

## Conference Paper

# The Photo Image of Artworks as an Instrument of Assessment and Attribution (the Case of Painting and Drawing by V. I. Shukhayev)

Elena P. Yakovleva

Doctor of Arts, leading researcher, Sectors of Actual Problems of Modern Art, Russian Institute of Art History, Sankt Peterburg, Russia

## Abstract

This article explores the use of photographic images of art pieces as a tool for assessment and attribution, focusing on Vasily Ivanovich Shukhayev's (1887–1973) paintings and drawings. Shukhayev was a famous Russian and Soviet artist, who contributed to greatly to Russian art during the six decades of his artistic career. The artist's works are kept in many state museums and private collections in Russia and abroad, and are also in high demand on the antiques market. Assessment and attribution of his works is, therefore, a pressing issue. Previously photographs of the pieces made at the exhibitions or during the plein-air paintings by the artist himself, as well as other photographic materials showing the artist with his works or their fragments were believed to be of low importance to the experts. The most important photos are those made within the artist's lifetime or which belonged to the artist personally, especially if they contain inscriptions on the back. Such photos help to understand what the missing pieces look like, to confirm authorship and the creation dates, to find its variations and copies, to detect fake works, to show the artist's working style and work stages and sometimes to prove that the artist painted the painting over (typical for V.I. Shukhayev). Altogether, creating a compilation of photographic images of works lost or distributed over the world helps shed light on the painter's artistic career, a task particularly important for research, for museums and exhibitions, for educational work for monographs and catalogues development.

**Keywords:** photographic images, works of art, assessment, attribution, painting, drawing, V.I.Shukhayev

## 1. Introduction

The relevance of the theme chosen for this article is dictated by the necessity to introduce into scholarly research systematic information on the use of photographic images for the purposes of assessment and attribution of art works created by Vasily Ivanovich Shukhayev. These are photographic images of his artworks, photos of his personal exhibitions, family photos from state and private archives – Scientific Archive of

Corresponding Author:

Elena P. Yakovleva  
avmonal@yandex.ru

Published: 25 August 2020

Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E

© Elena P. Yakovleva. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Questions of Expertise in Culture, Arts and Design Conference Committee.

 OPEN ACCESS

Russian Academy of Arts In St. Petersburg, Manuscript Department of the State Russian Museum, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, National Archive of Georgia, personal archive of the artist that now belongs to different private persons. Photographic images have been used many times and will continue to be used again to promote research into life and art of an artist, and as an instrument that is essential to artworks assessment and attribution. [1, pp. 107–113]

## 2. Materials and Methods

It is well-known that professional assessment is the first stage in the research of an art object, followed by its identification, determining its status and gathering information about it. Attribution demands an in-depth research of the piece in order to establish authorship, place and time of its creation, its provenance and other characteristics. Assessment and attribution of artworks involve the use of several main groups of sources – art and documentary materials that complement each other, including photographic images.

There are numerous and versatile examples of their usage in the course of research into the art Vasiliy Shukhayev and his individual pieces. First of all, it is worth noting that only thanks to the remaining photos do we know about the large-scale paintings important for the artists but lost in Tbilisi in 1949. [2, pp. 32–36] These are *Bacchanalia* (1912), a painting created for the competition, which helped the author win a journey to Italy [2, p. 35]; two paintings on the biblical theme: *Susanna and the Elders* (1913) completed in Rome while he was on his journey[2] and *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* (1923) created ten years later in emigration in France [2, p. 34]; as well as social realist painting *Threshing* (1935) [3, p. 40] that the artist started after his return from emigration working on it first in the Kabardino-Balkar collective farm where he was gathering material and then later in Leningrad where he lived until his arrest in 1937. Composition and size of this large-scale canvas (300 x 400 cm) can be guessed by looking through the photos that were made at the Shukhayev's first solo exhibition in the USSR in 1936 that took place in Leningrad Academy of Arts [3, p. 55] and in Moscow exhibition halls of *Vsekokhudozhnik* [4, p. 76].

## 3. Discussion

It is essential to stress the significance of photographic images made at the shows and exhibitions that were held during the artist's life, especially when they were not followed

by publication of catalogues. Such photographs proved the provenance of a series of art works, including those still unidentified held in the collections and those that can still appear on the antiquarian market.

Only thanks to the photograph from Shukhayev's archive (now private archive) we know the look of the commissioned painting *Comrade Stalin on the Meeting in Krt-sanisskiy gorge* (1953) that was mentioned only in the artist's list of art works. Thanks to Shukhayev's wife who made a signature on passepartout of the photograph, we know the dates the painting was made and what technique the author used (oil painting), its size (200 x 300 cm), as well as the fact that it was destroyed by the author himself [3, p. 42].

Judging by the photo from Shukhayev's solo exhibition that took place in Leningrad Union of Artist from December 1962 until January 1963 [3, p. 59], and according to documental materials, during this exhibition the Russian State Museum bought several sketches (1916) for the unfinished painting *Regiment on Positions* (1917) for its collection, as well as the famous double self-portrait of Alexander Yakovlev and Vasilii Shukhayev titled *Harlequin and Pierrot* (1914, Shukhayev finished it in 1962) [5]. Comparing photographic images of double self-portrait at the date of its painting in 1914 with the finished version of the painting proves that changes had been made in its composition: in the process of preparations for the exhibition Shukhayev replaced two arches over the figures of Harlequin and Pierrot and painted one instead that united them and created a sense of integrity in composition [3, p. 14].

This peculiarity that Shukhayev had – to add something to finished paintings that were photographed right before exhibition opening – should be emphasized in particular. These works confused experts on many occasions, because they didn't match the photos made by the artist himself. However, knowing about this trait, an expert can take it into consideration during research. At the same time, such approach to finishing his work says a lot about his artistic method and helps us look inside his art process. For example, two year after the completion of composition *Naked with a Wash-Basin* (1920) Shukhhayev painted the interior that transformed the painting almost entirely (1922) [3, p. 26]. In the painting *Discussing the Sketches* (1955), which had been already finished and photographed, the artist changed the faces of two young women in the right part of composition, and also painted again the right arm of a man in a hat [3, p. 107]. We can only make assumption as to when it happened, probably during preparation for some exhibition.

We can guess what the painted portrait of Parisian publisher Lucien Vogel, completed in 1925, looked like not only based on the graphic sketch from the National Museum

of Georgia collection but also looking at Shukhayev's family photo that captures the painter's wife Vera Fyodorovna and her mother against the background of a large-scale portrait of the publisher dressed in black evening costume and a cylinder, walking down the white marble staircase since. The present location of this painting remains unknown. [3, p. 35].

The photo of a drawing featuring a man's head in profile from the ex-archive of Shukhayev, which was printed in Parisian photo studio, had a signature on the back made by the artist's wife that made the attribution of this work possible. [6, p. 99] (lot 91) First of all, it was crucial to clarify the name of the depicted person – captain Obur. Comparing the profile head of an aged man with the image of one of the characters from *La Conversation* that we know from another photograph from the same archive showed their similarity. Searching for the information about this painting, whose location is also unknown, led us to the joint exhibition of Alexander Yakovlev and Vasiliy Shukhayev, which took place in Parisian Galerie Barbazanges in December 1921. According to the catalogue, this painting was exhibited under the name *La Conversation* [7, no. 4].

Dating the drawing at the back of the photograph as 1923–1924 the artist's wife made a mistake which can be easily understood, since Shukhayev family spent years of 1921–1925 on the Mediterranean island of Port-Cros and kept in contact with captain Obur through all these years. The name of the island Port-Cros was also written down on the back of the painting's photographic image with Vera Fyodorovna's hand. Thus, the painting itself and the preparatory sketch for this painting with the profile portrait of captain Obur were created by Shukhayev in the summer of 1921 on the island of Port-Cros. There is the author's inscription on the front of the drawing addressed to Henrietta Leopoldovna Girshman [6, p. 77, lot 57] which shows their relationship during the emigration period. This inscription dated June 11, 1922, already after this photo had been taken, also contradicts the date of captain Obur's portrait that the artist's wife put on the photo.

Talking about the role that photographic images played in the research of Shukhayev's art works, it is highly important to mention that some of his French and Georgian landscapes the artist painted not from life but based on sight photos made specifically for this purpose. They are kept in different archival funds of the artist but were never analysed, and their key role in creation of art works was never determined. One of the most telling examples is a mountainous landscape *Pankisskoye Uschelye* (1963, canvas, tempera. 120 x 95. Private collection), which was painted from the photo. [3, p. 110].

A photo of a graphic portrait of the unknown officer serving in the 4th Hussars Mariupol regiment (1916) [8, p. 310–311] facilitated the discovery of a fake sanguine drawing that appeared in the antiquarian market. In the course of analysis, it was possible to establish the name of the depicted officer using the group photo of this regiment officers from 1916. The next stage of research required Polish literary sources that included photos of colonel Yanush Bokschanin from the Polish army. Identification of his appearance with the appearance of the lieutenant from Shukhayev's drawing confirmed the name of the depicted man, while documents from the Russian State Military and Historical Archive enabled to confirm details of his biography before 1918 or before his move to serve in Polish army [9, pp. 103, 104, 115].

Photographic images also played significant role in the research of Shukhayev's painting *V Overni* (1929, canvas, tempera. 78 x 60. Private collection). [10, p. 74–75, lot 24] At the back of this painting, on the canvas stretcher, there are two exhibition stickers: the first one from *Vsekokhudozhnik* with the missing inscription that stated that this painting was exhibited in Moscow and in Leningrad at a solo exhibition of Vasiliy Shukhayev in 1936; the second one with the name *V Overni*, which was exhibited in 1958 at the artist's exhibition in the exhibition hall of the Union of Soviet Artists. Nevertheless, this artwork wasn't included into the exhibition catalogue published in 1936. We also don't have exhibition photos of this painting.

Instead, the photographic images of Moscow exhibition [4, p. 76] helped to discover a landscape that was compositionally close to *V Overni* in one of the photos. It was exactly this landscape that was discovered in one departments of State Russian Museum in Shukhayev's Fund as an individual photo. (F. 154. Op. 1. Item 182. L. 16) On the backside of the photo there is an inscription made by the hand of Vera Fyodorovna stating the name of the painting, *Korsika*, and its date (1930), as well as material, technique and size: canvas, tempera, 59 x 78 cm and its location (Kornilov's collection in Leningrad). A similar description, excluding the fact that this painting belonged to a Leningrad resident P.E. Kornilov, was provided in the exhibition catalogue in 1936. [11, p. 14]

Comparing photographic image of *Korsika* with *V Overni* demonstrated their similarities and differences or to be precise – similarity of their sizes and their general composition. It has been established that there are the same trees, their trunks and branches, as well as a hilly location and residential buildings on the side of the hill are in the same places at the both canvases. The differences are in landscapes painted in the distance (to the right, on the horizon line), in the presence of a figure of a peasant walking down the hill slope and an ox that follows him, as well as the author's inscription "V. Shukhayev 1929" present only on the *V Overni* painting. On the horizon line in the

centre of this painting the viewer can see a knot of trees and the silhouette of an half-ruined castle that resembles medieval Malt Gilbert castle located in the mountainous area of central France, in the Auvergne district, which, in a way, gives a name to the painting that, unlike pure landscape in *Korsika*, has a scenic character.

The depiction of the mountain in the distance in *Korsika* landscape, to the right of the centre, resembles the skyline of a famous Corsican archipelago des Sanguinaires with its well-known lighthouse that gives name to this painting.

The author's inscription on the front of the painting was made in Russian, which implies that Shukhayev painted it not in France but at home after he came back, where he signed his works only in French.

Hence, photographic images of *Korsika* painting and its presence in the catalogue of Shukhayev's solo exhibition in 1936 prove that this work was shown during that exhibition. Despite the sticker from 1936 exhibition, *V Overni* painting wasn't shown at this Moscow exhibition. The photos from Leningrad exhibition also don't include this painting. However, taking into consideration similar sizes of both paintings, it quite probable that the author could have taken the frame from *Korsika* landscape (with the sticker) and used it for the *V Overni* painting.

Through many years none of these paintings was listed anywhere. After his arrest in 1937, Shukhayev spent ten years in exile in Kolyma and only in 1947 settled down in Georgia. In 1954 with the support of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic Union of Artists he prepared his first personal exhibition in 18 years and showed *V Overni* painting for the first time. This fact was recorded in the typewritten list of art works published by E.N. Kamenskaya called "Personal Exhibition of Artist V.I. Shukhayev in 1954" [12, p. 282; no. 11]. The next exhibition, where *V Overni* painting was shown, was a large-scale exhibition of V.I. Shukhayev's works in Moscow in the exhibition hall of the USSR Union of Artists in 1958. There is proof in the exhibition catalogue [13, p. 8] and the second sticker on the canvas stretcher also proves it. The painting was shown at the subsequent personal exhibition of Shukhayev in Tbilisi (1962) and in Leningrad (1962–1963 и 1968). Kulakov family must have purchased it from the last exhibition, because they were listed as the owners in the "List of Shukhhayev's Main Artworks" compiled by I.G. Myamlin [14, p. 150]. The next owner of *V Overni* painting was a famous Leningrad collector A.F. Chudnovsky [15, p. 56–57, lot 46], while now this work belongs to the other owner.

*Korsika* landscape was purchased by Leningrad art historian and collector P.E. Kornilov in the 1960s [14, p. 150]. As his property, that painting was shown at Shukhayev's exhibition in Leningrad in 1968. At the next exhibition in Moscow (1977) the landscape

was presented as the artwork from Arkhangelsk Regional Museum of Fine Arts acquired from Kornilov.

It is important to stress that there are some photos of Shukhayev's landscapes from his personal ex-archive that are signed *Korsika* by Vera Fyodorovna's hand, which imply the name of the place depicted on the photo, as well as the name of the painting. We don't often come across the name *Korsika* in catalogues from Shukhayev exhibitions. At the same time, we can take a closer look at landscape titled *Pod Dozhdyom* (canvas, tempera, 60,5 x 78,5) dated 1914 with a question mark from the State Russian Museum collection [16, p. 211, no. 1180].

There is a photo of this painting in Shukhayev Fund in the Manuscript Department of State Russian Museum (F. 154. Op. 1. No. 182. I.11) with an inscription made by the hand of aging Vera Fyodorovna. It includes the name of the region depicted on the painting: France, even though there are names of Corsica and Tsikhischkhvari that were crossed out but the date 1930 inscribed on the photo makes it impossible to place it in Georgia. Vera Fyodorovna also wrote down the name of the owner – Elena Ivanovna Khuchua, a long-time friend of Shukhayev family. However, if we are to believe the catalogue, the Russian Museum purchased this painting from a different owner in 1977 [16, p. 211, No. 1180], notably, with a random name and date. The photo of this artwork, the inscription made by the artist's wife on the back of the photo and, especially, a certain similarity in style and images with his other Corsican landscapes from 1930, can become the grounds for the new attribution of this landscape.

## 4. Conclusions

These examples are just a tiny part of multiple ways in which photographic images can be used as a tool of assessment and artwork attribution.

## References

- [1] Yakovleva, Y. P. (2012). Rol' i Znachenije Fotografii v Voprosakh Ekspertizy i Atributsii Proizvedeniy Izobrazitel'nogo Iskusstva. In *Conference Proceedings Fotografija, kino, video: voprosy istorii, teorii i pedagogiki, Sankt-Peterburg, Russia*. Saint-Petersburg: NOU Ekspress, pp. 107–113.
- [2] Yakovleva, Y. P. (2005). Propavshije polotna Vasiliya Shukhayeva. *Antik-Respekt*, issue 5, pp. 32–36.



- [3] Yakovleva, Y. P. (Ed.). (2015). *Vasiliy Shukhayev (1887–1973). Retrospektiva: Katalog vystavki*. Moscow: Moskovskiy Muzei Sovremennogo Iskusstva.
- [4] Yudina, T. (2017). Vystavki “Vsekokhudozhnika”. Arkhivnyye materialy biblioteki MSKH. Vasiliy Ivanovich Shukhayev. 1936. Otkrytiye i ekspozitsiya vystavki v Moskve v zalakh “Vsekokhudozhnika” na Kuznetskom, 11. *Antikvarnyy mir*, issue 1, pp. 56–77.
- [5] Yakovleva, Y. P. (1987). “Eto bylo schastliveysheye vremya...”. A. Ye. Yakovlev, V. I. Shukhayev i V. E. Meyerkhof’d. K istorii sozdaniya dvoynogo avtoportreta A. Yakovleva i V. Shukhayeva. *Arlekin i Piero. Neva*, issue 8, pp. 171–176.
- [6] Sotheby’s. (2019). Russian pictures. Auction in London, 4 June 2019. Sale L19112 10.30 AM, p.160. London.
- [7] Exposition Alexandre Iacovleff et Vassili Choukhaeff du 15 novembre au 1<sup>er</sup> decembre. Galerie Barbazanges (1921), p.6. Paris.
- [8] Gogolitsyn, Yu. (Ed). (2013). *Russkoye iskusstvo kontsa XIX – serediny XX veka. Zhivopis’. Grafika. Al’bom-katalog izbrannykh rabot galerei iskusstv KGallery*. Saint-Petersburg: KGallery.
- [9] Yakovleva, Y. P. (2019) O kartine V. I. Shukhayeva Polk na pozitsiyakh i portretakh ofitserov 4-go gusarskogo Mariupol’skogo polka. In *Vasiliy Shukhayev: iskusstvo, sud’ba, naslediyе*. Moscow: BuksMArt, pp. 100–121.
- [10] MacDougall’s. (2019). Important Russian Art Auction. Auction Wednesday 5 June 2019, p. 303. London.
- [11] Shukhayev, V. I. (1936). *Vystavki v Moskve i Leningrade*. Moscow: VAKH.
- [12] Kamenskaya, Y. N. (2019). O pervoy vystavke V. I. Shukhayeva v Tbilisi (1954). In *Vasiliy SHukhayev: iskusstvo, sud’ba, naslediyе*. Moscow: BuksMArt, pp. 279–295.
- [13] (1958). *Katalog vystavki proizvedeniy Vasiliya Ivanovicha Shukhayeva*. Moscow: Soyuz khudozhnikov SSSR, Soyuz khudozhnikov Gruzinskoy SSR.
- [14] Myamlin, I. G. (1972). *Vasiliy Ivanovich Shukhayev*. Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR.
- [15] Sotheby’s. (2016) Russian pictures. Auction in London 7 June 2016. London.
- [16] Bolshakova N., et al (Eds) (2015). *Russkiy muzey predstavlyayet: Zhivopis’ pervoy poloviny XX veka (S–YA) Al’manakh, iss. 463*. Saint-Petersburg: Palace Editions.