

University of Tartu
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Institute of History and Archaeology
Department of Art History

Bachelor's research work
Renata Antonievna Feizulla

Does Russian Impressionism exist?

Supervisor: Holger Rajavee (PhD Art History)

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Introduction

Does Russian Impressionism Exist?

This question intrigues many art historians, myself included. In museums, one often hears comments like, "Look at how they work with light!" or "See the brushstroke, it's just like the Impressionists!" But does our impression of the light or brushstroke in a painting alone define Impressionism? Paintings may employ Impressionist techniques, but the underlying idea might differ. Does the use of Impressionist techniques make an artist an Impressionist? And can we consider Russian Impressionism a fully-fledged movement simply because there were artists who worked in this style? This work is dedicated to explore the difference between technique and concept, and attempt to articulate them.

Historiography

One of the first works to provide a detailed analysis of styles and movements was *"The History of Russian Painting in the 19th Century"* by Alexander Benois. He notes the Impressionist character of Konstantin Korovin's painting: "When Korovin's first paintings appeared at the traveling exhibitions, we were all still so far from the demands of purely pictorial, colorful impressions that the public painfully puzzled over the wild nature of the artist's intentions. Korovin's paintings, in which the artist sought only to achieve a beautiful spot of color, naturally confused many. This confusion was also contributed to by Korovin's own painting style. The misunderstanding regarding Korovin, of the most deplorable nature, best demonstrates how far removed the Russian public was from any understanding of painting." ¹

About ten years ago, the Museum of Russian Impressionism opened in Moscow. Naturally, its founders and staff believe that Russian Impressionism exists. They have expressed this belief many times in their series of video lectures. ²³ "The very concept of 'Russian Impressionism' remains controversial. Impressionism in Russia was not fortunate. Emerging in the late 19th century, Russian Impressionism was actively overshadowed by the avant-garde. After the revolution, it was completely 'outside the system.' However, despite everything, many artists, both before and after the political upheavals in the country, continued to create in the Impressionist style, continued to experiment with light and color on their canvases, and strived

¹ Benois, Aleksandr. *Istoriya russkoj zhivopisi XIX veka (History of Russian Painting in XIX Century)* (Moscow: Republic Publishing House, 1995), p. 362.

² Petrova, Yuliya. *Chto takoe russkij impressionizm? (What Russian Impressionism is?)*, <https://www.youtube.com/live/eotnxNTA7ag?feature=share> [accessed 17.03.2022].

³ Poznanskaya, Anna. *Stranniki i impressionisty – dva puti v XX veke (Wanderers and Impressionists - Two Paths in the 20th Century)*, <https://www.youtube.com/live/Mhk29ADsmxQ?feature=share> [accessed 17.03.2022].

to convey mood, emotions, and capture the subtlest vibrations of the air. Impressionism continues to inspire artists today." ⁴

Alexei Shadrin disagrees with the statement by Museum of Russian Impressionism in his lecture. He argues that the works of Russian artists do not correspond to the generally accepted characteristics of Impressionism. Impressionists are interested in nature, while Russian artists are interested in people. Despite the talent of Russian artists, Impressionism did not take root in Russia. It did not achieve great success, not because the artists lacked talent, but because it involved a completely different psychological paradigm and a completely different way of feeling. However, the avant-garde and symbolism proved to be very successful. ⁵

In his lecture "Why Were Russians Afraid of Impressionism?" Ilya Doronchenkov explains that the French were viewed as a "negative standard." "We encounter a very interesting phenomenon—a kind of negative standard, perceiving Western development as a negative standard." As an example, he cites the correspondence between Kramskoi and Repin, where they discuss what should take precedence—light and color, or whether they should primarily serve the conveyance of an idea. They agree that "The idea creates the technique and elevates it." And here Repin expresses surprise: "But what does that mean? Why are things turned upside down in the West?" From that moment on, modern Western artistic development and its radical outcomes—Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism—would play an extremely important role in the development of Russian visual art. Not through direct influence, but through the results of debate and dialogue. And from about the same time, it became clear that the new visual language of Russian painting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries would be perceived as an imported language, as a borrowed language, as a Western language. ⁶

In his book *"Impressionism. Founders and Followers,"* Mikhail German explores the difference between Impressionist techniques and the movement as such. He dedicates a separate chapter to Impressionism in Russia. "Russian Impressionism" is a term no more justified than "German" or "American" Impressionism. However, the chapter devoted to what is commonly referred to by this term is a special one. Everything that was influenced by Impressionism to a greater or lesser extent in Russia has become part of our perception, our attitude towards French

⁴ Muzej russkogo impressionizma (Museum of Russian Impressionism), <https://www.rusimp.su/ru/about> [accessed 11.04.2022].

⁵ Shadrin, Aleksej. *Russkij impressionizm – fejk ili iskusstvo? (Russian Impressionism – Fake or Art?)*, https://youtu.be/Gm5BF5_fnjc [accessed 17.03.2022].

⁶ Doronchenkov, Ilya. *Pochemu rossiyane boyalis impressionizma? (Why were Russians afraid of impressionism?)*, <https://arzamas.academy/materials/1445> [accessed 12.04.2022].

Impressionism, and has turned into the prism through which Russian consciousness perceives the phenomenon of Impressionism itself. This is part of the history of Russian public taste, and to ignore this fact is both unreasonable and unscientific.⁷

Vyacheslav Filippov, the author of a significant work on Russian Impressionism, also notes that Russian Impressionism emerged under conditions of accelerated development, leading to a mixture of various stylistic trends and its prolonged existence over time. "For Russian Impressionism, a greater burden of meaning and less dynamism compared to the French urban variant is characteristic, which defines its 'rural' nature. There is also the so-called 'cult of the sketch.' The relationship between Impressionism and other stylistic movements is particularly complex. The fundamental factor here was the genetic kinship between Impressionism and Realism. Therefore, it is absurd and unfair to oppose them. The blood relationship between Impressionism and Realism stems from the proximity of their creative methods, connected with direct observation. This is why, by leaning towards Impressionism, Repin, Polenov, and Surikov enriched their work. Subsequently, the connection between Russian Impressionism and styles such as Art Nouveau, Cézannism, Fauvism, Expressionism, and other movements became possible. At the same time, the persistent Russian inclination towards the meaningfulness of the pictorial image and its optimistic tone explains the resilience of Impressionism in Soviet painting."⁸

As we can see from the examples provided, many researchers agree that Russian artists influenced by Impressionism share an important common feature—the primacy of content over pictorial techniques. This creates a significant difference from the global movement of Impressionism, where one of the goals was the enjoyment of pure color and the immediate impression of the object.

Object of the research

This work is focused on the period of the development of Russian painting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It examines artists such as Isaac Levitan, Konstantin Korovin, and Valentin Serov. Throughout the research, will be explored which style and genre can be attributed to the works of these artists. And determined whether their work was Impressionistic or Realistic. It

⁷ German, Mikhail. *Impressionizm. Osnovopolozhniki i posledovateli (Impressionism. Founders and Followers)* (Moscow: Publishing house Azbuka, 2017), pp. 253 - 254.

⁸ Filippov, Vyacheslav. *Impressionizm v russoj zhivopisi (Impressionism in Russian Painting)* (Moscow: Belyj gorod, 2004), p. 6

is also important to discuss how Russian artists became acquainted with foreign art and reflected the advanced trends of Western art in their works.

The object of the research is the vibrant and rich cultural life of Russia at the end of the 19th century, filled with artistic upheavals, during which an extraordinary number of brilliant artists emerged. Never before had Russia seen such a large number of gifted, talented artists. Many of them went abroad to study. In one way or another, they encountered the work of their French colleagues. Upon returning home, each of them used this experience in their own way, developing unique styles and directions in their art.

The subject of this work is the analysis of the paintings of the aforementioned artists. Did Impressionism manifest in their work, and if so, how?

The goal of the work is to understand which Russian artists can be classified as Impressionists and which cannot.

Relevance of the work

Firstly, when someone visits a gallery and sees Russian paintings, they may not know how to understand and interpret them. They might look at the stunning light and think it's Impressionism, only to discover that it is actually a mood landscape or, for example, a psychological portrait. I want to provide a simple and clear explanation of how to recognize and distinguish one from the other.

Secondly, the whole world knows Western artists, but far fewer people know Russian artists like Levitan, Korovin, Serov, and others. Their works are no less remarkable than those of their Western counterparts, but unfortunate historical circumstances prevented them from gaining the recognition they deserved. I would like as many people as possible to become familiar with these wonderful artists.

Structure of the work

1. Introduction: Justification of the topic. Relevance of the work.
2. Cultural and Historical Life of Paris: Which artists were at the forefront, and what ideas were they trying to express? What is Impressionism as an art form, and what expressive means did it use? How did Impressionism spread to other countries: to Northern and Southern Europe, America, and Russia?

3. What was happening in Russia during this time? The "Revolt of the Fourteen," the formation of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions. What happened after that? Why didn't all artists align with the Peredvizhniki, and what alternatives did they have?
4. Levitan and the Landscape of Moods. Korovin – the first Russian Impressionist. Serov – from Impressionism to Modernity.
5. Conclusion

Research methods

First, It is needed to determine the historical context in which these artists developed their work. What was happening at that time in the West and in Russia?

Second, It is needed to study and understand the biography of each artist. Who are they? How did they come to art? What is their artistic position? What role does Impressionism play in their work?

Third, the clarification of the terminology is necessary. Clear definitions of Impressionism, philosophical landscape, psychological portrait, avant-garde, and other styles according to art historians will be provided, in order to understand how they differ from each other.

Fourth, in this work will be selectively analyzed the paintings of each artist (also based on the opinions of art historians) to determine what fits under Impressionism and what does not. After this, it should become clearer whether Russian Impressionism exists or not.

Information sources

I plan to gather information from various sources. For example, from the official websites Russian and international museums and galleries, such as the Tretyakov Gallery, the Russian Museum, the Museum of Russian Impressionism, the National Gallery of London etc.; from the Encyclopedia of Russian Avant-Garde and from the «Big Russian Encyclopedia» and «Britannica»; Vyacheslav Filippov's book "Impressionism in Russian Painting", Mikhail German's book „Impressionism. Founders and Followers“; as well as from the lecture series on the official YouTube channel of the Museum of Russian Impressionism. Additionally, I will use biographical books about each of the aforementioned artists.

Historical Context of Russian Artistic Life

The first Impressionist exhibition took place in Paris in 1874. This event proved to be significant not only for French artistic life but also for the world, including Russia. There was a tradition that gold medalists of the Academy of Arts were awarded a trip to Europe to familiarize

themselves with traditional art and the latest trends. Some of the most famous medalists were Ilya Repin and Vasily Polenov.⁹

In Russia, however, artistic life was marked by very different events. In 1861, serfdom was abolished. The country began to develop rapidly, and all progressive members of the intelligentsia saw this as a step towards freedom. In 1863, the "Revolt of the Fourteen" took place, when 14 graduates of the Academy of Arts refused to paint a diploma picture on the subject of "The Feast in Valhalla" and instead organized a traveling exhibition with paintings on contemporary Russian life. This is how the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions was formed.

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In 1872-1873, Ilya Repin and Vasily Polenov embarked on their "pensioner" journey through Europe. In 1873, they reached Paris and saw the works of the Impressionists for the first time, although these artists were not yet known by that name. After returning to Russia, Vasily Polenov spent a significant amount of time teaching at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. Among his students were I. Levitan, K. Korovin, I. Ostroukhov, A. Arkhipov, and S. Ivanov.¹²

In 1888, Konstantin Korovin painted "Portrait of a Chorus Girl." This painting is considered the first associated with Russian Impressionism.¹³

Just ten years later, in 1898, the art association "Mir Iskusstva" (World of Art) emerged in Russian life, bringing with it a new philosophy: art is valuable in and of itself, not for the idea it conveys. The members of "Mir Iskusstva" became interested in theater, then in the new movement of "modern" (Art Nouveau), and later in the avant-garde.¹⁴

Thus, there wasn't much time left for the development of Impressionism. Life was moving rapidly forward, and art followed suit. However, for artists, Impressionism served as a school.

⁹ *Russkij muzej (Russian Museum)*, https://rusmuseum.ru/news/segodnya-180-let-so-dnya-rozhdeniya-ili-repina/?sphrase_id=385808 [accessed 10.08.2024].

¹⁰ *Bolshaya rossiiskaja entsiklopedia (Great russian encyclopedia)*, <https://bigenc.ru/c/tovarishchestvo-peredvizhnykh-khudozhestvennykh-vystavok-189327> [accessed 10.08.2024].

¹¹ *Istoricheskij portal RUNIVERS (Historical portal RUNIVERS)*, <https://runivers.ru/Runivers/calendar2.php?ID=455927> [accessed 11.08.2024].

¹² Manucharova, Darya. *Polenov Vasilij Dmitrievich*, <https://bigenc.ru/c/polenov-vasilii-dmitrievich-e6e3c7>

¹³ Petrova, Yuliya. *Chto takoe russkij impressionizm? (What Russian Impressionism is?)*, <https://www.youtube.com/live/eotnxNTA7ag?feature=share> [accessed 17.03.2022].

¹⁴ Kulakov, V. *Mir Iskusstva (World of Art)*, https://old.bigenc.ru/fine_art/text/2216763 [accessed 10.08.2024].

Both Vasily Kandinsky and Konstantin Yuon went through an Impressionist period in their work before transitioning to the avant-garde and abstract art.^{15 16}

In 1917, the revolution took place, after which interest in the avant-garde waned for about 15 years. The leading artistic direction was "socialist realism," which was largely very political. However, for artists like Yuri Pimenov, Alexander Gerasimov, and Igor Grabar, the Impressionist style became a way to "take a break" from the harsh communist reality. The harsher the repressions, the brighter the sun shone on the lilac bouquets in the artists' paintings.¹⁷

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¹⁵ Avtonomova, N. *Vasily Kandinsky*, <https://rusavangard.ru/online/biographies/kandinskiy-vasiliy-vasilevich/> [accessed 10.08.2024].

¹⁶ *Istoricheskij portal Istoriya.rf (Historical portal History.rf)*, <https://histrf.ru/read/biographies/konstantin-fedorovich-yuon> [accessed 10.08.2024].

¹⁷ Kovyneva, Margarita. *Moskva na kartinah Yuriya Pimenova (Moscow in the paintings of Yuri Pimenov)*, <https://www.culture.ru/materials/253877/moskva-na-kartinakh-yuriya-pimenova> [accessed 10.08.2024].

¹⁸ Muratov, Aleksandr. *Igor Grabar*, <https://bigenc.ru/c/grabar-igor-emmanuilovich-20a006> [accessed 10.08.2024].

Chapter One. French Impressionism: Origins, Representatives, and Influence

When discussing Russian Impressionism, one should first turn to the origins of the style itself, understand where and how it emerged, its characteristic features, and how to analyze the paintings. For this purpose, firstly the cultural and historical context of Parisian life needed to be examined.

Cultural and Historical Life of Paris in the Early 19th Century

By the beginning of the 19th century, Paris could rightfully be considered the center of cultural life in Europe. The city had undergone several social, cultural, and industrial revolutions. Since the beginning of the century, there had been at least three changes in government, from an empire to a republic, and then back to an empire. During this time, diplomats, military leaders, and merchants held power. The city was rebuilt, its appearance changed, and the population increased many times over.¹⁹

Simultaneously, there was rapid industrial growth across Europe: railways and steam engines appeared. This required mass coal mining and large-scale metallurgical production. Factories and manufacturing plants began to be constructed. Architectural needs also changed—they required simplicity and speed.²⁰

The Shift in Artistic Styles

Artistic life was also changing. In the first half of the 19th century, academic painting was dominant. The main representatives of this style were Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Jacques-Louis David. They were masters of depicting nature, and their works were very similar in their precision and compositional accuracy. However, against the backdrop of the events taking place in France at that time, these paintings did not evoke strong emotional responses from the public. Artists sought to express something personal, fresh, and vibrant.²¹ Thus, the movement of Romanticism emerged, with Eugène Delacroix as its leading representative. He chose dramatic subjects, dynamic compositions, and very bold colors. His painting "Liberty Leading the People" attracted great attention at the Paris Salon of 1830.²²

¹⁹ Wilkinson, Philip. *Architecture. 50 ideas you need to know* (Moscow: Phantom press, 2017), pp. 72-75.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 72-75.

²¹ De Tholozany, Pauline, Larson, Sharon. *Fine Arts in Nineteenth-Century Paris: An Overview*, <https://library.brown.edu/cds/paris/finearts.html> [accessed 11.08.2024].

²² *The Musée National Eugène-Delacroix*, <https://www.musee-delacroix.fr/en/museum-studio/eugene-delacroix/biography/biography> [accessed 11.08.2024].

Simultaneously, landscape painting was being developed by artists of the Barbizon school, such as Théodore Rousseau and Jean-François Millet. They worked "en plein air," and this practice influenced the future of Impressionism, but they completed their work in the studio.²³

At some point, the emotional richness of Romanticism also became excessive. Art began to strive for simplicity and reality, leading to the emergence of a new movement, Realism, with Gustave Courbet as its first representative.²⁴

Another process that greatly influenced the development of 19th-century art was the invention and development of photography. By the mid-19th century, people had learned to take such good photographic portraits that painting genres like the "grand portrait" or "portrait miniature" were almost entirely supplanted. Artists now had the time and resources to experiment.²⁵

Spaces for Education and Exhibitions

The main art exhibition was the Paris Salon. Here, graduates of the Paris Academy of Fine Arts regularly exhibited their works. For many years, the Salon dictated artistic tastes and trends. To be admitted to the Salon, paintings had to pass a rigorous selection by an art jury. If a painting did not meet the approval of the admissions committee, it was likely that no one would ever see it. The primary educational institution where artists studied was the Paris Academy of Fine Arts. Students at the Academy were trained in a strict classical manner. They spent years painting plaster casts of ancient statues, learning to smoothly distribute light and shadow, and imitating their teachers.²⁶

But the way they were taught did not always align with their thinking and needs. In their search for truth, they tried to paint not what the object should be, but how they saw it at that moment. In life, we do not always see the contours of an object; more often, we see spots and shadows, but our knowledge of the essence of the object allows us to imagine what we are seeing. The future Impressionists gradually realized that an object looks different in sunlight and in shadow, that the moment is fleeting, and that they must hurry to capture it.²⁷

The relationship between artists and the Salon was ambiguous. The first painting that Édouard Manet submitted to the Salon was rejected. This was the painting "The Absinthe Drinker." Later,

²³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Barbizon-school> [accessed 11.08.2024].

²⁴ Gombrich, Ernst. *The Story of Art* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited Edition, 1995), pp. 511.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 523-524.

²⁶ *National Gallery of Art*, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/paintings/french-19th-century.html> [accessed 11.08.2024].

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 513-514.

two of his paintings, "Portrait of Parents" and "The Guitarist," were accepted by the Salon. However, in 1863, the Salon refused to accept "Luncheon on the Grass", along with works by many other artists. The outraged artists held an alternative exhibition, which became known as the "Salon des Refusés" ("Salon of the Rejected").²⁸ The Salon attracted many visitors, but the public mostly laughed at the paintings. This reflects the state of artistic taste at the time, and it is possible to imagine how much effort it would take for the artists to convey their vision and teach the public to properly view and appreciate the new style of painting.²⁹

Years passed, and young artists still could not showcase their art at the Salon. So in 1874, they organized their own exhibition, where Claude Monet's painting "Impression, Sunrise" was presented for the first time. The exhibition did not achieve much success, even financially. And even after eight exhibitions, their art was not fully understood or accepted.³⁰

Why did Impressionist painting seem so strange and difficult to understand? What did the artists do differently compared to academic painting? Each of them had their own artistic idea that guided their work. For example, Édouard Manet aimed to capture the play of light and shadow on plastic forms such as the human face and figure. Claude Monet was a devotee of painting "from nature." He painted what he saw right before his eyes. Another artist from the Impressionist group was Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who was a master of portrait painting and genre scenes.³¹ Edgar Degas sought to convey the dynamics of human body movement through the play of light and shadow.³² Paul Cézanne tried to capture the "nature" of a landscape through geometry and color.³³

Thus, we see that the Impressionists did not have a specific ideology or a common artistic goal. They simply exhibited their paintings together because they were rejected by the mainstream art community. However, each of them developed their own artistic idea, which later became a characteristic feature of Impressionism.

²⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Salon-des-Refuses> [accessed 11.08.2024].

²⁹ Courthion, Pierre. *Édouard Manet*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edouard-Manet> [accessed 11.08.2024].

³⁰ Gombrich, Ernst. *The story of art* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited Edition, 1995), p. 514.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 520-521.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 526.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 518-519.

If we combine all the new and unusual elements created by the Impressionists, we get the following characteristics:³⁴

1. Bright contrast of light and shadow. There are no clearly defined contours. The paintings are full of sunlight, which plays like sunbeams.
2. Broad, quick brushstrokes. Small details are not meticulously rendered. Therefore, the images need to be viewed from the correct distance.
3. Abundant nature. Gardens, streams, gazebos, fields, flowers. Admiration for nature and the moment is the main reason for painting. The desire to capture the moment and "savor" it.
4. Unusual angles. Cropped figures. We view the cityscape as if from a high window, the window of a carriage, or a camera frame. What is captured in our imaginary "lens" at that moment becomes the subject of the painting.
5. Unusual lighting and colors. Haystacks can be not only green but also blue, red, and purple, depending on the sunlight falling on them.
6. Everyday subjects and scenes. Almost any moment caught "in the frame" can become the subject of a painting. Sitting in a café, a view from a window, the arrival of a train, sunrise, etc.
7. Optical color mixing. Some of the artists were familiar with the work of the scientist Michel Eugène Chevreul on the law of color contrast. They used this knowledge to convey color. The idea behind his work was that a beam of light splits into color spectra: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet. Each color has its antagonist, which enhances its contrast. Thus, we get pairs of colors: red–green, blue–orange, violet–yellow. If you apply the colors in the correct order next to each other, you don't need to mix them on the palette to obtain derivative shades. And black becomes completely unnecessary, as it represents the total absence of light.³⁵
8. Painting en plein air. This aligns with the idea of "capturing the moment" and capturing it immediately. The advent of paint in tubes played an important role. The paints did not dry out, and they did not need to be prepared. The artist only needed to take a few tubes of paint, an easel, and brushes, and they were ready to paint at any moment. Since the paints were in tubes and did not dry out, the artist was not constrained by time and could

³⁴ The National Gallery. *Guide to Impressionism*, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/guide-to-impressionism?viewPage=1> [accessed 25.10.2023].

³⁵ Serullaz, Maurice, Serullaz, Arlette. *Enciklopediya impressionizma (Concise Encyclopedia of Impressionism)* (Moscow: Respublika publishing house, 2005), pp. 15-17

stay in nature as long as needed. This greatly simplified plein air painting. If the artist also had knowledge of color combination theory, they could achieve the desired effect with very few material resources.

The Spread of Impressionism to Other Countries.

We remember that Paris was the center of artistic life in the early 19th century. Artists from England, America, Germany, and Russia came there to study, eagerly absorbing the new artistic movements. Now they saw that this kind of art was possible, and naturally, they brought it back to their own countries.

Many Russian artists traveled to Paris. For example, Isaac Levitan, Valentin Serov, Konstantin Korovin, and others. All of them also adopted Impressionist methods. One can only imagine how astonished they must have been, coming from the gloomy skies of Russia into an artistic environment filled with sunlight and light. Would they be able to incorporate something from what they saw into their own work? And if so, how?

Chapter Two. The Influence of French Impressionism on Russian Artists.

In the first chapter, we discussed how the cultural life of France in the second half of the 19th century influenced the formation and development of Impressionism. In the second chapter, it is needed to analyze the historical and cultural realities against which artistic life in Russia unfolded. It is important to find the connection between the processes occurring in both cultures and to determine the point at which Impressionism as a style began to influence Russian art schools.

Cultural and Historical Life of Russia in the 1860s-1870s.

On March 3, 1861, an important event in Russian history took place—the abolition of serfdom. This became a catalyst for the development of politics, economy, and culture. Within just a decade, underground revolutionary circles were formed (the most famous of which was "*Narodnaya Volya*" or in English "The People's Will"). In 1863, the association of composers known as "*Moguchaya Kuchka*" "The Mighty Handful" was founded.³⁶ Also, on November 9, 1863, the "*Bunt Chetyrnadtsati*" or in English "Revolt of the Fourteen" occurred, when a group of 14 young artists demonstratively left the Academy of Fine Arts and organized their own artel (collective workshop).^{37,38} In 1866, the first edition of Fyodor Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment" was published. In 1869, the first edition of Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace" was completed.

Thus, we observe several trends:

Firstly, the creative intelligentsia strives for the liberalization and democratization of art. Realism becomes the leading movement, as it is understandable to everyone and capable of evoking deep empathy.

Secondly, there is a growing interest in national art, heroes, and themes. Artists move away from the classical academic tradition in favor of the truth of life.

³⁶ Danilova, Anna. *Mogutshaya kutschka (Mighty group)*, <https://w.histrf.ru/articles/moguchaya-kuchka> [accessed 10.08.2024].

³⁷ *Bolshaya rossiiskaja entsiklopedia (Great russian encyclopedia)*, <https://bigenc.ru/c/rossiiskaia-akademiiia-khudozhestv-19ffd6> [accessed 10.08.2024].

³⁸ *Istoricheskij portal RUNIVERS (Historical portal RUNIVERS)*, <https://runivers.ru/Runivers/calendar2.php?ID=455927> Quoted from: Troitsky N.A. Russia in the 19th century: Lecture course [accessed 11.08.2024].

Thirdly, writers, composers, and artists form circles. These artistic circles will continue to play a significant role in the formation of new styles, such as the “Abramtsevo Circle” or the "World of Art" association.

But now, let's talk about one of the first creative associations that emerged as a result of the "Revolt of the Fourteen."

The Association of Traveling Art Exhibitions: Origins and Development.

Just like in Paris, Russia also had an academy—the "Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture"—where young artists were trained in the arts. Much like their European counterparts, they spent hours drawing ancient statues and plaster casts, learning to apply light and shadow. Upon completing their studies, the graduates were required to create a final diploma painting on a specific mythological subject. The winner would receive a large gold medal and the opportunity to travel to Europe for three years to study Western traditions. For example, such graduates included Ilya Repin and Vasily Polenov, who won this journey in 1871 with their paintings on the subject of *"The Raising of Jairus's Daughter."*^{39 40} Later, Vasily Polenov became a painting instructor, and among his students was Konstantin Korovin, who is considered the first Russian Impressionist.⁴¹

We can see from the themes of the paintings that they were academic and "proper." But at some point, this stopped "igniting" the artists' passion, as there were far more interesting things happening around them than mythology and history.

On November 9, 1863, a group of fourteen artists refused to create their final work on the theme of *"The Feast in Valhalla."* They demonstratively left the academy and organized their own artel (collective workshop). The leader of the group was Ivan Kramskoi.⁴² The artists decided to unite to organize and conduct their own traveling exhibitions. The purpose of the association was "to provide residents of the provinces with the opportunity to become acquainted with

³⁹ *Russkij muzej (Russian Museum)*, https://rusmuseum.ru/news/segodnya-180-let-so-dnya-rozhdeniya-ili-repina/?sphrase_id=385808 [accessed 10.08.2024].

⁴⁰ Manucharova, Daria. *Vasily Polenov*, <https://bigenc.ru/c/polenov-vasilii-dmitrievich-e6e3c7> [accessed 10.08.2024].

⁴¹ Benois, Aleksandr. *Istoriya russkoj zhivopisi XIX veka (History of Russian Painting in XIX century)* (Moscow, Republic Publishing House, 1995), p. 362.

⁴² *Istoricheskij portal Kultura.rf (Historical portal Kultura.rf)*, <https://www.culture.ru/persons/8239/ivan-kramskoi> [accessed 10.08.2024].

Russian art and to follow its development; to foster a love for art in society; and to facilitate the sale of their works." ⁴³

The association had a rather strict charter that regulated the financial and organizational obligations of its members. There was no artistic charter, but behind the scenes, the main theme that interested the artists most was the everyday life of contemporary Russia. There were genre scenes, various portraits, and, of course, landscapes.

At the same time, young artists could continue their studies at the academy and go on pensioner trips for internships. They could also join the traveling exhibitions and showcase their works there. Ilya Repin and Vasily Polenov also contributed their paintings to these exhibitions.

Thus, we see that the processes occurring in French and Russian artistic circles were outwardly similar. They were even similar in concept. Both circles were interested in truth. However, the truth was different. Russian artists were most interested in social truth, while French artists were focused on visual truth. ⁴⁴

Pensioner Trips: Gaining New Experience

As seen in the previous section, Russian artists lived within a fairly tight circle. Therefore, when they had the opportunity to study abroad, they tried not to miss it.

Let us imagine the mental state of any person who sees nothing but gray, slush, winter, and cold for half a year. Then this person arrives, for example, in sunny Italy, where it is almost summer all year round, and everything is full of bright colors. If this person is an artist, then this change of scenery is especially important. Instead of hundreds of shades of gray, the artist finds themselves in an environment of bright colors, light, and shadows. They can see with their own eyes the original works that they studied at the academy. The artist gains a new perspective on the world, on subjects, and on painting techniques. And while Italy is an immersion in a historical environment, France, and especially Paris, is an introduction to new fashion trends.

We know for sure that the following artists were in Paris: Isaac Levitan, Ivan Shishkin, Arkhip Kuindzhi, Ilya Repin, Vasily Polenov, Boris Kustodiev, Konstantin Korovin, Valentin Serov, Filipp Malyavin, and Igor Grabar. Let's find out what they learned there.

⁴³ *Charter of the Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions*, <http://tphv.ru/ustav.php>

⁴⁴ German, Mikhail. *Impressionizm. Osnovopolozhniki i posledovateli (Impressionism. Founders and Followers)* (Moscow: Publishing house Azbuka, 2017), pp. 253.

As the main source of information on this topic, I have chosen Alexander Benois's book "The History of Russian Painting in the 19th Century." I chose it for several reasons:

Firstly, Benois was an artist himself. He was personally acquainted with many of those he wrote about. Secondly, as a younger contemporary of the Russian Impressionists, he belonged to another artistic movement, "*Mir Iskusstva*" (World of Art), and therefore had a clear view of the dynamics of artistic trends. And finally, the book contains a lot of criticism. Benois does not admire everything indiscriminately but tries to capture the successes and mistakes of each artist in their historical context.

Now I will list the artists who went to study in Paris and saw the paintings of French Impressionists, and how this influenced them, according to Benois's analysis.

Ilya Repin - He studied Western art extensively but was unable to fully understand it or "reeducate" himself to it. ⁴⁵

Arkhip Kuindzhi - He had a negative attitude towards the Impressionists, but their experience served as an example for him. After returning home, he began working with paints and color. This was reflected in his painting "Moonlit Night on the Dnieper." ⁴⁶

Isaac Levitan - He was in Paris for the 1889 exhibition, where paintings from the Barbizon school and works by Claude Monet and Arnold Böcklin were presented. After this, in 1891, he attended an exhibition in Moscow where Claude Monet's "Haystacks" were displayed. Levitan felt that there was something in this painting, but he could not grasp exactly what it was. ⁴⁷

Valentin Serov - As a child, he lived in Paris and Munich for several years. As an adult, he also attended exhibitions. He was familiar with Western art. ⁴⁸

Konstantin Korovin - He visited Paris and saw the Impressionists. He received the highest praise from Benois as a master of creating "beautiful" paintings from spots of color. ⁴⁹

During the first Impressionist exhibition, an interesting dialogue occurred in the correspondence between Ilya Repin and Ivan Kramskoi. Kramskoi wrote that it was essential

⁴⁵ Benois, Aleksandr. *Istoriya russkoj zhivopisi XIX veka (History of Russian Painting in XIX century)* (Moscow, Republic Publishing House, 1995), p. 270.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 315.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 347.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 356.

⁴⁹ Benois, Aleksandr. *Istoriya russkoj zhivopisi XIX veka (History of Russian Painting in XIX century)* (Moscow, Republic Publishing House, 1995), p. 361.

to move towards light, color, and air, but at the same time not to lose the precious quality of the artist—the heart. Repin countered that light and colors were merely tools, and the main thing in art was its content.⁵⁰ The answer to this debate was not found then, nor has it been found now. The importance lies in the process of dialogue and reflection, through which interest in Western art played a significant role in the development of Russian art.

Returning to Benois's analysis, by the late 1880s to early 1890s, the ground had been sufficiently cleared for art that was entirely free from politics, literature, and social issues. An artist could focus on self-expression and beauty for beauty's sake. This idea was embraced by the art association "*Mir Iskusstva*" (World of Art), which succeeded the "*Peredvizhniki*" (The Association of Traveling Art Exhibitions) and the Russian Impressionists, if such existed.

⁵⁰ Doronchenkov, Ilya. *Prikluchenija Mone, Matissa i Picasso v Rossii (The Adventure of Monet, Matisse, and Picasso in Russia)*, <https://arzamas.academy/materials/1445> [accessed 12.04.2022].

Chapter Three. Levitan. Korovin. Serov.

The third chapter of my work is dedicated to the analysis of paintings by Russian artists.

I have selected names from those listed in the second chapter. I decided not to include Ilya Repin, as his work is too diverse in genre, and he hardly used Impressionist techniques. I also chose not to include Arkhip Kuindzhi, because his work with light is too distinctive. Thus, the artists left are Isaac Levitan, Konstantin Korovin, and Valentin Serov.

As the paintings of these artists were being analyzed, I realized that the conclusion of my work would depend on which paintings are chosen for the analysis. First of all, it is important to establish a selection principle that would be applicable to all three artists.

At first, I considered selecting paintings that had counterparts among the Impressionists for comparison. For example, Isaac Levitan's "Haystacks" or "Water Lilies," or Konstantin Korovin's "Paris. Boulevard des Capucines," but this principle turned out to be not entirely correct, as not all the artists on the list have "doubles" among the Impressionists.

Then I thought of using paintings with a bright palette as examples and seeing if they correspond to the aforementioned theory of color contrast. But even this principle would be inaccurate, as some of Isaac Levitan's and Valentin Serov's paintings are done in a fairly restrained palette and do not contain strong color contrasts.

In the end, it was decided to select two paintings by each artist that:

Firstly, fit within the period from the last decade of the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th century. This is the period when the artists were truly engaging with paintings, attending exhibitions in Moscow and Paris, and were able to reflect on this experience.

Secondly, the paintings had to be contrasting in genre and theme. For example, Konstantin Korovin has a street landscape and a portrait. Isaac Levitan did not paint portraits, so I chose two contrasting landscapes. In the case of Valentin Serov, I selected two dissimilar portraits.

Thirdly, the paintings had to be well-known to a wide audience.

Fourthly, the paintings had to have been analyzed by a qualified art historian.

Thus, I have the following list:

Konstantin Korovin:

- "Paris. Boulevard des Capucines," 1911, oil on canvas, 65.2 x 81.2 cm, Tretyakov Gallery.
- "Portrait of a Chorus Girl," 1887, oil on canvas, 53.5 x 41.2 cm, Tretyakov Gallery.

Valentin Serov:

- "Portrait of Nicholas II," 1900, oil on canvas, 71.2 x 59.2 cm, Tretyakov Gallery.
- "Girl in the Sunlight," 1888, oil on canvas, 89.2 x 71.3 cm, Tretyakov Gallery.

Isaac Levitan:

- "Above Eternal Peace," 1894, oil on canvas, 152 x 207.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery.
- "March," 1895, oil on canvas, 60 x 75 cm, Tretyakov Gallery.

I will analyze the paintings from the following stylistic perspectives that relate to the characteristics of Impressionism: subject matter, composition and angle, contrast of light and shadow, color palette, presence of antagonistic colors, presence of loose brushwork, overall impression, and the analysis by art historians.

"Above Eternal Peace"



1894, oil on canvas, 152 x 207.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

My Analysis:

The painting depicts an old church and a cemetery standing high on a hill above a river. The sky is covered with gray clouds. Levitan chose a viewpoint from above, as if we are looking at

⁵¹ All photos of the paintings are done by the author in Tretyakov's gallery in Moscow unless mentioned otherwise.

the painting from the level of the clouds. This angle allows the painting to convey air and space while minimizing the horizon line. Although the church is in the foreground, it appears tiny. The sun is hidden by the clouds, so there is no contrast of light and shadow in the painting. The main colors are various shades of gray and green. The colors are close to each other, and contrasts are not used. The brushstrokes are precise, and the painting contains fine details that we see only due to these careful strokes. Where Levitan paints clouds and the vast water surface, the brushstrokes become broader, but they do not look careless. The painting sets a philosophical tone, combining the theme of life's finiteness (church, cemetery) with infinity (endless sky and water). This contrast of ideas invites the viewer to reflect on whatever thoughts arise within them. The painting includes a tiny detail that only the most observant viewers notice, but once seen, it is impossible to ignore: a window in the church wall is glowing. This small yellow spot fills the painting with life.

Analysis by Anna Vcherashnyaya:

"Above Eternal Peace" must be the most famous of all Levitan's paintings—and the most atypical... It is not the lyrical landscape for which Levitan is so famous, but rather a dramatic epic where the past meets the future, the sky threatens the earth, and time rushes into eternity.

From a bird's-eye view, a vast panorama of natural elements unfolds. Silver-violet clouds swirl in the gloomy sky. Some have already scattered on the horizon, while others approach, oppressively looming, displacing the sunlit part of the sky. The celestial confrontation is not mirrored in the leaden expanse of water: enveloped in a scaly ripple, the water lives its own life, majestic in its own way, filled with ominous calm. This enhances the sense of alienation, the cosmic indifference of nature. And yet "Above Eternal Peace" is not a painting of despair, but of hope: the green cliff is shaped like an ark, and light flickers in the wooden church."⁵²

⁵² Vcherashnyaya, Anna. *Analysis of the painting "Above Eternal Peace"*, https://arthive.com/ru/isaaclevitan/works/202953~Nad_vechnym_pokoem [accessed 17.03.2022].

"March"



1895, oil on canvas, 60 x 75 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

My Analysis:

The painting captures a moment on a clear, warm spring day. The sun is shining, and the snow is melting. A horse, harnessed to a sleigh, stands by the porch, waiting for its owner. We view the composition from the height of a person. The road on which the horse will travel leads directly to the viewer, creating the sense that we can step right into the painting. In the background, there is a vast expanse of blue sky, which expands the space of the painting. The painting features deep shadows cast by trees on the snow, but since most of the composition is sunlit, all objects have clear contours and are not composed of patches. The painting is very colorful, with many shades of white snow, bright blue sky, rich green firs, and warm tones of yellow and brown. The colors are as close to natural as possible. There is a contrast between blue and yellow, but they appear in large elements of the picture rather than in adjacent brushstrokes. The yellow wall of the house looks brighter against the blue sky. The painting includes several types of brushstrokes: quick and contrasting, applied in different directions for the play of light and shadow on the snowy road and the horse's sides; broad and smooth for the sky, house walls, and background snow, where the transition of shades needs to be shown; thin and precise for small details (branches, birdhouse, planks). The painting creates a joyful spring mood. It is full of sunlight and various "cute" details that create a sense of coziness and spring warmth. The horse has closed its eyes and is basking in the sun. A birdhouse sits on the branches, still empty, but soon birds will arrive. The door of the house is open for airing. The owner will

soon come out, and movement will begin. But the present moment is the anticipation of this movement and peace.

Analysis by Alexei Shadrin:

There is no doubt that Levitan was a Russian Impressionist. He avoided Western influence because he feared it. It was only in the company of Ilya Repin and Valentin Serov in 1900 that he had the courage to view the works of the Impressionists at the World Art Exhibition in Paris. He later wrote: "We were whipped, and rightly so." In the painting "March," despite all the modesty of "nature," Levitan deeply "savors" it, and we can feel it. But there is a nuance. He is a man with a woman's soul. This is why he succeeded as an Impressionist.⁵³

Analysis by Mikhail Alpatov:

Levitan had long since moved away from using genre figures in his landscapes, but the horse in "March" remains central and irreplaceable, much like the heart of the painting. The scene is one of quiet anticipation, where nothing seems to be happening, yet there is a sense of stillness and waiting, as if time has paused. The horse stands patiently, embodying the first gentle stirrings of spring. The understated nature of the painting adds to its poetic charm, with subtle details like the empty birdhouse and open door suggesting recent human presence. The composition is marked by simplicity, clarity, and precision, drawing the viewer into the scene with its natural, unpretentious lines.

"March" stands out from Levitan's other landscapes with its more enclosed and cozy character. The movement into the depth of the painting is softened by the slender, fan-shaped white trunks of the trees, curving gently against the blue sky and dark green firs. The horizontal line of the snowy field divides the painting into two equal parts, creating a sense of calm and balance. Levitan's approach in "March" is to compose the scene as if from separate fragments, each contributing to a unified whole. This painting reflects a rare sense of completeness in nature, capturing a serene moment near a village house at the edge of the forest.⁵⁴

⁵³ Shadrin, Aleksej. Russkij impresionizm – fejk ili iskusstvo? (Russian Impressionism – Fake or Art?), https://youtu.be/Gm5BF5_fnjc [accessed 17.03.2022].

⁵⁴ Alpatov, Mikhail. *Isaak Ilyich Levitan* (Moscow: State publication Art, 1945), pp.23-25.

"Girl in the Sunlight"



1888, oil on canvas, 89.2 x 71.3 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

My Analysis:

The painting depicts Valentin Serov's cousin. She is sitting on a bench in the shade of birch trees. Her face is relaxed and calm. The girl is in the foreground, and we view her slightly from above, as if we have just approached her. The girl's gaze is directed slightly upward, as if she is making eye contact with the viewer. In the background, there is a birch grove. The girl is in the shade, and spots of sunlight and shadows from the leaves are visible on her hands, face, and clothing. The contrast between light and shadow is presented softly, not harshly. The color palette is very subtle. The artist uses many shades of gray, blue, green, and yellow to convey the play of light on the girl's figure. Bright shades of green are used to contrast with the background. Different types of brushstrokes are used to depict various textures. Long, quick strokes are placed side by side on the folds of the blouse. The birch trunk behind the girl's back is painted with textured, thick brushstrokes. The background behind the girl is blurred, with large color patches used. The painting evokes a calm mood, with no dynamic elements. Thanks to the girl's gaze directed at the viewer, we engage in a silent dialogue with her.

Analysis by Igor Grabar from Serov's monography:

Serov was determined to continue the line established in "Girl with Peaches"... He observed his cousin Masha Simonovich several times as she sat on a bench under a sprawling tree. The model sat under the tree, leaning against the trunk of an old oak. Part of her figure was in the shade of dense foliage, invisible to the viewer, while sunlight played on her blouse, belt, and blue skirt. Serov worked continuously in June, July, and August, creating here his second significant work, equal to the first. Now all those endless shimmering colors could be appreciated—subtle, uncontrived, and far from theoretical, but deeply felt and precisely observed in nature. This piece is so perfect, so fresh, new, and "relevant" that it's hard to believe its date is 1888. Much later, many were inclined to attribute this portrait to the influence of the French Impressionists, forgetting that Serov had not seen any Impressionist paintings before 1889. Serov never left the depiction in a world of self-sufficient light and color tasks, as we see with the French. He did not replace the person with a still life, as often happens in the history of modern painting. "Girl in the Sunlight" was Serov's independent exploration that led him to this result, and the tasks of light and color were secondary and auxiliary, with the person remaining the focus. Unlike Renoir's portraits, which at first glance might seem similar to Serov's, the latter is stronger, more defined, without the vague forms, unnecessary blurriness, and smoothness that sometimes irritate in the works of the French master. Renoir is lighter and airier but also more superficial; Serov is heavier but deeper. There is no hint of the coquettishness always inherent in Renoir, no gestures calculated for effect, only clear, transparent truthfulness and the same clear, simple beauty.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Grabar, Igor. *Valentin Alexandrovich Serov. Life and art*, 1913, <http://vserov.ru/monografiya.php>

"Portrait of Nicholas II"



1900, oil on canvas, 71.2 x 59.2 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

My Analysis:

Typically, emperors are depicted in regalia with orders and a crown, making this a more casual portrait. If one didn't know this was the emperor, they might think he was just an ordinary soldier. The artist attempts to convey not the status of the emperor, but his human personality. Nicholas II is sitting at a table, with his hands folded on the table before him. There is no background behind him, allowing the viewer to fully focus on the portrait. The viewer is at eye level with Nicholas, as if we are sitting at the same table with him. The portrait is painted with soft side lighting. The left side of his face is slightly darker, but there are no harsh shadows as there would be on a bright sunny day. The primary color in the painting is gray. The gray officer's overcoat, the gray wall in the background. There are small patches of red on the epaulettes and shoulder boards. The overall tone of the palette is restrained, with soft transitions, and the principle of color contrast is not used. The brushstrokes are elongated and soft, smoothly blending into each other. The painting depicts a thoughtful person. Knowing the tragic fate of Nicholas II, this portrait takes on a special significance for us today.

Analysis by Alexander Benois and by Konstantin Korovin:

Alexander Benois wrote about Serov: "...No less good is his portrait of Emperor Nicholas II, which captured with striking accuracy the friendly expression of the current reigning sovereign." ⁵⁶According to Konstantin Korovin: "Serov was the first of the artists to capture and immortalize on canvas the softness, intelligence, and at the same time, the weakness of the emperor." ⁵⁷

"Portrait of a Chorus Girl"



1887, oil on canvas, 53.5 x 41.2 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

My Analysis:

This is a female portrait set in a garden against a background of greenery. We view the girl slightly from above, as if we approached her while she was sitting. The girl is relaxed on the bench. She does not make eye contact with the viewer, as if she is lost in her thoughts or simply wilting from the heat. The girl is in partial shade, with light spots on her face and clothing, similar to Valentin Serov's painting, but the tones here are warmer and more natural. The color palette is warm. There are no gray tones on the girl's face; instead, rich shades of beige and pink are used. Warm shades of yellow and brown complement the image. The main sunlight is positioned behind the girl, with the lush greenery combining with bright yellow spots. The painting is executed with thick, dense brushstrokes. Small details are not particularly defined.

⁵⁶ Benois, Aleksandr. *Istoriya russkoj zhivopisi XIX veka (History of Russian Painting in XIX century)* (Moscow, Republic Publishing House, 1995), p. 356.

⁵⁷ *Tretyakovskaya galereya (Tretyakov Gallery)*, <https://my.tretyakov.ru/app/masterpiece/21517?lang=en> [accessed 12.04.2022].

Korovin managed to capture and convey the atmosphere of a hot summer day. The girl in the painting is not just the main subject but a part of this scorching summer atmosphere.

Analysis by Julia Petrova and from the Tretyakov gallery:

On the back of the "Portrait of a Chorus Girl," the artist later wrote a kind of explanation for the painting, indicating the circumstances of its creation and subsequent reception: "In 1883, the portrait of the chorus girl appeared in Kharkov. Painted on the balcony of the commercial public garden. (...) At that time, Serov was not yet painting portraits. And the painting of this sketch turned out to be incomprehensible?! Therefore, Polenov asked me to remove this sketch from the exhibition, as it was not liked by either the artists or the participants—Mr. Mosolov and some others. The model was not a beautiful woman, even somewhat unattractive."⁵⁸

The artist implies that Serov's masterpieces "Girl with Peaches" and "Girl in the Sunlight" had not yet been created, meaning that all the proto-Impressionist discoveries in the "Portrait of a Chorus Girl" were his own. However, specialists at the Tretyakov Gallery have now established that Korovin's memory of dates was somewhat faulty: "The Chorus Girl" was painted in the same year as "Girl with Peaches"—1887, but this does not negate the innovative nature of Korovin's painting.⁵⁹

This is the first painting of Russian Impressionism. Korovin was the first Russian artist to view a human face in a painterly, detached manner, without considering personality or mood. Only the color spot, reflections, and shadows matter. In "The Chorus Girl," the focus is not on the beauty of the person.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The inscription on the back of the painting was written by Konstantin Korovin himself.

⁵⁹ *Tretyakovskaya galereya (Tretyakov Gallery)*, <https://www.tretykovgallery.ru/collection/portret-khoristki/> [accessed 12.04.2022].

⁶⁰ Petrova, Yuliya. *Chto takoe russkij impressionizm? (What Russian Impressionism Is?)*, <https://www.youtube.com/live/eotnxNTA7ag?feature=share> [accessed 17.03.2022].

"Boulevard des Capucines"



1911, oil on canvas, 65.2 x 81.2 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

My Analysis:

The painting depicts an evening scene of Parisian life. A bustling street, bright lights from windows, numerous figures of people and carriages. The artist painted the scene while looking down at the street from a hotel window, so the perspective is from above. The figures of people and vehicles are depicted without details, merely to create a sense of crowding and movement. The main elements of the painting are concentrated in the center. The primary contrast of light and shadow is between the gray walls, gray sky, and bright street lighting. This is not a contrast of sunlight and shadow, but rather a contrast between darkness and artificial light. The main colors that attract attention are yellow, orange, and red. There aren't many of these colors in the painting, but they are given heightened contrast with dark gray and dark green. In this combination, they appear much brighter. The brushstrokes are large and broad. Contrasting strokes are placed next to each other without transitions or blending. Small details are barely noticeable. Sometimes a figure of a person or vehicle may consist of just one or two strokes. The first impression when looking at the painting is of movement and crowd. The figures of people and cars move in different directions. The viewer observes from above and is not a participant in this movement.

Analysis by Alena Esaulova:

First of all, when looking at Korovin's boulevards, we recall the similarly titled paintings by Claude Monet. The French proclaimed light and color as the main characters in their paintings.

The refraction of light rays, color contrasts, radiance, and effects—these were their primary interests.

In the 1880s, in a conversation with fellow artists, Konstantin Korovin once remarked that daytime landscapes were a studied scene, and artists had already mastered the concept of sunlight from all sides. But painting the night was something new, it was the "mystery of the night."

Korovin typically painted night-time Paris with small, multidirectional strokes, with the outlines of objects and people barely sketched. "Boulevard des Capucines," like many other Parisian paintings, is shown from above. It seems he enjoyed sitting on a hotel balcony and painting. The color palette and dynamics in this case are more complex than in the previous, earlier "Boulevard des Capucines." If in the 1906 work the coloristic center is clearly defined by a brightly lit storefront on the corner, then in the 1911 version there is no such clarity; the painting is very dynamic, conveying what is often called the breath of the city. Thanks to the horizontal composition (as opposed to the vertical one in the previous version), we see not only the boulevard but the entire noisy intersection. Among the crowd of people, we can discern cars, horses, and pedestrians. The evening lighting makes the city particularly festive, yet it remains casual—this is not the tourist's festive version of Paris, but Paris as it is from within.⁶¹

⁶¹ Esaulova, Alena. *Analysis of the painting "Paris. Boulevard des Capucines"*, https://arthive.com/ru/konstantinkorovin/works/5880~Париж_Бульвар_Капуцинок [accessed 12.04.2022].

Conclusions

Now, I will draw conclusions for each artist and provide an overall conclusion from the work.

Isaac Levitan

As a result of the analysis, we see that "Above Eternal Peace" is a painting in the genre of a "philosophical landscape." Impressionist techniques are not used. One might consider the unusual angle, as a view from above, to be an Impressionist technique. However, in this case, the use of the high perspective carries more symbolic and meaningful weight. We look down from nearly the height of the clouds at symbols of life's transience—crosses and a church. This immediately shifts us from the realm of landscape to reflections on life. By juxtaposing contrasts—nature and the cemetery, the wide horizon and the tiny window, still water and wind—Levitan compels the viewer to ponder philosophical questions.

The painting "March" is executed in the genre of a "mood landscape." It is difficult to find hidden meaning in it. It is more Impressionistic, as it uses some stylistic techniques (quick brushstrokes, color contrasts, captured details).

However, based on the analysis of the selected paintings, it is unlikely that Levitan can be considered an Impressionist.

Valentin Serov

The two portraits create completely different first impressions. In "Girl in the Sunlight," we first notice the play of light and shadow. It incorporates many Impressionist techniques and captures a moment, reveling in the beauty of the girl and the light, which aligns well with the goals of Impressionism.

In the "Portrait of Nicholas II," the focus is on his personality, with details being secondary. This portrait is "psychological"; we attempt to discern the character of the emperor, whereas with the girl, we simply enjoy the beautiful natural scene.

Konstantin Korovin

Both the portrait and the landscape are painted using Impressionist techniques.

Overall Conclusion

Of the three artists analyzed, only Konstantin Korovin consistently uses Impressionist techniques. Valentin Serov employs them when it is necessary to convey the atmosphere surrounding a character. Levitan uses only a few techniques that help him convey his ideas.

Of course, it is difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions based on just two paintings from each artist. However, it can be said that Impressionism provided artists with new tools and methods of depiction, but it did not develop into a fully-fledged movement in Russia as it did in France.

In the case of French Impressionism, we see that it grew into a significant movement that influenced art worldwide and laid the foundation for other artistic styles. This cannot be said for Russian Impressionism. Russian artists utilized the techniques of French Impressionists, but a separate movement did not form. Nevertheless, there were enough artists painting in the Impressionist style that their works are collected into entire exhibitions several times a year.

I realized that the original framing of the question needs to be changed. The initial question—"Does Russian Impressionism exist?"—is too simple and broad to be answered accurately.

Now I would ask whether the manifestations of Impressionism in the style and technique of Russian artists can be distinguished as a separate direction, "Russian Impressionism."

Many artists had Impressionist periods in their work, or they used elements of the style or technique of Impressionism, but later transitioned to other styles. This can be viewed as a means of self-education and exploration of painting, as a transitional phase in the life of an artist, where, by shifting from an academic approach to a more immediate one, they discovered new ways to reflect their perception of the world and communicate with viewers.

Kokkuvõte bakalaureusetöle “Kas Vene impressionism on olemas?”

Oma bakalaureusetöö sissejuhatuses esitasin küsimuse – kas me saame rääkida Vene impressionismist? Esmalt soovisin oma töös kindlaks teha, millised omadused teevad Vene maalikunsti impressionistlikuks ja miks. Erinevad kunstiajaloolased rõhutavad impressionismi määratlemise juures erinevaid omadusi. Millised omadused on selle puhul tähtsamad – kunstiteose kompositsioon, pintselitehnika või idee, mida kunstnik oma teoses on soovinud edasi anda?

Konteksti ja teema paremaks mõistmiseks analüüsib töö esmalt Prantsuse impressionismi, selle saamis- ja pärinemislugu, mil moel see erines 19. sajandil tekkinud realismist ja romantismist. Oma töös määratlesin mitmed omadused, mille alusel saame hinnata maali “impressionistlikuks”. Nende omaduste hulka kuuluvad kunstivoolule iseloomulik valguse ja värvide vahekord, kiired pintsli tõmbed, loodusteematika, igapäevaste objektide kujutamise viis ja ka maalimine vabas õhus.

Vene impressionismi arengu paremaks mõistmiseks on töösse valitud kunstnikud, kes külastasid Pariisi, tutvudes vahetult impressionistide teostega. Selleks, et mõista impressionismi kinnistumist ja arengut käsitleb töö samuti ajastu kunstikultuurilist konteksti 19. sajandi Venemaal. Oluliseks kujuneb siinjuures erinevate 19. sajandi Venemaal erialaste ühenduste loomine. Üheks märkimisväärsimaks antud kontekstis oli “Rändnäituste Ühing”. mis astus, sarnaselt Prantsuse suunale, vastu akadeemilise maalikunsti domineerimisele, valides oma peamiseks eesmärgiks kriitilis-realistliku suuna maalikunstis.

Töös analüüsitakse võrdlevalt Prantsusmaal ja Venemaal eksisteerinud kultuuriloolist konteksti, mille raames toimusid maalikunsti arengud. Ära on toodud erinevate kunstiajaloolaste arvamused ja hinnangud selles küsimuses – nii nende, kes usuvad Vene impressionismi olemasolusse kui ka nende omad, kelle arvates ei ole sellest võimalik rääkida. Käsitlen oma töös omapoolselt valitud kunstnikke ja nende teoseid, toetudes oma valikus

üldnimetatud kriteeriumidele.

Jõudsin oma töös järeldusele, et minu püstitatud küsimus Vene impressionismi eksisteerimise suhtes on liiga lai. Adekvaatsemaks oluks küsimus kas saab impressionislikku maalilaadi Vene kunstis vaadelda kui eraldiseisvat liikumist. Paljud Vene kunstnikud küll õppisid tundma selle voolu elemente, kuid peatusid sellel põgusalt ning integreerisid oma teostesse impressionislikke elemente, liikudes seejärel teiste kunstistiilide juurde. Impressionistlikku faasi võib vaadelda kui üleminekuperioodi, mis võimaldas Vene kunstnikel liikuda traditsioonilistelt kunstimeetoditelt uuema kunstinägemise ja -käsitluse suunas.

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