

Introduction

I have passed through all that the West can offer at the present time, and all that my country has assimilated from the West. I now shake the dust from my feet and distance myself from the West.¹

On 30 September 1913, Natal'ia Goncharova's mammoth one-person exhibition opened in Moscow with nearly eight hundred works on display, accompanied by a catalogue that proclaimed a shift in her orientation from West to East. The exhibition of such a body of work was a major coup for any artist in 1913 – but especially for a woman representing Moscow's most radical avant-garde faction. Moreover, her claim (cited above) was provocative in the extreme; Goncharova could count on most viewers to react with surprise. All parties, critics, and the public understood that although she might declare West European modernism “outlived,” the exhibition proved beyond all doubt that she spoke as one its key exponents.

One must approach Goncharova's statements cautiously and with as much irony as the artist herself indicated readers should. Recent research on the collective production of the preface has revealed that it was coauthored by her friend, Il'ia Zdanevich, based on a draft written in Goncharova's own hand.² Although the statement served to introduce viewers to her oeuvre, it also retrospectively linked Goncharova with her Muscovite colleagues in a shared and highly polemical revision of Russian modernism. In presenting her work to the public on such a massive scale, Goncharova and her colleagues gained a rare opportunity to neutralize – even reverse – the critical prejudice that cast Russian art as a failed mimesis of Western (French) modernism. No longer exclusively focused on participating in the Parisian art world, they addressed their audiences from a newly empowered cultural sphere, more Eastern than Western. Written in the spring of 1913 in the wake of two exhibitions, the Donkey's Tail and Target, which she dominated, Goncharova's Preface claims that Russia's cultural plurality makes its art truly avant-garde: a challenge from Europe's eastern periphery to its center. These professions of cultural identity, and the practices that underpin them, defined Russian modernism at a pivotal

moment – between the revolution of 1905 and the First World War – that is reconstructed and critically examined in this book.

This broader view of the avant-garde's “turn to the East” grew from my study of Goncharova's Russian career, as I sought to make sense of her progression from student to avant-garde spokesperson. I became intrigued by her frequent shifts in style and wondered what connected this constant feature of her art to the debates and exhibitions in which she participated. The critical literature and other records of the activities of the Donkey's Tail group in Moscow during this period clearly indicate that Natal'ia Goncharova's life and work were perceived as providing retrospective coherence to the shifts in avant-garde positions between the revolution of 1905 and the advent of the war. Her paintings, and not Larionov's (nor Kazimir Malevich's), were promoted and received in exhibitions and public debates as the quintessence of “left” avant-garde provocation. It was she who articulated most eloquently the search for a national tradition and first sought to identify difference from the West as a significant factor in her work. Larionov's organization of exhibitions and publishing of manifestos from the Donkey's Tail to No. 4, as well as his promotion of the movement neoprimitivism (*neoprimitivizm*), responded to and recapitulated her progression as an artist. Everythingism (*vsechestvo*), theorized by Larionov and Il'ia Zdanevich in 1913, was likewise based on their retrospective appreciation of her eclectic oeuvre.

Goncharova's tremendous output and conspicuous status as Larionov's colleague and consort (it was he who principally promoted her work) put her on the modernist map before 1913. But this book proposes that it was her approach to creative work – her view of artistic agency – that turned new painting into a radically revisionist cultural project. In Moscow and St. Petersburg her practices seemed to gain significance and sophistication in inverse proportion to her adherence to the imperatives of modernist art history established in the West. The promotion of Goncharova's turn to the East, of neoprimitivism and *vsechestvo* as historical movements, countered the

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image of the European master artist, author of a singular style, with a complex feminine creative persona, who openly appropriates and seeks to perpetuate plural traditions. Goncharova's elusiveness as author, and particularly her celebration of the East, cast doubt on the homogeneity of modernist discourse at a critical moment in its Russian formation.³ The paradox implicit for Western viewers and readers in such a proposition – that a radical form of avant-garde praxis may not lead directly to a canonical modernist oeuvre – accounts at least in part for recent historical neglect of Goncharova's career. She has been represented as an “amazon of the avant-garde” any number of times, but today we appreciate her contribution to Russian modernism still less than viewers of her retrospective did in 1913.⁴ A pioneer of abstract painting, rayism (*luchizm*) was only one, and perhaps not the most important, of her identities.

In gaining visibility, Goncharova represented avant-garde difference along two axes: those of gender and of cultural voice. As the focus of “new” Eastern-oriented, Muscovite painting (and conspicuously female), she became a lightning rod for critics, reviled as the antichrist – *antiartist* (*anti-khudozhnik*).⁵ In 1914, her art and its reception dominated critical review in the Russian art world but would be eclipsed by war and overwhelmed by Malevich's invention of suprematism within the course of a year. The self-conscious mediation of traditions East and West that she presented to Russian viewers, whatever their cultural inclination, finally was rendered irrelevant – or at least seriously compromised – by her emigration to France. Having appropriated individual Western and period styles with particular purpose, she herself became transformed into something other than the preeminent artist *provocatrice*; “after Russia” she became, almost by default, the purveyor of Russian orientalia for Sergei Diaghilev's *Saisons Russes*.⁶

Goncharova's course might be understood as subversively antimodernist or even postmodernist (where the progressive unfolding of Malevich's oeuvre stands as modernist paragon). Her momentary prominence, however, presents other interpretive possibilities: that the priorities of modernism were openly disputed and realized through dialogue or interchange among national and within local urban cultures. She argued, then, that the authority critics granted to individual styles was a symptom of the era, an ahistorical (*a priori*)

affirmation of one among many strands of modernism. Thus, I take the ambiguity of Goncharova's authorship, no less than her dual cultural orientation, as exemplifying a long-observed but little-explored dilemma within Russian avant-garde circles in the late imperial era. She, more than most of her colleagues in Moscow, deliberately rejected – while still invoking – Western art historical paradigms. By 1913, Goncharova strongly opposed the emerging narrative of originality and individual style as “the hidebound of holies” in contemporary art criticism. In the texts she produced that year, she sought to distance herself from artists whose work seemed to presage or confirm a modernist canon – the Jack of Diamonds painters (also based in Moscow). Yet with her disengagement from this group, Goncharova was perceived as epitomizing the aspirations (and deficiencies) of “new Russian painting.” Such staged disagreements within avant-garde groupings polarized the urban art world and challenged the authority of its institutions with plural and sometimes contradictory versions of its own recent history. This tension lies at the heart of Goncharova's early success and, I argue, it is a condition of Russian avant-garde praxis that cannot be explained through any single methodological paradigm.

Following Goncharova's cues, we are advised to suspend our belief in the particular master narrative for modernism writers had established for new painting in Paris. The turns in her career are both stunning and confusing – and, I believe, crucial for understanding developments in Russian art before and after the revolutions of 1917. Her career forever reminds us that the faith we have (as early twenty-first-century viewers) in the trajectory of modernist painting – a canon before it has been recognized as fully and diversely expressed – was by no means secure in the Moscow of 1913. This is a difficult leap, for Goncharova does not supply us with the usual reinforcement. The visual pleasure we receive in following Picasso and Braque's hot pursuit of each other is not indulged by a close study of Goncharova's work in relation to that of her colleagues. Looking at individual paintings, we frequently cannot fix the moment at which we have entered her oeuvre. Rather, we are forced to acknowledge her repetitiousness, her mastery of diverse media, styles, and traditions, and the role played by ornament and the copy in the creation of her monumental and remarkably prolific oeuvre. We may have accepted modernism as a

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historicist gambit, but rarely have we pulled back the layers to reveal the battles waged between competing and *plural* practices in artistic communities outside Paris.

Like her Muscovite colleagues, Goncharova adopted not one but several models of creative practice within a short period of time (1910–1914). Some paintings signal her commitment to recent Western European art as a venture parallel to her own; she quotes the individual styles of major modernists and therefore seems to validate their work as an historical precedent. But the same images also derive from a practice and theory of copying that perpetuated the Byzantine tradition in Russia. Fauvist, cubist, and futurist, Goncharova's work draws even more deliberately from the icon and broadsheet and their means of production. She worked from an historical perspective that was also self-consciously regional, concerned with locally relevant, if still disputed, cultural values. Ironically (and predictably), her emulation of diverse models created expectations for conformity to the development of a singular style, the laborious work toward "mastery" exemplified in the painting techniques of Cézanne, Matisse, and, increasingly, Picasso. Contemporary critics had difficulty identifying Goncharova's "essential 'I'" (as one critic phrased the problem) because her individual mark was not easily added to theirs – it was also distinctly part of another cultural tradition.

This book reexamines Goncharova's contribution in light of her different stake in modernist art history. She drew on the icon and broadsheet not as artifacts to be salvaged but as diverse realizations of artistic practice that *continued into the present*. The logic of Goncharova's oeuvre is revealed through her involvement with these media. Traditions based on the material identity of origin and copy gave another kind of historical legitimacy to the contemporary artist's assimilation of models from both East and West. If modernist paintings could be imagined as both original works and copies, as a function of their means of production, the value critics assigned to originality could be historicized, accepted as an idea or construct, and demystified as an essential condition of creativity. Goncharova did not participate in a history of modernism, or primitivism transcendent, a display of individual genius bracketed off from the contingencies of production. Appropriation in her oeuvre paradox-

ically imparts a sense of the artist engaged fully in re-presenting her connection to the concerns of her immediate social and aesthetic milieu. Conceived in a symbiosis between past and present, East and West, Goncharova's eclecticism so disrupted viewing habits as to require censorship, precisely when she began to enter art history through critical journalism and commercial gallery and museum presentations. In this respect, she clearly contributes to the history of modernist art as European and *avant-garde*; her ambitions must be distinguished from many of the non-Western models she emulated: icons, broadsheets, and the like.

If it does not follow that Goncharova shaped the Russian modernist canon in the manner of Malevich, she does, nevertheless, prepare us for the object-based work of the postrevolutionary era: both her paintings and texts were agitational. She anticipated and thereby sought to alter contemporary habits of viewing. Yet it is difficult to evaluate her success in this effort. Goncharova's polemical rhetoric, visual and verbal, won her limited but powerful support within the critical establishment. The many reviews of her exhibitions that connected issues of gender and national identity with questions of originality and individual style reveal that Goncharova was able to provoke serious responses to her work – and on her own terms. Criticism that focused on her rapid shifts in style, whether denouncing or celebrating the results, usually took into account her interest in merging the priorities of the monumental and decorative traditions in Russian art with those of Western easel painting.

It is true that these practices have not been served either by a market or a critical discourse to the extent that Goncharova and Larionov seemed to anticipate in 1913.⁷ In post-Cold War retrospect, it is easy to see how recent historical neglect of the prerevolutionary avant-garde may be linked to the reseparation of East and West along the divide of the "iron curtain." As Stephen Mansbach has observed, the specific conditions of modernism in East-Central Europe and Russia require a level of interest in national politics and cultural debates that has not characterized the foundational, formalist scholarship on modernism in the West – the terms in which Goncharova's art has always been underestimated.⁸ The early twentieth-century Russian intelligentsia's tendency to turn every cultural question into an opportunity to philosophize about Russia is itself part of the problem.⁹

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Russians engaged in such philosophical-cultural debates probably no more than did artists elsewhere. However, inasmuch as the French tradition was identified, by 1913, as the (universal) embodiment of high modernism, any project that pointed to sources and debates outside France would be measured as local, culturally specific, and derivative. Russian artists who returned to native traditions were more likely to be viewed as exotic, unconsciously perpetuating a national type *as defined and received in the West*. There are moments when the balance of cultural dominance appeared to have been reversed before the First World War. Apollinaire complained about the absence of public and critical interest in French contemporary painting by citing the success in 1914 of the Russian conquest of the Opéra; here it is Goncharova who embodies the universal aspirations of modernist painters everywhere.¹⁰ Goncharova's shifts in style and the pro-Asian rhetoric of her texts both responded to and aimed at reshaping European views of Russian difference (and French universality). By representing contemporary culture as a syncretism of traditions high and low, East and West, of the icon, broadsheet, and European easel painting, she renegotiated her position of address from *the other side* of a discourse on national identity and formal mastery that had long marginalized the Russian artist. At critical moments in her career, Goncharova managed her identity by recognizing and activating existing stereotypes, including that of Russia as Orient and the decorative as feminine. It is this strategy for reclaiming agency – and not the artist's signature style – that runs “like a red thread” throughout her work and gives narrative coherence to the multiple cultural forms present in her paintings and texts.¹¹

Orientalism

The Russian avant-garde's effort to counter West European hegemony in the visual arts reveals a pattern of assimilation and disavowal that is not easily accommodated by discourse theory, whether centered on the politics of representation in the tradition of Michel Foucault or that of orientalism formulated by Edward Said.¹² Particularly Said's book, in its neglect of empires that form the Eurasian perimeter, demonstrates why this remains true.¹³ Scholars of Russian literature and ethnography have argued that individual

authors shared the principal assumption of orientalist discourse by representing the Asian (and Caucasian) Other as an inverse and anxious projection of self and national identity. But as Geoffrey Hosking frequently reminds us, a homogenous, imagined identity and community of Russians was never secure among the intelligentsia, nor was it even among the bureaucrats who represented imperial institutions and their interests.¹⁴ Indeed, much of the scholarship published in the past few years emphasizes the fragmentation of and contradictions within national discourse throughout the period of Russian conquest within Asia and the Caucasus. Russian orientalism as expressed by the activities and writings of individual ethnographers, bureaucrats, and artists is defined by complex dialogues between authorized and personal discourse, individual and institutional aims. So, too, is any representation of orientalism as it might apply to the avant-garde generation. Coming of age during the Russo-Japanese and then the Balkan Wars, artists emphasized the mutability of identity as a function of political hegemony and the ambiguity of cultural boundaries. The location of the borderlands – the Orient itself – was by no means clear as Russians retreated in the Far East and reinforced their presence elsewhere. Moreover, the representation of Self as Asian Other remained, as it always had been, one possibility for projecting self-identity and agency, as Russians addressed Europeans from their location on Europe's eastern periphery.

Chapter 1 situates the Russian intelligentsia's orientation East and West within an orientalist context and introduces avant-garde texts that shift the terms of address within the discourse on national identity. Goncharova, Larionov, and Zdanevich reclaimed Russia's Eastern heritage at a time when nationalist rhetoric throughout Europe was strident. Their art and their statements resemble – indeed, they echo – many examples of West European primitivism (Gauguin) and orientalism (Matisse). These French artists were appreciated by the Russians for their apparent rejection of dominant narratives of cultural identity inculcated at the *École des Beaux Arts*. But Goncharova and her colleagues resisted the European primitivist's projection of a Self/Other dichotomy. Goncharova's art expresses her dual status as cultural emissary (mastering various contemporary Western styles) and as colonial subject whose

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primary goal is to oppose the cultural hegemony of the West.

Avant-garde arguments for the superiority of the East were influenced by European primitivism but are better understood in the context of orientalist movements in India and Japan, which allowed artists to strategically embrace certain elements of Western style in a contemporary renewal of precolonial practices.¹⁵ By the turn of the century, Russians had become quite familiar with their pre-Petrine (understood as non-Western) visual culture, primary examples of which were the stone statuette (*kamennaiia baba*), the icon (and fresco), and the broadsheet (*lubok*). But Goncharova and her colleagues also understood these traditions as sharing a common parentage in the East, together with arts of China, Japan, Persia, and India. Goncharova valued these traditions as distinctive expressions of the contemporary needs of their audiences. Russian art would reassert its place in world culture through the historical transmission of past values into the present – as a counterweight to the authority and prestige obtained by the Western tradition in Russia. This dual positioning, a polemical disavowal of one cultural origin in favor of another, produced two avant-garde strategies. Artists would borrow selectively from Western modernism to demonstrate difference within the local cultural environment while reasserting a cultural attachment to the East/Orient to differentiate their history and experiences from the European. This second strategy overwhelmed the first as Russian artists became more confident of their position within the Moscow and St. Petersburg art worlds.

On one level, my study of the Russian avant-garde's "turn to the East" is concerned with the nuances of self-representation as described in recent scholarship on orientalism in literature and the visual arts. Since the publication of Said's book, many writers have reevaluated West European orientalist art and literature in specific colonial contexts by focusing primarily on the cultural production of the colonizer. Lisa Lowe, Reina Lewis, and John MacKenzie have emphasized the heterogeneity and contradictions within European representations of the Eastern Other, some of which subvert the dominant tropes explored by Said. Few scholars who work on colonial and postcolonial cultures argue that orientalism should be understood as a monolithic discourse whose

only purpose and effect is to reinforce the hegemony of Western values.¹⁶ Unfortunately, still fewer writers on the visual arts have examined orientalism in the development of modernist practices outside of Western Europe.¹⁷ Exceptionally, Partha Mitter has argued that this neglect tends to perpetuate the assumptions of orientalist discourse by depriving the colonized of speech – and reducing the assimilation of West European forms to an ineffective mimesis of the dominant (foreign) culture. Mitter's *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India* charts the complex interchange among traditions in the visual arts of colonial India and provides an important precedent and parallel to this study. Of particular relevance is his characterization of Kakuzo Okakura's "Pan-Asianism" and Indian *swadeshi* doctrine as orientalist projects (he uses lowercase to differentiate these attitudes from Said's study – as I do). Russian artists counterpointed Western academic and modernist narratives of individual style with indigenous traditions that depended on the copy. In a similar way, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Okakura "encouraged originality" while advocating a Pan-Asian school of painting.¹⁸ Thus contemporary artists in India and Japan drew on multiple cultural traditions and selectively promoted specific media and techniques, a process that Okakura described as syncretic. He argued that such culturally hybrid projects would eventually bypass singular and essentialist notions of national or ethnic identity characteristic of art in the West – and therefore represent modernity better than their Western counterparts. In his orientation, East and West, Okakura's strategy doubles back to reflect an already assimilated European value system; neither can be prior to the other. In describing this orientalist/westernizing project another critic, Sadakichi Hartmann, appropriates and inverts the terms of difference: "The Japanese have found in Europe a new China, and, as formerly they imitated the art of the Celestial Kingdom, they now dream of adapting Western art."¹⁹

Okakura's promotion of Japanese art as a union of Indian and Chinese spiritual and intellectual traditions²⁰ might be seen as parallel to Goncharova's, Larionov's, and Zdanevich's representation of Russia's hybrid cultural heritage. In their theories, Russia (*Rossiiia*) is not represented as ethnically Russian (*Russkoe*) or politically dominant but as a site for cultural interaction and assimilation. Just as Indian artists

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could represent themselves in terms taken from the West without carrying imperialist overtones,²¹ so too, their Russian contemporaries launched a principal challenge to West European hegemony that lacked any ambition to exploit; their view of nationality assumed the significance of empire, without being literally imperialist. The Muscovites, but particularly Zdanevich, viewed an alliance with the East as a means of survival, as they competed for international stature against the West. But the reasons given in their writings are not what we would expect as readers of orientalist literature. For these artists, the arts of China, India, Persia, and Japan represented the greatest potential for the future, because they sustained ancient traditions that, through centuries of copying, had survived into the present. Like the Russian broadsheet and icon, the Japanese woodcut and Chinese popular print were media that had become integrated into the fabric of daily life while perpetuating the values of the past. By contrast, Zdanevich would claim: “to strengthen the dominance of Europe in art is to widen the gap between art and life.”²²

As in Mitter's book, terminological quandaries abound in the Russian modernist's cultural discourse. I have adopted a similar strategy, using East to designate the widest range of cultural traditions and practices, so as to better capture the fluid meanings avant-garde artists attached to the term *Vostok* (East) and its dialogical equivalent, *Zapad* (the West). The debates, theories, and practices discussed in this book demonstrate the values these terms obtained as a function of their context and performance. The historiography of orientalism informs my use of this term, and like Mitter, I find that it has a place in the debates and theories discussed below. In the Russian context as in the Indian, orientalism is the only adequate translation for terms that encompass plural and sometimes contradictory representations of self-identity. It is therefore significant that it should have no single Russian equivalent. *Vostokovedenie* (orientology), the scholarly study of the East, does not convey the imperial triumphalism that characterizes the French and English systems of representation explored by Said and Linda Nochlin, in part because Russian *vostokovedy* have had various (and sometimes conflicting) interests and connections to Asia and Central Asia itself.²³ In the twentieth century, a number of prominent Russian scholars recognized their own ambiguous cultural sta-

tus as Russians by studying orientalism, and its prejudices and priorities, as part of their research on the East. Vasilii Bartol'd's writings and bibliography were among the first to indicate important differences between European orientalism and an orientalist discourse that shares interests with the cultures that are its object of study.²⁴ Bartol'd's critique of West European ethnocentrism is thus historically grounded in his study of orientalist texts and represents yet another current within Russian orientalism contemporary to, yet distinct from, the Eurasianists who are discussed in Chapter 1.²⁵

In studying the Orient, artists, writers, and ethnographers may express their love of Eastern culture (*vostokofil'stvo*) or claim to follow its example (*vostoknichestvo*), both of which imply a devotion, even subordination, to the East that exceeds orientalist discourse in the West. These last terms extend (through their suffixes) the historical opposition in Russia of Slavophile to Westernizer to include Russia within Asia.²⁶ *Vostokofil'stvo* was the term coined by the critic Iakov Tugendkhol'd in 1913, however, to recognize the inadequacy of this binary conception of Russian history and culture specifically as regards Goncharova's turn to the East and her representation of the Russian peasantry.²⁷

Recent historical, archaeological, and ethnographic scholarship that focuses on the borderlands, North, East, and South (Transcaucasia) – what Daniel Brower has described as “Russia's Orient” – suggests that questions of national identity arose as a consequence of Russian expansion East, on the one hand, and increased contact with the West (from Peter's reign forward), on the other.²⁸ Orientalist art and literature in the last decades of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries presented imperial interests in the Eurasian periphery as a natural consequence of Russia's expansion and the emergence of a discourse on the nation-state. Throughout the century, ideologies of nationality responded to the shifting diplomatic allegiances of the empire, and to the symbolic geography of Russia herself, positioned on a European Asian continental divide that forever shifted in the imagination of her rulers, cartographers, and chroniclers.²⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, many among Russia's cultural elite considered the high art of the Russian Academy not to be the locus of national identity but rather looked to the icon, decorative arts, and

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the broadsheet. National Russian Art (*Natsional'noe Russkoe iskusstvo*) would be reaffirmed as popular (*narodnoe*) in the sense of being of and for the people – the masses. Because these art forms were believed to have remained uninfluenced by Western culture, they were deemed manifestations of Russia's Asian cultural origins. The Muscovite artists discussed here do not differ so much in their assumptions as they do in their solution. For this generation of Russian artists coming to terms with the problem of national identity involved a radical repositioning of the artist, now rhetorically aligned with a familiar East against a foreign West.

The avant-garde's "turn to the East" can be interpreted through much of the literature on Russian orientalism, first, as a legacy of state interests in empire building that sought to dominate and assimilate a backward, barbaric Asian and Caucasian periphery. Although neither Goncharova nor Larionov supported the enterprise itself, much of their writing reproduces a familiar network of cultural associations and stereotypes that we may identify as Orientalist (as narrowly circumscribed by Said). Crucially, however, such an approach is overwhelmed by the second sense the term conveys. Revised as *vostokofil'stvo*, avant-garde orientalism refers to the perception (by artists and critics) of Russia as colonized by the West, economically and culturally dependent on the prior "civilizing" accomplishments of England, Germany, Italy and, in 1905–1914, particularly France. In the pre-war era it was (as it still is today) a popular obsession with Russians to link Russia's cultural and moral dilemmas with her economic dependence on various European and American spheres of influence – a situation that very much resembles resistance to Western culture in China and Japan during the first decade of the twentieth century. In this context, study and celebration of the East serve to distinguish Russian interests from the cultural and economic imperialism of the West. As participants in a culture that emerged from Russian interaction with East and West, Goncharova and her colleagues countered the chauvinism of radical right-wing groups such as the Black Hundreds (*chernosotentsy*), as well as automatic acceptance of the West. And, as a result, Goncharova's paintings and her polemics were eventually distinguished by critics and artists alike from both a conservative *slavianofil'stvo* (Slavophilism) and a more liberal *zapadnichestvo* (a preference for everything Western).

Avant-garde *vostokofil'stvo* is thus profoundly unsettling. One point of reference lies in Russian annexation and colonialization of peoples and territories on its periphery. But at the same time, by refiguring Russia-Eurasia as coterminous, their project neutralizes the binary and hierarchical opposition of center and periphery. For Goncharova and her colleagues, to be properly Russian was to selectively activate identities within an imaginary East/West continuum. Their writings and their art may affirm their difference from West European and Asian cultural traditions or figure the collapse of one term onto the other. It is a project that conforms to orientalist discourse, in the senses described by Said, but could transgress it by undermining the self-validating logic of Western hegemony. Simply put, my argument for Goncharova's prominence represents the avant-garde's turn to the East as a condition of its radicality in 1913.

Modernism

To acknowledge the dialogue between East and West as a central feature of Russian modernism, and Goncharova's role as catalyst, is to begin where Peter Wollen concluded his study of orientalism in the art of the *Ballets Russes* over a decade ago. In describing Diaghilev's project as "modernism's obverse," he observed that "deconstruction has to begin from the side of the Other, the supplementary, the decorative, . . . the east."³⁰ Goncharova's course demonstrates that aspects of the feminine, decorative, and oriental Other, which Wollen and others have argued haunt the texts of Clement Greenberg, are meaningful, critical terms. Early-twentieth-century Russian art historical polemics fleshed out the many disputed claims that made Goncharova's art seem quintessentially modern to her viewers. At a time when prominent artists and critics advocated the formal autonomy of art as an index of originality, Goncharova among others was committed to translating form through ornament and recasting ornament as high art. Traditions of design in the decorative arts, where ornament migrates from one medium (textile) to another (wood carving), influenced Russian modernist claims to originality. These practices produced a view of art history that differed significantly from the tenets of early-twentieth-century modernism in

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its foundational texts, from those by Clive Bell to those by Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg, and Michael Fried. The triad, East/West/modernism and their attributes, obtained meaning through the polemical interests of artists, critics, viewers, and the representatives of official art (Academy and Court). My historical reconstruction works outward from these internal debates.

If Barr's pioneering exhibition of 1936, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, has overdetermined most formalist histories of European modernism, it also has ensured that histories of Russian modernism would share many of the same assumptions.³¹ Over the past twenty years, the scholarly recuperation of the Russian avant-garde has echoed Barr's evolutionary schema insofar as scholars have focused principally on the origins of abstraction and the careers of its most significant practitioners. Represented by Barr as an autonomous, medium-specific practice, divorced from political and culturally specific receptive environments, suprematism, the counter-relief, and constructivism all have been shown to issue from cubism and thus have a common point of origin in the master narrative of late nineteenth-century French modernism.³² This history of Russian modernism should not be dismissed, for the mechanisms and debates that directed it have yet to be explored. Formalist critical concerns were established in Russia early in the century and it is this prior history that informs my study.³³ In their many art reviews, a number of Russian critics, but especially Alexandre Benois and Sergei Makovskii, identified compositional and structural priorities in French painting that they felt could be extrapolated to other cultural contexts. By 1913, they had designated Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso as the heirs apparent to that supranational tradition; Tugendkhol'd's 1914 publication in *Apollon* of the contents of Sergei Shchukin's and Ivan Morozov's collections only confirmed what artists had known for several years.³⁴ The latest trends in French modernism were admired, assiduously studied, and copied by succeeding generations of Russian avant-gardists. This process of assimilation or emulation also encouraged specific viewing habits that Goncharova's and Larionov's Muscovite faction would seek to displace.

Russian artists valued new French modernist painters (impressionists, postimpressionists, fauves, and cubists) for their mastery of form – in a culture

that demanded moral and political accountability of its artists. It is true, as many critics of new Russian painting complained, that the Muscovites' understanding of West European modernism was somewhat superficial. Not familiar with the public reception and social context for modernist art in Western Europe, they apparently took seriously the declarations of formal purity that were delivered by some European artists and contemporary Russian art critics. By contrast, in a native context the Muscovite artists' understanding of visual form was charged with the real consequences of working in conditions of political upheaval through years of revolution and reaction. These included various forms of censorship and the physical suppression of speech through police intervention in the exhibition space. As artists organized outside of official channels to present new work they polarized public discourse on the social role of the artist. Questions of national identity, of the values attributed to "new Russian painting," arose repeatedly in the critical literature, each writer linking cultural preferences to the ambitions of a particular social class but often to different ends. In light of the priority Western modernist art history has ceded to Greenburg's "specialization of the medium,"³⁵ it cannot be overstated that in Russia, affirmations of the autonomy of form meant different things to different groups and always had a polemical purpose. Moscow, though westward looking, was not Paris; the economic, political, and social conditions for making and viewing art differed in crucial ways.

Goncharova's art and its reception suggest that representations of the Parisian center, the "West," are as fraught with ambiguity as is orientalism's object, the "East." Painting in the style of Cézanne and the icon, Goncharova exposes the values of modernist autonomy as just that – assumptions that have obtained historical currency but do not exhaust the connections that obtain between images, audiences, and institutions. Larionov's postmigration writings make the same point. Among the contents of their Paris studio archive, now located in the Tre'iakov Gallery, Moscow, are fragments of Larionov's retrospective study of modernism, which he considered merely a historicist gloss on the actual debates of the past. But, this perspective, we should underscore, is provided by an artist who was, at times, guilty of playing the same game. A constant refrain appears regarding the course of modern art and Picasso's dominance at

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the head of the European avant-garde. Larionov, the displaced Russian, very much identified with Picasso, in whom he saw the same effects of expatriate survival. No matter how famous, Picasso was for Larionov an artist forever seeking entry to a world that remained culturally foreign to him. However, Larionov also appreciated Picasso not as a radical avant-garde figure, but as one of Europe's last great painters *in the academic tradition*, an artist who successfully mastered the Louvre as well as the Musée de l'homme.³⁶ Writing of Picasso's ability to insert himself into the histories provided by French museum culture, Larionov observed ironically (while taking stock of himself):

Of course, he [Picasso] didn't invent anything, (he cannot "invent" anything; that is what others attribute to him [in hindsight], with the words "founder," "head of a school," etc.). Despite what they say, Picasso speaks very humbly about himself, that he doesn't look, but finds – this is completely true. He finds everything in the Louvre or in other museums, or in his young and resourceful colleagues.³⁷

Although Larionov believed that Picasso deliberately shaped the public reception of his work, he conceded that the Spaniard was a great painter and that he had transformed the visual language of his era. Larionov's statements on Picasso speak more about his own status as a Russian emigré situated uncomfortably between cultures than they pretend to rewrite modernist art history (these fragmentary texts remain in archives, unpublished). More significant are his allusions to the inevitable consequence of Picasso's success: the marginalization of both Russians, Larionov and Goncharova. War and revolution tipped the balance between cultural centers and forever altered the historical relevance of the Moscow exhibitions and debates of 1910–1914. But letters from Russian friends indicate that Larionov and Goncharova knew their worth in their native home at least. Some respond to Larionov's queries regarding copies of the Moscow catalogues, the locations of their paintings and the price of sales. Late in life, still living in the shadow of the School of Paris, both Larionov and Goncharova fully understood the extent to which their own "moment of entry" into modernist art history in Moscow had been compromised by their escape to Paris (Fig. 1).³⁸



1. Photograph of Natal'ia Goncharova, Jean Cocteau, Mikhail Larionov, and Pablo Picasso, 1917, Rome. Photograph courtesy Mary Chamot, *Gontcharova* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1972)

Larionov's musings on Picasso do not diminish the latter's achievements but broaden the criteria against which creative work is measured, just as his thoughts on recent avant-garde art history provide glimpses into its other communities (those of Japan, for example).³⁹ This is consistent with his promotion of his art and that of his colleagues in Moscow and St. Petersburg, which frustrated critical attempts to define modernism at its Parisian center from 1905 through 1914. Russian adaptations of cubism, futurism, and primitivism exposed the dialectic explored by Rosalind Krauss and Richard Shiff (each in different ways): style was not so much an index of "absolute originality" as it was of derivation – of processes and practices that bound copy to prototype.⁴⁰ By reclaiming numerous cultural models, the Muscovites neutralized the authority critics and historians attributed to the French modernist tradition alone. On the eve of war, as Russian audiences viewed contemporary Georgian painting together with Chinese broadsheets in the context of a Russian (neoprimitivist) project equally indebted to Boccioni and Picasso, it was impossible for critics to settle on one historical orientation to the past as a means of securing the future. In the prewar avant-garde environment, where so many groups competed and interdependencies among cultures were recognized, no single tradition marked the point when the past predicts future unity – or when art becomes national.

Thus it was not until 1913 that the occasional critic would recognize mastery in either Goncharova's

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or Picasso's art, and at this time they were seen as equals.⁴¹ In the same year, Goncharova and Larionov argued that if Picasso had turned to Africa, and Matisse to the Orient, to revolutionize art in Western Europe, it was now time for artists in the East (with Russia as the avant-garde) to reclaim modernism as a radically syncretic – not eurocentric – project. Two events, one local, the other cataclysmic and international, altered Russian artists' perceptions of their place in the East/West continuum and thus the power dynamic among avant-garde groups. Goncharova's and Larionov's departure to Paris was followed by Tatlin's and Malevich's successes in their Moscow and St. Petersburg exhibitions of 1914 and 1915 respectively (The Store, Tramway V, and "0.10": The Last Futurist Exhibition). The counter-relief and suprematism restored order to the exhibition spaces of Moscow and St. Petersburg; the eclectic exhibition "The Year 1915" was the last in which Goncharova and Larionov would participate as leaders of the Russian avant-garde. In the same year, 1914, Russia joined with Europe to fight a war over imperial hegemony. These new conditions made primitivism and orientalism as a strategy of national self-definition and empowerment among Russian artists obsolete.

Chronology

In this study of avant-garde orientations East and West, I interpret efforts at national self-imaging among the Moscow avant-garde as they are performed: in public debates, avant-garde exhibitions, manifestos, and critical reviews. The first four chapters of this book chart the turns in the rhetoric polarizing East and West in group exhibitions and press reactions; the last chapters explore the public reception of Goncharova's most controversial (and censored) images, paintings such as the *Coronation of the Virgin* (1910), the *Evangelists* (1911), and her serial compositions from 1907 through 1911. My presentation is generally chronological, covering the period in Russian modernism typically termed *neoprimitive*. As an avant-garde movement, neoprimitivism is associated with the "faction"⁴² that came of age in Moscow in the first two decades of the twentieth century and included as its principal exponents Goncharova, Larionov, Aleksandr Shevchenko, Mikhail Le Dantiu,

and Il'ia Zdanevich (the latter two were based in St. Petersburg). Correspondence by several other participants in these exhibitions is important as well for their detailed discussions of theories and practices of copying – a central preoccupation of this group. Maurice Fabbri, Evgenii Saigadochnyi, and Le Dantiu have been considered secondary figures as painters, in part because they looked to Goncharova and Larionov for guidance in their art practices and institutional politics. But their writings, together with Goncharova's recently recovered diaries, provide important insight into the ways avant-garde painters approached their creative work.

In the spring of 1913, neoprimitivism was formulated to signify the Eastern focus of the "Donkey's Tail" and "Target" exhibitions; the term was introduced in Aleksandr Shevchenko's publication by that title.⁴³ Not conceived as a style, but as a polemical discourse, neoprimitivism was constituted through publications and lectures to rout rival avant-garde groups with which Larionov and Goncharova had established temporary allegiances, beginning with the World of Art and ending with the Jack of Diamonds and Union of Youth and their collective opposition: long-established art organizations, such as the Society of Itinerant Painters and the Union of Russian Painters. Within the same year, *vsechestvo* was theorized and presented by Zdanevich in lectures on Goncharova's oeuvre in November 1913 and again in April 1914. It was further developed as a theory in the writings of Le Dantiu, a member of the Union of Youth group who remained connected, however ambivalently, to the Muscovites and authored the essay "Painting of the Everythingists."⁴⁴

The exhibitions and debates that promoted new national cultural agendas during the first two decades of the twentieth century took place in Moscow but with the following caveats. The Muscovite Donkey's Tail group first exhibited their work and received their first public reviews in St. Petersburg as an extension of the Union of Youth group in December 1911. In a reciprocal fashion, the Moscow debut of the Donkey's Tail group the following spring (1912) contained a separate section (on the second floor of the Moscow Art School's exhibition space) of work by Union of Youth group artists.⁴⁵ Throughout the period of 1910–1913, Moscow artists from both Donkey's Tail and Jack of Diamonds participated in a number