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## Connections between 18th-Century Russian and European Culture

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I. M. Marisina, *Ocherki po istorii mezhdunarodnykh svyazei Imperatorskoi akademii khudozhestv vo vtoroi polovine XVIII–pervoi treti XIX veka* (Essays in the History of the Imperial University of Art's International Contacts in the Second Half of the 18th and the First Third of the 19th Centuries). 440 pp. Moscow: BuksMArt, 2021. ISBN-13 978-5907267473.

M. A. Pozharova, *Evropeiskie kontseptsii iskusstva v russkoi kul'ture XVIII veka: Ocherki* (European Concepts of Art in 18th-Century Russian Culture: Essays). 240 pp. Moscow: BuksMArt, 2022. ISBN-13 978-5002030019.

Both of the books reviewed here share commonalities not only in their essay-collection format but also in their subject (cultural interactions between Russia and Europe in the 18th century). Russian-language scholarly work on this problem in the field of art history owes much to the pioneering research of D. V. Sarab'ianov, who studied 19th-century Russian painting in the context of European schools.<sup>1</sup> Before this book, scholars of art tended to consider Russian and European art in isolation from one another. Sarab'ianov aimed both to identify the general features of artistic processes common to both and to reveal the national specifics of concrete phenomena; in the process, he uncovered a variety of links among different traditions, inaugurating a methodologically novel approach. He considered not only general problems (the specifics of Russian Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, and Modernism in the European context) but more specific ones as well (comparing artists of A. G. Venetsianov's circle and German Biedermeier art, A. A. Ivanov and the

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<sup>1</sup> D. V. Sarab'ianov, *Russkaia zhivopis' XIX veka sredi evropeiskikh shkol* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1980).

Nazarene movement, V. I. Surikov and European historical painting, V. E. Borisov-Musatov and Les Nabis).

Sarab'ianov did not analyze 18th-century art in detail, but applying his approach to that period became a hallmark of the Moscow school in the field of art studies. This tradition was associated with the name of O. S. Evangulova—a professor at Moscow State University and a leading specialist of the last decades on 18th-century Russian art—and actively developed two thematic areas: the study of Russian-European artistic relations of this era and the consideration of the customer's role in the development of national culture and the creation of art collections. In the 1990s and 2000s numerous dissertations were written on issues of French influence in the field of painting under Evangulova's guidance: the work of Jean-Louis Voille in Russia, the activities of French artists at the court at the beginning of the 18th century, the art of Jean-Laurent Mosnier in Russia, and the interaction of Alexander Roslin with the Russian artistic environment.<sup>2</sup> In 2007, Evangulova wrote a monograph on 18th-century Russian travelers' perceptions of European art schools, which highlighted the most important aspect for understanding the cultural dialogue between Russia and Europe.<sup>3</sup> The development of sculpture was already being actively investigated in the Russian Academy of Art; in the 2000s, several dissertations examined the work of Marie-Anne Collot in the context of the Enlightenment era and style formation in the art of Étienne Maurice Falconet.<sup>4</sup> These researchers paid special attention to the role of English art in the development of 18th-century Russian culture: the interest of researchers in Moscow and in St. Petersburg was drawn both to general aspects of interaction in the field of painting and the work of certain masters—John Atkinson and James Walker.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> L. Iu. Rudneva, "Zhan-Lui Vual' v Rossii" (Candidate of Art History diss., Moscow State University, 1994); A. Iu. Mikhailova, "Frantsuzskie khudozhniki pri russkom imperatorskom dvore v pervoi treti XVIII veka" (Candidate of Art History diss., Moscow State University, 2003); E. B. Klement'eva, "Zhan Loran Mon'e v Rossii" (Candidate of Art History diss., Moscow State University, 2006); E. E. Agratina, "Aleksandr Roslin i russkaia khudozhestvennaia sreda" (Candidate of Art History diss., Moscow State University, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> O. S. Evangulova, *Russkoe khudozhestvennoe soznanie XVIII veka i iskusstvo zapadnoevropeiskikh shkol* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> L. M. Bedretdinova, "Tvorchestvo Mari-Ann Kollo v kontekste kul'tury epokhi Prosveshcheniia" (Candidate of Art History diss., Russian Academy of Art, 2004); O. E. Rusinova, "Problemy stileobrazovaniia v tvorchestve Et'ena-Morisa Fal'kone" (Candidate of Art History diss., Russian Academy of Art, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> G. B. Andreeva, "Russko-angliiskie sviazi v oblasti zhivopisi vtoroi poloviny XVIII–pervoi treti XIX veka" (Candidate of Historical Sciences diss., Moscow State University, 1998); E. A. Skvortsova, "Tvorchestvo D. A. Atkinsona i D. Uokera v kontekste russko-angliiskikh khudozhestvennykh sviazei kontsa XVIII–nachala XIX vekov" (Candidate of Art History diss., St. Petersburg State University, 2012).



Marisina's book aligns with the contemporary trend in art studies in Russia, which is characterized by close attention to the history of art education: if S. V. Moiseeva's research is devoted to the establishment of the Academy and the educational organization of various painting classes, then this work is her international relations counterpart.<sup>6</sup> The introduction of the book highlights the background of the academic project in Russia, which already in Peter the Great's plans assumed a focus on Europe and attention to Russia's international reputation (8). The purpose and objectives of the book are not specified in the introduction, but in the abstract the problems of the work are associated with the "process of forming the institutional image of the Imperial Academy of Art in the eyes of European contemporaries." Although the study's methodology is not clearly indicated by the author, it can be reconstructed by carefully examining the content of the work. The author demonstrates a thorough knowledge of all the sources necessary for such a study: documents on the establishment and existence of the Academy, texts in various languages by foreigners about traveling to Russia (the most significant fragments were first translated into Russian in the appendix), and scholarly literature about the work of Russian masters and their stay abroad. The author's reliance on a huge body of documents and materials allows her to consider specific phenomena in the utmost detail and formulate conclusions that are convincing and fundamentally justified.

The first chapter is the most important both in terms of volume and the content of its conclusions. Russian artists were chosen to conduct educational trips to Europe, especially to Paris (21), where the first Russian artists emerged. This type of trip is known as *pensionerstvo* in the Russian scholarly tradition; although it corresponds the English word for "retirement," it actually means receiving a cash allowance (*pension*) after graduation from the Imperial Academy of Art to improve one's artistic skills in Europe for three years (with a possible extension). The purpose of the chapter is to study the evolution of the position and ideas of Russian masters in the context of a stable educational process (24). The Imperial Academy of Art clearly defined the criteria for the institution of *pensionerstvo*, the first of which was to preserve the specialization of training (often the mentor turned out to be a master practicing another genre or even a type of art [53]), and the second to write regular reports on training in Paris (75). The gradual increase in

<sup>6</sup> S. V. Moiseeva, "... K luchshim uspekham i slave Akademii": Zhivopisnye klassy Sankt-Peterburgskoi Akademii khudozhestv XVIII–pervoi poloviny XIX veka (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2014).

the number of pensioners in Paris led in the 1770s to the appearance of a guardian, who often complained about the lack of contact with them (39) and their careless attitude toward reports (many explained such noncompliance by citing their heavy workload).

Another important aspect of *pensionerstvo* is the interaction of Russian masters with mentors. Scholars often invoke the idea of foreigners neglecting their teaching duties (26), which is not always supported by facts: the involvement of a mentor could vary from periodic correction of work to daily collaboration in the workshop (47). The author's analysis of an extensive body of sources concludes that mentors did not strive for strict regulation of the educational process and built quite trusting relationships with students (113). In addition, French artists developed the creative individuality of pensioners as well as the key quality of the academic system—competitiveness (97). Russian masters took an active part in competitions to get the best places in the full-scale class, improve their skills, and achieve public success. Nevertheless, their position had a noticeable specificity: the status of a foreigner and a representative of the Orthodox Church did not allow them to count on achieving the highest award—the Royal Roman Prize—but gave them the opportunity to participate in the selection competition and receive small medals or special certificates confirming the high level of work performed (101).

Such skill, which distinguished the work of the best pensioners, reflected their serious approach to education: for example, A. P. Losenko's interests included "full-scale sessions, copying, independent composing, theoretical classes, and, by his own choice, additional artistic disciplines" (77). All these training practices were well known to graduates of the Imperial Academy, but Paris provided an opportunity for their independent and free combination, which determined the diversity of training (108). The discussion of art in press and in salons led to an expansion of ideas about technical and figurative-stylistic solutions (113), which allowed considerable creative freedom. All of the above makes it possible for the author to conclude that *pensionerstvo* in Paris was a period of intensified creativity for Russian masters (114), which presupposes enrichment and analytical comprehension. In this regard, Paris was perceived as the capital of modern art (109), while Rome was perceived as the cradle of classical art, where the lack of secular entertainments focused attention more on enthusiastic art classes (56).

The position of a Russian pensioner in Paris was quite privileged, which is confirmed by several facts. First, the emphasis placed on French language

training at the St. Petersburg end of the program improved Russian masters' reception in Paris. Second, the very status of a pensioner, demonstrating one's belonging to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris, greatly simplified communication in artistic circles and was a better recommendation than a noble name (45). Third, Russian masters not only had access to art workshops while creating works but also sometimes actively participated in their teachers' creative process (111). Finally, sending the best students to Paris after their graduation from the Imperial Academy of Art brought them closer to the position of the highest-status group—students-protégés of the Royal School at the Academy (85), who were undergoing additional training for departure to Rome.

Marisina's second chapter is devoted to the study of impressions of foreign guests from the Imperial Academy of Art. Creating a certain image was an important task for the institution, expressed by their informing the press about all significant events (convocation of meetings, opening of exhibitions, and award ceremonies) and in inviting representatives of artistic and diplomatic circles (116). The considerable interest of foreigners in the Academy was explained by a combination of several factors. First, the unique feature of the institution in St. Petersburg was that the building corresponded to its purpose (181), whereas in Europe it was customary to adapt palace or church buildings for the tasks of art education. Second, the Academy's lengthy construction made it possible to observe the buildings in an unfinished form while creating a large-scale architectural ensemble (121). Third, the principal point was the constant openness of the institution to visitors, who received a tour with professional explanations (120). Foreigners' views of the Academy's collection were ambiguous: if architectural models, plaster antiques, and sculptures by Russian masters were admired by visitors (164), then the paintings by West European masters received criticism (172), especially in contrast with the Hermitage collection. Moreover, the review of this part of the collection allowed guests to establish a relationship between the low quality of the original paintings and the moderate development of Russian painting. Thus the serious attention paid by foreign guests to the architectural design and internal structure of the Academy demonstrates its significant role in shaping ideas about both art education and the state of the arts in Russia.

The following chapters are devoted to more specific issues that allow us to comprehend the interacademic ties of the 18th century using the example of special projects. The third chapter examines the work of Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder, exploring innovations in the Imperial Academy of

Art and translated into Russian for the first time, which is an important contribution by Marisina to the history of Russian art. The Austrian master notes the special imitative talent of the Russian nation (206), which at the time meant the creative development of the world's artistic heritage. On the basis of the artist's general theoretical and practical ideas, Marisina concludes that they corresponded both to the principles of other academies (in particular, Vienna's) and to the proposals of Russian theorists and professors at the end of the century (212), which demonstrates the inclusion of Russian art education in the pan-European academic tradition of the 18th century. The fourth chapter explores Prince Hoare's initiative to maintain academic correspondence between European art institutions. The project's inspirer was particularly active in contacting the secretary of the Imperial Academy of Art, A. F. Labzin (218), which strengthened international dialogue in the field of culture and led to the gradual formation of more concrete ideas in England about the Russian art school in the first decades of the 19th century. The fifth chapter examines the institute of honorary members and free community members, which allowed the Academy to establish official relations and artistic contacts with similar art institutions in Europe (265) by the 1760s–70s, thereby strengthening its own international reputation. In addition, foreigners elected to the Academy often brought significant benefits, which manifested themselves in completing the museum collection and replenishing the fund of necessary educational materials (268). Thus Marisina's research demonstrates the geographical breadth and thematic diversity of international contacts of the Imperial Academy of Art, which by the beginning of the 19th century was not only perceived as the center of the Russian art school but also fully corresponded to the European academic mentality peculiar to 18th-century culture.



Pozharova's book is devoted to the reception of European theoretical texts in 18th-century Russian culture. If the development of art criticism in this period has already been studied at a fundamental level,<sup>7</sup> the history of theoretical views has been considered only in recent articles by certain authors (E. B. Sharnova, K. Iu. Lappo-Danilevskii, E. B. Mozgovaia), which demonstrates both the novelty of the book and the scale of the idea. This topic perfectly

<sup>7</sup> A. G. Vereshchagina, *Kritiki i iskusstvo: Ocherki istorii russkoi khudozhestvennoi kritiki sere diny XVIII–pervoi treti XIX veka* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia, 2004).

complements Marisina's research: the Academy in the 18th century did not translate significant theoretical texts; that was done by enthusiastic art connoisseurs at their own discretion (7). An important feature of the artistic situation is the simultaneous perception in Russia of texts from different centuries (9), which, on the one hand, precludes a full presentation of their polemical context and, on the other, promotes attention to the fundamental meanings inherent in such works. The book consists of two large parts: the first examines the peculiarities of the interpretation of texts in Russia, while the second looks at European visual sources in Russian art. The sources used in the research are the works of European theorists: the author examines their content in detail while spending even more time recapitulating key ideas. This results in a flawed approach that engages insufficiently with the scholarly literature; in addition, the specific aspects of the reception of West European theories in Russia are not always clearly identified.

Pozharova considers the most famous texts of European art theory from the 17th and 18th centuries in the context of Russian culture. The concept of a hierarchy of genres developed by André Félibien aroused interest in Russia: the French theorist proposed the division of genres into low, ordinary, and noble and proclaimed the superiority of historical and allegorical painting over still lifes, landscapes, and portraits. Nevertheless, this idea was not perceived in Russia dogmatically but viewed in accordance with the stages of an artistic education (from everyday objects to the human figure) (22). The theory of expressions associated with Charles Le Brun was very popular in Russian artistic circles: the French painter singled out six basic passions—admiration, love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness—and explained in detail the methods and techniques for depicting them (with a description of each grimace and movement of the muscles), creating a series of magnificent drawings. This theory attracted noticeable popularity, which led to the creation of a special competition within the Academy (31), but also led to some inconsistency: the concept was translated as “soul movements” (32), which shifted the semantic accent from external physical manifestations to the subtle emotional states that were so important to Russian culture. Especially popular were the arguments of Roger de Piles regarding color, which demonstrated the superiority of Peter Paul Rubens over Raphael in this respect (44) and largely influenced the creation of a magnificent collection of Flemish and Dutch paintings in the Hermitage. An important event was the rapid translation of Joshua Reynolds's “Speeches” from the English original instead of the French edition (123), which was generally accepted and contained a significant



number of inaccuracies: the Russian version in this regard turns out to be the most reliable among European analogues.

The author pays special attention to the problem of fascination with antiquity, which was characteristic of Russian culture in the second half of the 18th century. One of the most thorough discussions is about European engravings: although Pozharova's review of the main publications does not consider the connections between their creation and the Russian artistic context, it nonetheless demonstrates their decisive role in the formation of ideas about ancient culture even before the appearance of the famous work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (108). Interest in this German scholar in Russia was due to his ability to clearly express thoughts about art (116), and not the concept of imitating the ancients: these ideas were known to Russian contemporaries from previous works (de Piles, Le Brun, Nicolas Boileau), which demonstrates the popularity of 17th-century European theories (120). The orientation toward France, characteristic of Russian culture, manifested itself in serious attention to the intellectual context of the age (146): thus many of Denis Diderot's ideas were perceived more readily due to widespread awareness of his predecessors and contemporaries (Claude-Henri Watelet, Marc-Antoine Laugier, Anne Claude de Caylus).

The second part of the monograph, devoted mainly to specific stories of the creation of concrete works, seems more modest in terms of the conclusions formulated. Thus the author notes the high level of execution and interpretation of *The Farewell of Hector and Andromache* by Losenko, surpassing European predecessors and contemporaries in some aspects (157), yet criticizes the substantive and technical features of I. A. Akimov's painting *Saturn with a Scythe, Sitting on a Stone and Trimming the Wings of Cupid* (169), which demonstrates the crisis of the Russian academic school at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Especially noteworthy is her discussion about the work of Jean-Baptiste Le Prince in Russia, which significantly influenced the development of the Russian genre (200), presenting a whole gallery of images from folk life and defining the basis of artistic impressions for the masters of subsequent generations. In general, Pozharova concludes that the theoretical works she examines played a significant role in the development of Russian culture as a whole (216): the translation of texts using complex artistic categories led to the refinement of the Russian language in the 18th century, thereby influencing the great literary heritage of the 19th.



Viewed together, these books indicate crucial directions for understanding 18th-century Russian art in the European context—the international relations of the Imperial Academy of Art and the reception of theoretical works. The approach proposed by Marisina seems quite promising for further research into interacademic contacts: the main aspects of the topic were considered using the most famous examples, which makes it possible to compare other cases to identify national specifics (comparison of *pensionerstvo* in Paris and Rome, academic programs in different European institutions, and much more). The result of Pozharova's study is the presentation of a wide range of European texts on the theory of art, common in the Russian artistic environment, which makes it possible to revise accepted scholarly formulations about the defining role of concepts articulated by Winckelmann and Diderot. The author convincingly shows that the positions of the French philosopher largely continue the work of his predecessors, well-known in Russia, and the new understanding of antiquity was due to the study of engravings rather than the text of the German scholar.

A careful consideration of the international activities of the Academy and the European theoretical heritage in 18th-century Russia eliminates serious gaps that have prevented a comprehensive understanding of artistic developments in this period. Our increasingly sophisticated picture of the context in which artistic works were created, used, and understood can now strengthen the validity and fundamental nature of comparative studies of 18th-century Russian and European art, revealing both the commonalities inherent in the culture of the Enlightenment era and differences reflecting the national specifics of each country. In this sense, Sarab'ianov's idea, first developed in his 1980 book on painting, have led to an all-around study of Russian-European relations: artistic processes, institutional contacts, theoretical influences, public discussions of works, and the role of the customer in the formation of art. The combination of all these aspects in perspective contributes to the consideration of similarities and differences in the development of art in Russia and Europe at a fundamental level.

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