

# SOVIET IMPRESSIONISM



**P. VECHKANOV** DEDICATION II TO THE VOLUNTEERS OF WORLD WAR II  
2003 Oil on canvas 50 x 50cm

£5.00

Impressionism in the USSR after the Second World War  
27th October – 1st December 2005



**B. PASTUKOV** SEATED LADY 1935 Oil on canvas 54 x 45cm

# SOVIET IMPRESSIONISM

## A B O U T   T H E   G A L L E R Y

*The Chambers Gallery* was launched in October 2004 and has held several exhibitions of Russian art.

The Gallery, located in the City of London just minutes from the Barbican Station, is housed in a renovated art deco building in 23 Long Lane, EC1 (adjacent to the Chambers and Partners publishing house).

Exhibitions include painting and sculpture, with an emphasis on 20th Century figurative painting.

Opening hours are: Mon-Fri 10-6; Saturdays by appointment.

For further information please contact Evgenia Georgiadis at:

[EvgeniaG@chambersandpartners.co.uk](mailto:EvgeniaG@chambersandpartners.co.uk)

Tel: 0207 778 1600



**S.A. GRIGORYEV** A BOY WITH CHARACTER 1982 Oil on canvas 100 x 70cm



## Impressionism in the USSR after the Second World War

For many years, Soviet art – heroic peasants and triumphant Red Army soldiers – was dismissed in the West. It was seen as political, dull, and – after the rise of abstract expressionism – too representational. Now, with the demise of the Soviet Union, we see things differently. Socialist Realism is appreciated on its merits. Soviet Impressionism, too, is taken seriously. Bold, beautiful and arresting, it stands as testimony to the range and vitality of Soviet art.

To judge this art by Western aesthetics would be to miss its point. It should be seen, rather, against the cultural ideals of the USSR. With such an exceptional background, the Soviet version of Impressionism inevitably developed its distinctive character.

The paintings in this exhibition, spanning seven decades, are powerful examples of this unique twentieth century artistic phenomenon – valuable in terms of their historical significance and their undeniable aesthetic quality.

Soviet Impressionism, often assumed to be a post-Stalinist movement, can actually be traced back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century when works in the Impressionist style emerged as an alternative to Petersburg academicism. Whilst official academic art was elitist and stilted, Impressionist painting was colourful and dynamic, capturing the essence of the Russian folk spirit. It became fashionable with art connoisseurs before the October Revolution, and would fetch high prices. Artists like Malyavin, Korovin and some members of the *Jack of*

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*Diamonds* group – Konchalovskiy and Mashkov, for example, – were particularly successful and, although much was to change after the revolution, their art laid the foundations for later Soviet Impressionism.

With the rise of Stalinism in the 1930s came the rejection of much pre-revolutionary art. Avant-garde movements such as Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism and Constructivism were condemned. Art would now be more accessible to the masses and devoted to the goal of achieving communism. It would be ‘realist in form’ and ‘socialist in content’.

One might ask how Russian Impressionism fared in this political and artistic climate. Although never vilified to the same extent as the definitively avant-garde movements, Impressionism was seen as too individualistic and politically neutral to have any relevance to the struggle for socialism. Some artists did continue to paint in an Impressionist manner, but they were perceived as a bourgeois artistic minority – tolerated but never accepted.

The earliest pieces in this exhibition – Pastukov’s *Seated Lady* (inside front cover) and *Self Portrait* (opposite) (both 1935) – are excellent examples of Soviet Impressionism before the Second World War. The artist was obviously a passionate follower of the pre-revolution ‘Jack of Diamonds’ group. The free brush strokes, bright colours and flickering light of *Seated Lady* provide a refreshing alternative to the naturalism of much Soviet Realist art. However, in this period, paintings like this were the exception and not the rule. Indeed, there is only one painting in the exhibition from the 1940s – Bezchastnov’s *Villa Near Odessa* (page 6).



**B. PASTUKOV** SELF PORTRAIT 1935 *Oil on canvas 64 x 49cm*

It was in the 1950s, especially after Stalin's death in 1953, that Impressionist influences began to return in full force. Soviet artists gained more freedom to develop their own personal styles. Although the subjects depicted were often in keeping with the Socialist Realist ethos, they were now given a more Impressionistic treatment. Works like



**BEZCHASTNOV** VILLA NEAR ODESSA 1940s Oil on board 31 x 25cm

Serbutovsky's *The Dairymaid* (1957) (page 9), Luchenko's *The Watermill* (opposite) and Popov's *Reading to My Brother* (1954) (page 8) represent this tendency. *The Dairymaid*, for instance, is a typical image of the Soviet hero-farmer, a painting celebrating the common worker. Yet it is not the static. Serbotovsky paints with broad, free





**LUCHENKO THE WATERMILL** b.1914 Oil on canvas 78 x 62cm

brush strokes and the warm sunshine lends the piece an immediate appeal.

We must distinguish this Russian Impressionism from its French counterpart. Works like *The Dairymaid* have little in common with, say, the art of Monet or Renoir. French Impressionists based their art on fleeting visual



**I. POPOV** READING TO MY BROTHER 1954 Oil on board 30 x 23cm



**A. A. SERBUTOVSKY THE DAIRYMAID 1957 Oil on canvas 63 x 57cm**

sensations, on the transitory effects of light and shadow. By contrast, Soviet artists painted works that were decidedly more vigorous and robust. Their images, in general, are more solid and tangible. Moreover, their art was based on different principles. The term ‘Working Class Impressionism’ is often applied to the Soviet style. These were paintings to capture the hearts of the masses.

By the 1960s the Communist Party began to soften its control over the cultural life of the state. Artists were free to move further away from Socialist Realism and to develop



V. ALTANIETZ LAKE 1971 Oil on board 45 x 35cm

their own individual styles. When we compare Altanietz's *Lake* (1971) (above) and *Evening* (1982) (opposite) with Mokrozhitsky's *Seaborne in the Crimea* (1984) (page 12), for instance, we see the extraordinary variety within the Russian art scene. Altanietz's works are reminiscent of a Post-Impressionist style, with the picture plane flattened in the manner of Gauguin or Cezanne and the brush strokes barely visible. Mokrozhitsky's piece, in contrast, shows a far more Impressionistic treatment, with light, lively brush strokes and a subdued colouring far from the bright yellows and red of Altanietz's paintings.



French Impressionism was essentially bourgeois;  
Soviet Impressionism proletarian



**V. ALTANIETZ** EVENING 1982 Oil on board 30 x 35cm

Works like Lomykin’s *Odessa Station House* (1975) (page 13) – light, colourful and close to the style of French Impressionism – are shown here alongside works displaying a more traditional fusion of Impressionism and Soviet Realism. Anokhin’s *Logs on the River* (page 13), for instance, Yaravoi’s *Feeding the Chickens* (1966) (page 24), and Senekevich’s *Sunday Evening in Village* (1966), typify “Socialist Realism with an Impressionist bent.”

The 1990s was a period of unprecedented creativity and experiment on the Russian art scene. The popularity of Russian Impressionist art abroad encouraged artists of the



**W. MOKROZHITSKY SEABORNE IN THE CRIMEA** 1984 Oil on board 30 x 46cm

older generation whilst also stimulating the growth of new artistic talent. The outstanding paintings of Vechkanov – *Couple* (2000) (page 15), *Dedication* (2003) (front cover) and *Friends II* (1999) (page 14), for instance – would have been inconceivable in the Stalinist era. Their unusual style and dramatic compositions lend these paintings an arresting quality. The thick impasto of their surfaces is far from the light touch of earlier Russian Impressionism. Kuznetsov’s *Hot Summer’s Day* (1998) (page 18) is a further example of the diversity and vitality of the Russian art scene at the turn of this century. Once again, the painting is neither typically Impressionist nor Socialist Realist. What we see is the emergence of the artist’s own personal temperament and distinctive style.



**K. LOMYKIN** ODESSA STATION HOUSE 1975 Oil on board 50 x 69.5cm



**Y. ANOKHIN** LOGS ON THE RIVER 1927-1977 Oil on board 33 x 49cm



**P. VECHKANOV** FRIENDS II 2000 *Oil on canvas* 70 x 50cm

The view that Soviet artists were robots working in a mechanical fashion, producing overtly political paintings in a tediously academic style, is thus confounded. Indeed, it is difficult to make generalisations about the nature of





**P. VECHKANOV** COUPLE 2000 Oil on canvas 67 x 50cm

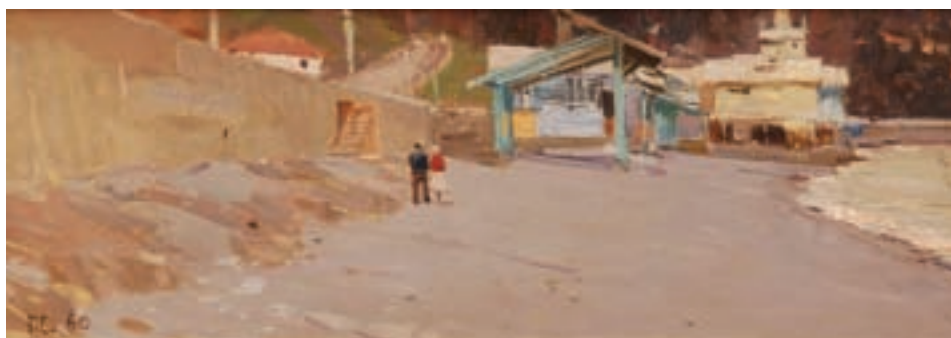


**I. GVOZDA NUDE** 1999 *Oil on canvas* 35 x 40cm

Soviet Impressionism. What emerges from this exhibition is not the image of a cohesive style or movement but rather of an art marked by diversity and originality, by the distinctive sensibility of the individual artist. Perhaps the only generalisation we can make concerns the vitality and significance of Russian Impressionism. This is an optimistic art of joyful spirit, offering another view, another insight, into the turbulent life of the Russian people.



**BULINSKAYA** AT THE MARKET 1963 Oil on board 50 x 70cm



**P. STOLYARENKO** ON GURZUF BEACH, CRIMEA 1960 Oil on board 25 x 70cm





**E. KUZNETZOV** HOT SUMMER DAY 1998 Oil on canvas 95 x 100cm





**V. LITVINIENKO**  
**AUTUMN IN ODESSA**  
1958 *Oil on canvas*  
71 x 81.5cm



**V. LITVINIENKO**  
**TEEMCOVE** 1988 *Oil*  
*on canvas* 52 x 68cm



**V. I. MAKATUKHA**

**IN A GARDEN**

1950s

*Oil on board*

33 x 48cm



**SHILOV**

**STILL LIFE**

1995

*Oil on canvas*

57.5 x 45.5cm



**V. ZAICHENKO** BLACK SEA b.1912-1980s Oil on board 15 x 35cm



**V. ANOKHIN** AFTER THE RAIN 1990 Oil on board 33 x 43cm



**V. ALTANIETZ** MORNING 1977 Oil on board 29 x 36cm



**V. ALTANIETZ** MORNING MIST 1970s Oil on board 29.5 x 34.5cm





**STOLYARENKO** YALTA STREET (CRIMEA), BLOSSOMING PLUM TREE 1963  
Oil on board 49 x 69cm



**O. VOLOSHINOV** SAILING BOATS 1976 Oil on canvas 85 x 85cm



**SYSOLATIN** **SPRING THAW** b.1936 *Oil on board* 52 x 120cm



**S. YARAVOI** **FEEDING THE CHICKENS** *Oil on canvas* 71 x 75cm



**V. BEREGOV** ALLEY 2000 *Tempura and Pastel on card* 44.5 x 60.5cm



THE  
CHAMBERS  
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**RUMYANTSEV** WOMAN WITH WASHING 1962 *Oil on canvas* 106 x 114cm

The Chambers Gallery

23 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HL

Tel: 0207 778 1600

[www.thechambersgallery.co.uk](http://www.thechambersgallery.co.uk)

