup>341</sup>

Through the reaction of the Soviets it became clear that the repercussions that the United States representative Walter had feared, which was that the Soviets would see in the American art shown an indication that the United States was a breeding ground

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Kushner. P. 18.

<sup>339</sup> Kemenov. *Sovietskaya kul'tura*. August 11, 1959.

<sup>340</sup> Kushner P. 19

<sup>341</sup> Kemenov. Translation Halina....

for Communism, in the end never emerged. In fact the art was viewed as a manifestation of a free society, much in the way originally anticipated by the USIA.<sup>342</sup>

The Russian author, Vasily Aksyonov told the director of policy and research of the exhibition that the American National Exhibition in Moscow was one of the:

most important events in the opening up of the Soviet Union, which began in the fifties and culminated in the change to the current Commonwealth of Independent States. Certainly the American Art Exhibit was a key element among the new impressions and ideas introduced by the American National Exhibition.<sup>343</sup>

This paper set out to demonstrate that the influence on artists comes from a myriad of places and affects them differently. That the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959 which set out to shock the Soviet public with the American life-style did in fact set strong impulses for the young Soviets who came in contact with all of these new visual impacts. The response was so immense that it reeled back to America, proving Abstract Expressionism the triumph of Twentieth Century art and the United States the hero of Modern Art.

John E. Bowlt in all his surveys of Russian art and culture came to the conclusion that the teacher of so many artists in the Soviet Union, Eli Belyutin, “owes something to the Action Painting of Pollock.”<sup>344</sup> He found that Pollock’s closest disciples in the Soviet Union also followed this style – Petr Valius and Boris Zhutovsky. This did not mean that the artists necessarily understood the paintings or the background which have been described here. They were disciples of what they witnessed in an Exhibition – of art seen live! Important for the Soviet art world and John E. Bowlt made us aware of this was that in the hands of the Soviet artists, abstract paintings often carried certain thematic donations and they brought to mind the occasional

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Kushner P.19-21.

<sup>344</sup> Rosenfeld and Dodge. P.300.

gestural paintings of the Russian avant-garde, including those of Rodchenko's pencil drawings from 1921 as well as works from Eli Belyutin's teacher Lev Bruni. 1959 was the only time when the most important teacher of abstraction in Moscow after 1959, Eli Belyutin came in one-to-one contact with a Jackson Pollock painting. It would therefore become evident that the American National show not only influenced this Russian teacher, but his so numerous students as well.

Let us not forget that it was as early as 1936 when the American Alfred Barr Jr. so clearly described in his book entitled "Cubism and Abstract Art" printed by the Museum of Modern Art, how essential Western artistic influences were for the Russians in a chapter entitled "Abstract painting in Russia". Although he was referring to a different time and flow of influence we could come to understand that although Moscow was fifteen hundred miles away from Paris it "kept in continuous contact with the art of the French capital" through exhibitions and periodicals such as *Apollon* and collectors like Stchukin and Morosov who bought over one hundred Picassos and Matisse prior to 1914.<sup>345</sup> The collectors opened their doors to young artists in Russia who in turn were affected by what they saw. Artists such as Larionov or Malevich from the 19teens or Rodchenko and Lissitzky and of course Kandinsky, were witness to some of the most radical art of the early twentieth century. They developed their own style out of what they had seen and what they had experienced. Why should it have been any different in 1950 or 1960? Would it not seem logical that a country that was literally starving for any sort of outside information, any outside knowledge or creative gesture devoured what was set before them by the United States in 1959? Would it not be undeniable that a country that avidly listened to Jazz music and then picked it up and created Russian Jazz in its own nightclubs

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<sup>345</sup> Alfred H. Barr, Jr. *Cubism and Abstract Art*. The Museum of Modern Art. New York. 1936. P.120. In 1956 Alfred H. Barr, Jr. visited George Costakis in Moscow – he was one of the first foreigners to visit the Costakis in their apartment. (Rudenstein p. 45)

would also do the same with the art work presented to young artists being taught only one narrow definition of art? I believe it did and that the artists and specialists in Russian and Soviet culture individually answered these questions with a clear yes.

APPENDIX A  
PAINTING AND SCULPTURE INCLUDED IN THE AMERICAN NATIONAL  
EXHIBITION

**Outdoor Sculpture**

Alexander Calder, Seven-Footed Beastie, 1958  
Jose De Creeft, Youth, 1956  
Jose de Rivera, Copper Construction, 1949  
Herbert Ferber, Once Again, 1954–58  
Minna Harkavy, American Miner's Family, 1931  
Gaston Lachaise, Standing Woman, 1932  
Jacques Lipschitz, Mother and Child, 1941–1945  
Oronzio Maldarelli, Bianca II, 1950  
Bernard Reeder, Adam and Eve, 1957  
Hugo Robus, Walking Figure, 1957  
William Zorach, Victory, 1945

**Indoor Sculpture**

Saul Baizerman, Extase, 1950–1957  
Alexander Calder, Black Mobile, 1957  
Jo Davidson, Dr. Albert Einstein, 1934  
Jose De Rivera, Construction No. 47, 1957  
John Flannagan, Pelican, 1941  
Chaim Gross, Balancing, 1935  
Ibram Lassaw, Galactic Cluster #1, 1953  
Robert Laurent, La Toilette, 1944–1945  
Seymour Lipton, Sorcerer, 1957  
Elie Nadelman, Head of a Woman, 1922  
Isamu Noguchi, The Ring, 1957  
Theodore Roszak, Hound of Heaven, 1953

**Paintings**

Ivan Le Lorraine Albright, The Hole in the Wall Gang, 1952  
William Baziotes, Moby Dick, 1955  
Thomas Hart Benton, Boom Town, 1928  
Hyman Bloom, Younger Jew with Torah, 1942–1944  
Peter Blume, The Eternal City, 1937  
Alexander Brook, My Son Sandy, 1932  
Charles Burch. eld, Promenade, 1928  
John Steuart Curry, Wisconsin Landscape, 1938–1939  
Stuart Davis, Combination Concrete, Number 2, 1958  
William [sic] de Kooning, Asheville II, 1949  
Charles Demuth, After All . . . , 1953 [sic—actually 1933]  
Edwin Dickinson, Ruin at Daphne, 1943–1953  
Philip Evergood, Street Corner, 1936  
Lyonel Feininger, Manhattan, The Tower, 1944  
William Glackens, Soda Fountain, 1935  
Fritz Glarner, Relational Painting, 1949–1951

Arshile Gorky, Water of the Flowery Mill, 1944  
Morris Graves, Flight of the Plover, 1955  
George Gross [sic], Peace II, 1946  
Philip Guston, Passage, 1957  
Marsden Hartley, Mt. Katahdin, Autumn, No. 1, 1942  
Edward Hopper, Lighthouse at Two Lights, 1929  
Karl Knaths, Winter Wharf, 1955  
Walt Kuhn, Seated White Clown, 1929  
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, The Amazing Juggler, 1952  
Jacob Lawrence, Fulton & Nostrand, 1958  
Jack Levine, Welcome Home, 1946  
Conrad Marca-Relli, Pamplona, 1958  
John Marin, Movement—Sea & Sky, 1946  
Reginald Marsh, Steeplechase Park, 1936  
Robert Motherwell, Wall Painting #4, 1953  
Georgia O'Keeffe, Ram's Head, White, Hollyhock and Little Hills, 1936  
Jackson Pollock, Cathedral, 1947  
Abraham Rattner, Two Figures and Masks, Composition #3, 1949  
Mark Rothko, Old Gold over White, 1956  
Ben Shahn, Parable, 1958  
Charles Sheeler, Lunenberg, 1954  
Charles Sheeler, Upper Deck, 1929  
John Sloan, Sixth Ave. Elevated at 3rd Street, 1928  
Raphael Soyer, Waiting Room, 1942–1943  
Eugene Speicher, Red Moore, Blacksmith, 1935  
Niles Spencer, In Fairmont, 1951  
Joseph Stella, American Landscape, 1929  
Yves Tanguy, Multiplication of the Arcs, 1954  
Mark Tobey, Delta, 1952  
Franklin Watkins, Portrait of Thomas Raeburn White, 1940

### **Exhibiting Art**

Max Weber, Music, 1940  
Grant Wood, Pastor Weems' Fable, 1939  
Andrew Wyeth, Children's Doctor, 1949

**Following is the checklist of the pre–World War I paintings that were added to the exhibition.**

George Caleb Bingham, *The Jolly Flatboatmen*, 1877–1878  
Gutzon Borglum, *Lincoln*, 1911  
Mary Cassatt, *Caresse Infantine*, 1902  
George Catlin, *Buffalo Bull (Grand Pawnee)*, 1832  
William M. Chase, *Hide and Seek*, 1888  
George W. Cope, *Wild Duck, Hanging on a Green Wall*, 1905  
John Singleton Copley, *Portrait of Jacob Fowle*, 1763  
Arthur B. Davies, *The Hesitation of Orestes*, c. 1915–1918  
Louis Eilshemius, *Bridge for Fishing*, 1905  
Childe Hassam, *Washington Arch, Spring*, 1890  
George P. A. Healy, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1860  
Robert Henri, *Indian Girl in White Ceremonial Blanket*, 1921  
Edward Hicks, *Peaceable Kingdom*, n.d.  
George Inness, *Georgia Pines*, 1890  
Ernest Lawson, *Spring Night, Harlem River*, 1913  
Emanuel Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, 1861  
George Luks, *New Year’s Shooter*, c. 1916–1923  
Thomas Moran, *Cliffs of the Upper Colorado River, Wyoming Territory*, 1882  
Maurice Prendergast, *Autumn Festival*, 1917–1918  
Frederic Remington, *Fired On*, c. 1907  
Charles M. Russell, *Meat for the Wagons*, 1925  
Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Moonlight*, 1880–1885  
John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Field*, 1882  
Gilbert Stuart, *John Adams*, 1826  
Gilbert Stuart, *Portrait of George Washington*, 1796  
John Henry Twachtman, *Emerald Pool*, 1895  
Julian Alden Weir, *A Gentlewoman*, 1906  
James McNeill Whistler, *Battersea Reach*, c. 1865

The following three paintings were mentioned in the USIA press release as “already in Moscow, sent with the original shipment last month.” They were not included on the original checklist. (Taken from Marilyn Kusher’s article on exhibit)

George Bellows, *Blue Snow, The Battery*, 1910  
Thomas Eakins, *Salutat*, 1898  
Winslow Homer, *High Cliff, Coast of Maine*, 1894

ALL INFORMATION ACCORDING TO EXHIBITION CATALOGUE PRINTED;  
USIA RECORDS AND PRESIDENT’S PRESS RELEASE.



APPENDIX B – PICTURES



1. Georgia O'Keefe *Blue I* c. 1917 Watercolor on paper



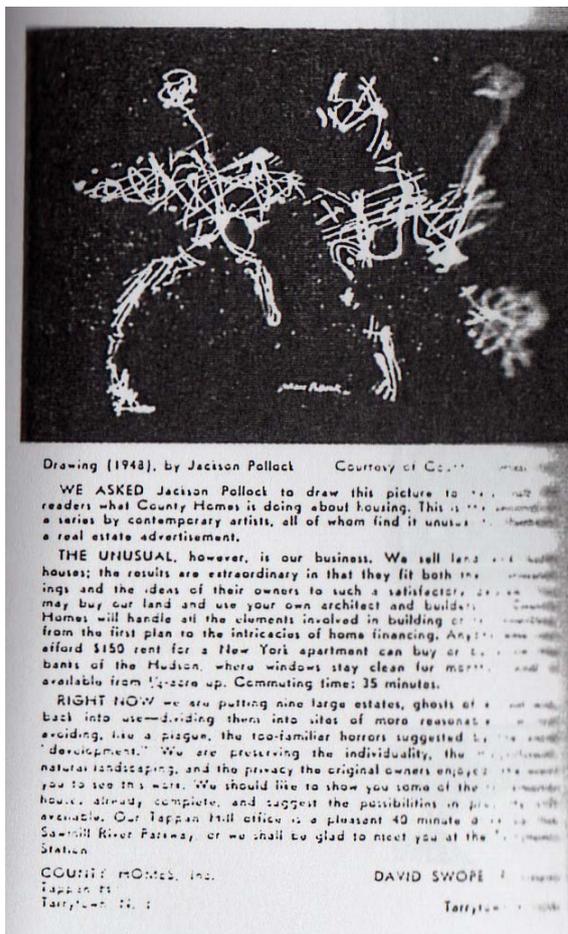
2. Emmanuel Leutze *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (Westward Ho!)* Mural in the United States Capitol Building, Washington D.C.



3. Wassily Kandinsky *Improvisation 33 (Orient I)* 1933 Watercolor  
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation 1970.10



4. Jackson Pollock *Totem Lessons 2*  
1945, Oil on Canvas



5. Jackson Pollock; Ad for Country House; In *Partisan Review* September Issue 1948



6. Stuart Davis, *Egg Beater No. 1*, 1927, Oil on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney



7. Willem DeKooning; Ad for Container Corporation of America; In *Fortune* January 1945



8. Seagram Offices in Manhattan; Works by Franz Klein and Mark Rothko

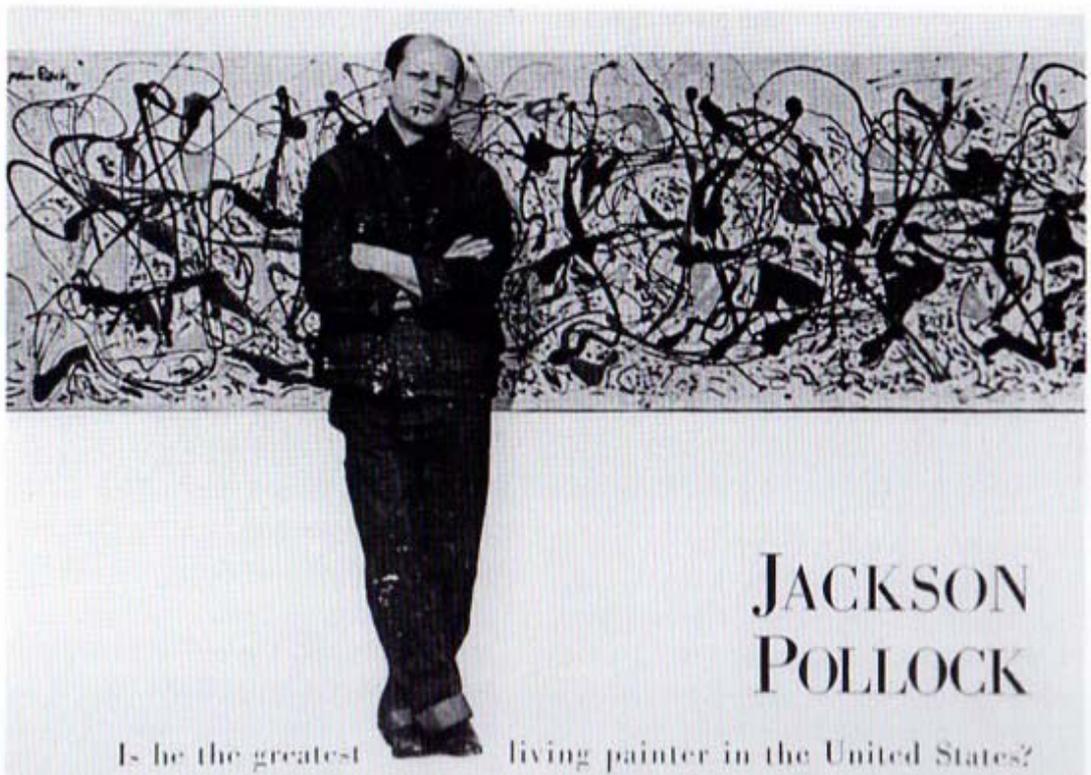


9. "Bikini" in *Fortune*, December 1946

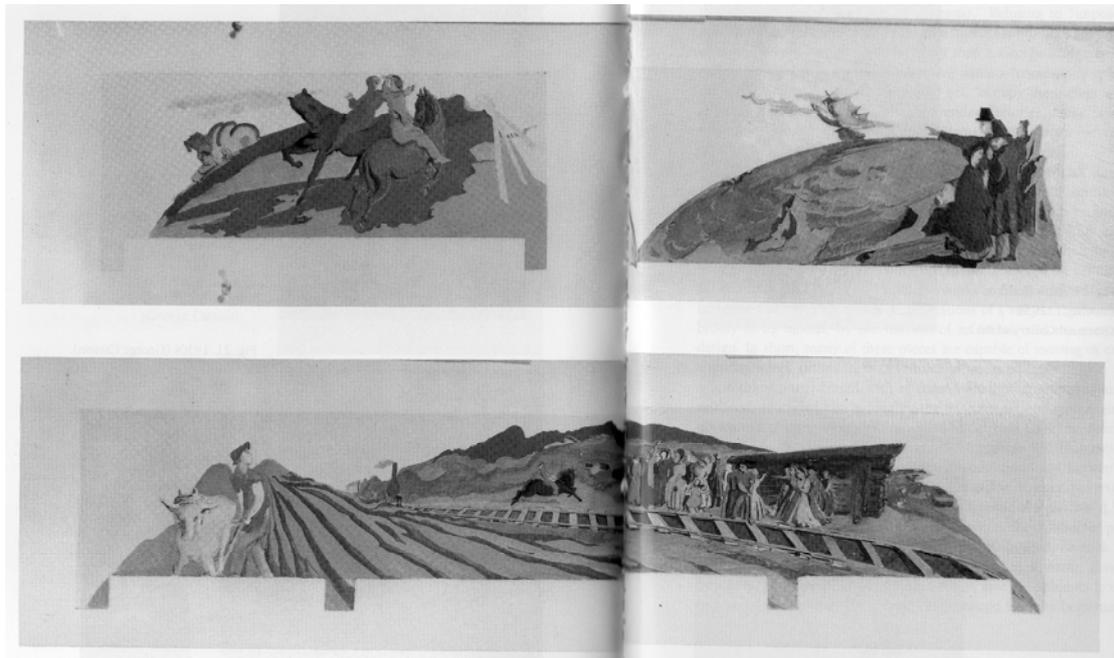


Artists exiled in New York. From left to right, first row: Matta, Zadkine, Tanguy, Ernst, Chagall, Léger; second row: Breton, Mondrian, Masson, Ozenfant, Lipchitz, Tchelitchev; back row: Seligmann and Berman.

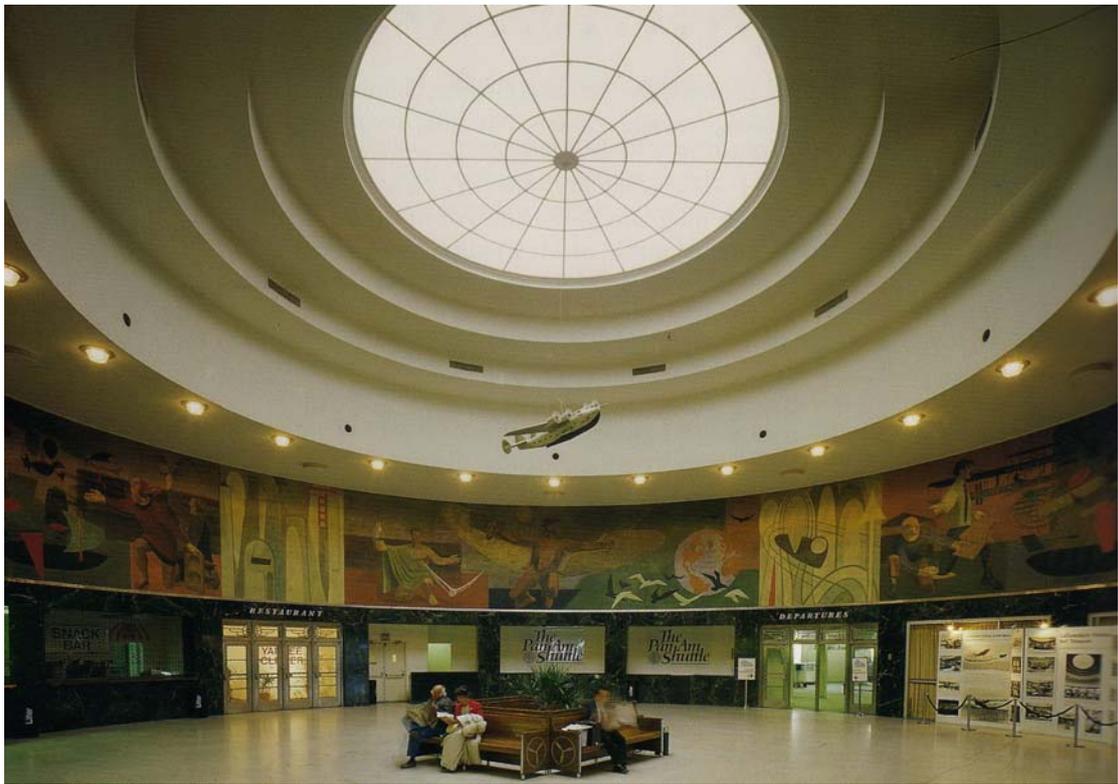
10. Group photo taken of some of the artists who came to New York with the War



11. *Life* magazine, Issue August 8, 1949



12. Mark Rothko, Sketch for mural, circa 1939, National Archives



13. James Brooks, History of Flight circa 1935, Marine Air Terminal, La Guardia Airport, New York City



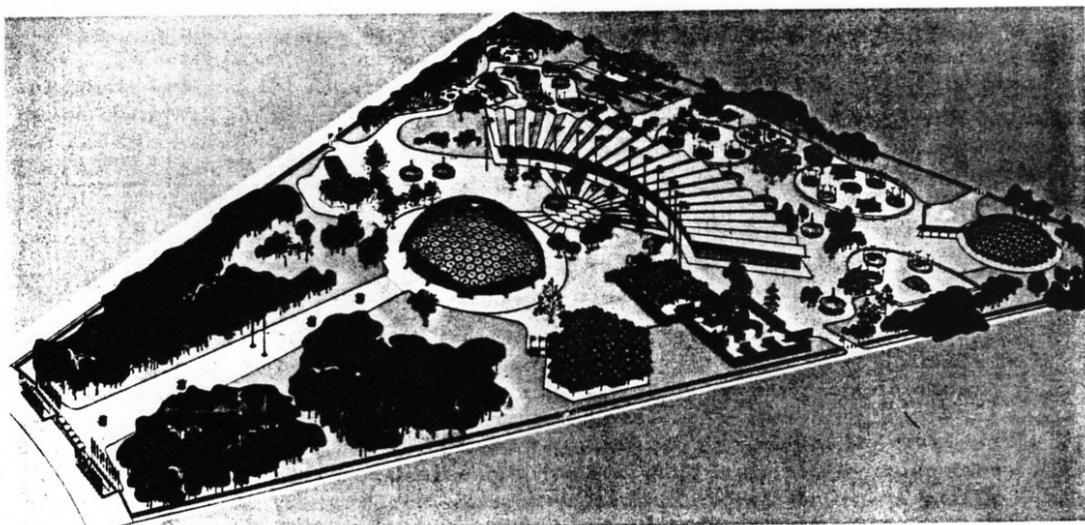
14. Jack Levine, Welcome Home, 1946



15. Oversized bust of Abraham Lincoln



16. Cartoon in *New York Times*, July 12, 1959

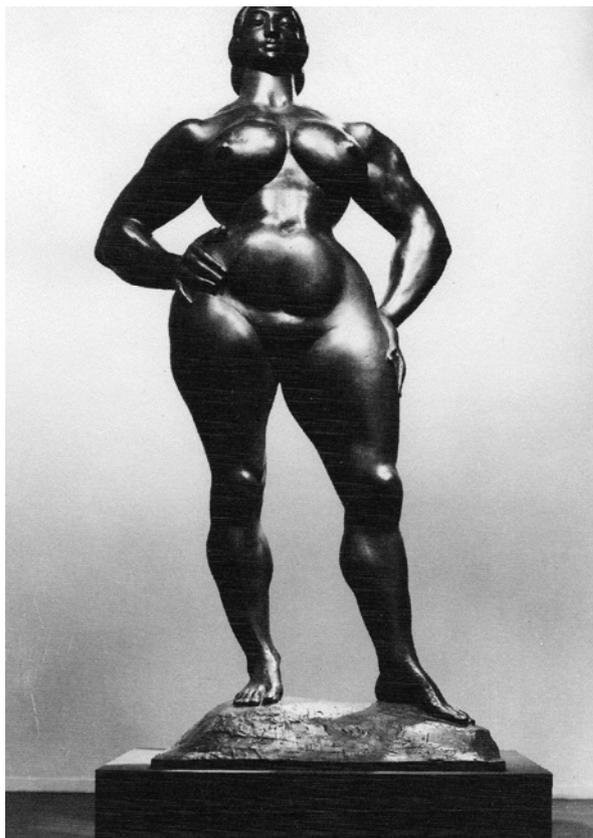


17. Sokolniki grounds, depicted in pamphlet for visitors, U.S. State Department



Richard Buckminster Fuller with a model of his geodesic dome.

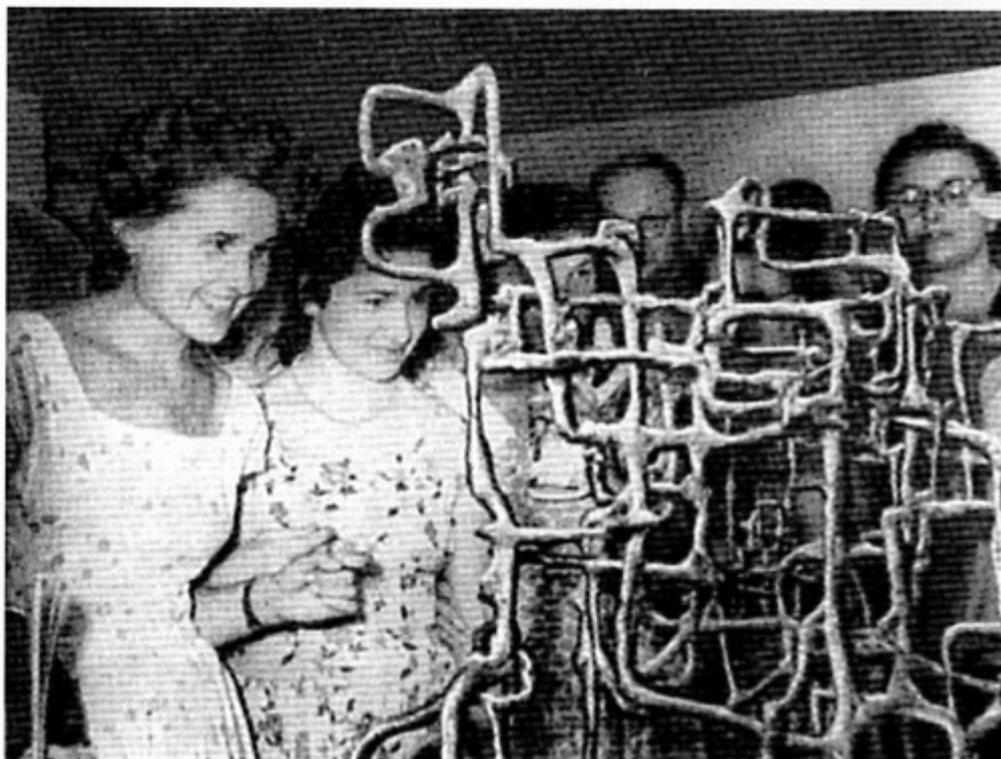
18. Buckminster Fuller and a model of dome for Sokolniki grounds in Moscow



19. Gaston Lachaise, Standing Woman, 1932



20. Premier Khrushchev and Vice President Nixon sipping Pepsi-Cola at Exhibition opening, *The New York Times*, June 27, 1959



21. Soviets viewing Ibram Lassaw sculpture at American National Exhibition, 1959 (V.Kemenov, *Protiv Abstraksionizma v sporakh o realizme* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1969)



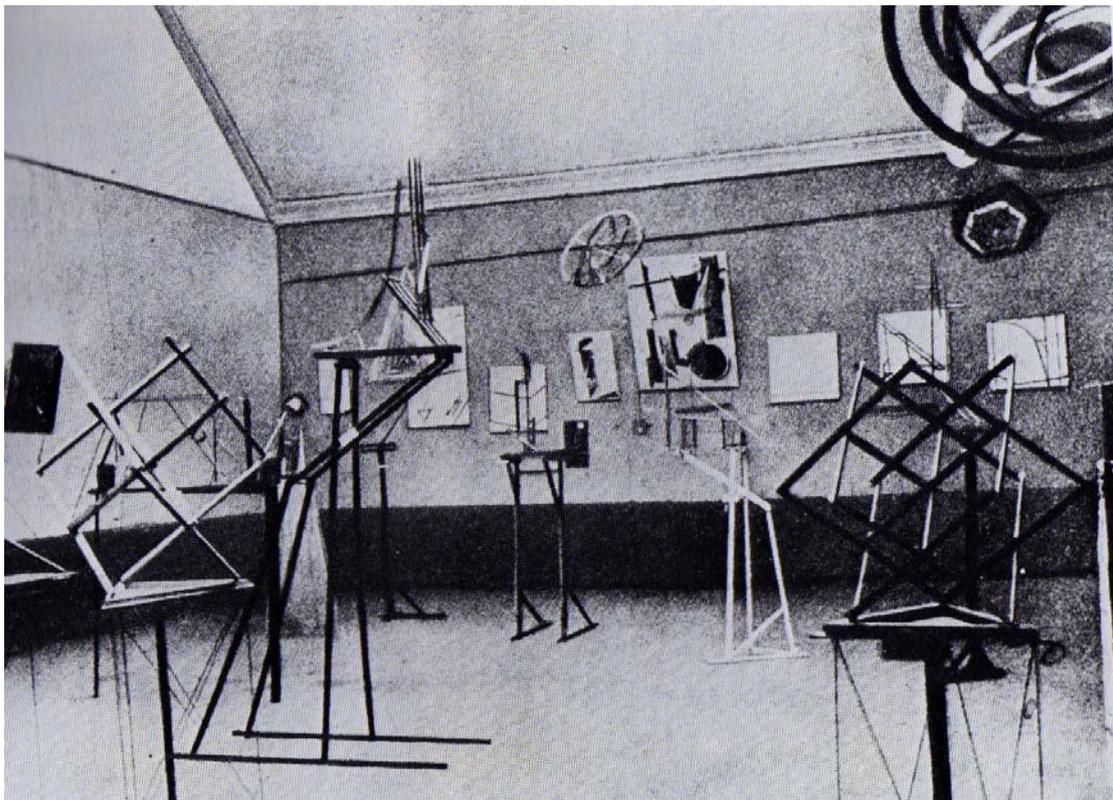
22. Crowds of visitors in front of Jackson Pollock's *Cathedral* at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959



23. Jazz music played in the late fifties in a Moscow café.



23a. Stuart Davis, Swing Landscape, 1938, oil on canvas, Indiana University Art Museum, IL



24. The first Obmokhu-Society of Young Artists – exhibit in Vkhutemas, Moscow in May 1920



25. Fedor Shurpin, Dawn over our Homeland, 1946-48, Society for Cultural Relations with USSR, London



26. Cover *America* magazine



страстностью, и  
нейших и вдох  
ния» Шагала о:  
рода. На соседн  
ния двух круп  
рижской школ  
терны для высш  
музыканта» Лез  
ского периода т  
отходил от фо  
Работы немца  
яркие и глубок  
ские события в  
другой характер  
воположной ст  
узского и дву  
в истории бесц

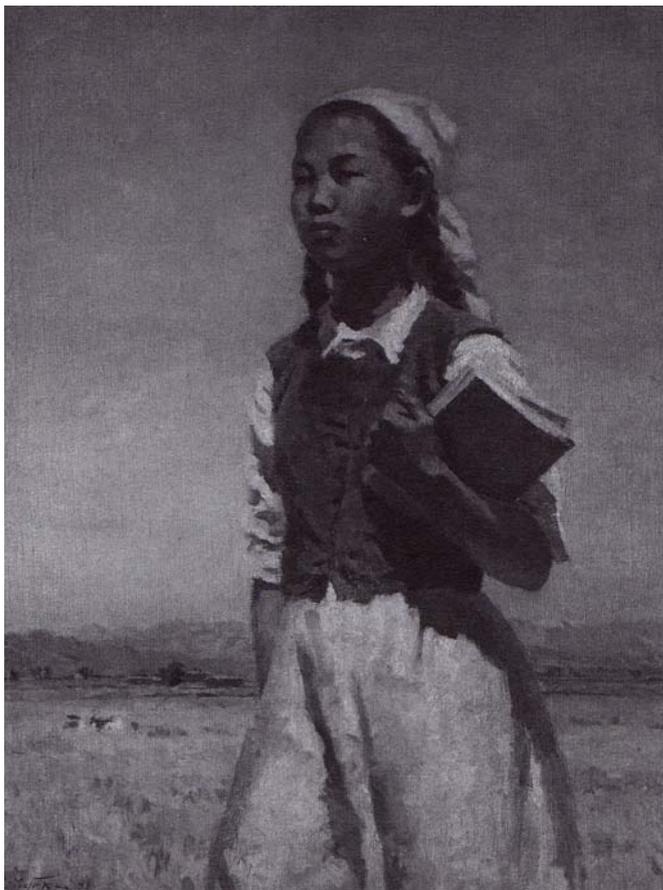
## от Гогена до Поллока

Альфред Г. Барр

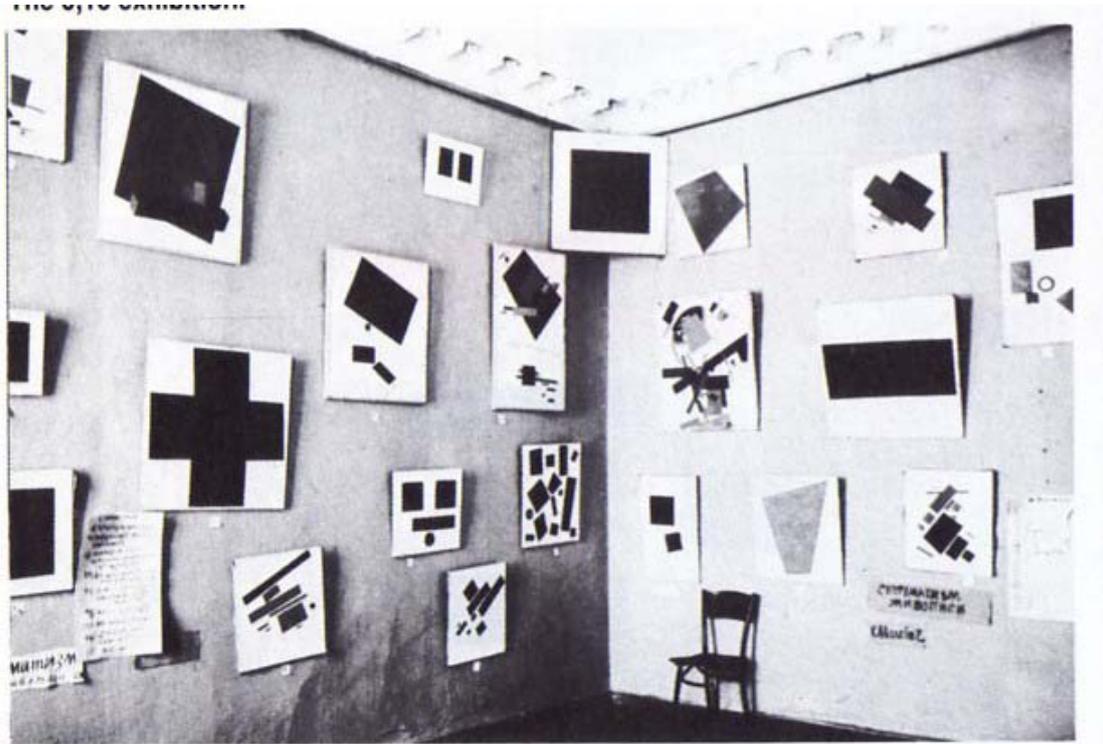
МЕККА СОВРЕМЕННОГО ИСКУССТВА

Хотя Музей  
по своим устан  
другие музеи,  
внимание иску  
страницах 32 и  
нальные автопо  
и необычные ки  
держания: рабе  
старшего покол  
реалиста и эке  
На последних  
ских изображен  
ского мастера  
американца Мс

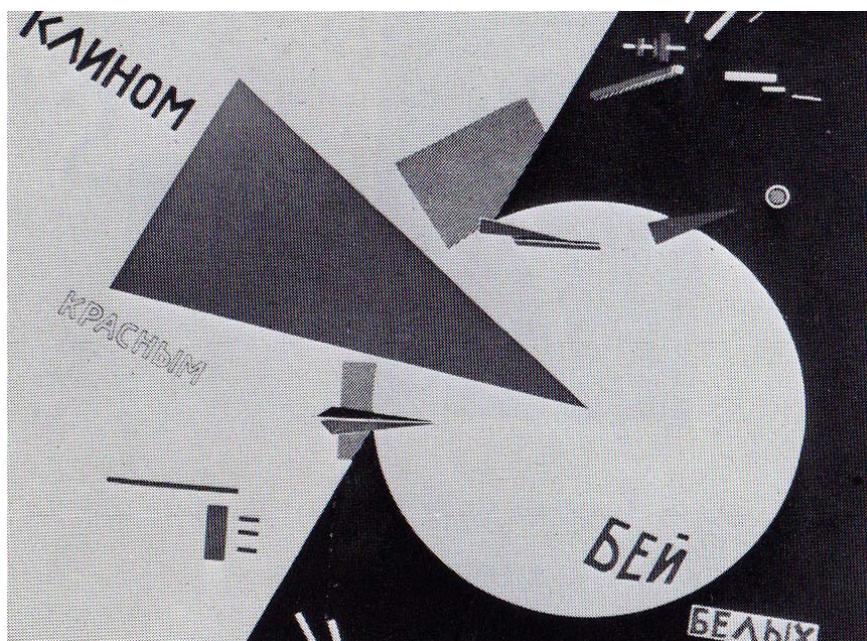
27. *America* magazine, article on the Museum of Modern art in New



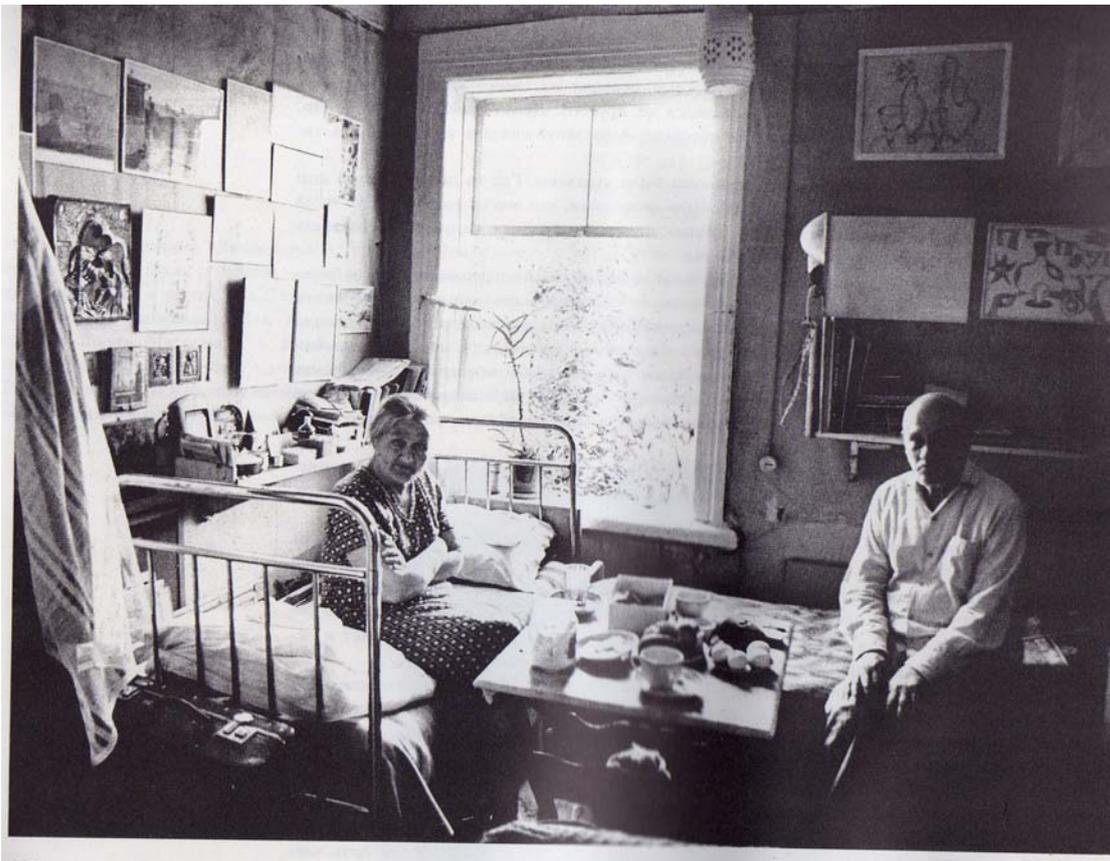
28. Semen Chuikov, Daughter of Soviet Kirghizia, 1948, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



29. Malevich, Black Square exhibited in 1915

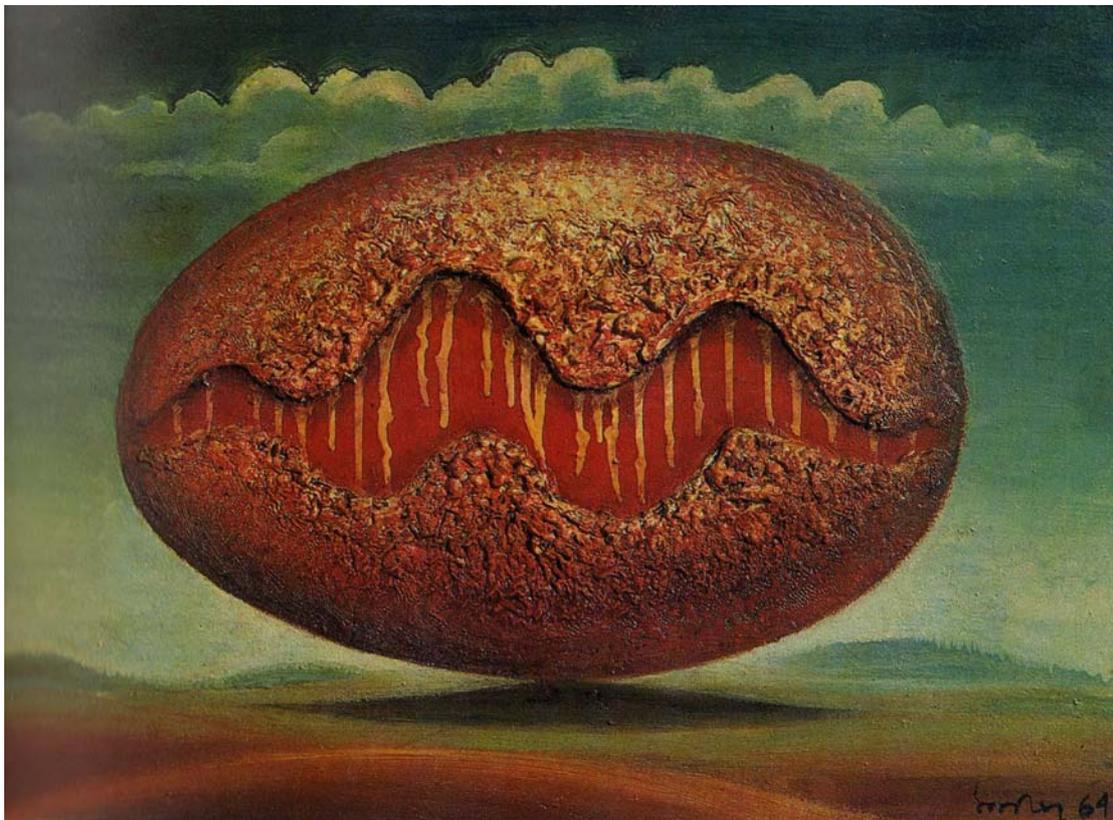


30. El Lissitzky, Street Poster, 1919-20, Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge



О.Потапова и Е.Косиловский

31. The artist Olga Potapova with her husband in their apartment



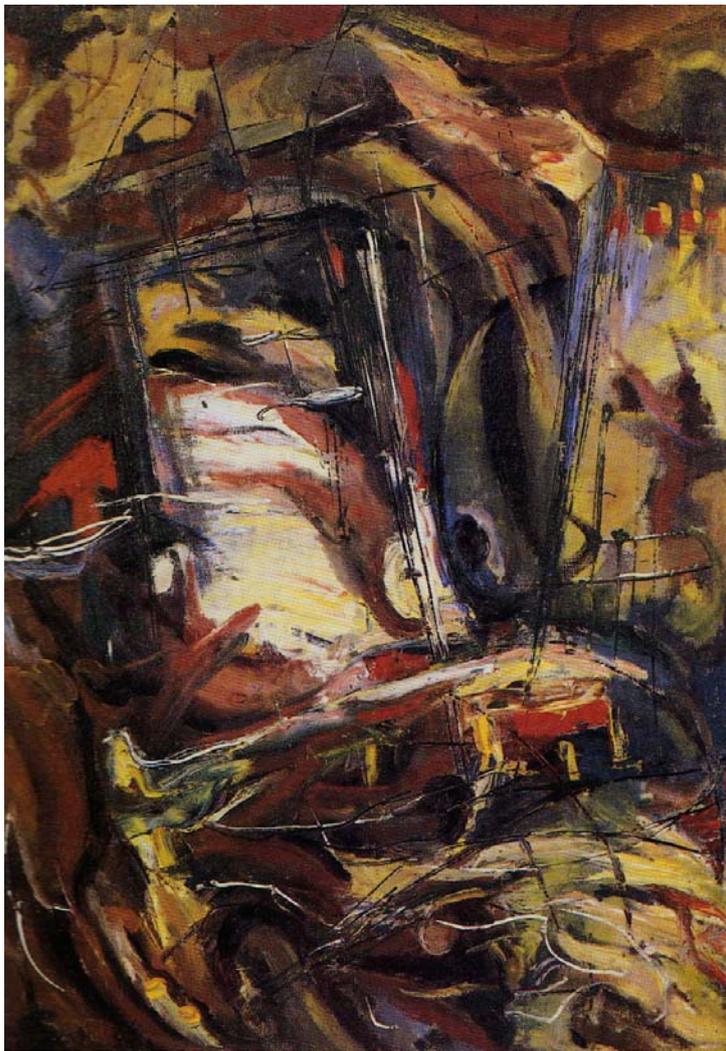
32. Ullo Sooster, Egg, 1964, private collection



33. Vladimir Slepian, creating an abstract artwork with a vacuum cleaner and autopaints



34. Lianozovo group with Oscar Rabin on far right



on canvas, 1961

35. Vladimir Nemukhin, oil



Black Card Table, oil, playing cards and wood on canvas, 1986-87

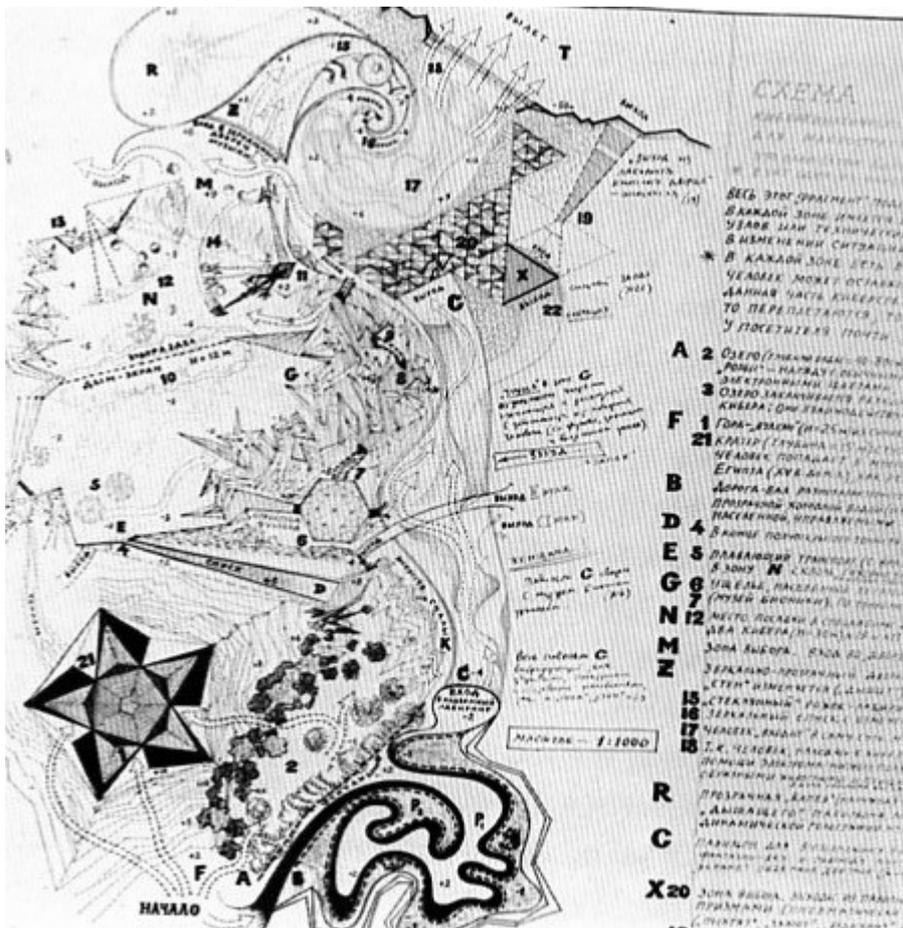
36. Vladimir Nemukhin, later work,



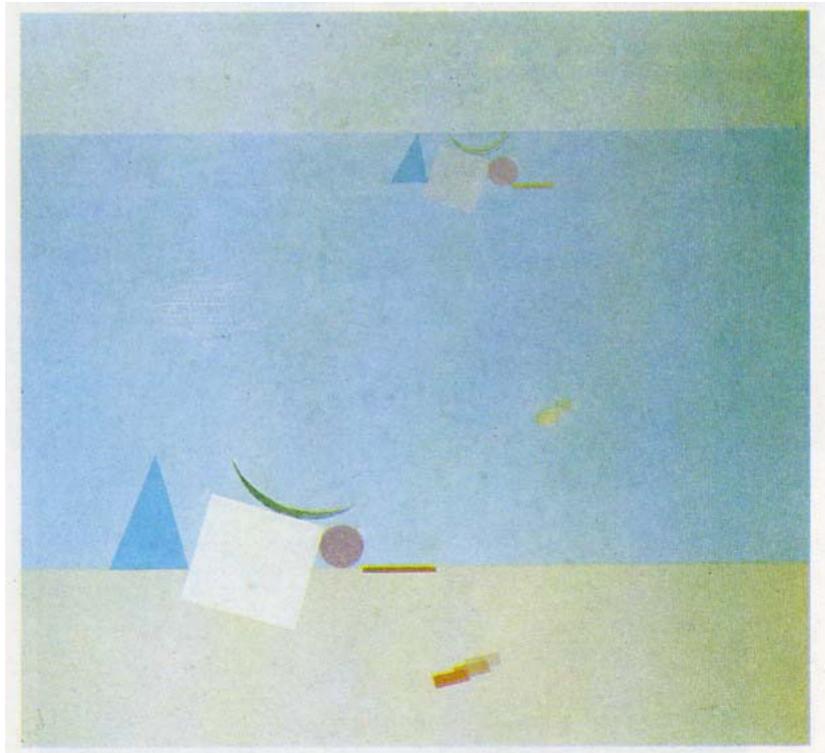
37. Lev Kropivnitsky, oil on canvas, 1961, private collection



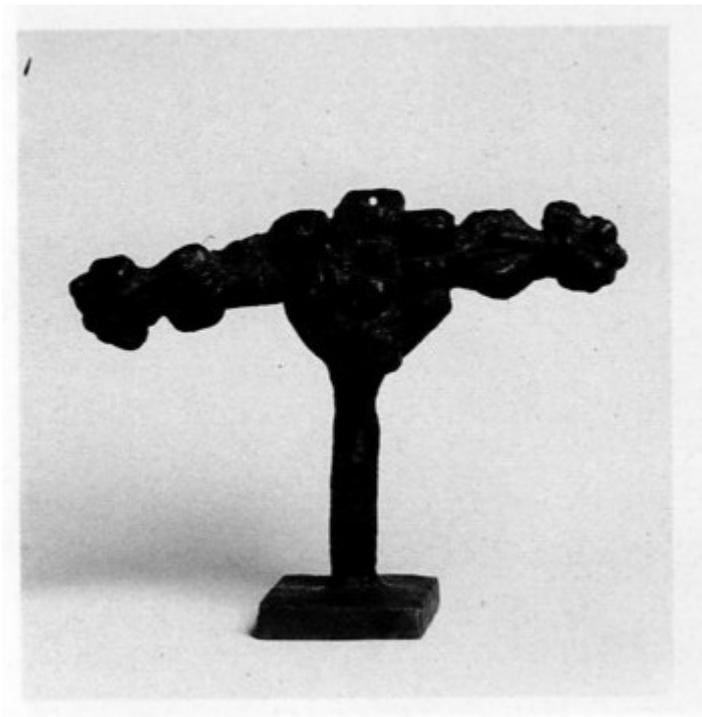
38. Lev Kropivnitsky, oil on canvas, 1967, private collection



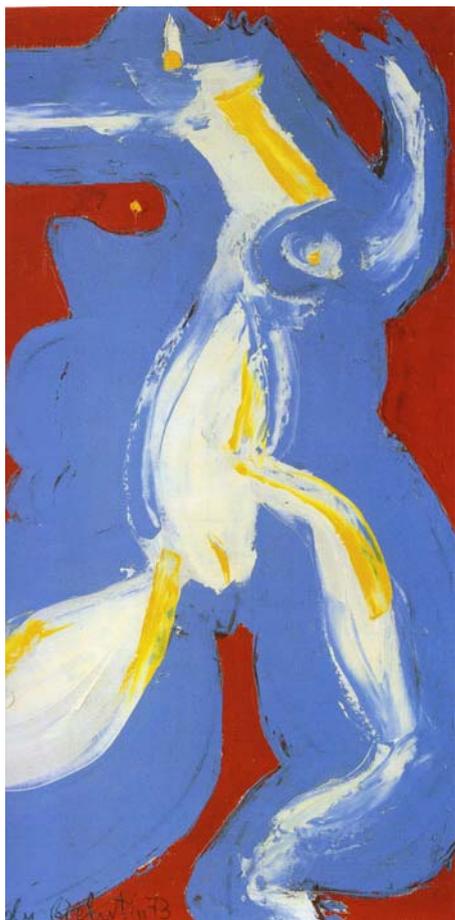
39. Lev Nusberg and the Movement group, Plan of Cybertheater: Art\_World, 1966, Gelatin silver print, private collection



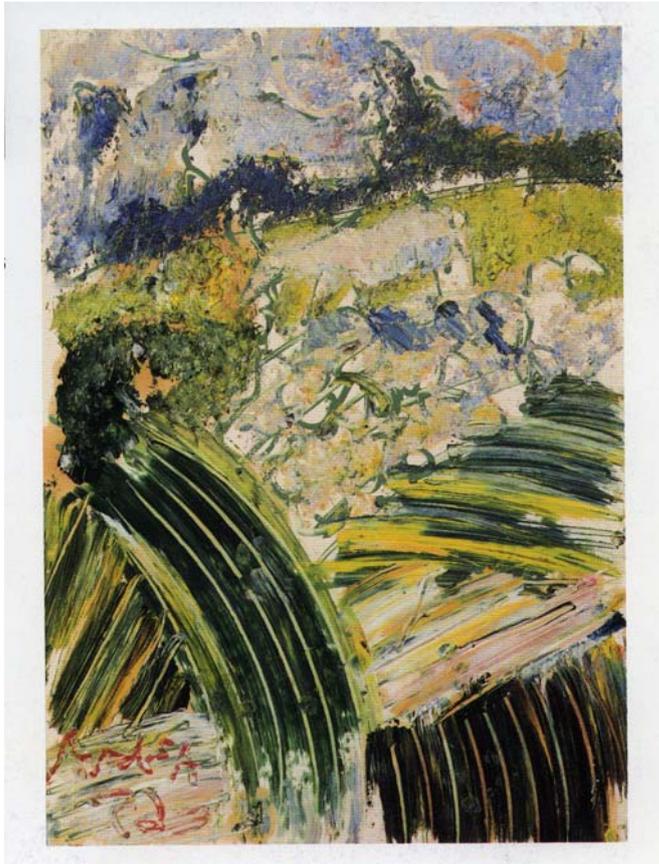
40. Eduard Shteinberg, Oil on canvas, 1976, private collection



41. Ernst Neizvestny, bronze, no date, private collection



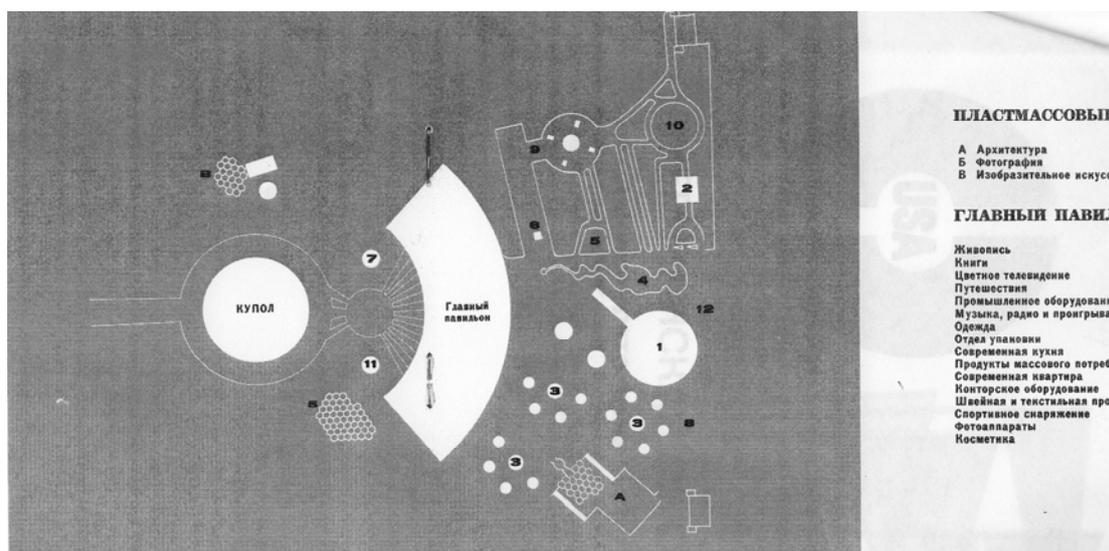
42. Eli Belyutin, oil on canvas, 1973, private collection



43. Anatoli Zverev, Summer, oil on canvas, 1965, private collection



44. Cover of pamphlet distributed in Moscow 1959 at American National Exhibition

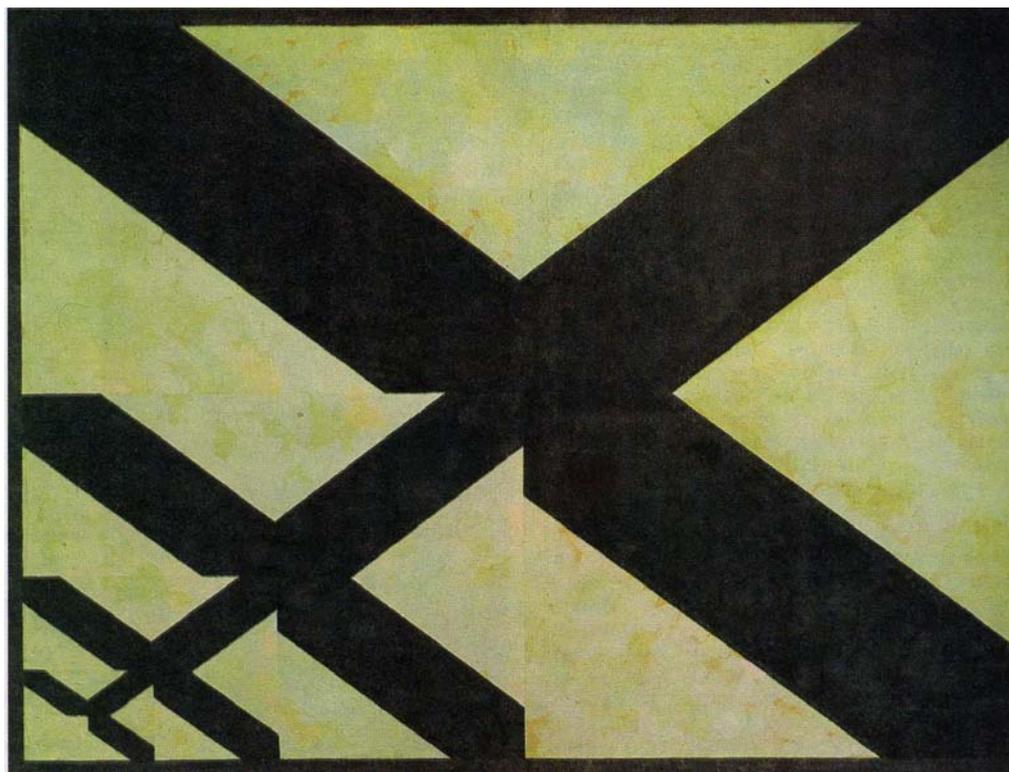


45. Description of fairgrounds at Sokolniki in pamphlet

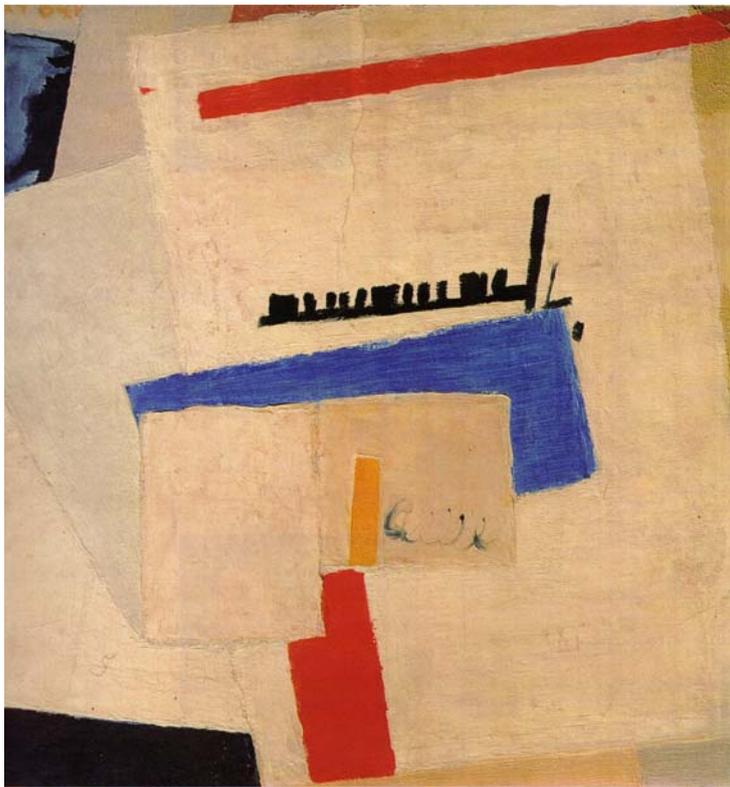




48. Lydia Masterkova, Oil on Canvas, no date, private collection



49. Michael Chernyshov, 1976



50. Aleksei Tiapushin, Oil on Canvas, 1964, private collection



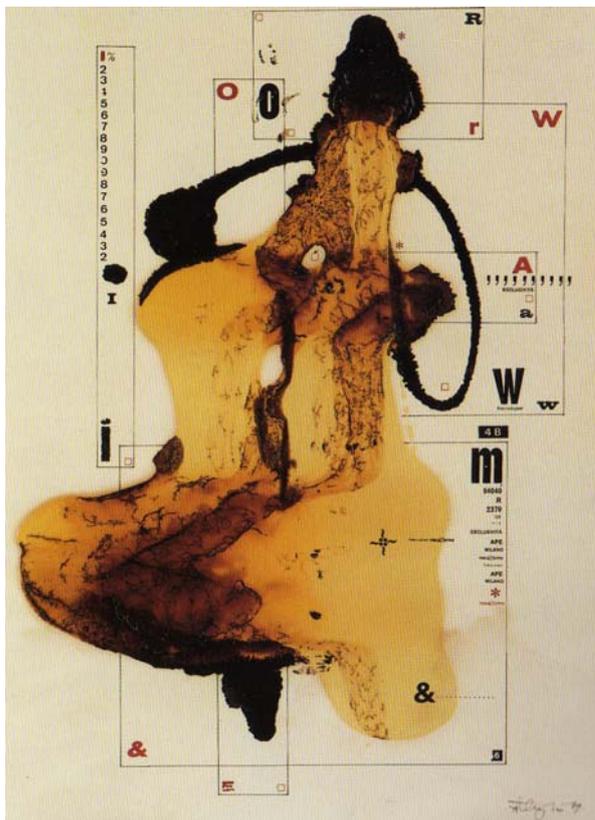
51. Eli Belyutin, Landscape, Oil on canvas, dated 1952 (probably incorrect date) , private collection



52. Ernst Neizvestny, Tree of Life, Bronze, 1968-72, private collection



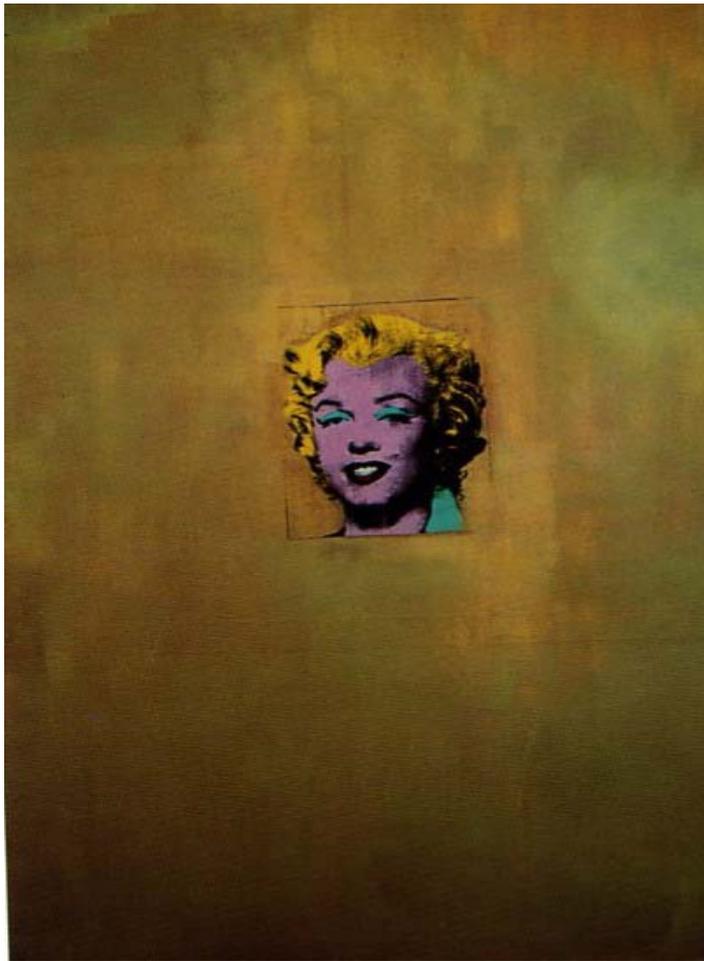
53, 54 Khrushchev at Exhibition in Manezh in Moscow, 1962



55. Boris Zhutovsky, mixed media, 1969, private collection



56. Nikolai Andronov, Raftsmen, Oil on canvas, 1960-61, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



57. Andy Warhol, Gold Marilyn Monroe, Synthetic polymer paint, silkscreened and oil on canvas, 1962, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



delegation visiting V.I. Lenin, 1950

58. Vladimir A. Serov, A Peasant



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Katja Jacobs – January 2007 at her home in New York State

Norton Dodge – Telephone Interview in January 2007 and May 2007

Leonid Bazhanov – March 2007 at his office in Moscow

Martin Manning – May 2007 at the State Department Library in Washington DC

Jack Masey – May 2007 at his office in New York

## **Die Reaktion der Russischen Kunstszene auf die Abstrakte Kunst in der 1959 in Moscow Ausgestellte „American National Exhibition“**

Die Kunst die in der *American National Exhibition* in Mosow präsentiert wurde, war von der USIA (United States Information Agency) unter dem Director George V. Allen und Association of Federated Artists (AFA) Vice President Lloyd Goodrich, damaliger Director des Whitney Museum of American Art sowie eine ausgewählte Kommitte zusammengestellt. Die Ausstellung sollte die diversen Stile der amerikanischen Moderne wiedergeben (von 1928 bis 1958). Sie umfasste realistische Werke von Edward Hopper und Andrew Wyeth, regionalistische Arbeiten von Thomas Hart Benton, sozialkritische figurative Maler wie etwa Philip Evergood und Ben Shahn sowie "non-objective" Maler wie etwa Stuart Davis oder Lyonel Feininger aber auch zeitgenössische Abstrakte Expressionisten wie Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko und William Baziotos.

Es war eine ideale Zeit eine solche Ausstellung ins Leben zu rufen. 1958 war die "East – West Cultural Exchange Agreement" zwischen der USA und der Sowjet Union unterzeichnet worden. Chruschtschow hatte diesen Austausch initiiert und somit gab er den Vereinigten Staaten auch die Möglichkeit sich der Sowjet Union zu präsentieren. Nach dem „Zwanzigsten Partei Tag“ und die damit verbundenen Änderungen in der sowjetischen Politik zeigte sich Chruschtschow's Regime auch den Künsten und Künstlern gegenüber offener. Ilya Ehrenburg, gelang es mit seiner hohen politischen Funktion, eine grosse Picasso Retrospektive in Moscow zu zeigen. Dies war eine Weichenstellung auch in Richtung der moderne Amerikanische Kunst.

Die offizielle Kunst in Russland war der "Sozialistischer Realismus" – realistische Kunst welche die sowjetische Geschichte und die sozialistische Ideologie repräsentierte. Unter Lenin und Stalin wurde diese Kunst nicht nur gefördert sondern genau diktiert. Künstler die ihre Wurzeln in der Russischen Tradition der 20er Jahre hatten wurden nicht nur nicht offizielle engariert, sondern verfolgt, eingesperrt und oft auch ermordet. Dies änderte sich zwar mit Chruschtschow, der Sozialistische Realismus war aber nicht destotrotz bereits dreisig Jahre lang unterrichtet worden und die Russische Avant-garde untersagt.

Diese Arbeit soll nicht nur die Vielschichtigkeit der Ausstellung aus den USA aufschlüsseln. Sie soll den Hintergrund der amerikanischen Kunst verständlich machen und deutlich machen warum gerade die Werke gewählt wurden die letztendlich nach Moscow gingen. Sie soll die Komplexität einer solchen Ausstellung vor Augen führen – die politischen, künstlerischen und organisatorischen Verstrickungen die mit einer solchen Ausstellung verbunden sind.

Sie soll aber auch die Rezeption einer solchen Ausstellungen aufschlüsseln. Wer ist zu dieser Ausstellung gekommen und wie war die Reaktion der Zuschauer: generell aber auch spezifisch, also wie wurde die Amerikanische Kunst von den Künstlern in der Sowietunion aufgenommen? Da diese Ausstellung während des „Kalten Krieges“ stattfand gab es eine politische Reaktion auf die Ausstellung die ebenfalls hier untersucht wird. Um die Reaktion der Zuseher 1959 verständlich zu machen ist es essentiell

zurückzublicken und sich ein Bild von der politischen und sozialen Entwicklung in Russland und der Soviet Union zu haben. Diese Dissertation soll durch Recherchen und persönliche Gesprächen vor Augen führen, dass die *American National Exhibition* das Kunstverständnis für die Künstler der Sowietunion wieder öffnete und somit veränderte. Sie soll vor Augen führen wie besonders die Werke der Amerikanischen Abstrakten Expressionisten die Kunst in der Sowietunion inspirierte. Wie die Künstler sich dort änderten, zurückblickten auf Ihre Russische Tradition, in sich und um sich schauten um am Ende etwas neues, sowjetisches hervorzubringen und den Mut hatten diese dem Obersten Gremium zu präsentieren.

## **The American National Exhibition in Moscow and the Soviet Artistic Reaction to the Abstract Art**

The American National Exhibition was an exchange exhibition organised by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and took place at Sokolniki Grounds in Moscow in 1959. The overall director George V. Allen and the Association of Federated Artists (AFA) Vice President Lloyd Goodrich, who was also President of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, were responsible for the art section of the Exhibition. The art committee selected, intended to show the Soviet public the developments in modern American art since World War I.

It was an ideal time for such an exhibition. Khrushchev had initiated the “East-West Cultural Exchange Agreement” which was signed in 1958 and with it he had opened the doors to the Soviet Union. With the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Meeting and the political changes involved, Khrushchev proved to be more open towards the arts and artists within his country than anyone in the past thirty years.

The official art in the Soviet Union at the time was “socialist realism” – figurative works that showed Soviet history and ideology in a positive light. Lenin and Stalin were not only the initiators of this powerful Soviet movement, they enforced it with random laws and those artists who did not abide by these were excluded from official commissions, exiled or extinguished. Although this changed during the Khrushchev years, the style of socialist realism had been enforced so thoroughly for such a long period of time and the Russian avant-garde had not been officially taught or openly accepted. This dissertation will show the foundation of the *American National Exhibition* – who played what role and why the art was chosen as it was. It will not only reveal the complexity of such an exhibition but by examining the background of American art it will show the relevance and ultimate importance of the political and social factors involved.

The Soviet response to the Exhibition can only be fully appreciated by looking back at the developments within Russian and Soviet art as well as the political and social changes which the peoples in the Soviet Union experienced under Khrushchev. Through the analysis of the Soviet reception of the Exhibition, this dissertation will show how the Soviet public and especially the artworld in Moscow perceived specifically the American abstract art.

Through comprehensive research and personal interviews this dissertation will reveal how the American abstract art displayed at the *American National Exhibition* actually facilitated the Soviet artists path in looking back at their Russian roots, looking within themselves and looking outside of their immediate boundaries in order to create new Soviet art. In going beyond the actual events surrounding the *American National Exhibition* and in relating the repercussions the new Soviet art had within the Soviet Union, a more comprehensive understanding of the influence the American artwork exhibited in 1959 had on the Soviet artists, is given in this dissertation.



## CURRICULUM VITAE

### LEBENS LAUF

#### Akademische Ausbildung

- 2006 - 2007    Universität Wien  
Dissertationsrecherchen; Privatissimum
- 1990-1997    Universität Wien  
Abschluss: Mag. Kunstgeschichte
- 1984-1988    University of San Francisco  
Abschluss: Bachelors of Arts – Economics
- 1986-1987    Universität Wien, Wirtschafts Universität  
                  Intstitut for European Studies  
                  Volkswirtschaft und Betriebswirtschaft  
                  Einführung Kunstgeschichte
- 1984            Annie Wright School, Washington  
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#### Arbeitserfahrung

- 2003-2007    Institut für Translationswissenschaften  
Vorträge im Bereich U.S. Kultur – „American National Exhibition“  
Zentrum für Kunst und Wissenschaft – Vortrag über Ausstellung:  
„American National Exhibition“
- 2001-2002    Jüdisches Museum  
Ausstellungskuratorin: Ernst Eisenmayer, März 2002
- 2001-2002    Sezession  
Teilzeitstelle im Bereich Sponsoring
- 1998            iFF  
Teilzeittätigkeit im Büro Prof. Stohmeier
- 1990-1997    Berlitz Sprachschulen  
Sprachlehrerin – Englisch, Deutsch
- 1991-1993    Kunstforum  
Kunstpresse – Redaktion  
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- 1988-1990    Wolf Schulz Gallery, San Francisco  
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#### Diverses

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