

RUSSIAN FOLK ARTS. By *Alexander Pronin* and *Barbara Pronin*. South Brunswick and New York: A. S. Barnes & Company. London: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1975. 192 pp. Photographs. \$20.00.

Russian folk art has flourished in obscurity. Public notice has rarely served it well, and the present work is no exception. The authors of this popular introduction follow the organization of the *al'bom* from the Second Russian National Handicrafts Exhibition in 1913 and echo the outlook of that promotional endeavor. Crafts patronized by the state, the church, and the well-to-do—from icons and decorative tiles to carved bone, lacquerware, and porcelain—or articles mass-produced for the urban market—such as *lubki*, toys, and Khokhloma utensils—dominate the display. The art that lived in the villages receives only fitful attention.

Within their focus, the authors relate the history and technique of the more conspicuous crafts. Their stories come with excess packing material: verbal descriptions of objects without pictures for reference, and fragmentary facts—"Wooden dippers of outstanding shape were produced on the lower course of the Sheksna and Mologa rivers" (p. 61). Still, the text contains much to nourish the initial curiosity of students, tourists, and collectors of folk art.

The illustrations do less. Most, if not all, were evidently copied, *without any acknowledgment*, from recent Soviet publications—and ineptly copied at that. In this reviewer's copy the black and white pictures come out fog gray, blurring or obliterating the clear designs of popular art. The scattered color plates are better, but few readers will glimpse the distinctive beauty of Russian folk art in the "over 200 illustrations" presented here.

Compared to the photographically splendid albums of folk art now being published in the Soviet Union, the present volume is an embarrassment. Yet it will probably preempt the Russian niche in the folk art shelf of public libraries, thus extending that veil of benign incomprehension which has surrounded the art of the Russian people.

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SERGEI IUR'EVICH SUDEIKIN, 1884–1946. By *D. Z. Kogan*. Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1974. 216 pp. 2.85 rubles.

This is the first monograph to have been published on the studio painter, stage designer, and poster artist, Sergei Sudeikin, and it is long overdue. It has been preceded by an increasing number of references to Sudeikin's work in recent Soviet publications on modernist stage design and in the spate of Western articles, exhibitions, and auctions connected with the recent centenary of Diaghilev's birth. Although the subject is a novel one for a Soviet art historian, Kogan has done a very thorough job, presenting us with an accurate and stimulating account of the artist's life and work during both the pre- and post-revolutionary periods.

Like Nikolai Sapunov (in many ways his rival), Sudeikin contributed much to the evolution of Russian stage design and, with a few major exceptions in his easel work, deserves to be remembered particularly for his stylized, "miniature" sets for Meyerhold, Vera Komissarzhevskaja, and others just before the Revolu-

tion. Although Sudeikin did not have the originality or universality of Bakst, Exter, and Popova, his work is idiosyncratic and peculiarly "Russian." Kogan makes this very clear by her detailed examination of the artist's principal sources of inspiration, especially during the first decade of the twentieth century (for example, his debt to the *lubok*), and by her attempts to distinguish him from the more Western oriented *miriskusniki* (Benois, Somov, and so forth) with whom Sudeikin was in close contact. Quite rightly, therefore, although with insufficient emphasis, Kogan refers to the apparent parallels between Sudeikin and Larionov. Unfortunately, she omits the reasons for the sudden but general trend toward Primitivism around 1908 (Goncharova, Khlebnikov, Krymov, Remizov, Stravinsky). Furthermore, we receive no adequate explanation of Sudeikin's rapid move from his Symbolist tendencies, dominant just before the *Blue Rose* show of 1907, to his Primitivist painting of 1908 onward, or of his new application of Symbolist motifs and methods as in the paintings *Ballet* (1910) and *Red Sails* (a few years later).

Despite these minor failings, Kogan develops her text consistently and logically. She investigates Sudeikin's theatrical work both as a consequence of his proximity to Mamontov and to Komissarzhevskaja, and as a natural outgrowth of his Symbolist and Primitivist easel work. It becomes understandable, therefore, why Sudeikin's costumes and sets for Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (New Dramatic Theater, St. Petersburg, 1909) or for Kuzmin's orientalist play *Zabava dev* (Malyi Theater, St. Petersburg, 1911) were particularly successful. Kogan might have mentioned, however, that the "toyiness," the *maketnost' arkhitektury* (p. 44), manifest in the designs for the above spectacles anticipated the monotony and repetition of much of Sudeikin's later work, particularly of the émigré years. Of specific interest in the theatrical context is Kogan's discussion of Sudeikin vis-à-vis the St. Petersburg cellar-cabaret The Stray Dog, for which Sudeikin (with Belkin and Kulbin) did the murals and with whose bohemian life he was closely connected. The author not only describes the main scenic events at The Dog and refers to Sudeikin's contact with Akhmatova, Kuzmin, Pronin, and so on, but she also raises the whole question of the derivation and development of this artistic "laboratory of synthesis" (p. 89), discovering an organic link with Mamontov's Abramtsevo Circle of the 1870s. In the same context, it is interesting to read of Sudeikin's involvement in similar enterprises—Baliev's *The Bat*, *The Cellar of Fallen Angels* in New York, and so forth. The book ends with a comparatively brief but useful account of Sudeikin's émigré work in France and America, a summary facilitated, we may add, by the recent transfer of Sudeikin's archive from New York to Moscow.

The value of Kogan's monograph lies not only in her treatment of an artist long neglected, but also in the extensive archival references to persons and events contemporary with Sudeikin's Russian career. In addition, a number of works, from both public and private collections, are reproduced (many in good color) for the first time, pride of place being given to the splendid collections of the Bakh-rushin Museum in Moscow and of Mr. Lobanov-Rostovsky in New York. If projected Soviet publications on other modernist designers prove to be as informative as Kogan's study, historians of art and the theater will be fortunate indeed.

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