

Conference Paper

Aspects of Study of the 20th Century Naive Art in Russia: Researchers, Collections and Names

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Abstract

This article explores the main stages of the study of naive art in Russia, starting from the first decades of the 20th century and till the 1980s, when naive art was called an “amateur art”. This is the period of IZORAM (Saint Petersburg Art Workshops of Working Youth) activity and the long work of the National University of Extramural Studies. The first amateur art exhibitions took place in the 1970s, later leading to the establishment of specialized collections. In the 1980s, academic research into naive art began to filter through the image of a primitive, or so-called “third”, culture supposed to exist between “high” and “grassroots” art. Only since the 1990s has naive art begun to be perceived as a separate artistic movement. In Russian art criticism, naive art was defined as one of the primitive art areas of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. During this period, separate museum collections began to take shape in Moscow including a private museum of outsider art, where some works by naive artists were presented, and the Municipal Museum of Naive Art. In Ekaterinburg, Gamayun Municipal Center for Folk Art and Crafts began to study naive art in 1994. In the 2000s, interest in the naive art of the 20th century began to grow. At this time, public and private collections of naive art were being formed in the following museums: B.U.Kashkin Museum at the Ural State University; Soviet Naive Art Museum; and Museum of Naive Art, which in 2015 became the part of the Yekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts.

Keywords: primitive art, amateur art, naive art, folk art, outsider art.

1. Introduction

Today there is an urgent need in studying Russian naive art of the 20th century and reflecting upon it: what main approaches are used by researchers, how the collections are being shaped and what are the main characteristic features in development of Russian naive (primitive art, amateur art, naive art). It is also crucial to understand what the roots of curatorial and research interest in naive art are today, when contemporary art world has long lost its interest in naive art. Foreign researchers and curators are more interested in promoting outsider’s art and art produced by people with mental disabilities.

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2. Materials and Methods

First, it is essential to highlight what is the nature of naïve art and what first discoveries have taken place in this sphere. It is well known that naïve art was born within the historical primitive art of the 17th–19th centuries that “domesticates, keeps and rewrites the closest memories...” [1]. Hence, Russian primitive art in *lubok*, *parsuna* and *folk icons* have paved the way for the emergence of naïve art in the 20th century.

In the beginning of the 20th century many avant-garde artists showed keen interest in primitive forms. It is a well-known fact that in 1913 M. Larionov organized the *Exhibition of Icon-painted Originals and Luboks* that he started to collect back in the early 1900s with V. Kandinsky [2]. It was the same year that four paintings of Niko Pirosmanshvil, a Georgian self-taught artist, were presented at the *Mishen'* exhibition. Kirill Zdanevich discovered him in Tbilisi and brought his works to Moscow.

The second stage of studying Russian naïve art of the 20th century is closely linked to the new historical period in the USSR in the 1920s–1980s when non-professional authors were included in the activities of various groups: studios of IZO PROletcult, IZORAM, National University of Extramural Studies named after N.K. Krupskaya and Houses of National Creativity. K.G. Bogemskaya gives a detailed account of artistic activities among people after the October revolution: “In 1918–1920 there were 186 studios of IZO PROletcult across Russia...” [3]. It is emblematic that in St. Petersburg art workshops of working youth (IZORAM) brought together over 80 independent studios called “art cores”. They were headed by M.V. Brodsky. Many amateur artists studied there from 1928 till 1931. That is the reason why all through the 1920s and up to the 1980s amateur art will exist in Russia. It is also only logical that publications from this period will be titled *Amateur Art in the USSR* [4]. In the 1930s there were studies of works made by the students of the Institute of the Peoples of the North and later in 1929 the exhibition was put together at the behest of N. Punin. There was also research into children art (A. Bakushinsky) which resulted in the International Exhibition of Children Drawings in 1934 in Moscow.

3. Discussion

In our opinion, the most significant in terms of reflecting upon the 20th century naïve art is the work of National University of Extramural Studies named after N.K. Krupskaya (ZNUI) that was established in 1934 at the Central House of National Creativity named after N.K. Krupskaya. The education process took place by correspondence when a teacher got

student's work, wrote a review and sent it back by mail. Starting "...from 1935–1936 a well-developed network of supervisors from the Houses of National Creativity, organizers of competitions announced in newspapers seminars that were led by the consultants – professionals, talented artists from all across the country were found and educated formally" [5]. For instance, in 1942 there was a competition for the best poster among the amateur artists. "Among those who taught in ZNUI during all the long years of its existence we can name – Robert Falk, Yury Kuperman, Mikhail Roginsky, Kiril Mordovin, Andrey Grositsky, Alexey Kamensky..." [6]. Simple people, like Alexey Aizenman, who was the first teacher of Sergey Stepanov (1923–1995), a carpenter from Orsk, became the students of many famous graphic artists and painters who taught in ZNUI. Mikhail Roginsky taught Pavel Leonov (1920–2011), an odd-job man from Mekhovitsy in Ivanov region [7]. Today they are naïve artists famous in Russia and abroad.

In the 1960s–1980s clubs and art studios of the Houses of Culture housed classes for the naïve artists, who were also identified as amateur authors. At that time, different commissions on national and amateur art were organized within the structure of the Union of Soviet Artists. Scientific and methodological centres were active in the Houses of National Creativity and Trade Union Councils that chose naïve artists and amateur artists for exhibitions. For example, in Moscow you could meet naïve artists at the first evenings–exhibitions that were held without censorship among the leftist artists of Moscow Union of Artists. In Sverdlovsk, they could be found at "31 Surikov St." (1987). There were regular exhibitions that brought together amateur artists from different regions of the country, for example, in 1977 at the Russian exhibition of *Amateur Artists of Russia*.

In the 1980s naïve art was perceived as a separate art movement. It is when it got its present name. There was a series of objective reasons for that. First, scientific work done by V.N. Prokofyev, M.A. Bessonova, L.I. Tananayeva, E.D. Kuznetsova and others. [8] For example, theoretical views of V.N. Prokofyev regarding whether naïve art should be included in the system of fine arts are relevant even until nowadays. When a researcher points at the fact that naïve works are an example of "serious primitive art". The primitive art itself becomes the intermediary layer between "professional art" and "folk art" or the so-called third culture. This vision of primitive art in general and naïve art in particular created a certain niche for naïve movement in scientific and artistic spheres. In 1984, a World Encyclopedia of Naïve Art was published in Belgrade and it included over thirty naïve artists from Russia. N.S. Shkarovskaya was responsible for preparing materials about the works of Soviet naïve artists.

In the 1990s, these theoretical ideas were fruitfully developed in the works of specialists – K.G. Bogemskaya, O.D. Baldina, V.V. Metal'nikova, A.V. Lebedev, G.S. Ostrovsky and others. First conferences dedicated to this theme take place, for example *Primitive in Art. Aspects and Challenges* (Moscow, 1992), *Primitive in Fine Arts* (Moscow, 1995) and others. Also, in research of A.V. Lebedev [9, 10] who proclaimed the final stage of development in primitive art. Naïve art is labelled by the stage of aesthetic primitive art that follows after genetic and socio-ethical stages of primitive art. In 1995, he opened his exhibition *Primitive Art in Russia. 18th–19th centuries*. Even earlier, in 1990, a commercial Dar gallery, which was organized by S. Tarabarov and curated by K.G. Bogemskaya, started its work and was selling the works of naive artists.

By the mid–1990s a new round of interest to naive art in Russia started when an opportunity to show naive artists abroad presented itself. For instance, Russian naive artists were highly praised at the Insita World Triennial of Naive Art (Bratislava, Slovakia). They got their first grand prix: 1997 – Pavel Leonov, 2004 – Vasily Romanenkov. At the same period, first naive art collections appear in the museum environment: the municipal Museum of Naive Art appeared in Moscow in 1996. It was headed by V.I. Grozin. Research associate – O.V. Dyakonitsina. In 2014, it became the Museum of Russian Lubok and Naive Art. At the same time a private museum of Outsiders Works, directed by V. Abakumov, appeared in Moscow in 1996 and it displayed the works of naive artists (A. Kantsurov, P. Leonov, E. Medvedeva) from its collection. In 2011, collection of this museum and its founder move to Montenegro (Bar) and change the name to Art Brut-Outsider Art Centre. V. Patsukov assembles a collection of naive art in Tsaritsyno Museum and Nature Reserve. In 1994, a Museum of Folk Arts and Crafts *Gamayun* appears in Ekaterinburg and at the same time interval a private museum of simple Ural and Siberian art is created by Oleg Yelovoy. By the end of the 1990s, the one of its kind website *Virtual Museum of Russian Primitive Art* that brought together researchers of naive art and participants of the art process was launched.

The beginning of 2000 opened new horizons in naive art research. A lot of naive artists were included in the Russian art context after the projects of Russian State House of National Creativity (*Slavnyie Syny Otechestva*, 2002, 2003/2004) and of the Naive Art Museum (international festival *Festnaiv* was established in 2004 and continues to exist). 2004 was the first time that the exhibition of a naive artist (Katya Medvedeva) took place at a state museum (Museum of Personal collections, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts). These exhibitions accumulated curatorial activity in the region, with many regional museums becoming regular participants in the *Festnaiv* festival. Among them is the museum of B.U.Kashkin (Ural State University, Ekaterinburg) opened on December

28, 2008 and dedicated to the naive artists of the Ural region (collection of artist A.I. Utkina).

4. Conclusions

The commercialization of naive art at the beginning of the 21st century had an impact on the status of Russian naive art. The naive artists became ready to openly sell or exchange their works. Collectors started to build-up their collections. The Ural region became one of the most active in this respect, since two private naive art collections emerged in the year of 2013 alone. Collectors Agishevyy opened Soviet Naive Museum (Perm, May 13, 2013), and Eu. Roizman – the Museum of Naive Art (Yekaterinburg, May 19, 2013). That expanded the circle of classical naive artists when the most famous and most sold artists of central Russia – P. Leonov, K. Medvedeva, L. Maikova, V. Romanenkova, T. Yelenok and others – were joined in by the new names from the Ural region – K. Korovkina, N. Varfolomeyeva, E. Bartseva, V. Belova, P. Ustugova and A. Utkina. It goes without saying that the collections comprised not only naive artists but also of amateur artists and outsiders. Nevertheless, Russian naive art has acquired a new face with national and regional features, making it even more attractive for the art market. Doubtless, this gives new chance for the 20th century naive art to be seen at the international scene.

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