

MIR ISKUSSTVA. By *A. Gusarova*. Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1972. 100 pp.

This is the first book on the "World of Art" to appear since N. Sokolova's valuable monograph of 1934, and for this reason alone would merit the historian's attention. In addition, Gusarova's book, like many recent Soviet publications concerned with Russian Modernism, reflects a dramatic aesthetic reappraisal of what is still, in many Soviet eyes, a cultural *bête noire*.

Unfortunately, when we consider the book as more than a symbol of an aesthetic thaw and look for new information, sound artistic analysis, and objective judgment, we are disappointed. Like the new monograph on Konstantin Somov by I. Pruzhan (Moscow, 1972), Gusarova's book offers historical data already available in many scattered contemporaneous essays, memoirs, and general commentaries. This defect is especially lamentable since there are so many archival sources in Soviet hands which treat precisely of the "World of Art"—Dmitrii Filosofov's papers, Somov's diaries, recent additions to the Konstantin Korovin collection—yet Gusarova draws on none of them. Nevertheless, she presents, on the whole, a positive appreciation of the "World of Art," even though, amusingly, she pursues a sociopolitical approach which brings her to conclusions quite opposed to those made over the last forty years or so. In brief, although the factual material is not new, the treatment and tone are; and this is important precisely because this book is not an isolated case, but maintains the same plea for broader artistic tolerance which we find, for example, in the remarkable set of essays on Modernist Russian painting by D. Sarabianov (*Russkaia shivopis' kontsa-1900-kh-nachala 1910-kh godov*, Moscow, 1971).

Although this is a general book to be enjoyed by the layman rather than the professional art historian, Gusarova does advance certain tenets which are, to say the least, unexpected. It is surprising to read, for example, that the "World of Art," essentially such an integral part of the St. Petersburg upper middle-class, aspired to "shock the bourgeoisie" (p. 38) and represented a "reaction against that spiritual confusion which the bourgeois regime had brought" (p. 52). A few years ago we would have read in any Soviet publication that the "World of Art" was an extension and reflection of bourgeois taste. Although it is not surprising to find such an extreme reversal of judgment within a school of art criticism that is beginning to question its traditional criteria, we should not rush to praise a critic simply because she takes a new and refreshing approach. Paradoxically, it was such Stalinist die-hards as A. Uss (see his "Sotsial'noe litso 'Mira iskusstva' i ego otrazhenie v sovremennom iskusstve" in *Literatura i iskusstvo*, Moscow, 1931) who were more correct in their sociological analysis of the structure of the "World of Art." The "World of Art" was very much a bourgeois phenomenon: it relied on capitalist subsidy and on a middle-class art market; its members were the favorites of such fashionable patronesses as G. Girshman and E. Oliv; Bakst designed their clothes and Lanceray their boudoirs; and they were the habitués of the numerous St. Petersburg and Moscow salons and cultural clubs. Similarly, one feels critical of Gusarova's attitude toward the paintings of the "World of Art" artists: she states, quite correctly, that the landscape was one of their preferred subjects, and explains this as the consequence of their wish to fuse life with nature and art, and of their reaction to the modern industrial city. One wonders, however, whether the severe, artificial landscapes of Versailles and Peterhof, which Benois, Somov, and others admired so much, were not, in fact, part of their aspiration to

"theatricalize" reality—to impose a rational order on the elements and not to flee to nature's bosom. And if the "World of Art" members felt the horrors of urban life so strongly, as Gusarova would have us believe, then how can we explain their idealized concentration on the exquisite linearity of St. Petersburg and not on the slums of Vasilevsky Island or the sprawling tenements of suburban Moscow?

The attitude toward nature with which Gusarova would imbue the cosmopolitan stylists of the "World of Art" was more applicable to the second generation of Symbolist painters—that is, Borisov-Musatov and the "Blue Rose" group, who escaped from Western materialism to their nocturnal vistas and "landscapes of the soul." Indeed, Gusarova fails to make a distinction between the first and second "waves" of Russian Symbolism in the context either of writers or of painters. This is to be regretted, for the emphasis that is to be found on the "how" in the work of Balmont and Briusov and on the "what" in the work of Bely and V. Ivanov was of the same kind that separated the St. Petersburg "World of Art" and the Saratov/Moscow "Blue Rose." Hence, because of Gusarova's silence on this important point, we hesitate at general statements such as "Contrary to Symbolism, the 'World of Art' was by no means inclined to consider only fantasy, visions, dreams, and recollections to be the content of art" (p. 10), or "Like the Symbolists, Diaghilev declared art to be an end in itself, self-functional, free" (p. 11). When we think of Balmont's "elemental" poetry in the first context and of Bely's and V. Ivanov's theurgic art in the second, we have to admit that Gusarova betrays an apparent ignorance of the essential composition of Russian Symbolism.

Because of Gusarova's dramatic reversal of interpretation, the "World of Art" is examined certainly in a different light, but again from too exclusive, too extreme an angle. The group's political activity in 1905–6 is therefore emphasized out of all proportion. In any case, the fact that the "World of Art" was by then hardly a cohesive group after its internal disruption in 1903–4 is ignored. The mutual and bitter hostility between the Realists—such as Repin and Stasov—and the "World of Art" is brushed aside, whereas Golubkina, Maliavin, and Levitan, who essentially had little to do with the "World of Art," are treated as key members. Again, the literary activity of the "World of Art," admittedly less significant than its artistic achievement, is grossly neglected, and we learn nothing of the role of Filosofov, Hippius, Merezhkovsky, and Rozanov. In her haste to reassess, Gusarova makes mistakes and omissions which point to her own lack of scholarly preparation: the last exhibition of the "World of Art" (first series) and probably the most important for the evolution of the Russian avant-garde—that of 1906—is never mentioned; no date is given in this context of the enterprise "Contemporary Art," and no reference is made to its financial benefactor, V. von Mekk; the inauguration of the second society called the "World of Art" is given as 1911, not 1910; and no mention is made of the group's publicist achievements outside its own journal (such as Diaghilev's book on Levitsky and Benois's many books and articles). And though Gusarova makes much of the Ballets Russes, one wonders whether it is legitimate to consider them the direct outgrowth of the "World of Art," or whether, in fact, their success depended just as much on extraneous factors (e.g., their reliance on Western patronage, their debt to Larionov, Goncharova, Stravinsky, and so forth). This very broad conception of the "World of Art" indicates at once the author's desire to encompass the many

aspects of its artistic output and her inability to provide an orderly and adequate examination of its main contribution to the Russian Silver Age. Ironically, Gusarova lacks that sense of measure, stylistic balance, and gift of organization possessed by the "World of Art," and leaves us floundering in a text devoid of chapters, name index, and detailed bibliography.

Despite the book's many shortcomings, we must treat it as a gesture promising the appearance of more serious and more professional studies of the "World of Art" and its position within the Modernist movement. In this respect, we must thank Gusarova for her sincere attempt to lift the Soviet anathema on the group and to confirm that, far from being a decadent phenomenon, the "World of Art" was a vital and original source of artistic inspiration.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ART. By *Lev Semenovich Vygotsky*. Introduction by *A. N. Leontiev*. Commentary by *V. V. Ivanov*. Cambridge, Mass., and London: M.I.T. Press, 1971. Translated from the Russian by Scripta Technica, Inc. xiv, 305 pp. \$12.50.

The appearance of an English translation of Vygotsky's major work on the psychology of art is definitely to be welcomed. One of the foremost Soviet psychologists of the interwar years, Vygotsky is of course already known to the non-Russian specialist from the translation in 1962 of his *Thought and Language*, and the lasting originality of his contribution has since earned wide recognition. Vygotsky held that the psychology of art had in his day foundered on the rocks of subjectivism, from which he aimed to free it by placing it on a sound sociological and historical basis. His chosen method was to define the form of a work of art (its most significant characteristic, in his view), to analyze the function of its elements and structure, and thence to arrive at general laws governing the aesthetic response. An interesting feature of the book is that Vygotsky devotes a large proportion of his argument to detailed criticism of a wide range of psychological theories of art, including those associated with the Symbolists and the Formalists; in effect, he presents his ideas embedded in the context in which his contemporaries would have viewed them. Understandable in this context is the zeal and explicitness with which Vygotsky attacks the idea that the creative process is something unknowable. He accepts that it can only be explained in terms of subconscious mental activity, but rejects all the psychoanalytical theories of art known to him—including Freud's—on the grounds that they evade the problem of form and cannot account for the social manifestation of the subconscious, which art is. Vygotsky's own conclusions relate the aesthetic activity to a physiologically based need in man for a balancing-out of contradictory emotions, producing a psychological effect that is "cathartic." The concentration of the individual's biological and emotional processes in art is, for Vygotsky, inherently social; indeed, he views art as a form of social manipulation of emotional life, and consequently emphasizes its educative function. Vygotsky's findings are of interest to the literary critic as much as the serious psychologist, and are partly aimed at him. The translation unfortunately contains many small and a few serious infelicities, despite the considerable care taken over equivalence of technical terms.

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