

RUSSIA!

GO 227 & SSP 100 Trip to the Guggenheim
Skidmore College
Fall 2005

The Age of the Icon

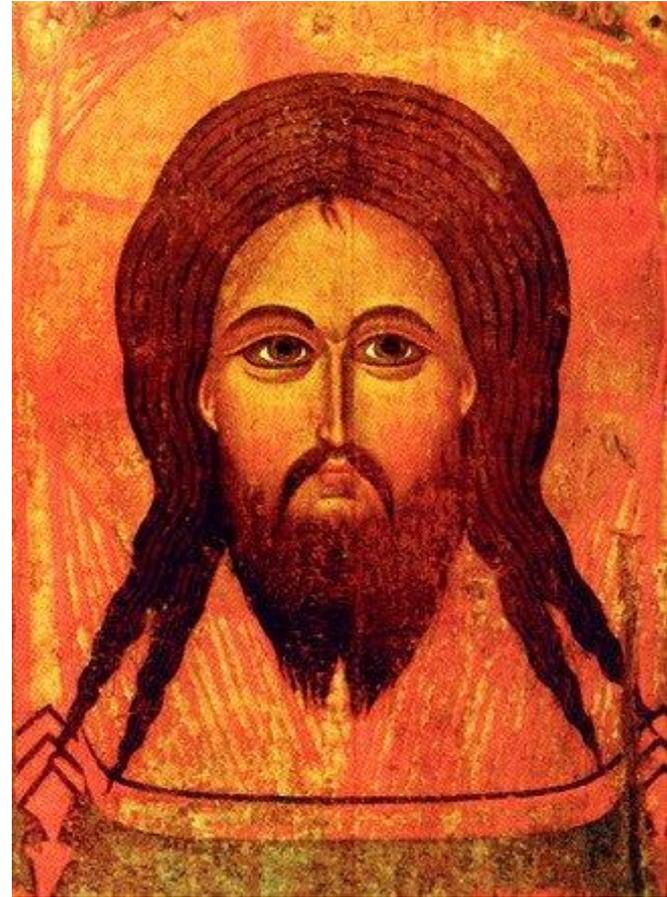
13th-17th Centuries

- In Eastern Orthodox Tradition, Russian churches were dominated by iconostasis, a wall of painted images
- A distinct Russian Orthodox Art was developed by the 15th Century
- By the 17th Century icons began to exhibit Western religious influence, which prepared the ground for secular Russian art under Peter I who sought to diminish the role of the Russian Orthodox Church

Savior Acheropita

Last quarter of the 14th Century

- “Savior not made by human hands”
- Emphasizes Christ’s disembodied face, long hair, enlarged eyes, long straight nose, and arched eyebrows
- Example of the “Age of the Icon”



S.S. Boris and Gleb with Scenes from Their Lives

Second Half of the 14th Century

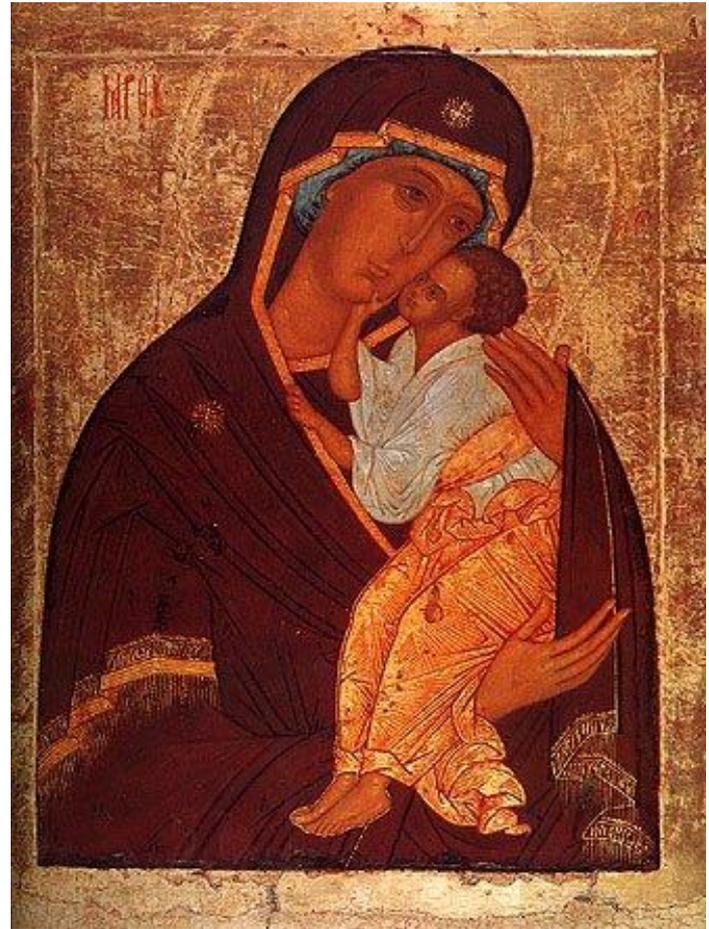
- Boris and Gleb were younger sons of Prince Vladimir of Kiev, who brought the Orthodox faith to Kievan Rus
- Chose to accept suffering and death, fit the Russian Orthodox model of Christ as a sacrificial lamb
- Portrayed as military saints dressed in royal regalia



Our Lady of Yaroslavl

Second Half of the 15th Century

- Emphasizes interaction between mother and child
- As characteristic of the 15th and 16th century, the Virgin turns her head to the right and does not gaze at the viewer
- The hint of sorrow suggests inner reflection concerning her child's ultimate fate



Western and European Masterpieces in Russia:

The Imperial Collections of Peter I, Catherine II, and Nicholas I

- Peter I founded St. Petersburg in 1703. As part of the new city many buildings and palaces were constructed and required decoration, especially sculpture
- Beginning in 1764 Catherine II began to acquire foreign collections of art in an effort to bring the best of culture to Russia. By 1785 she had 2,685 paintings.
- Catherine's successors enhanced the imperial collections. Alexander I, a leader in the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 purchased the private collection of Napoleon's first wife, Empress Josephine of France
- Under Alexander II the Imperial Hermitage Museum became free and open to the public. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the collection was declared national property and renamed the State Hermitage Museum

Portrait of Nicholas I

Luigi Bienaime, 1850

- Portrait of Nicholas I portrays Tsar Nicholas I in classically regal costume, explicitly attributing to him the prestige of the Roman Empire.
- His imperial status is emphasized by blending the tsar's contemporary style with a sense of antiquity.



Portrait of Peter I

Bartolomeo Carlo Rastrelli, 1723

- Rastrelli's portrait came to stand for the entire epoch, with Peter's resolute figure embodying the advent of a Westernized and Modernized Russia



Portrait of Catherine II

Fedor Rokotov, 1763

- Painted a year after Catherine staged a successful coup d'etat, dislodging her unpopular husband Peter III and installing herself to the throne
- Facial expression exudes self-confidence and power



Assimilating Western European Aesthetics: 18th Century

- In the late 17th century a new type of painting emerged in Russia as artists began to produce secular portraits of contemporaries
- To increase the level of art in Russia, Peter the Great invited foreign artists to St. Petersburg
- The importance of portraiture reflected the Western European influence of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason and individualism

View of the Admiralty from the Vasilevsky Island Embankment
Johann Mayr, 1796-1803



- Mayr came from Germany by invitation of the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg
- The Admiralty was a fortress founded by Peter the Great. After the painting was complete, however, it was entirely rebuilt making the painting essentially a historical record.

Portrait of Catherine II in a Travel Dress

Mikhail Shibanov, 1787

- Shibanov was commissioned to paint this portrait to commemorate Catherine's trip to Crimea
- She is depicted as a reserved humanist, an enlightened monarch, and the embodiment of the "philosopher on the throne" as she described herself



The Coming of Age of Russian Art: First Half of the 19th Century

- Deteriorating relations between France and Russia culminated in Napoleon's invasion in 1812
- The end of the War of 1812 allowed Russian artists to resume studies abroad
- The period reflected the influence of Romanticism which stressed the importance of the individual and emotion as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment

An Official the Morning After Receiving His First Decoration
Pavel Fedotov, 1846

- The painting is Fedotov's first genre painting
- The official poses as a monument to himself, but his audience is made up only of his cook who looks mockingly
- The scene exposes the empty nature of officialdom



Portrait of Colonel Evgraf Davyov

Orest Kiprensky, 1809

- The portrait demonstrates the kind of adventurous, daring exploits characteristic of the Romantic hero
- Davydov was a hero of the War against Napoleon (1812)



On the Harvest: Summer

Alexei Venetsianov, mid 1820s

- The painting formed a kind of diptych about the cyclical life of the peasant
- Captures the dignity and beauty of farm labor and emphasizes the close connection between humans and nature



Art and Society: Second Half of the 19th Century

- Alexander II became tsar in 1851 and ushered in a period of liberalism. In 1861 he freed the serfs and his initiatives allowed a new class of intellectuals to emerge
- A group called the “Wanderers” sought to use their art to express democratic ideas, criticize the inequities of Russian society, and pose key moral questions
- Artists focused on the poor and corruption among the clergy and government. There was also renewed interest in religion.

In Winter

Konstantin Korovin, 1894

Korovin is a foremost representation of Impressionism

The painting combines a traditional Russian subject with modern techniques



Barge Haulers on the Volga

Ilya Repin, 1870-73

- Cheap labor reflects social and economic conditions of the time. Serfs were free but without land
- Repin depicts both their suffering and their moral strength



Capture of a Snow Fortress

Vasily Surikov, 1891

- “Capture of a Snow Fortress” was a popular Siberian game that took place on the Day of Forgiveness
- In addition to its historical and religious associations, Surikov’s painting is a celebration of boldness of national character and the inventiveness of Russian traditions



Knight at the Crossroads

Viktor Vasnetsov, 1878

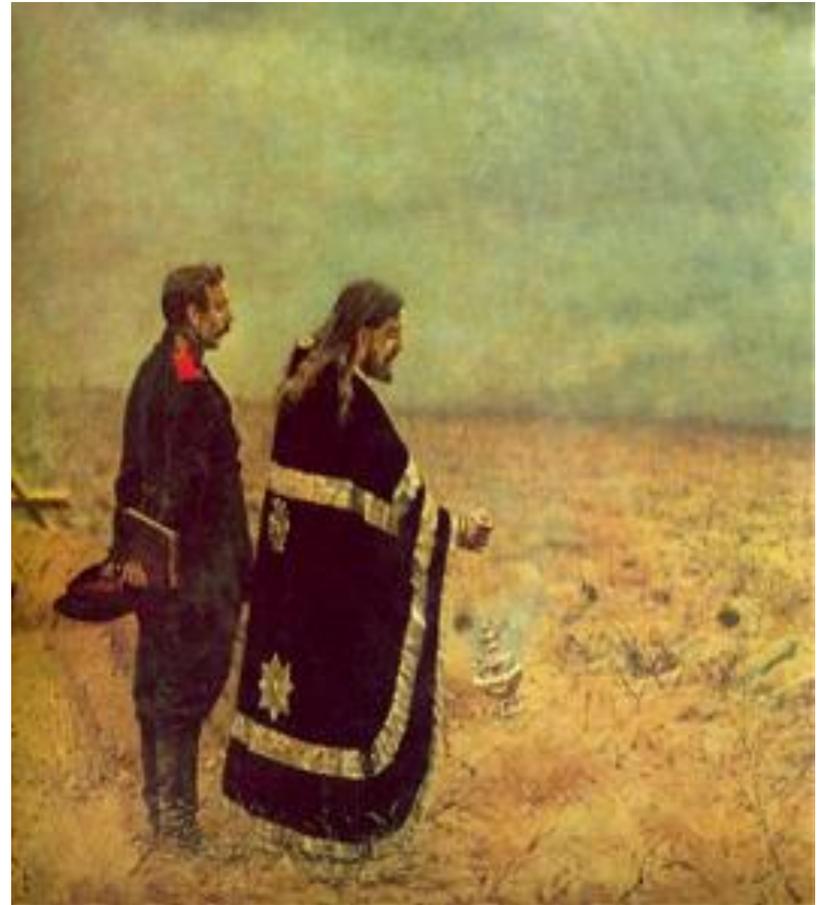
- The painting depicts a critical moment for the hero. An inscription on the stone reads “if you go straight you will not survive, there is no way for anyone walking, riding, or flying”
- It echoes Russia’s humiliating defeats in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the intelligentsia’s subsequent dismay at the country’s social and political situation.



Defeated: Service for the Dead

Vasily Vereshchagin, 1878-79

- Painted response to the Russo-Turkish War in which Russia supported the liberation of the Slavs in the Balkans from the Ottoman Empire
- This painting provoked great discontent from the tsarist government, which sought to ban it



A Party

Vladimir Makovsky, 1875-97

- The painting depicts a clandestine gathering of the revolutionary intelligentsia. The figure at the left conveys heavy thinking and the right side is devoted to younger activists.



Convict

Vladimir Makovsky, 1879

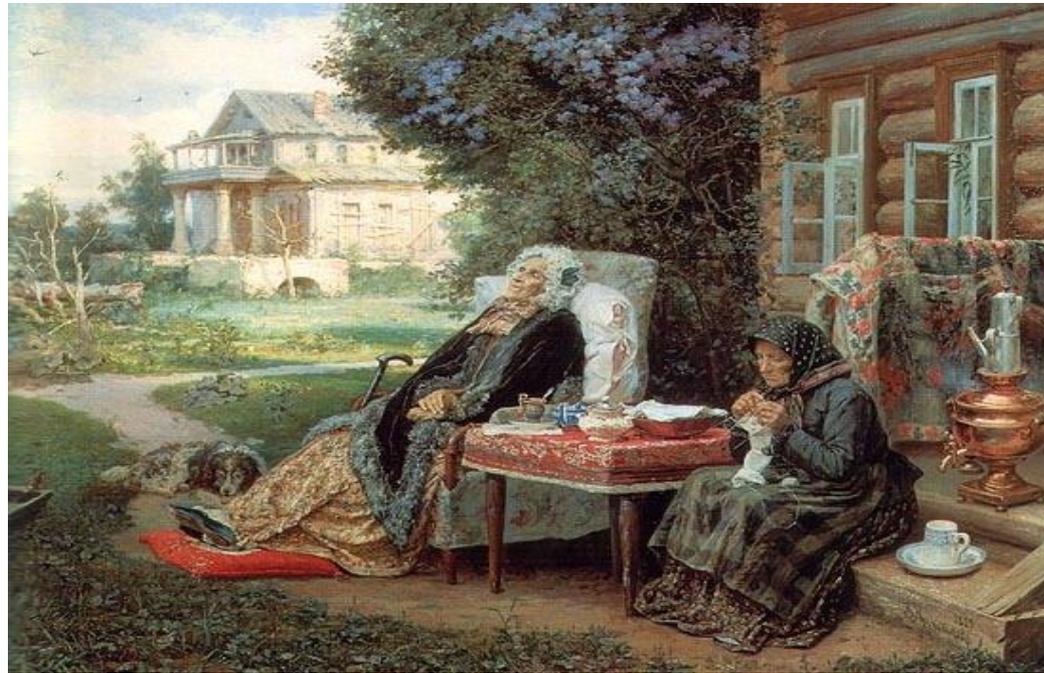
- The figure of the social revolutionary is heroicized in *Convict*.
- Makovsky was part of the “Wanderers,” at a time when social and political problems pervaded Russian society.



All in the Past

Vasily Maximov, 1889

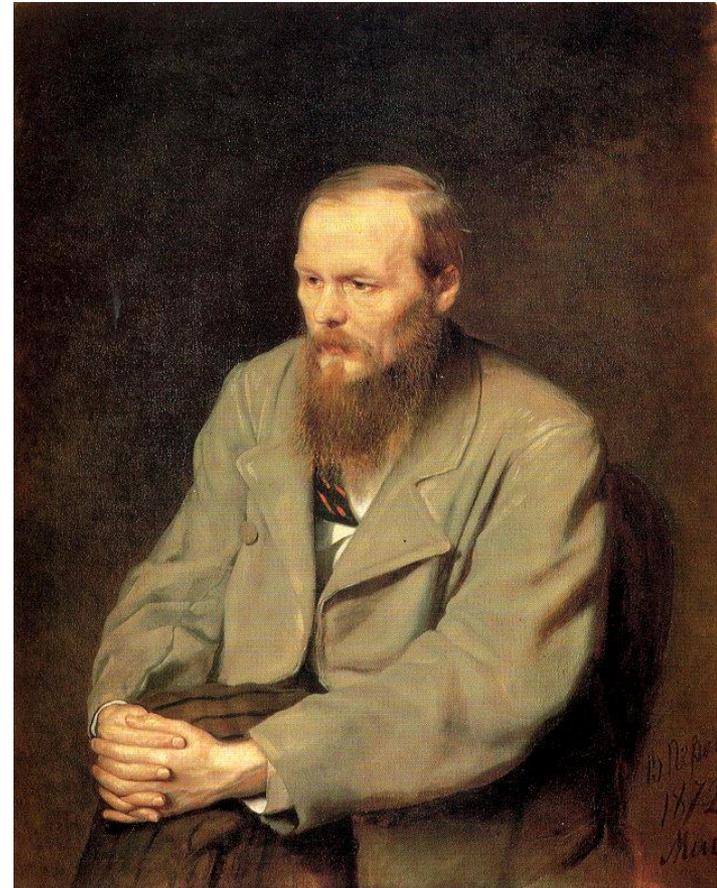
- The work is a social commentary on the fate of the impoverished gentry and the imminent decline of their estates in the late 19th century. An old lady of aristocratic background is lost in dreams of her glorious past, while her peasant housekeeper knits next to her.



Portrait of the Writer Fedor Dostoevsky

Vasily Perov, 1972

- The dark, flat background and the brightly lit forehead draw attention to the writer's self-absorption and intense intellectual activity
- Dostoevsky's sympathy for the suffering of the "small man" brought him close to the revolutionary intelligentsia of the 1860s-70s.



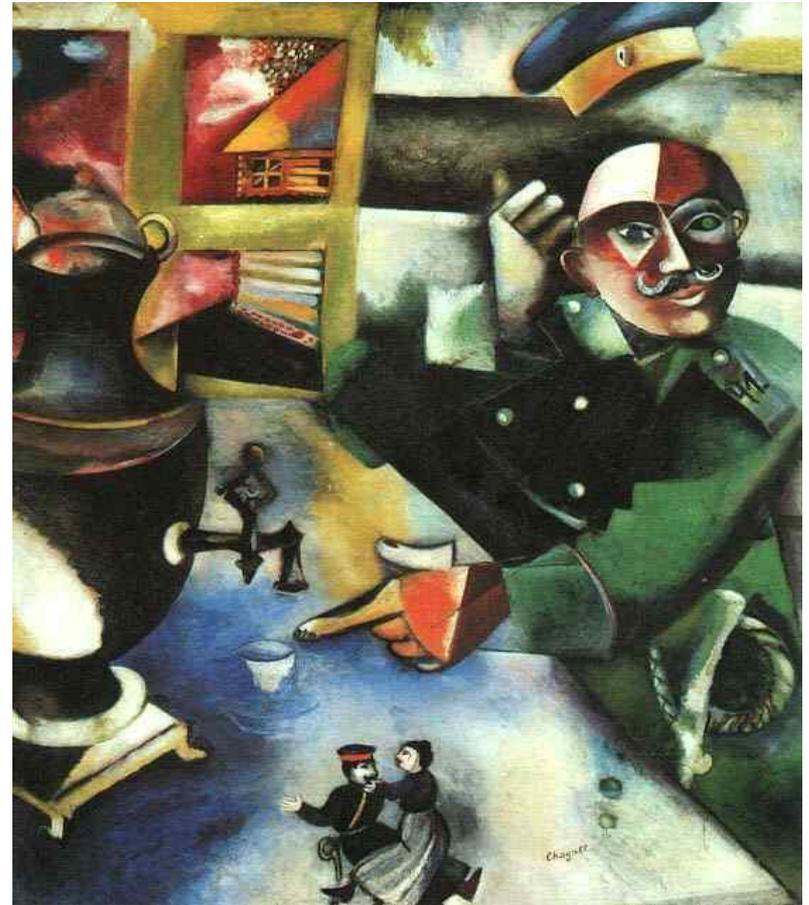
Acknowledging Tradition and Breaking New Ground: Early 20th Century

- In 1905 Russia suffered an embarrassing defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the country entered a troubled period domestically after a peaceful protest outside the Winter Palace was met with deadly force. This became known as Bloody Sunday.
- Entry into WWI in 1914 was a rallying point for the nation.
- A major art revolution was underway in opposition to the progressive groups of the previous century. Artists developed a style known as “Neo-primitivism” that combined elements of French Fauvism, German Expressionism, and Russian folk art.
- After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 leftist artists embraced the change in government and actively participated in the establishment of a new visual culture rooted in mass-media.

The Soldier Drinks

Marc Chagall, 1911-12

- The painting depicts a space between reality and dream in which the soldier's memory of his wife is perhaps manifested in the form of the small dancing couple in the foreground
- Chagall said that this image was evoked by his memories of tsarist soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.



MOSCOW

Aristarkh Lentulov, 1913

- The space of *Moscow* is powerfully dominated by the traditional Russian red and the colorful onion-shaped cupolas of Russian Orthodox churches
- The vertical nature of the painting depicts the dynamism and density of the city.



Women and Fruit

Aristarkh Lentulov, 1917

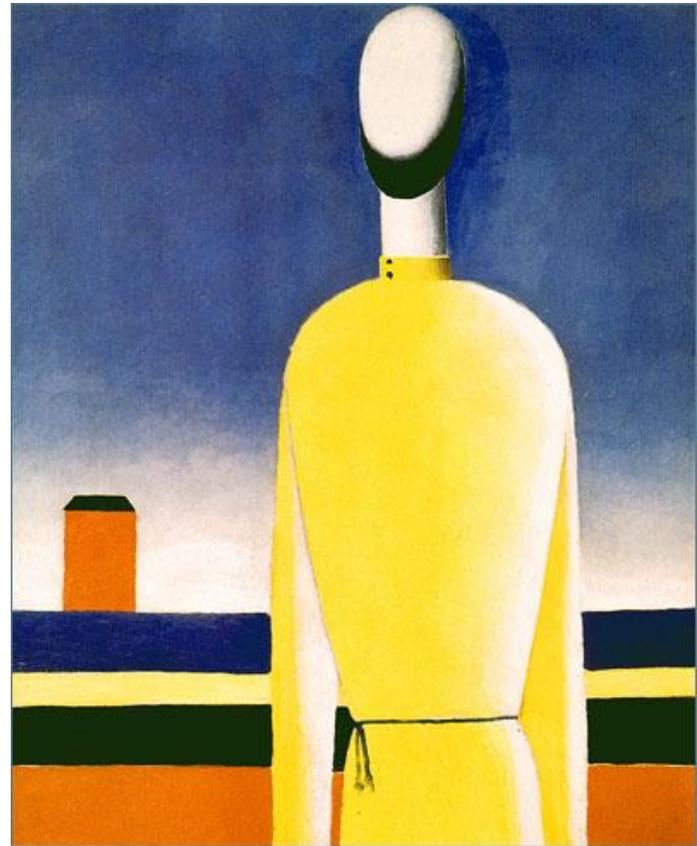
- The decorative bright patchwork inspired by Russian traditional motifs is the signature of Lentulov's style.
- It is often said that in the work of the members of the “Jack of Diamonds” groups human figures become indistinguishable from still lifes, which is the case in this painting.



Complex Premonition (Torso in a Yellow Shirt)

Kazimir Malevich, 1932

- The figure's peasant attire has led a number of art historians to interpret this work literally, as the artists lament for the fate of Russian and Ukrainian peasants during the famine in the 1930s, which was the result of forced collectivization.
- The painting also expresses the artist's more generalized anxiety, which is evident in the inscription on the back which reads "Composition came together from the feeling of void, solitude, and hopelessness of life."



Art and Ideology: Late 1920s-1930s

- Beginning in the late 1920s, freedom of artistic expression was gradually but steadily curtailed by Stalin's regime.
- In 1932, the Central Committee of the Communist Party centralized control over the nation's artistic production by issuing a decree requiring artists to join the "Union of Soviet Artists." The accepted means of expression were restricted to representational painting and sculpture that was realist in style and Socialist in content
- Socialist realist artists glorified the collectivization of agriculture and expressed enthusiasm for Stalin's Five Year Plans
- Socialist realism was found in fine art and mass-produced mediums such as posters. It became deeply ingrained in Soviet visual culture and the popular imagination for generations.

At the Coffin of the Leader

Isaak Bordsky, 1925



- One of the leading painters of Socialist Realism, Brodsky specialized in portraits of revolutionary leaders in staged, often pseudo-historical settings.
- *At the Coffin of the Leader* shows Vladimir Lenin's funeral in a conventional theatrical setting. The viewer is positioned as an onlooker and is invited to identify with one of the older peasants in the foreground.

V.I. Lenin in the Smolny

Isaak Brodsky, 1930

- This first well-known portrait of Lenin shows the leader at the Smolney Institute for Young Ladies of the Nobility, from which he directed the revolutionary uprising
- The second empty chair conveys the democratic nature of Lenin and the revolution, inviting the viewer to join the leader
- This painting, like many later works of Socialist Realism was widely disseminated.



Defense of Petrograd

Alexander Deineka, 1927

- The painting depicts the resolve of the city's workers to defend Bolshevik power during the first post-revolutionary years.
- The solid linear structure of the bridge underscores the psychological commitment of the figures. The slow progress of the wounded soldiers turns into the confident march of the figures below.



An Unforgettable Meeting

Vasily Efanov, 1936-37

- After 1934 Stalin was depicted as a warm, paternalistic figure who cared about ordinary Soviet people.
- During a series of highly publicized meetings, Stalin met with exemplary workers and peasants.
- The presence of the party leaders and Lenin's widow legitimize his authority.



A Collective Farm Festival

Sergei Gerasimov, 1937

- The painting celebrates the advent of the bright Socialist future in the Soviet Countryside.
- Figures are arranged in a theatrical manner against the backdrop of an idyllic landscape that bears signs of modernity: a bicycle, still a rare commodity, and a high voltage tower in the background.



New Moscow

Yuri Pimenov, 1937

- Pimenov's painting is a hymn to the reconstructed city center and to the liberated Soviet woman.
- The viewer is in the backseat of a luxury car driven by a woman with a modern short haircut along one of the central streets of Moscow.



Uprising

Kliment Redko, 1924-25

- Uprising was painted soon after Lenin's death.
- An intense radiance spreads outwards from the figure of Lenin toward his Communist Party comrades and onto the Red Army soldiers who fill the streets of revolutionary Petrograd



Official and Unofficial: 1940s-1980s

- In 1939 Stalin entered into a nonaggression pact with Hitler, which was violated in 1941 when German troops invaded Poland.
- The Soviet Union joined the Allies in WWII, which is known in Russia as the “Great Patriotic War.”
- During the war, museums evacuated their collections to the eastern part of the country. Russian artists played a key role by making propaganda and producing reportage. Paintings depicted epic compositions that attested to the bravery of the Soviet military.
- After Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s coming to power freedom in the area of culture increased. Works of Impressionists and Picasso were shown in the Soviet Union.
- Unofficial art included a plethora of styles. In the 1970s a group of artists held the First Fall Open-Air show of Paintings. The event became known as the Bulldozer Show because the unofficial artists were met with force and artworks were destroyed. Many artists left for Western Europe and the U.S.
- Under Gorbachev both the Soviet Union and the era of “Soviet” art, official and unofficial, ended.

Lenin Lived, Lenin Lives, Lenin Will Live

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, 1981-82

- Part of a series “Nostalgic Socialist Realism,” the painting proclaims that despite Lenin’s death in 1924, he continued to exert a vital presence.



The Origins of Socialist Realism

Komar and Melamid, 1983

- The painting depicts Stalin in the series “Nostalgic Socialist Realism.”
- Komar and Melamid painted the series as political satirists examining the ironic contradictions inherent in myths of power.



Raising the Banner

Gelii Korzhev, 1957-60

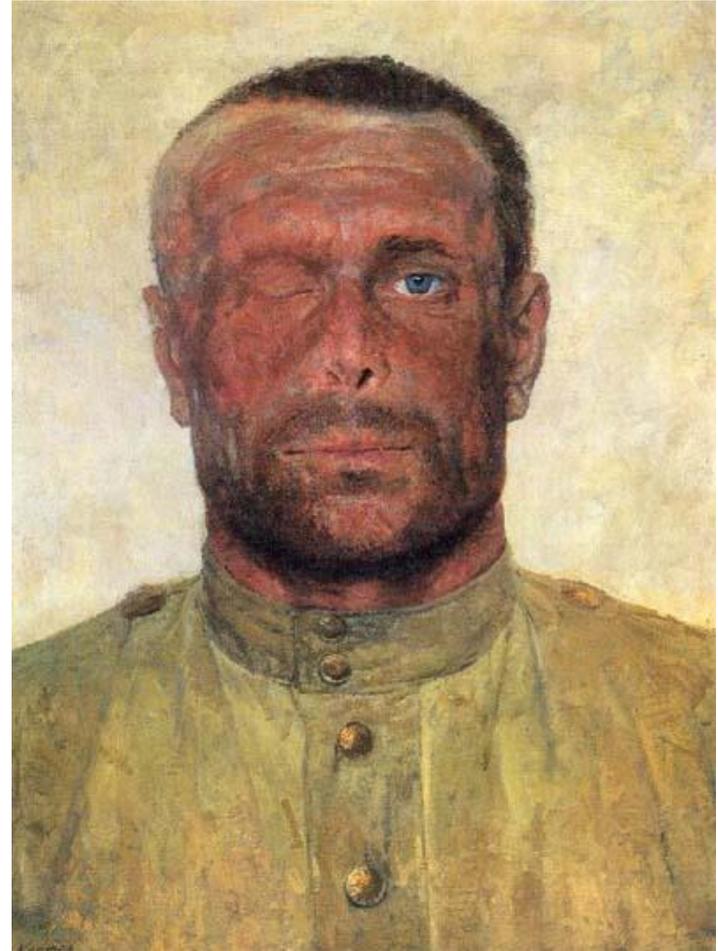
- The painting reflects both the events of the revolution and the emotional impact of WWII.
- The strength of the image also lies in the stark realism of the figures and the earthy tones, which bring out the bright red of the flag.



The Traces of War

Gelii Korzhev, 1963-64

- The image of a soldier who lost an eye in WWI is an honest look at the disfiguring consequences of a catastrophic event.
- It is also testimony to the heroism of the Soviet soldier.



Letter from the Front

Alexander Laktionov, 1947

- The painting depicts a group of residents of a small town who have gathered to listen to a boy reading good news from the front.
- It appeals to the short-lived relief and optimism of the first post-war years and became one of the most popular Soviet images of the 1940s.



Buffet

Mikhail Roginsky, 1981-82

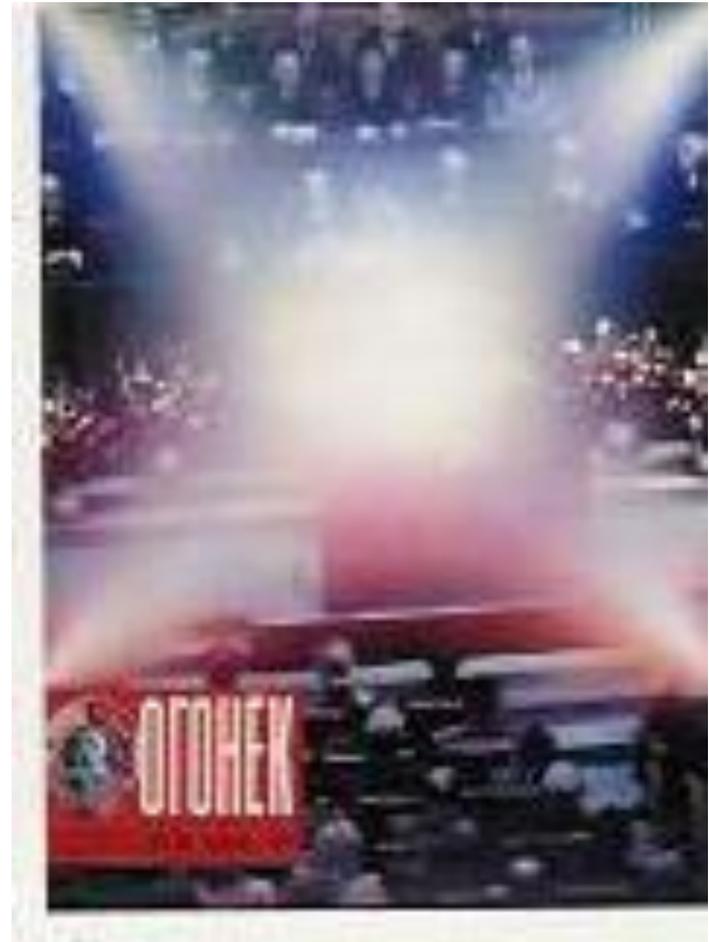
- In this work Roginsky uses loose brushwork and flat forms to render the depersonalized worker and three anonymous customers in a buffet that is part of the restaurant “North”
- He painted this and other scenes from everyday Moscow life from memory.



Ogonyok No. 25

Oleg Vassiliev, 1980

- The painting examines the “interactions between space-surface-light and depicted object,” which here is an official Communist Party Meeting. The intense light completely obliterates the speaker, Leonid Brezhnev, who is surrounded by delegates on both sides.
- It implies that the Soviet leadership and system were not a beacon to the world, but rather no more than a little light.



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