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Susan Emily Reid, Rosalind P. Blakesley, eds. *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007. viii + 246 pp. $42.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87580-360-9.

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Identity and Imagination: Artistic Exploration of Russia and the West

Ever since the nineteenth century, Russian art has taken pride of place for its innovative styles–from modernism, to eclecticism, to constructivism and socialist realism–while also reflecting the Russian social order. The role of Russian artists as interpreters and symbols of Russian society has attracted the attention of the nine authors in the collection *Russian Art and the West*. These essays offer a fascinating analysis of lesser-known artistic fields to challenge the idea that Russian art was isolated from the currents of Western European art.

In the collection, edited by Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan Emily Reid, nine authors read the history of modern Russian art alongside changing discourses, within Russia and abroad, querying Russia's identity. As an example, Blakesley and Reid address the debate between the nineteenth-century Slavophiles and Westernizers, who portrayed Russia's trajectory, respectively, in terms of a movement to a uniquely Slavic future or into the arms of Western European culture. Through the story of Russian art, primarily of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the authors of the essays in this collection look to move beyond this dichotomy in understanding Russia. They set aside the vision of Russia as a failed imitation of Europe, and they reject as well the concept that Russia was somehow the antithesis of all things European. Instead, Blakesley and Reid argue, Russia has been a zone of mediation between East and West.

Blakesley and Reid, as well as the other authors, make this argument through eleven chapters, arranged in a chronological fashion, and all playing to the idea of complex connections between the so-called East (including Russia) and the West (Western Europe and the United States). The editors begin this discussion by imagining a Russian artist who moved to Paris and managed to bring European techniques back to Russia. In "Promoting a Pan-European Art: Aleksei Bogoliubov as Artistic Mediator between East and West," Blakesley highlights the story of a lesser-known landscape painter who became essential as a patron/contact for Russian artists in Paris; it is through Bogoliubov's influence on younger artists, Blakesley argues, that Western European emphasis on brushwork technique moved into the realm of Russian art. Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier's chapter continues the discussion of reception. Her piece, "Opening Up to Europe: The Peredvizhniki and the Miriskusniki Respond to the West," shows how two major art movements between 1850 and 1900 shaped their goals in response to the West: the Peredvizhniki ("Wanderers") ultimately rejecting anything other than a "national school" and the turn-of-the-century Miriskusniki (the "World of Art" group) seeing Russian art's salvation in its connection with the West.

The book is framed so that individual essays clearly respond to each other's ideas. For example, both Sona S. Hoisington and Reid, studying the Soviet era, focus on groups of artists who questioned to what extent Western European cultural influences should bear weight on the Soviet world. Hoisington, in a compelling chapter entitled "Soviet Schizophrenia and the American Skyscraper," portrays a pre-Cold War fixation with America. She argues that early Soviet architects were fascinated and impressed by U.S. building technology, most especially as exemplified by the Rockefeller Center, and determined they had to outdo the Americans in the same field. In a chapter on the post-Khrushchev period, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism: The Re-engagement with Western Modernism in the Khrushchev Thaw," Reid sees a Soviet interest in reworking socialist realism, remaking it as something other than stodgy academicism, in light of the post-Picasso developments of the West. Her piece echoes the ideas of the late Catherine Cooke, who had submitted the chapter "Modernity and Realism: Archi-

tectural Relations in the Cold World" to interrogate how Nikita Khrushchev's leadership attempted to develop Soviet architecture in engagement with, but not in imitation of, Western European structure. Even the design of the famous Moscow metro, she pointed out, was influenced by concepts of what was Western modernism–and what should, therefore, by contrast, be Russian. Indeed, Cooke noted, Khrushchev, who was highly suspicious of Western modernism, was the guiding hand behind the daily work in creating Stalin's pet project, the Moscow subway.

While the above-mentioned chapters focus on fairly traditional subjects like painting and architecture, *Russian Art and the West* makes its most interesting contribution in chapters 4 through 6, which frame lesser-known subjects. In the fourth chapter, "Decoration and Disconnection: The Russkii stil' and Russian Decorative Arts at Nineteenth Century American World's Fairs," Karen Kettering manages to discuss not just the development of a "national style" of Russian art, but how this style, linked imaginatively with contemporary peasant designs, would have contrasted with other exhibits at the World's Fairs held in America. She also initiates a discussion of American/Russian exchange by tracing the valuation of certain Russian arts: Tiffany and Company's embrace of the Russian bronze, for example, as "art" vs. the lesser values put on glassware and woodwork. In chapter 5, Charlotte Douglas turns to a study of fabric prints ("The Art of Pure Design: The Move to Abstraction in Russian and English Art and Textiles"), setting the evolution of print art into the context of a pan-European resistance to realism. Chapter 6, Jane A. Sharp's "Beyond Orientalism: Russian and Soviet Modernism on the Periphery of Empire," moves the discussion of East/West into a new plane as well. While Douglas looks to a new material (fabric) and Kettering studies a new international setting (America), Sharp looks within the Russian Empire to see how modernist painting fared in the provinces. Most studies of Russo-Soviet modernism, with few exceptions (including William Brumfield's many works studying modern architecture), have privileged the experiences of St. Petersburg and Moscow artists; this discussion of art as an arena encompassing far more than the largest cities is invigorating.

While the above essays respond to the book's goal in a unique fashion, some other contributions seem a curious fit: for example, John McCannon's chapter, "Mother of the World: Eurasian Imagery and Conceptions of Feminine Divinity in the Works of Nikolai Roerich," is a fascinating display of how Buddhist imagery was subsumed in the works of one Russian artist. But the chapter suffers from two issues for its placement in this volume. One, it stands alone among all of the chapters in including a gendered analysis, and even then, this gendered analysis does not go far enough. McCannon, discussing natural goddess images, does not comment on the choice of linking earth figures with a female body, and how that fits culturally with either Roerich's Russian background or his Asian studies. He describes these earth figures without even addressing the fundamental question of why an earth figure was made female to begin with. In addition, the main axis of McCannon's work is Russia/Asia, not European culture/Russian culture, as the rest of the book purports to analyze. McCannon places Roerich in a context of Russian and European artists who engaged in dialogue with Asian cultural motifs, and he does demonstrate how Roerich meshed together Asian and Western European imagery. But he does not speak to the issue that the other essays address, the relationship between Western European art and Russia. Instead of exploring the European/Russian or American/Russian relationship, McCannon looks at how Russian artists tried to bridge the gap between their imagined "west" and the Asian "east."

The issues with McCannon's chapter are merely issues with its fit in the book, not the merits of the piece itself. As with the other chapters, McCannon's is solidly written, researched, and novel in approach. Overall, then, *Russian Art and the West* succeeds in its goal. It stands as a fascinating attempt to find new facets of discussion in modern Russian art and its connection with the world.

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