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In academia, there is an unofficial division of "larger" and "smaller" histories of art. The present volume, *New Narratives of Russian and East European Art: Between Traditions and Revolutions*, edited by Galina Mardilovich and Maria Taroutina, deals with this division by exploring national and regional histories of art. The editors combine a reassessment of grand narratives of Russian art with a discussion of art from other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, such as the Balkan and Baltic states, and artistic endeavors of East European artists in Italy and France. As most histories of art from this region (except, in fact, Russian art) have received limited interest from international anglophone scholars, every attempt of this kind is welcomed. Between the universally acclaimed Western and so-called non-Western art (ranging from traditional arts of Asia to the aboriginal arts of Africa, Oceania, and Americas), there is still a huge research lacuna of "non-European stories" stipulating a predominantly geographical approach to the study of arts, as opposed to the West, where the development of art is seen chronologically, through the prism of its historical development.[1] Finally, we are currently facing "geographical discoveries" in the history of art of formerly colonial or peripheral cultures of wider Europe.

The cover design of the collection under review is a meaningfully chosen 1991 lithograph by Oleg Vassiliev, serving as a visual key to the book narrative. The statue of Vladimir Lenin metaphorically reveals the focus of the volume, Soviet art historiography and its reassessment seen through pre- and post-Soviet developments constrained by the Soviet past and its sociopolitical effect. *New Narratives of Russian and East European Art* deals with this kind of uncovering and rethinking of the materials and problems once hidden, silenced, or forgotten in the Soviet Union. As the editors state in the beginning, the volume grew out of two sessions of a panel, "Reconsidering Art and Politics: Towards New Narratives of Russian and Eastern European Art," that took place at the College Art Association's annual conference in 2015. And while the editors mention in the introduction that the book "builds on this momentum in the field of art history and the impulse in Slavic cultural studies," the term "Slavic" seems to be inaccurate because the volume also addresses Lithuania and Hungary (p. 2). This review is not motivated by a nationalistic approach but rather aims at avoiding pan-Slavic or Russian imperial narratives.

The volume follows the principle of "geographically roaming chronology" and consists of two thematic parts, "Mobile Margins: Artists, Artworks, and Institutions" and "Visualizing Ideology: New Systems, Cold War Aesthetics, and Post-Socialist Memory." It is roughly divided into pre- and postrevolutionary (taking 1917 as a marker) eras and includes thirteen chapters in total. The first chapter, by Allison Leigh, is devoted to Karl Briullov in 1832. Leigh deals with the early developments of Russian academic painting. The contradiction between Russian traditions and new European trends is shown through the artist's biography and his successes and failures during his Roman years. Two versions of his unfinished *Bathsheba* (circa 1830 and 1832) serve as a point of departure, unveiling the themes of blackness, femininity, and orientalism. Briullov is depicted as an artist of tragic fate, with his "place as a Russian living in the West" and an uneasy self-identification that drove him to attempt to destroy his own painting (p. 27).

Alison Hilton's "Iaroslavna's Lament and Its Echoes in Late Nineteenth-Century Russian Art*"* brings a wider topic into the discussion: the visualization of the heroine of the opera *Prince Igor* by many national painters and exploration of the motif of a noblewoman in the context of the spirit of prerevolutionary times. The choice of different literal sources marks the treatment of this personage by various artists, as well as its connection with other historic paintings of this period. As the chapter's title mentions "echoes," the key study goes far beyond the medieval theme and discusses biographies of Aleksandr Borodin, Vladimir Stasov, and various painters and their politically and socially active female relatives (p. 37). The theme of femininity is in fact the study of feminism in relation to Russia's sociocultural reality and the emerging role of women in society, literature, and the arts, making them "a barometer for the health of the nation as a whole" (p. 32).

Ilia Repin's painting *They Did Not Expect Him* (1882-83) is analyzed by Mardilovich. She highlights a single painter and his single work but widens her study to Repin's background and "the aesthetic qualities of the canvas, which have often eluded scholars" (p. 48). Mardilovich mentions *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* (1881-85), a painting usually discussed on par with *They Did Not Expect Him*, for merely political connotations but ignores its artistic features. She convincingly shows that during his time in Europe, Repin, already a mature artist, observed and learned from the masters. The author analyzes in-depth the images within the images, their interconnections and meanings, explaining Repin's works as a turn from previously isolated realism to "a different kind of modernism, Russian modernism" (p. 59).

The chapter by Andrey Shabanov is a reworked version of the conclusion of the author's 2019 book, *Art and Commerce in Late Imperial Russia: The Peredvizhniki, a Partnership of Artists*, which brought a new light to the Peredvizhniki, a Russian group of painters. Shabanov analyzes the art market that defined the group's success. He wittily responds to Stasov's 1894 essay, "Is Disagreement between Artists a Good Thing?," and provides comparative critical observations to European trends of the time that have rarely been questioned before. In referring to the history of salon-type exhibitions in Russia and abroad, Shabanov argues that the Peredvizhniki were not simply political and social "enthusiasts," but their motivation of traveling from province to province and their implementation of easily accessible and popular topics in painting were motivated by commercial profit.

Taroutina deals with Mikhail Vrubel's art. Her key essay evolves from personal findings on the whole art movement of Russian modernism. It is noteworthy that the concept of "decorativism" (Rus. *dekorativnost'*), implied as the leading motif in Vrubel's work, has had at least two different meanings in the Soviet theory of art through the 1980s. The first is explained as the common feature of decorative art ("decorativism"), while the second had been the alternative form of speaking about stylized or non-figurative art; quite often, scholars used this term to avoid such terms as "stylization" or "abstraction," which sounded as blame in formalism and could be dangerous for artists and their work. The innovative plasticity of Vrubel's majolica animal sculptures and his experiments with "kaleidoscopic effects" on ceramic surfaces are also highlighted as examples of the artist's tireless quest. Taroutina concludes with a discussion on the artist's importance for early Soviet avant-garde art and twentieth-century Soviet decorative arts.

The first essay in the volume that moves beyond Russia is the text by Steven A. Mansbach, focused on the work of Slovene modernist architect Jože Plečnik. The artist's activities cover the wider area from Austro-Hungary to Yugoslavia and his legacy belongs to most of East-Central Europe. "Idiosyncrasy," a word used in the chapter's title, explains Plečnik's professional qualities, fed by many sources of architectural and cultural traditions. Elaborating on the Roman wall in Ljubljana (constructed 1934-37), Mansbach shows how Plečnik dealt with contemporary trends of functionality and deepened the quest of mythopoetic identity, in tune with various nationalist regimes of Europe of those times.

Kristin Romberg's essay opens the second part of the book, dealing with constructivist design and events from the October Revolution of 1917 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and beyond. In her essay, devoted to Alexander Rodchenko's graphic arrows, Romberg demonstrates how the artist appeals to a parallel visual metalanguage, creating his own visual narrative, aside from merely "illustrative" goals. The case exposes the ideological course of Bolshevik thought even in relation to the translated guide for organizational needs of labor, where the innocent arrows, as graphic figures, reveal this contradiction of the original content and its context. The context is seen through Rodchenko's artistic vision, as dictated by epochal industrialization under socialist ideology.

Paradoxicality of the hybrid style of socialist realism is often discussed in scholarly works, and in her chapter Maria Mileeva concentrates on the activities of MOSKh (Moscow Union of Soviet Artists), an organization that had great influence in forming socialist realist art. The case of less-known artist Pavel Mal'kov, whose works encountered harsh criticism at MOSKh meetings (1937), is Mileeva's major focus. The author observes Mal'kov's professional path whose status, shortly after being awarded the Stalin Prize, changed rapidly from an outsider of socialist society to one of its most favored figures.

Nikolas Drosos raises the question of "avant-garde revival" in the socialist state of Yugoslavia (since the 1950s), which enjoyed a relatively softer regime and more physical and ideological closeness with the Western world, serving along with Hungary as a window of freedom for the USSR. The author contextualizes the art of Ivan Picelj and particularly his *Homage to Lissitzky* (1956) as an example of a transitional object that visually marked the escape of Yugoslavia from the direct influence of the Kremlin and a return to prewar avant-garde traditions. Highlighting Yugoslavian neo-avant-garde artists, presented at the EXAT-51 (group of artists from 1950 to 1956) exhibition and other exhibitions, Drosos juxtaposes them with "bourgeois" counterparts, explaining their different background and further circumstances for development.

The topic of democratization is explored in Katalin Cseh-Varga's essay in which she concentrates on socialist Hungary and deals with art during the long-lasting Kádárism (the period of rule of János Kádár, a Hungarian communist leader, marked with relative democratization yet in general a socialist state) during the Cold War, from the mid-1950s through the 1970s. She employs Václav Havel's categories of "official," "parallel," and "unofficial" culture to describe the long and hard process of liberalization under modified socialist rule (p. 170). "The second public sphere," in the author's own words, is the main subject of discussion, a field that could be identified as parallel to official art. As Cseh-Varga notes, this has not had a "homogenous form of clear-cut antagonisms" and remains an individual practice and thought, undoubtedly preparing society for further rethinking of the Soviet past (p. 171).

Tatsiana Zhurauliova's chapter is a discussion about artistic responses to Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorship in its current phase. The author appeals to artists who were born during the downfall of the Soviet Union and now live in independent Belarus, though, in their mature age, they have not seen any other leader of the country. The creative work of Antonina Slobodchikova, Mikhail Gulin, and Sergey Shabohin are shown as rebels against the long-lasting regime. Zhurauliova unveils the biographic facts of current artists who are tracked by police and often charged and arrested. The protest expressed in the form of silence and visual narration (Slobodchikova's ***The Vote to the Ground***, 2012), irony and minimalism (Gulin's ***Personal Monument***, 2012), or a combination of text and image (Shabohin's ***Practices of Subordination***, 2011) are all interpreted under the omnipresence of ***Bats'ka*** (Belarus. for "daddy").

In her essay, Ksenia Nouril analyzes Deimantas Narkevičius's way of rethinking the Soviet past. Trained as a sculptor and mostly known for film and video art, Narkevičius explores sculptural objects and their meanings. Choosing the role of an art-historical documentalist, Nouril provides a detailed account of the historic events and the artist's voice as a post-Soviet public response. Narkevičius visually historicizes monuments and their installation/removal and Nouril carefully conceptualizes this societal rethinking of the past, where sculptures are not simply sculptures but also the "actors" of video stories.

The closing, thirteenth chapter by Jane A. Sharp studies Igor Makarevich's and Elena Elagina's installations. While exploring the work of two artists, the author rethinks the entire history of twentieth-century Russian art. Through her selection of artworks, Sharp unveils the long and specific history of modernism under Soviet rule, where links with the West were interrupted for more than half a century and the artists, under conditions of an informative and cultural split with the West, were creating their artworks intuitively. There was very little to nothing on the artistic scene until the 1980s that could be called "postmodernist" art, and postwar art followed mostly modernist traditions, echoing some trends from the other side of the iron curtain (seen in the rare exhibition catalogs and other, partly illegal, material among artistic and intellectual circles). Examples ranging from Nikolai Gogol's ***Overcoat*** (1842) and Aleksei Tolstoy's ***Adventures of Buratino*** (1935) to the paintings of Édouard Manet and Kazimir Malevich and many more illustrate how much could be reinterpreted by the artist and the art historian as icons of the pre-Soviet past and inspirations for artistic references.

In the end, a few words should also be said about the term "East/Eastern" in regard to nineteenth- and twentieth-century European art that had been used mostly during the Cold War and continues to be widely used today. It describes the art of the countries of the vast territories of the former Soviet Union and socialist bloc which are situated in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe. However, this term is not universal either, and another Routledge publication (Beáta Hock and Anu Allas's edited collection, ***Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*** [2018]), for example, totally excludes many countries, while entirely concentrating on countries between Central Europe and the Balkans. The new paradigm of studies of countries once under Kremlin's political, ideological, and cultural influence, as Hans Belting defines it, started during the Cold War and continued within the complex field of geopolitically motivated area studies.[2] This, at some point, has determined the phenomenon of

"East" in Western European and American eyes, seeing Moscow as its dominant and an icon, while less attention would be paid to the "local histories" of art in other parts of the socialist world.

The chronological and geographical coverage of the present volume from the 1830s to the 2010s and from Russia to Italy and the Baltics to the Balkans is truly remarkable. And while the publication does not pretend to be a general history or epochal outline, it brings to light many previously un-discussed or heavily ideologized issues. Also, taking the key events of politics and art throughout two centuries as historiographical points of rethinking unites the whole collection and contextualizes various new narratives in the historical and cultural perspective.

Notes

[1]. James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 89-94.

[2]. Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 54-55.

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