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Bye Bye Babushka: Female Russian Artists' Understanding of the Modern World

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Abstract

Female Russian artists in the early 20th century were pioneers in different art movements, experimented with a range of styles, materials, and received commissions of artwork. These artists witnessed multiple political upheavals which at first created and then deprived them of many rights, diminishing their autonomy. Thus, the creation of art in itself became a political statement for these women, allowing them to process the extreme changes from ruralism to urbanism, from a humble form of living to the lavish, commercialized lifestyle of Western Europe that spread through Russia. The artists Lyubov Popova, Natalia Goncharova, Vera Mukhina, and Tatiana Kopnina deconstruct and understand Russia's transformation from aristocracy to socialism, and finally from socialism to communism through art and thus contributed their own understanding of modernity. Analyses of their paintings, sculptures, and common motifs (such as the peasant woman and Mother Russia) elucidate the dissimilarities between male artists' and female artists' experiences in this volatile era. This thesis will bring key female Russian artists into the discourse on modern art and serve to establish their importance in the mainstream art canon as well as elucidate their relationship with modernity.

1. Introduction

The art canon has been defined largely by the Western world and by men, for men. A recent study that looked at eighteen major U.S. museums found that around 87% of the artists displayed/represented are men, leaving very little room for women to share the limelight.[1] This fact may not be surprising to those who have flipped through art history textbooks and struggled to find women in even the most comprehensive surveys. It is, however, even more of a challenge to find women artists represented in the canon who were not born in western Europe or the United States. Modern art is no exception when it comes to exclusive practices that have marginalized artists by gender, race, and locality such as Russian artists.

Western Russia flourished artistically during the modern era (1860s-1970s).[2] It contributed many milestones such as Rayonism and avant-garde movements, paving the trail for many more movements to follow. Cubism (1907-1914) bourgeoned with the transition from ruralism to urbanism as artists began to see the world from new angles and diversified lenses. The modern era (particularly 1900-1965) also marked the beginning of women's rights movements in Russia, heralding economic and social gender equality. With the progression towards gender equality came equal opportunities for women, allowing for them to participate more in the art world.

Female Russian artists used their newfound opportunities to redefine Russian modern art by deconstructing the evolution from agricultural to industrialized Russia. The pace of Russia was changed as a whole, thrusting women into a fast, commercialized world. The country that was once so reliant on and revolved around peasant farm workers, shifted to cities that encouraged scholarship and artistry. While Modern Russia was home to innumerable remarkable artists, few of its women artists have been acknowledged.

This thesis will bring key female Russian artists into the discussion of modern art and focus on their relationship with modernity. Female Russian artists of the 20th century such as Lyubov Popova, Natalia Goncharova, Vera Mukhina, and Tatiana Kopnina processed Russia's transformation from ruralism to urbanism, aristocracy to socialism, and finally from socialism to communism through art and thus contributed their own understanding of modernity. Through the analysis of many works and common motifs (such as the peasant woman and Mother Russia) the dissimilarities between the male artist's experiences and the woman artist's in this volatile era will be elucidated.

2. Women's Rights: Acquisitions and Losses

Turn of the twentieth century Russia was not an idyllic world for women's rights. Women could not yet vote, run for office, and had little in regard to worker's rights. Large contributors to the women's movement were women's journals that advocated for social change. Women's rights journals which originated in the late nineteenth century were unsuccessful and short-lasting, and it was not until 1904 that one gained traction.[3] A journal that became pivotal to the women's rights movement was the *Zhenskii vestnik* (*Women's Herald,* 1866-1868). It was published by a woman, Anna Borisovna Messarosh, and released articles monthly concerning the "woman question" which is "a complex of social problems, including women's role and society and the family, maternity and child care, and ways to liberate women from oppression."[4] The journal was viewed as highly controversial as it published articles about women's businesses, economic standings, rights, and inequalities. All of the articles were written by democratic women's rights activists who had ties to other journals (such as *Russkoe Slovo*) that had recently been shut down by the Romanovs - which only added to the scandal perceived by the public.[5] The censorship that all publishers faced prevented most women from being able to become editors of public journals like *Zhenskii vestnik,* which Borisovna had originally planned to edit.[6] Borisovna was passed over as editor because of her gender and the position was eventually given to a man because of the legal responsibilities that editors carried in Russia which were typically believed to be too risky for women to manage. It is ironic that a women's rights journal was not allowed to be edited by a woman and further underscores the importance of its very existence and decision of so many women to challenge this type of inequality.

Zhenskii vestnik focused on showing the importance of women in the workforce and how all women should be compensated fairly for the hard work they put in. To do this, the journal worked to combine the interests of many different women's organizations that had previously been at odds. The assimilation within *Zhenskii vestnik* made the journal influential in the women's rights movement, particularly the path towards women's suffrage. As women began to find similarities in their interests and causes, the movement became more fluid while its size and strength grew considerably.

Russian women's rights movement picked up momentum after January 9th, 1905, Bloody Sunday, when approximately 430 workers were massacred in St. Petersburg. The day started with a peaceful protest for work regulation reforms led by a Russian priest, Father Gabon.[7] The workers made officers aware of their intentions before the protest started and notified them of their plan to march to the palace with a petition for reform to give to the tsar. As the protest moved through the city, however, the protesters began demanding more than just improved working conditions. The workers chanted "Let all be free and equal. And to this end let the election of the members to the Constituent Assembly take place in conditions of universal, secret and equal suffrage" as they marched the streets.[8] It was only once the workers arrived at the palace that things became violent when officers began firing upon the crowds.

The Tsar Nicholas II's lack of reaction to the massacre sent the Russian people into an uprising that only ignited their distrust in the government. Women were moved by the death of their loved ones and knew that action had to be taken to improve the lives of all Russians, acknowledging that women's suffrage would not only benefit women. According to the *Zhenskii Vestnik,* two days after Bloody Sunday 150 women petitioned for women's suffrage "without distinction of class, nationality, or religion."[9] By the end of February professional unions had formed, inspiring the creation of a comprehensive women's union in Moscow that would include organizations like the League for Women's Equal Rights, Women's Progressive Party, and the Women's Equal Rights Union.[10] These unions focused on women's right to vote as a way to solve all of their issues firsthand with the end goal being Parliament positions held by women. The Women's Progressive Party joined the International Women Suffrage Alliance, allowing for an international exchange of ideas and comradery.[11]

The Industrial Revolution forced a large portion of the rural population to move to the city in search of work.[12] However, the jobs available were low paying and demoralizing, further promoting the disillusionment that caused the working class to overthrow Tsar Nicholas II once and for all after his 23 year reign (1894-1917).[13] A political limbo followed the overthrow of the aristocracy that only ended with the onset of World War 1. Sparks of equality and social

progression ran through Russia as a result of the war, with leaders recognizing the importance of demarginalizing groups such as women. It wasn't until October of 1917 that change would finally be set into motion.

A group known as the Bolsheviks was led by Vladimir Ilich Lenin, a man inspired by Karl Marx's socialist ideas, took control of Russia on November 7, 1917.[14] Lenin supported the working class; he wished to end the extreme class disparity and intended to do so by equalizing the sexes.[15] Under Lenin's control, women were sent into the workforce and were relieved by paid domestic help that allowed them to leave the home. Lenin looked down upon housework and deemed it "barbaric" which urged him to relieve women of their domestic burdens.[16]

A year after the Bolsheviks took control of Russia, they granted women equal status to men. Marriage was no longer considered a matter of the church, giving the government full control over marital contracts. Divorce was then also obtainable by either spouse, freeing women from domestic abuse or maternal expectations. Before the Bolsheviks came to power "peasant women bore nine children on average, about half of whom survived to adulthood" but once the new policies of equality had been put in place, women could control their own bodies be it through divorce or abortion (given by a physician).[17]

Marriage laws under the Bolsheviks became extremely controversial amongst Russian citizens. While removing the church's sovereignty over marriage gave women the freedom to get divorces from their husbands, it also meant that any marriages not made through the state were considered illegitimate.[18] A woman in an illegitimate marriage would not be able to receive alimony, leaving many women without any support for their family's once divorcing their husband. The government began to leave behind some of their communist ideals and enacted the New Economic Policy in 1921 which aimed to return to a partially free market. While the idea of a free market had been enticing to businesses, it resulted in a major layoff of public employees, 70% of which were women.[19] In 1922 the government also cut the public funding of housing and childcare dramatically, leaving women in illegitimate marriages without options for shelter or money. It was not until 1925 that unregistered marriages became legal, returning the right to alimony to many women.

The Russian population was torn between their trust for the new form of government and their policies and their allegiance to the former government. A civil war between the Red's (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites - a group primarily made up of upper class citizens and military officials who served under the Tsar - broke out in 1920.[20] The war gave women the opportunity to prove their abilities to men, creating an influx of women into the military. Approximately 73,858 women served as soldiers in the civil war, filling all positions including espionage and performing in active combat.[21] With the war came "ease of promotion and frequency of transfer over vast distances [which] introduced Russian women of that epoch a mobility, social and geographic, unknown to their sex anywhere."[22] The equality seen during the war was short lived and once Russia returned to a state of peace many women were removed from their positions.

The following decade was full of peaks and valleys for women. In the 1930's only about 1/6 of all administration posts in the Party were filled by women. While women were given legal and electoral equality, there was still "little practical equality in the administration of the state machinery."[23] True positions of power were given to men and very few women held notable positions within the Party.

Though the political aspects of Russia seemed tumultuous at best, the women living through it prevailed with their heads held high. As seen throughout history, people turned to art as a cathartic escape be it to return some form of normalcy or to create a new normal that better suited the times. Visionary women stepped out of the shadows and into the art world, proving that while they may not be treated equally, they still possessed the same talent as their male colleagues. Cubist artist, Lyubov Popova, was one of these women.

3. Cubism and Beyond: Lyubov Popova and Natalia Goncharova

Lyubov Popova was born in a village near Moscow in 1889.[24] She was born into a wealthy family who were patrons of the arts. Popova's parents greatly encouraged her to create art and actively helped her travel through Europe to study art outside of Russia, enabling her to draw from many different practices and artistic philosophies. With her parent's encouragement Popova went on to work with artists such as Konstantin Yuon in Moscow where she was introduced to impressionism, traditional art, and Russian rural life motifs that she would not have previously been exposed to in her upper-class childhood.[25]

Popova became infatuated with Russia's art history, prompting her to travel to the city of Kiev where she studied ancient Russian painting. From there, Popova would go on to expand her influences, stating that cubist Natalia Goncharova and impressionists such as Claude Monet inspired some of her art. More of Popova's inspirations were drawn from her other travels including her time spent in Italy studying Giotto in 1910, visiting the Hermitage in 1911,

and touring the ancient city of Kiev in 1911 where she would finally come to terms with and assimilate Russia's art history into her work.[26]

A reconciliation with her culture and heritage allowed for Popova to move forward and accept the political and social changes happening around her. An art movement that had overtaken Europe, cubism, had reached Russia. Cubism was particularly appealing at the time because of its use of abstract, confusing forms that reorganized the way the world was viewed, giving artists the ability to view life from multiple perspectives as opposed to a traditional single perspective. Popova began exploring the use of multiple perspectives to consolidate the events occurring in the early 20th century and the personal strain that evolution had taken on her. Her painting, *Portrait of a Philosopher*, is a notable example of Popova's reliance on cubism as an outlet.

Portrait of a Philosopher is an oil painting that Popova completed in 1915 (Figure. 1).[27] It is a cubist representation of a man, Popova's brother, in a top hat with his cane in what is presumably a café or study. "Philosophy" and "Review" are written in French near the left side of the painting, calling back to Popova's time in Paris.

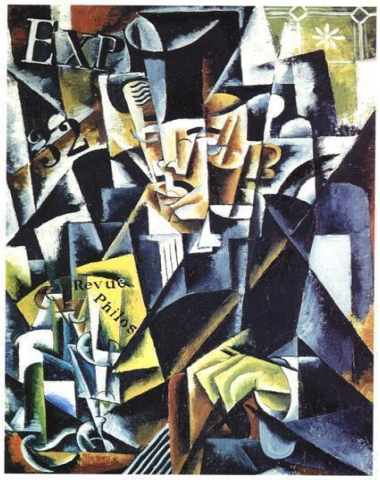

Figure 1. Lyubov Popova, *Portrait of a Philosopher,* oil on canvas, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 1915. [27.]

The color palette used is darker than the majority of Popova's other works, creating a much grimmer, washed-out tone. A navy blue fills the man's jacket and only lightens at the edge of his sleeves and colors where Popova kindly hints at volume and a light source. Highlights on the jacket remain muted, highlighted only with a white that, if anything, dulls the saturation more. The man's gloves and the tile wall behind him are painted with the same yellow green that resembles old, white linens after many years of wear. White lines define the tiles and a small flower decorates the upper left corner. A crimson covers the top right corner, offering a bit of relief from the business created by the low saturation that confuses the eye.

The muting of the colors is not to displease the viewers, but instead is meant to show the dreariness of modern, urban life. While many artists such as Kandinksy turned to bright colors in this period, Popova harkens to the darker, more tired side of urbanicity. While the quality of life may have increased for the majority of the Russian population, it also drilled out a new taxing, never-ceasing version of production needed to support this rising bourgeois lifestyle.

The cubist representation of a man meant to be educated and sophisticated adheres to the confusion that overtook people like Popova during this progressive time period. She shows that no one is exempt from the changes witnessed in modern times and that even her brother had been thrust into the whirlwind, further emphasizing the extent to which Popova's own life continued to change. Geometric shapes that are usually the key to clarity break up the man's form into an almost unreadable figure. He is no longer just a man, but something organic that has been broken down to be artificial much like the lives and industry in Russia.

Lyubov Popova paved many pathways for other female artists in her time. Sometimes the pathways created led both ways, allowing for the inspirer to become inspired by her peers. As stated earlier, a large inspiration for Popova was her junior, and contemporary, Natalia Goncharova. Both artists would use the complexities of cubism to further their understanding of the modern world while innovating other's understanding of art as a whole.

Natalia Goncharova was born in 1881 into a middle-class family. Goncharova spent most of her childhood in Ladyzhino in Central Russia where she was exposed to the countryside and peasant's culture. She started as a sculptor

and attended the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1901-1904 where she met her future husband and life partner, Mikhail Larionov.[28] It was Larionov that convinced Goncharova to pursue painting instead of sculpture, leading her to a far more successful, recognized career. Initially Goncharova looked to French modern artists for inspiration in her early years as a painter, but eventually decided to turn to her roots and own deliberations in the Russian avant-garde.[29] At an exhibition in 1913 she confidently stated "I am reopening the path towards the East and on this way, I am sure, many will follow me."[30]

Goncharova's belief and trust in her country's culture and art sphere turned out to be fruitful as she helped reinstate Russia as a modern art powerhouse in the early 20th century through exhibitions. She was held in high regard by all of her peers and critics, with one of the leading Russian artists, Sergei Diaghilev, asserting that "all youth of Moscow and St. Petersburg bow down to Goncharova."[31] The success that Goncharova witnessed would not have been possible for a woman at any earlier time in history though still proved to be a huge feat in the far-from-diverse Russian art world.

The year 1913 was still engulfed in a period of freedom and prosperity for women under Tsar Nicholas II– a period where they had much more economic freedom than they did a few decades before or after. Women were therefore more welcome to participate in commercial production and consumption as the outside world started filling Russia with more products and resources. Goncharova was taken by the world around her and was particularly overwhelmed by the flood of advertisements that were distributed across urban Russia. At the same time as the increasing exposure to foreign products and advertisement methods, Russia was beginning to be more exposed to more of the Western art world, including movements that were taking place in Italy. Russian Futurism took hold of many modernist painters like Goncharova and appealed to the new pace that Russia (particularly Russian women) had picked up. Goncharova's *The Cyclist* (1913) shows the influence that the Western world had on Russia, by displaying both the new market and the interest in displaying movement in visual art like the Italian Futurists (Figure 2).

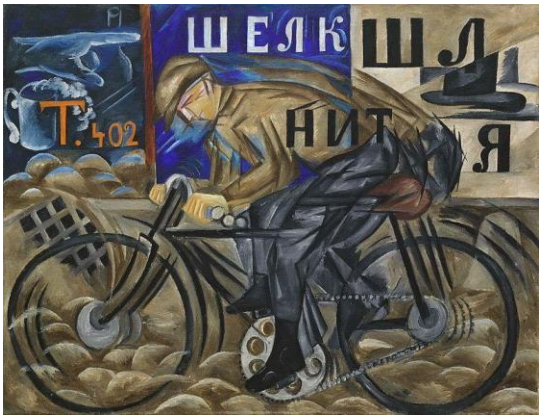

Figure 2. Natalia Goncharova, *The Cyclist*, oil on canvas, The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 1913. [32]

The Cyclist is an oil painting on canvas that is now located in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.[32] Goncharova was 32 when she completed this painting and was just beginning to show her interest in Russian Futurism, the precursor to her engagement with Rayonism shortly thereafter. The painting's dimensions are 30.7 inches by 41 inches, which makes the subject near life-size.

Goncharova's choice to make the cyclist near life-size is interesting because it gives the viewer only a taste of reality. The reality of the painting lies in the subject matter but not in its depiction though neither offers a break from the chaotic world experienced by contemporary, urban Russians. The cyclist is superimposed upon himself with at least three versions trailing behind his completed form. The bicycle is painted in a similar fashion, but the wheels are more emphasized and clearly superimposed. Goncharova is following the Futurist's technique by showing motion and speed with her superimposition and decrease in clarity as the cyclist increases his speed. Her quick line making gives a sense of haste, particularly when placed behind the cyclist's downturned head that shows his concentration on his task at hand.

Bicycles were popular in Russia at the turn of the 20th century and were quite appealing to the youth because of the speed that they allowed. They were accessible and a convenient mode of transportation but most importantly, they connected the new with the old. The Romanovs, the imperial family who had ruled since 1613, adored bicycles and incorporated them into their daily lives. Tsar Nicholas II wrote numerous entries in his diary about enjoying a bike

ride with his daughters before dinner as a leisurely activity.[33] Goncharova's use of the bicycle may represent the Romanov family as they were the ones credited with bringing them from Paris into Russia and, as stated before, may be used to represent the old Russia embracing new technologies.

The cyclist in the painting does not appear to be engaging in a leisurely activity as the Romanovs once did but is racing through the developed city. The man's downturned head should not be overlooked, people typically turn their heads downwards to be more aerodynamic or to avoid looking at something and the cyclist is not excluded from this. He is being bombarded by his surroundings, something that before the increased urbanization and commercialization of Russia had not been a huge hindrance to everyday life. Advertisements for silk (шелк), thread (нит), coffee, and hats fill the area around the cyclist as well as over his body, showing the inability to escape the flood of information that citizens had begun to face. Many of the advertisements are cut off or unclear due to his movement, but perhaps they are also unclear because of his avoidance to see them. Only part of a hat is shown, which could easily represent only the part of the advertisement that the man fully registered as he sped by with his gaze turned away.

The cyclist's speed creates clouds of dust around him that cover the lower half of the painting. An industrial pipe is placed to the left of the painting, hinting at the ever-increasing technology that arose during the industrial revolution. In the upper left corner, a hand leads the viewer's eyes back into the image which, like the man, forbids the viewer from being able to escape the bustle of the city.

The bustle of the city was something that Natalia Goncharova was familiar with and seemed to have a distaste for as Goncharova believed she belonged in the countryside "where the grass grows up through stones, or better still where there are no stones at all."[34] One can assume that the cyclist is merely a place-holder for any urban citizen including Goncharova herself. Though the modernization of Russia brought many beneficial technologies to Russia, it also removed a sense of tranquility from many citizens' lives.

Goncharova found tranquility in the countryside, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. She would turn to many styles - such as neoprimitivism - and the peasant woman motif to escape back to the simple life she had led before her move to the city and the chaos of industrialized life.[35]

4. Depictions of Women: The Peasant and the Nude

Peasant women living in rural communities were the most common type of representation of women in Russian art prior to World War II. The peasant woman was valued for her hard work and the joy that she took in completing said work. She was a timeless motif, one that could be depicted the same way in both the 19th century and the 20th century, showing that even in turbulent political times the lives of some still remained unchanged. [36] The peasant woman was part of the communist political ideology because of her humility and willingness to work which the government believed would urge the population to push on in their production of a utopia.

Natalia Goncharova's costume, titled *Costume for a Peasant Woman* (1937) was designed for the ballet/opera Le Coq d'Or shows the idealized beauty that the Russian peasant woman was believed to have (Figure 3).[37]

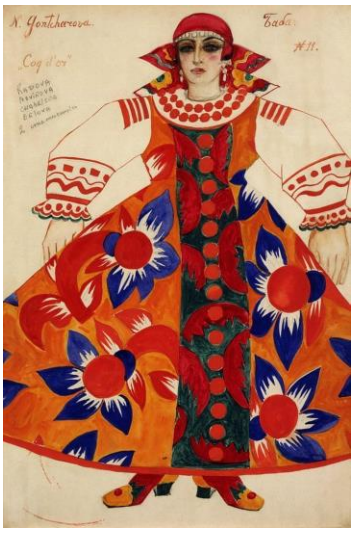

Figure 3. Natalia Goncharova and Barbara Karinska, *Costume for a Peasant Woman*, cotton, wool, metal, fasteners, linen, paint, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. 1937.[37]

The costume was handmade by Barbara Karinska and is made out of a combination of cotton, wool, metal fasteners, linen, and paint. The smock is colored bright orange and is about ankle length. The sides are decorated asymmetrically with large flowers whose petals are painted coal blue. The flowers themselves are composites, where it appears that two different flowers (one with large blue petals and one with small orange petals) are forced together haphazardly. A mustard yellow trim separates the dress from the floor, lining the entirety of the bottom of the dress excluding the independent, decorated center. The center of the dress is created with a long, rectangular strip that runs from the neckline down to the hemline. It is a sea foam green with what appears to be red leaves falling down the dress. A string of orange circles lines the center, splitting the body into perfect halves.

Below the smock lies a clean, white shirt with pillowed sleeves and cinched, pleated cuffs. Only orange stripes and circles decorate the sleeves, maintaining a level of modesty while drawing the eye to the body of the dress. The modesty of a peasant woman was highly valued in modern Russia throughout the evolution of women's rights particularly because of the sentimentality and need for preservation of women's modesty in a world that seemed destined for hedonism. The belief of modesty being equivalent to eudaimonism (arguably the opposite of hedonism) was not universally accepted and may have been interpreted as a form of humility and practicality for women working in fields.

The motif was not strictly Russian but seemed to be ubiquitous throughout European countries where artists such as Jean Francois Millet used peasant women to represent the common man with hard-working values. Perhaps Goncharova encountered Millet's *Peasant Woman Raking* (1885) when she was away in Paris, further strengthening the love for the peasant woman. In Russia, Goncharova encountered peasant women who were meant to be humble and shrined in humility but she projected a new type of femininity in *Costume for a Peasant Woman* that exudes strength, emphasizing more than just the hardiness and beauty of the peasant.[38] Goncharova redefined a motif that had existed for centuries (though it had been most popular in the 19th century) by giving the woman her own strength and not relying on the strength she would maintain through the repulsion of the tainting of man.

Peasant Woman (1927) by Vera Mukhina highlights the strength that women began to represent themselves with (Figure 4).[39]

Figure 4. Vera Mukhina, *Peasant Woman*, bronze 186 x 70 x 69 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia, 1927.[39]

The bronze, life-size sculpture stands at approximately five and a half feet tall. It is of a burly peasant woman with her arms crossed with a sickle placed by her bare feet. The sickle is proof of the work she has completed out in the fields and is a stand-in for her beloved nation, Russia.

The peasant women's pose above the sickle, a communist symbol, is protective and prideful. She is the manpower of the nation, flexing her muscular arms that she has built up after years of manual labor. Her hips, accentuated by her traditional peasant dress, are wide, perfect for childbearing to replenish the population. Mukhina's *Peasant Woman* is the embodiment of the raw power and determination of the women paving the way for all women to realize their very own power. The peasant woman was no longer just a Russian symbol of pride, but a feminine symbol meant to empower and inspire girls.

The evolution of the peasant woman's meaning shows the changes in representations of women. However, not all motifs were updated as quickly as this one and remained limited by the expectations of men. Women were praised for their feminine abilities though this praise sometimes came at a cost.

Women were seen filling the role of traditional homemaker, never straying far from their families in paintings.[40] The family was a particularly popular subject, and within this unit it was specifically representations of mothers with their children that accentuated their nurturing, empathetic nature. The mother was arguably women's most important role shown in art because of her symbolism as Mother Russia. Mother Russia is/was meant to be a strong, resilient, yet loving figure that stood for her country regardless of the sacrifices she must make. Mother Russia, of course, is simply the idealized Russian population.

The Russian population was reduced dramatically through both mortality and enlistment during World War II and all capable citizens were being called to fight against Hitler's armies which had begun invading Russia in 1941.[41] Over 300,000 women served as medics and combatants from the start of the war until 1945, greatly changing the country's perception of the positions women were capable of holding.[42] The decline in the male population opened up positions that needed to be filled, allowing women to join the workforce en masse. As women began to take on more roles in factories and jobs typically held by men, they began advancing in the art world as well.

The female nude grew more popular in the art world at the beginning of the 20th century and extended to World War II. While many people from contemporary, Western cultures may view the female nude as regressive and targeted towards the male gaze, in 20th century Russia "erotic paintings [tended] to be seen as a tribute to women's beauty rather than exploitative."[43] The dichotomy between the praise of a woman's body and her rights in Russia is interesting because of the incredible imbalance of a massive number of works representing women and a small number of works by women. While the female nude could be praised in a museum, it was not something that was accessible for women to view in person. Women were not allowed to attend life drawing classes in many schools which hindered their ability to create anatomically correct artworks, specifically sculptures.[44]

5. Sculpting and Painting the Soviet Woman: Vera Mukhina and Tatiana Kopnina

Vera Mukhina was one of Russia's most influential sculptors of all time and is still one of the most famous modern female sculptors in the world. She was born in Riga, Latvia's capital, into a merchant family in 1889.[45] When Mukhina was two her mother passed away from tuberculosis, leaving her dad a widower. Her family left their life in Riga behind and moved to Kiev in what is now the independent country of Ukraine, where Mukhina began taking private drawing lessons in the comfort of her home. Mukhina was only fourteen when her father passed away and she moved to Kursk, then eventually to Moscow in 1910. It was in Moscow that things began to look up for Mukhina, particularly when she met famous, wealthy people such as the Morozovs and was able to begin attending Konstantin Yuon's school, a famous Soviet Realist painter.[46]

Konstantin Yuon's school was particularly important to Mukhina's progress as an artist, because it was there that she met one of her closest friends, Lyubov Popova, who introduced her to Impressionism and the importance of color.[47] Popova also opened Mukhina's eyes to the importance of Russian religious Icons in Russian art and how much they influenced their contemporaries' use and understanding of color. Mukhina became more familiar with cubism which she would later reject, saying "Cubists reveal form, but skeletally losing what is most dear, the image. When they try to depict a living person they are defeated."[48] After attending Yuon's school, Mukhina took classes at Mashkov's school where she was urged to focus more on the piece as a whole and to stop getting too caught up in the details. Ilya Mashkov was a famous post-impressionist and fauvist painter which was reflected in his teaching – color and form were far more important than realism which is what initially stunted Mukhina's growth as an artist.

Next Mukhina studied sculpture under female sculptor Nina Sinitsina.[49] Mukhina's time with Sinitsina was short though important to her growth and understanding of being a woman in a male dominated field such as sculpture. She learned that in order to be recognized as a competitive artist, she had to go above and beyond what any man around her could do. When she moved to Paris in 1912 to attend the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, studying under Antoine Bourdelle, she began rejecting Impressionism due to its lack of simplicity and hindrance on "visual and psychological impact" of sculpture.[50] Eventually, Mukhina decided that Paris was not meant to be her home and returned back to Russia to be with her dear friend, Lyubov Popova, in Moscow. Popova would go on to introduce Mukhina to avante-garde artists who would initiate her artistic drive to create in the years after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.[51] The Bolshevik Revolution (also known as the Russian Revolution) inspired many artists like Mukhina to show their pride in their country and its progress which led to the *Plan for Monumental Propaganda*.[52] The Plan for Monumental Propaganda was started by Lenin who pushed for the "removal of Monuments Erected in Honor of the Tsars and Their Servants" and the "Production of Projects for Monuments to the Russian Socialist Revolution."[53] Mukhina would go on to spend the majority of her career commissioning works for the government including her most notable sculpture *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*.

Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Collective Farm Woman* was completed in 1937 for the World's Fair in Paris, one of the biggest honors a Soviet sculptor could receive (Figure 5).[54]

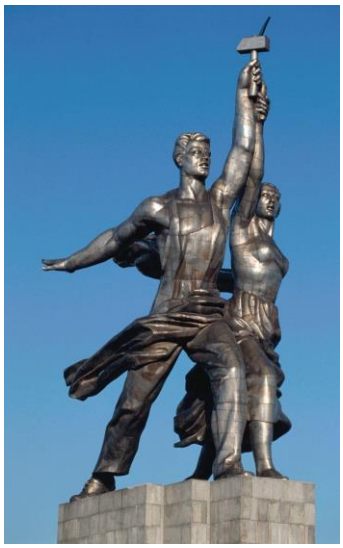

Figure 5. Vera Mukhina, *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*, 1937.[54]

Stalin had to personally select and approve the work present in the Fair as it was going to represent the nation as a whole. The selection process was momentous for the Russian population and was documented in Alexsandr Bubnov's painting *Stalin approving a USSR model of the pavilion for the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937* (1940) (Figure 6).

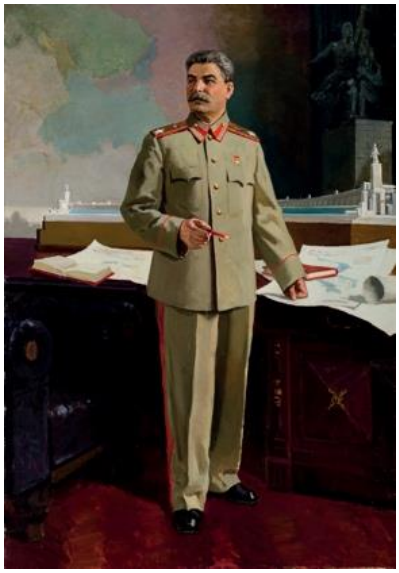

Figure 6. Alexsandr Bubnov, Stalin approving a USSR model of the pavilion for the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937, oil on canvas. 1940.
http://artrusse.uk/collection/artwork/stalin-approving-ussr-model-pavilion-world-exhibition-paris-1937#sthash.1hDAstwd.dpbs

Mukhina was the only female artist featured in the fair, pushing Russia's facade of equality.[55] Her work was belligerently displayed directly across from Nazi Germany's exhibition, further showing the importance of giving a female artist representation and emphasizing the importance of equality in this time period.

After the Fair, *Worker and Collective Farm Woman* was moved to its final destination in Moscow where a commemorative museum has been installed beneath the pedestal.[56] The sculpture is stainless steel and stands at a

monumental seventy-eight feet tall upon a 113 feet tall pedestal.[57] A courageous man and woman stand united, reaching towards the sky with a sickle and hammer.

The figures are set in a climbing pose. The man's left leg and the woman's right leg are elevated with their knees extended out from under their body, absorbing their weight. The pose is similar to European representations of historical conquerors, establishing their strength and ownership over the land beneath them. Their skirts blow dramatically behind them as they march forward, twisting outwardly to match the movement of their arms. Both of the figures' outside arms reach far behind them; the man sprawls his fingers with his flat palm to the ground while his counterpart holds her wild dress high above the ground.

This peasant woman does not adhere to the conventions of the peasant woman motif. She is not shown with a smock or with pillowed sleeves as seen in Goncharova's *Peasant Woman Costume*. She also has fashionable flats on rather than the typical bare feet or work boots. Is Mukhina reinventing the peasant woman as the modern woman? Perhaps Mukhina aimed to show the progress that Russia had made as a nation, showing its development and awareness of the western world. By not following the conventions of the traditional peasant woman motif, Mukhina is also transitioning the focus away from the woman's position or socioeconomic status to the strength and leadership of the woman. Mukhina shows that even the symbols of the country are changing with the times and are ever evolving.

Her international platform gave her the opportunity to empower women while expressing her patriotism. Not only did she create a representation of a woman who stood equally with a man but she herself was placed in a position equivalent to all of the other male artists participating in the World Fair. Mukhina's use of realism reconnects the imaginary with reality, reconstructing what is to what should be.

The use of realism became more popular in Russia overtime. One of Russia's most successful female portraitists was Tatiana Kopnina, a Soviet painter who brought life to her subjects to create new perspectives and express her very own outlook on contemporary events. Tatiana Kopnina was born November 11, 1921. She was originally known for her portraits, landscapes, genre scenes, and still lifes but went on to become primarily a portraitist. Kopnina was a member of the Saint Petersburg Union of Artists, ensuring that she would have a say in her treatment as a professional.[58] She would go on to be one of the most recognizable representatives of the Leningrad School of Painting. Very little else has been published about Kopnina, demonstrating that there is still room for scholarly and curatorial attention to both her work and the work of other women of the period. What can be understood, however, is the context in which Kopnina was living and which she processed through her art.

Tatiana Kopnina completed *Boy in Hat* in 1962 (Figure 7).

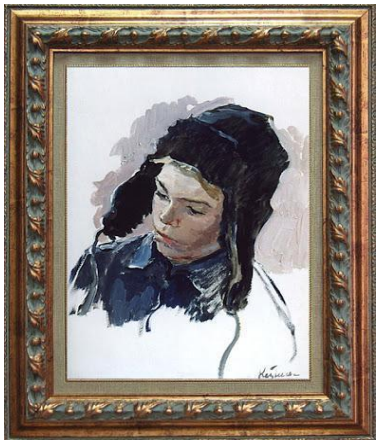

Figure 7. Tatiana Kopnina, *Boy in Hat*, oil on cardboard, 47 x 35 cm, 1962. [59]

Boy in Hat is an oil painting on cardboard that is 47 x 35 cm that shows a life-size portrait of a young boy in a toboggan.[59] The boy is gazing downwards pensively with his head cocked slightly to the right in an inquisitive manner, showing his youthful curiosity. Kopnina uses movement, technique, shapes, color, and lack of background to emphasize the disorderliness and ephemerality of modern life in Soviet Russian

The boy is created with quick, painterly strokes that orient diagonally towards the right. Kopnina has left the texture of her paint on the cardboard, allowing for it to extend slightly off of the page. The boy's jacket and the area surrounding him are particularly textured to the point where they become sketchy and almost incomplete. The sketchiness allows for the painting to appear to be a snapshot of someone in movement, the quickness of the strokes

emphasizing the speed of the boy passing Kopnina. The viewer is let into a single moment because of Kopnina's painterliness and is not limited to a posed figure but instead a real child that anyone may pass on the street.

The movement that is shown with the sketchiness of the paint strokes is also made evident with the direction that the strokes themselves have taken. As all strokes orient towards the right, it becomes clear to the viewer that the boy is traveling to the left as he pushes against the cold air. Tassels hang from his toboggan and are pushed by the breeze and sway towards the viewer slightly to the left. They contradict the crisp, organized movement of the strokes composing the boy by curving in a far more organic manner as they slither through the air. The organic movement of the tassels reminds the viewer that not all things are orderly in reality, therefore a naturalistic painter such as Kopnina will allow for disorganization of movement.

There is an emphasis on the disorderliness of time in *Boy in Hat*. Kopnina's modeling technique is loose and speedy. From afar, the painting may appear to be heavily blended but once the viewer steps in closer they will see that there is little to no blending at all. Kopnina forms independent shapes with definable edges, accentuating the contours of the boy's face and clothing. The modeling of his clothing is far less intricate and relies on fewer shapes to enforce readability. Many shapes constructing the clothes are much larger and generic, allowing for the boy's face to become the focal point of the painting. His face is modeled with lovely little organic shapes that highlight the boy's soft features. Kopnina relies on rounded shapes with hard edges as seen in the rounded slope of the brow to a sharp peak just beneath the eyebrow. The cupid's bow is defined only by two j-shapes, showing Kopnina's skill to use minimal definition while remaining incredibly delineated.

Kopnina shows her skilled use of color to reiterate the cold weather the boy must be walking through. The painting is composed of cool tones as Kopnina chills even traditional warm colors such as the pink of the boy's lips. The skin tones used on the face are milky pink with hints of blue to define the shadows on the right side of the boy's cheek and under his lower lip. Shades of light olive are used as the supporting mid tone throughout the face though most prominently on the boy's forehead where the olive is used to break the bright highlight into a slighter, more subtle shape. Juxtaposed to the shades of pinks and olives lies the heavy, dark blues of the boy's jacket and toboggan. The deep navy-blue jacket has little variation in hues and relies primarily on tinting and shading. Exceptions to this include the lower right side of the boy's jacket where the saturation is lower where Kopnina has replaced the navy-blue with a whale-blue that is created with simply five strokes of paint. The left collar and shoulder have been highlighted by simply mixing a large amount of white with the navy, continuing the diagonal line from the upper right corner to the lower left. The boy's hat is completed in a very similar fashion though it is primarily black.

Kopnina chose to leave out a background and place the focus solely on the boy's head. He floats upon the whitened cardboard without any context or clues to his location. He has been pushed forward from the page by a warm, pinkish gray that surrounds only his immediate figure. Kopnina's choice to rely solely on a small area of color to create a background while leaving the lower half of the boy unfinished calls back to the disorder and ephemerality of life. The boy is seen quickly passing her, denying Kopnina the luxury of truly seeing anything other than the boy's face. She is showing the speed at which the Russians of Leningrad lived their lives, not limiting this constant rush and production to adults.

As a skilled painter, Tatiana Kopnina uses little to convey the complex subject of the disorderliness and ephemerality of life. Her decision to display quick movement with her painterly strokes and loose modeling shows how a figure can pass her by in just a few seconds. Her use of color is her main supplier of context with her cool colors that emanates brisk air and her lack of context refers the viewer back to the impermanence and speed of daily life. *Boy in Hat* is simply a painting of daily life and the turbulence at which modern Soviets lived.

6. Conclusion

Female artists in Russia faced extreme changes both politically and to their ways of living. At the beginning of the 20th century Russian women could not vote, could not divorce, and had little say in the treatment of their bodies. Opportunities were limited and every step forward was another two steps back for the women pushing for equality. For instance, women fought in many wars to prove their allegiance to their country and to prove their strength, expecting their participation to be a large turning point for their rights and the government's perception of women though all rights and respect were revoked after the war. While some women fought wars, led protests, or wrote journals, artists turned to creating as an outlet, a form of activism, and as a guide to understanding the unrest and rapid changes that Russia went through.

The female artists highlighted in this thesis had witnessed the complete upheaval of Russia's government and its transition from aristocracy, to socialism, and finally to communism. They had to learn how to live new lives in an

industrialized world that suddenly thrust the population into a mechanized and commercialized society. Just as the real peasant woman became less common in society, the peasant woman motif became a huge symbol of pride for Russia. Women had to adapt and learn to understand their new roles and expectations in society while also redefining them themselves. Lyubov Popova, Natalia Goncharova, Vera Mukhina, and Tatiana Kopnina used their art to do just that. While male artists in the modern world could focus on processing the changing of their lifestyles and had the luxury of concerning themselves with art concepts such as using color as their religion, female artists had to process who they were and where they belonged in the world. Popova's *Portrait of a Philosopher* shows the transfer from the organic and agricultural to the synthetic and manufactured lives of Russian citizens; Goncharova's *Cyclist* highlights the increasing commercialization the artist experienced and captures the anxiety and unease. Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Collective Farm Woman* brings the female Russian artist to an international scale and reclaims Mother Russia as a symbol of equality and feminine strength; Tatiana Mukhina's *Boy in Hat* shows the new pace that Russia had escalated to in order to keep up with modernity. Thus, it becomes clear that female Russian artists aimed to define who women were and to fully accept the changes occurring around them.

7. Acknowledgements

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8. Endnotes

1 Chad M Topaz, et al, "Diversity of artists in major U.S. museums," in *PloS one* vol, 14,3 e0212852, 20 Mar. 2019, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0212852

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7 Judy M. Westrate, "The 1905 bloody Sunday massacre: American reactions," *Student Work*, Proquest LLC, https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/361, pp. 10, 1973.

8 Sydney Harcave, *First Blood: The Russian Revolution of 1905*, Bodley Head, pp. 73, 1965.

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10 Edmondson, "From Small Deeds to Suffrage," 29.

11 Irina Iukina, "Russian Suffragists and International Suffragists Organizations: Solidarity, Discipleship, Victory," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 2020, ISSN: 2468-4414.

12 Barbara Alpern Engel, et al, "Introduction." *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, Westview Press, 1997, pp. 1–16.

13 Ibid

14 "Revolution in Russia and the Formation of the Soviet Union," *Revolution in Russia and the Formation of the Soviet Union* (Seattle, WA: Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, 2017); Russia was still following the Julian calendar which has caused confusion in the past on what dates to follow. This revolution is still known as the "October Revolution" because of the Julian calendar.

15 Barbara Alpern Engel, et al, *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, pp. 1–16.

16 Ibid, 4.

17 Ibid; It is important to consider that this is a contemporary reading and the language would have differed when considering this subject.

18 See D. Atkinson, Dallin, A., & Lapidus, G. W, *Women in Russia*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977, p.141

19 ibid.

20 Barbara Alpern Engel, et al, *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, pp. 1–16.

21 See Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, p.322.

22 Ibid. 322

23 Ibid.

24 Miuba N Yablonskaya, "The Amazons of the Avant-Gard," in *Women Artists of Russia's New Age*, edited by Anthony Parton, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd), 1990, 99.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Lyubov Popova, *Portrait of a Philosopher*, oil on canvas, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 1915.

28 See Olga Furman, "Natalia Goncharova: Artistic Innovator and Inspiring Muse," In *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in Her Circle*, edited by Malycheva Tanja and Wünsche Isabel, 193-206, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017, Accessed November 3, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h0q1.20, p. 194

29 Ibid, 195

30 Ibid, 198

31 Ibid, 193

32 Natalia Goncharova, *The Cyclist*, oil on canvas, The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 1913.

33 Kent de Price, "Diary of Nicholas II, 1917-1918, an annotated translation," *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*, Scholar Works at University of Montana, 2065, 1966, https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2065

34 Miuba N Yablonskaya, "The Amazons of the Avant-Gard," in *Women Artists of Russia's New Age*, edited by Anthony Parton, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd), 1990, 52.

35 Neoprimitivism was a movement from the early 20th century which, like Gauguin, looked to indigenous (formally characterized as "primitive") art to create a colorful, naïve style. Individualism was discounted and a focus on expression was maintained. Goncharova's form of neoprimitivism looked at traditional Russian folk art and the method of depicting and pigmenting the world.

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37 Natalia Goncharova and Barbara Karinska, *Costume for a Peasant Woman*, 1937, cotton, wool, metal fasteners, linen, paint, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

38 Miuba N Yablonskaya, "The Amazons of the Avant-Gard," in *Women Artists of Russia's New Age*, edited by Anthony Parton, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd), 1990, 52.

39 Fig. 4 Vera Mukhina, *Peasant Woman*, 1927, bronze 186 x 70 x 69 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

40 Ibid.

41 Norman Rich, *Hitler's war aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the course of expansion*.,Vol. 1, (WW Norton & Company, 1992), 212.

42 It is important to note that Stalin's decision to enlist so many women as combatants was not an effort to create equality. The use of women was strictly utilitarian and meant to win the war. The world's perspective of it, however, it what helped create or give a sense of equality.

43 Lindsay and Lavery, "Soviet Female Sculptors," 99-188.

44 Wendy Rosslyn, Alessandra Tosi, and Rosalind P Blakesley, "Women and the Visual Arts," in *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), pp. 91-117.

45 Miuba N Yablonskaya, "Two Soviet Sculptors," in *Women Artists of Russia's New Age*, edited by Anthony Parton, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd), 1990, 221-234.

46 Kirill Sokolov,"Aleksandr Drevin, Nadezhda Udal'tsova: An Exhibition That Never Was." *Leonardo* 35, no. 3 (2002): 263-69, Accessed November 4, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1577115.

47 Yablonskaya, "Two Soviet Sculptors," 221-234.

48 Vera Mukhina, cited in P.K. Suzdalev, *Vera Ignatievna Mukhina*, Moscow, 1981, 7.

49 Lindsay and Lavery, "Soviet Female Sculptors," 99-188.

50 Boris Ternovets, *Mukhina*, Vol. 1, Moscow and Leningrad, 1937, 13.

51 Yablonskaya, “Two Soviet Sculptors,” 221-234.

52 Ibid.

53 Cited in Christina Lodder, “Lenin’s Plan for Monumental Propaganda,” in Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917–1992, ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 20, quoted in Dickerman, Leah, *Monumental Propaganda*, October 2018, 181.

54 Lindsay and Lavery, “Soviet Female Sculptors,” 99-188; Fig. 5 Vera Mukhina, *Worker and Collective Farm Worker*, 1936, stainless steel 78 ft. Moskva, Moskovskaya Oblast, Russia (photograph ©1967 Jess Frost)

55 Robert H. Kargon, Karen Fiss, Morris Low, and Arthur P. Molella, "Modernity À La Francaise: The 1937 Paris Exposition," In *World's Fairs on the Eve of War: Science, Technology, and Modernity, 1937–1942*, 7-29, Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015, Accessed October 29, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18d83c0.5.

56 ibid

57 Lindsay and Lavery, “Soviet Female Sculptors.” 99-188.

58 See Sergei V Ivanov, *Unknown Socialist Realism: the Leningrad School*, St. Petersburg, Russia: NP Print, 2007.

59 Sergei Ivanov, “Tatyana Kopnina.” Search Art for Sale: Tatyana Kopnina (1921-2009), Accessed March 28, 2020, http://www.leningradschool.com/kopnina-tatyana.htm; Fig. 6 Tatiana Kopnina, *Boy in Hat*, 1962, oil on cardboard, 47 x 35 cm