

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

“THE ADVENTURE OF THE XXth CENTURY RUSSIAN PAINTING IN A SPANISH COLLECTION”

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In the preliminary text by Dolores Tomas I read heartfelt aswell as precise words that confirm the history and the coherence of the exhibited Collection, which offers us a complete general view, the living result of a superhuman effort that is today rewarded.

It is the enthusiastic conquest of an extraordinary patron and collector, though, to me, she is a patron to a greater degree, given her help and unconditional support to her artists. It is an achievement thanks only to the weapons of will, sensitivity and love towards beauty. She has been able to gather these works of so many painters, with whom, at the same time, she shared friendship, understanding and affection.

These spiritual incentives have been the cause and reason which explains the existence and the presence, among us, of this unusual Collection: unquestionable proof of the triumph of will over power and money. If this Collection is valuable itself, as far as its aesthetic and human content is concerned, the adventure of the one who has gathered it is not less attractive.

I must point out a second dimension in this Collection: the external history of its restoration, so directly lived by the one who brings us together. The pictures in these canvas are treated with colours of a poor material, and the same can be said about the bases that support them. The physical means are as scarce and fragile as rich is the emotional content of nostalgia, of suffering and gladness; and abundant aesthetic sensitivity. The artists' soul is reflected in their colours and brushstrokes.

Dolores Tomas searched for these works in the most far off villages of the huge territory of the Soviet Union. It was a silent and persistent deed, with a happy ending.

In Spain we are much acquainted with the Russian literature and music of the current century, especially those of us who studied in high school during the 40s and the 50s, nevertheless we have only known its painting and sculpture throughout ideological propaganda. Paradoxically, the fascist and communist tendencies possessed, as a common model, the imperative imposition of their respective ideas on artists.

On the one hand, the glories of the personalised elites; on the other, those of the triumphant people. This disconcerts the painters of our days, who proclaim the freedom of the spirit as the fundamental principle in their art.

In the democratic West the "isms" succeeded: first, impressionism, futurism, expressionism, cubism, as well as abstraction and so on. Communism hampered this increasing artistic inclination, despite the fact that there were prestigious abstract artists in early times.

In short, after the Revolution a new art is imposed. Painting would now become an instrument in the service of the people. The situation demanded intelligible pictures of the existential reality, of the events and ideals that were lived and felt. The realist figurative art is the most direct and useful one in order to transmit the achievements of the socialist program and its feelings and hopes to the people, after three centuries of injustice and suffering.

From the point of view of the West, this imposed aesthetics is opposed to freedom, creativity and imagination; but the situation in the Soviet Union is different from that of the rest of Western Europe. We must put ourselves in their place and live their circumstances to be able to understand the reasons that lead to all this. From their point of view, the "isms" mark the degeneration of art and they prefer to keep the dignity of paintings after the miseries of the war. They stick to beauty and classical values to express their feelings and passions.

According to what the critic Alois Reig said, aesthetical judgements must be made from the own historical perspective, taking into account the milieu, the time and the circumstances, in order to understand its raison

d'être. Following this fine, critical view of the aesthetic judgement, the greatness of the soviet realism of the XXth century achieves an unquestionable value. The life quality of authenticity is the highest value of art.

Art is guided in Russia, but full of noble intentions. Painting answers to the needs of the revolution; a mirror of its demands, proudly taking in all the emotional impetus of the common people.

Among the painters that are gathered here, some were sidelined due to their independence in relation with the officialist authority, but even these, witness of the experiences of their days, when painting the most everyday scenes, accept many ideological incentives imposed in the revolution. We hardly see conventional middle-class signs, considering that abstraction binds life's beats. Realism is asserted without falling into a brazen and degrading naturalism. Beauty and the classical antiquity are unbreakable bases.

Those who are not acquainted with the Russian art of the beginning of the century will be surprised by the paradoxical antinomies that it contains. Lenin, concerning the aesthetic field, invites the artists to take beauty as an aim in their works:

It is silly to worship what is new only because it is. An intelligent sentence that many of our artists should remember. This agrees with what I have said on many occasions, ignoring the maxim of the Russian politician: If you want to be modern, read the classicals. For the westerners, the Soviet Union painting is like that of the nineteenth century, contemptuous terms for the partisans of the abstract trends. The latter forget the century of petrified life carried in the former trend. Paradoxically, a new social order retains models of the past, though, of course, with a different political content.

In this Collection there are no huge paintings enhancing the fights of the revolution and its epic during the two wars, but they are present in their exquisite small models. The size, we must insist, is not an obstacle to avoid the transmission of the patriotic phatos of the warlike epics in the history of painting. The rebel painters assembled here also maintain these aesthetic ideals. We identify these positive values in the different genres that are, fortunately," generously represented in this Collection.

The history of this nation is represented with pictures of its daily life, transmitting us ethical principles along with tenderness, the drama of the war and the hopeful joy of the new life. Humanism, beauty, patriotism and dignity are inherent values in the Russian people, together with a sort of out-of-date and poetic romanticism, forgotten by the West.

History and Composition

We already mentioned the variety of modalities in the paintings belonging to this Collection, that summarizes all the XXth century trends. The victory of socialism and the two wars fought on Russian land are dominant subjects, chants to the country and its heroes. Being the latter not only the soldiers, from a traditional point of view, but also, and enhanced to the same degree, the workers and the peasants. Never had the ordinary work of the common people been valued in painting. The people is the main character in history. This is strongly present in the canvas. The mentioned patriotic feeling is reflected with: Danilichev, Litvinski (fine painter of battles), Striguin and Martynov, assembled on this occasion.

Still life

Still life and flowers, a successful genre during these decades, became considerably popular in the Soviet society, with symbolic and expressive connotations that leave it bordering on precubism and expressionism in the last decades. In most of these works a truthful and realistic background dominates, being essential in the aesthetics of Russian art, where flowers are reproduced with a lavishness of volume and rhythm, and rich colours. Certain critics, fascinated by their realism, as in Konchalovski's "Lilacs", talk about them giving off their scent. Concerning objects, their essence is caught with a surprising skill. We find great examples of this genre in Velichko, Preobrazemski and Buj; where the shapes and lively colours of some of them coexist with the delicacy and exquisiteness of the others.

Portrait

The portrait is commonly considered as the inborn motivation of man to perpetuate himself. There is a certain vanity in this. The glorification of the

ego is a fact in the human species. The portraits in "Russia, XXth century" are numerous and varied, but different from those of the West as far as their content is concerned.

The portrait is now the mirror of a new society. I have always admired the feeling of gratitude of the Russian people towards the men and the women who gave something of themselves to the collectivity; making the image of their great men eternal thanks to a popular initiative, like the Roman Empire did. The nature of these portraits is evident proof of our statement. Despite the servile dependence on reality that this genre demands, more than any other, its aesthetic feeling adopts a different course from that of the West.

The excellence that is appreciated in the new men is based on the hard work in the fields, in the factory, in the scientific research and in the war, whose painful trace is not hidden. If we had to define this portrait with one word, it would be character. A portrait that opposes to everything that humiliates man. There is dignity and trust, psychological deepness, strength and contained spirituality. In the portraits of humble people, Humanity and internal beauty. They all aim to raise man's dignity. We will never see affectation or vulgarity. From the plastic point of view, sobriety is imposed as a fundamental aesthetic value. The dramatic references to the war leave their stamp on all of them.

We also find collective portraits in the working scene, at school and in homes, with a background of ethical values, both felt and practised. We see children fervently devoted to study: they are the little heroes of the future.

To sum up, the portraits take up the soul of the worker in the mines, of the artists and of the scientists again; together with their working instruments, as signs of their dignity that speak for themselves. Sometimes absorbed with them, indifferent to the imaginary spectator. We find these testimonies in the portraits belonging to Sokolov, Litvinsk, Zajarkin, Chemikova and in Chervonenko's collective portraits.

Genre and Society

This is the most abundant work, gathered in this Collection and corresponding to the idea of Genre and society painting, true

document of the everyday life of the Russian people of this century. No other country has reflected its existence with such a convincing truthfulness and realism. They had no contact with the outside world, and this explains the authenticity and purity of its privacy. The external traces are but the exception. A certain amount of social criticism is observed in some artists, disillusioned about the oligarchic power that, as we stated before, gagged many free spirits among the elite of the Russian painters who, fortunately, have their testimony here, in this Collection.

The spectator has the chance to enter the privacy of the Russian people, in a century that is rich in all sorts of adventures. Feelings and attitudes are revealed thanks to these artists, who take the reality of existence as a main aspiration in their art. The beauty of ordinary things is promoted with the same dignity that historical painting possesses. It is about the activity of workers and peasants, of scientists, of their parties, as well as their scenes of war and post-war.

One is overcome with emotion before the suffering of civilians and soldiers. The content of humanity becomes the most important element in all the genre painting. Sometimes the account of facts is full of poetry and romanticism, a feeling that the West considered finished in those days. But the Russian painters cling to life with all the consequences, despite its misfortunes, hating abstraction for it denies it.

Quite often, the characters and scenes appear in close contact with nature. In fact, they are united with nature, to such an extent that it is difficult to separate the genre paintings from the landscape; catching snaps with a surprising facility. There is freshness and authenticity in these paintings.

Few artists are as identified with their milieu and their motherland as the masters represented in this exhibition. Few have left so much of themselves in their works. This is a proving example of the spirit's power over technique in a surprising degree of desire to better oneself.

We have already dealt with the poverty of materials, but this is more than compensated by the beauty of the models, the perfect composition, the harmonious drawing and the virtuosity; together with the dignification of work and a deep and sensitive humanism. Let us not forget that many of the artists whose works are gathered here have witnessed the history of

their country and have been able to make the ordinary things in their lives epic: Borodin, Stroyev, Litvinski, Danilichev, Zajarkin, Skuridin, Chervonenko, Chernikova and Patrin, have given proof of this, I can not help due to the closeness of so many of our things, seeing, in Striguin's light, something of Sorolla, and in his elegance and refinement, something of Casas.

Landscape

The fascination of landscape, that is an unlimited vision of the universe, the ground we walk on and the immensity of the sky, was an inexhaustible source of glorious inspiration for Russian painters.

Despite the fact that this land has been battered so many times, the signs of patriotic feelings are exposed to the spectator's eyes.

Unforgettable, their landscapes of vast steppes, luxuriant woods that sometimes become crystal fantasies under the frost, mountains and valleys colourfull springs, warm beaches and simple villages. Astoundingly beautiful dusks and dawns cover the rich wheat and sunflower fields, represented in all their living beauty.

The ground of these landscapes seems to be full of life as it takes the sap of rain in its bowels and the roots of the trees of the woods sometimes presage similar visions in the content of feelings. We find scenes of peasants carrying shafts and farming objects in their hands, together with flags of their country; or even landscapes that are broken by the intrusion of urban and industrial buildings, creating beauty even in the devastating action of man on nature.

The vision of huge, almost cosmic views is obtained by these painters with rare greatness. The mountains fade in the blue immensity of the sky. Many of these landscapes possess an overwhelming spirituality that connects them with the purest expressionism. Sometimes desolation reaches a poetical level and a passionate romanticism.

Also in landscapes, the Russian painters assert the values of life with as much passion as in their historical and genre paintings: Borodin, Stroyev, Suetin, Sogomonian, Nefiodova, Zhuk, Fomkin, Danilichev, Martynov, Ivanovski, Glazunov, Leonov, Sushenok... make up the gallery

of the best painters of the XXth century, many of which compete, because of their light effects, with the most famous impressionists of the last century.

This Collection covers an exiting and exceptional period of de Rusian painting. Its presence in Spain, thanks to the will and effort of a single woman, conscious of the value of this half-forgotten, moment of its painting, is a deed that we already ppointed out at the beginning of this presentacion.