

GONCHAROVA – Catalogue and Book Reviews *plus*

“Genesis of a Catalogue Raisonné” by Denise Bazetoux



NATALJA GONTSCHAROWA

Zwischen russischer Tradition und europäischer Moderne

Beate Kempfert with Alla Chilova, Editors Jewgenija Iljuchina,

Beate Kempfert, Gleb Pospelow, Irina Vakar

Hatje Cantz 2009 €39.80 CHF 56.90

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Between Russian Tradition and European Modernism

Beate Kempfert with Alla Chilova, Editors

Texts by Evgenia Iluchina, Beate Kempfert, Gleb Pospelow, Irina Vakar

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The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova

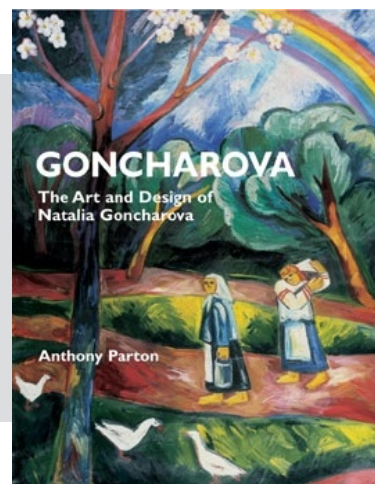
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NATALIA GONTCHAROVA

Son oeuvre entre tradition et modernité

Denise Bazetoux

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NATALIA GONCHAROVA

Between Russian Tradition and European Modernism
Beate Kemfert with Alla Chilova, Editors

That Natalia Goncharova has to be considered among the most important protagonists of the Russian Avant-Garde movement is well known and may seem to be a matter of course especially since the artist has been ennobled by the art market as the most expensive woman artist in the world.

Even more surprising – and often forgotten – is that the art historical discourse on her was still in its infancy in 2009 when this catalogue was first published on the occasion of the exhibition, *Between Russian Tradition and European Modernism*, so adding to the short list of books devoted to her art.

The show was the first monographic exhibition on Goncharova ever seen in Germany. On display were about seventy works dating from the artist's early beginnings in 1905 until her death in 1962. Most of the works were oil paintings and some, such as the late "Space" paintings, had not been seen for decades. The exhibition was made possible through the cooperation of the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, from where the works came, and in collaboration with three smaller museums in both West and East Germany. According to the art historian Ljudmilla Belkin in a review of the exhibition in the German art journal *Kunstchronik* ("Das kuratorische Werk in der Gemengelage der 'Bilder' Review der Ausstellung Natalja Gontscharowa – Zwischen russischer Tradition und europäischer Moderne", in *Kunstchronik*, 1 (2011), S. 7-11) the idea for the show came originally from Alla Chilova, a freelance curator and former associate of Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery, who had tried ever since her emigration to Germany to realise an exhibition of Goncharova and her husband Mikhail Larionov in the West. But for more than thirteen years, Chilova had received only refusals from German museums. The reasons were always the same: the artist was too unknown, the exhibition's success too uncertain, and the financial risk too high.

Although the so-called "Paris estate", which was the core of this exhibition, had been incorporated into the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery twenty two years before, the foreword to the catalogue states that Goncharova's legacy had been insufficiently investigated at the time. When in 2006 Thorsten Rodiek, of Kunsthalle St. Annen Lübeck, Beate Kemfert, curator and head of Opelvillen Rüsselsheim, as well as Wolfram Morath-Vogel, director of Angermuseum Erfurt decided to realise this project, fundamental research was needed, especially in terms of dating.

The catalogue is divided into four major chapters written by Beate Kemfert, Irina Vakar, Yevgenia Iliuhina and Gleb Pospelov. They are supplemented by Goncharova's, "Artistic Manifesto" of 1913, three catalogue notes without references and a short biography of the artist written by Michael Zuch.

The catalogue opens with the essay of Beate Kemfert introducing the reader to Goncharova. Kemfert's essay provides important historical and biographical references which may help to explain the stylistically diverse oeuvre of the artist who does not seem to fit easily into either "Russian" or "Western" artistic categories.

This difficulty of fitting Goncharova's work into established labels of national stereotypes also plays a role in the following essay by Irina Vakar entitled "Natalia Goncharova in Exile". Vakar's text focuses on the stylistic development of Goncharova from the time she left Russia forever in 1915 to later settle in Paris, where she died in 1962. Along this broad time span Vakar aligns the artist's oeuvre and suggests the redating of some works such as *Sunflowers* (previously dated to 1908 and now dated to 1955-59 – Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Inv. No. Sch. 2224). Following the opinion expressed in Ljudmila Belkin's review, Irina Vakar emphasises the disparity between native traditions and the international avant-garde in the oeuvre of Goncharova rather than to try to work out the internal logic of Goncharova's artistic development. The author's descriptions of paintings and different periods of Goncharova's oeuvre are more like those of an art critic, using attributes such as "sentimental", "decorative" and "pleasant", or she confronts the reader with sentences like:

"And although she appeared to be satisfied with the results of her work ('The criterion of the success of something that one has done is satisfaction or non-satisfaction'), the present-day viewer will hardly agree with her."

Goncharova's work for the theatre is the subject of the essay by Yevgenia Iliuhina entitled "Natalia Goncharova – Between Theatre and Painting". Iliuhina's essay gives a detailed overview of different productions for which Goncharova designed costumes and sets. Although Iliuhina recognises that the work for the theatre has been an important source of inspiration to the artist, she remains focused on Goncharova's work for the theatre only. What is missing are references and descriptions to what

ways her work for the theatre influenced her paintings and vice versa. Moreover, Belkin has introduced an interesting aspect which could have been revealing:

“For the described inner conflict of Goncharova the confrontation with her attitude towards easel painting would have been illuminating. This word (...) in Russian, *stanok*, is a metaphor that stands for freedom of art. The debates around *stanokovistic* art were up for the pictorial culture of Russia in the 1930s – for the emigration of even longer – forming “ (Ibid., p. 10)

By leaving aside these kinds of questions Iliuhina takes the risk of creating the impression of Goncharova as “being in between” free and applied art in the dilemma of having to work for the theatre in order to have an income instead of exploring the consequences of this interaction.

Gleb Pospelovs essay “Der Nachlass von Natalja Gontscharowa”/“The Estate of Natalia Goncharova” investigates the intertwined ways in which the artist’s oeuvre finally came to the Tretiakov Gallery. Pospelov gives the reader an impression of the political difficulties that led to the fact that the Goncharova works had to travel halfway around the world before they came into the collection of the Tretiakov Gallery. Although Pospelov’s essay blends perfectly into the style of the catalogue by using many quotes from the artist’s diary and different letters from her and her companions – making the artist thereby more concrete for the reader – it is a pity that his essay does not discuss the question about the large number of works which he had seen in the apartment of the artist when he visited Tomilina in 1977 to select works for a Larionov exhibition, and which did not, in the end, find their way into the collection of the Tretiakov Gallery. (See, Akinsha, Kozlov, Bergazov with Sylvia Hochfield: “The Strange Illegal Journey of the Larionov–Goncharova Archive” *ARTnews*, March 1997.)

That there are so many questions arising from the catalogue shows how much still needs to be done by art historians so as not to lag behind the art market which has long recognised the importance of this extraordinary artist.

Ariane Hofstetter

Venues:

Rüsselsheim, Opelvillen
5 October 2009 – 24 January 2010
Lübeck, Kunsthalle St. Annen
7 February – 30 May 2010
Erfurt, Angermuseum
13 June – 3 October 2010



GONCHAROVA

The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova
Anthony Parton

This is the first comprehensive historical investigation into the painting, graphics, work for the theatre, and design of Natalia Goncharova. It has been in the making for thirty years, Dr. Anthony Parton (Durham University, England) having spent years travelling between libraries and collections in the gathering of archives and documents on the art of Goncharova in order to compile an exhaustive and authoritative account of the artist’s phenomenal creativity that began in 1900 and continued to the end of her life in 1962.

Integrating personal biography with the artist’s creative biography, Anthony Parton develops his history on two levels.

First of all he situates groups of works in a context – such as the Neo-Primitive works of peasants (Chapters 2 and 3), the artist’s commissions from Sergei Diaghilev for his Ballets Russes (Chapter 7), the artist’s futurist books (Chapter 6), her interior designs for restaurants, homes, a chapel (Chapter 11) and so forth – and discusses the ideas informing these projects – respectively, Goncharova’s deep commitment to social liberty and justice, the celebration of Russian traditional culture, the formal interplay between language and image, panel paintings devoted to the seasons or the liturgical cycles for example.

Then Parton develops the history of these creative works stylistically and formally.

This two-fold approach to Goncharova’s work makes the book readable and engaging on the one hand, and allows for in-depth discussion of the various trends on the other hand.

Goncharova worked in several styles simultaneously. In her mammoth (over 800 works) one-woman show of autumn 1913 (Moscow, spring 1914 in Petersburg), she exhibited works in the Neo-Primitive style for her peasants, in Cubist style for portraits or figures which were also inspired by ancient Russian sculpture, in a bright, flat Fauvism that was equally influenced by the icon

where she depicts Biblical cycles, and in her Rayism she captures light in nature. In using such a wide range of styles, Goncharova was adapting style to her subject matter, rather than beginning with a style to then choose a subject matter. In this Goncharova was truly innovative, and such a range of styles allowed her to capture the very content of her world view – egalitarian, aesthetic and spiritual, with a strong attraction to Eastern cultures – in all the different media in which she worked.

This stylistic versatility also allowed Goncharova to navigate between figurative and non-figurative painting. After her Rayism of 1913-1914, she turned to a flat, abstract Purism in the early 1920s when she was in Paris. This gave a new impetus to her work for the stage and in design during the 1920s and 1930s. As she said, “painting is an inner necessity for theatre design and not the other way round.” (Chapter 12)

In his approaches to Goncharova’s original and unconventional artistic development, Parton also had the added task of confronting the historical difficulties posed by the lack of studio inventories of Goncharova’s work from both the late 1910s after she had left Russia to design for the Ballets Russes, never imagining that she would not return, and when her Paris studio was emptied in the 1970s after her death in 1962. (Conclusion) So many works are known to have gone unrecorded and into a number of hands both private and state, in Russia and Paris, and they have been appearing on the market in recent years. This has meant that collectors are relying on analysis by reputable scientists to replace the loss of recorded provenance. In a particular case, this benefited the art historian directly. For scientific investigation into one painting showed that it had signs of smoke damage, and this made it possible for Parton to identify it with the title of a work in the 1912 Donkey’s Tail exhibition catalogue, a fire in the premises having broken out just prior to the opening which the press reported on, adding that numerous works had suffered smoke damage. (Chapter 2)

Thus relying on science, documents from exhibition catalogues (although of the over 800 numbers listed in her 1913 catalogue only one half of the works can be identified, for example) and press reviews, the memoirs of those who knew Goncharova and whom Anthony Parton also knew such as Alexandra Tomilina-Larionov, Tatiana Loguine and Mary Chamot, the Goncharova archives in London, and above all on the works themselves, Anthony Parton has compiled a history and a story about one of Russia’s most creative and inventive 20th century artists.

As the author wrote to this reviewer,

“Of course I was working on this book, without knowing it, for 30 years – ever since I met Mary Chamot and Tatiana Loguine back in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time I was researching Larionov but you couldn’t do one without

automatically doing the other. Then of course there was the continual pressure from Mary and Tatiana to write about Goncharova – they were both wonderful – they arranged appointments for me to meet half the Ecole de Paris (the half who were still alive) and so I had access to the most wonderful archival sources. Mme. Prokofiev was brilliant with me – it was such a privilege to know her – though that introduction came from Oleg, Prokofiev’s son, who had been married to Camilla Gray. I knew Michel Seuphor very well, Pierre Vorms, Anton Dolin, Giuseppe Sprovieri, director of the Galeria Futurista in Rome – I had contact with Mme. Spendiarova in Russia, the wife of Sergei Romanovich, both of whom adored Larionov and Goncharova. Mme. Spendiarova even kept a pair of Larionov’s shoes that he had left in Moscow in 1915! So, I collected information on Goncharova for 30 years and in the process, of course, saw many paintings.

“I knew Mme. Larionov but she was very frail and never allowed me to see any archival documents in the apartment, claiming that the most important documentation had all been sent to the Victoria & Albert Museum. Indeed, the National Art Library in the V&A has the most magnificent Goncharova / Larionov archive outside of Russia. It possesses almost the entire contents of Goncharova’s and Larionov’s library, including manifestos, writings, letters, photographs and much more besides. There are hundreds of rare items in that collection. And the print rooms of the V&A contain a stunning collection of stage works, artist’s sketchbooks, pochoir prints, drawings etc.

“Well, I am off the point – I knew Mme. Larionov, we all did in the early 1980s: Sue Compton, John Bowl etc., but the paintings at this time were locked away in the Odoul Warehouse. However, I had free access to Mary Chamot’s archives including her own catalogue raisonne of works both inside and outside Russia. Mary had spent years travelling in Russia (she was, of course, Russian by birth) visiting both major collections and provincial galleries and studying Goncharova’s work wherever she could find it. Mary gave me her catalogue raisonne before she died – I still have it! She also gave me many important documents relating to Goncharova and items from Goncharova’s and Larionov’s personal archive that they had given to her.

“The other thing that was very kind, was that Mme. Larionov sent me scores of photographs of works by Goncharova – many of which had at that point gone missing and were only known from archival photographs in her possession. I think I have put all this or a substantial part in the acknowledgements of my book.”

Anthony Parton’s, *The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova*, is of the highest academic standard and is the basic text for the history of the art of Natalia Goncharova.

Patricia Railing



NATALIA GONTCHAROVA
 Son oeuvre entre tradition et modernité
 Denise Bazetoux

Published in the spring of 2011, this long-awaited first volume of Denise Bazetoux's *Catalogue Raisonné* compiles the paintings by the artist from oil on canvas to works on paper in various media. In preparation is Volume 2 which will contain other paintings that have since come to light, together with the artist's work for the theatre.

Volume 1 comprises a listing of 1,534 works plus 34 Attributed Works, all of which are illustrated in colour where possible. They are accompanied by full cataloguing-in information, including exhibition history. The catalogue opens with an excellent overview of Goncharova's creative biography and a chronology of exhibitions until the year of her death in 1962.

Denise Bazetoux's *Catalogue Raisonné* is a necessary reference for all those interested in the painting of Natalia Goncharova.

Because the art of compiling a catalogue raisonné is a very specialist endeavour (Denise Bazetoux is author of the catalogues raisonnés of three French painters – Henri Lebasque, Maximilien Luce and Georges Valmier), her essay, "Genesis of a Catalogue Raisonné", which first appeared on the InCoRM website at Forum in June 2011, is now also published here.

Patricia Railing

Denise Bazetoux Genesis of a Catalogue Raisonné

I first came across one of Natalia Goncharova's paintings thirty-five years ago. What struck me was the quality of her painting, and, even more, the strength that came out of it. It was both surprising and uncommon for a female artist.

I was amazed, but the feeling was cut short by my surprise that such an artist was not more famous. This drove my curiosity further. I carried out some research during my frequent visits to libraries and museums, since I was preparing, at the time, French painters' catalogue raisonné. I therefore managed to collect a significant amount of documents, photographs, and exhibition catalogues among other pieces of evidence. This happened little by little and over a long period of time. I soon had a pleasant surprise: Goncharova started to place her work on exhibit at the beginning of the 1900s. In particular, a major retrospective exhibition took place in Moscow in 1913 and displayed over 800 pieces of work.

As I began to understand how prolific the artist was, and still driven by my own curiosity, I seized every opportunity I could to gain more knowledge and to examine and understand Goncharova's paintings and artistic path especially. I first approached the Tretyakov Gallery and the Russian Museum of Saint-Petersburg from whom I managed to obtain a limited amount of information. Very quickly, though, the exchanges turned out to be problematic. I therefore decided to approach the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which gave me access to its large database. More to the point, it gave me the opportunity to examine all the artist's paintings at the Musée national d'Art moderne, without any restrictions. Little by little, I continued my research and my observations, consulting other museums in France and abroad.

The first thing I needed to accomplish was to set the artist's career into its historical context. This led me to understand why Goncharova had been forgotten for such a long time. The outbreak of World War I left Goncharova and her companion Larionov with a very short period of time to work and carry out her research. After 1915, she devoted herself to creating decors and costumes for the Russian Ballets, at Diaghilev's request, and became famous in the West, especially thanks to this new dimension of her work.

Moreover, under the Soviet regime and after World War II, Russian artists who did not follow party line were boycotted. Local authorities did not hesitate to confiscate the possessions of many opponents as well as Jewish collectors. The paintings were listed and put away. They were doomed to oblivion for a long time, except those that some collectors managed to hide and save in spite of the political context.

This explains why, until the fall of the Soviet Union and the "opening" that followed, the only pieces that we knew of were the ones displayed in museums. Yet, this historical rupture offered new prospects. I thought it would be interesting, and henceforth conceivable, to find unknown pieces. I could prove their existence, mainly (but not only) thanks to the 1913 and 1914 exhibitions. Even if I had to admit that they could have

been destroyed or that they could have “vanished” during the wars, I thought that they should definitely be somewhere, in Russia or elsewhere. I decided to get in touch with galleries and auction houses among other stakeholders.

I was not disappointed. Since the beginning of the 1990s, paintings began to be publicly traded or sold by dealers who took advantage of the political evolution to take a closer look at the Russian Avant-Garde.

Not surprisingly, a lot of these pieces came from Israel, where Jewish families brought them when they decided to leave Russia and from other satellite countries. Indeed, many people fleeing from Russia managed to take some or all of their goods with them. These collectors – or their heirs now – gladly sell the paintings they own to face more urgent needs.

This is why several unknown paintings (or paintings that were thought to be lost) have emerged in Western Europe over the past years. This has caused some problems due to the lack of knowledge of history or to its deliberate concealment by key stakeholders who are usually close to the art market and whose goal is to limit the arrival of pieces on the market so as to protect their quasi-monopoly for their own benefit. The well-documented problem of the origin of the objects then emerges. It is currently – and paradoxically – tending to act as an authenticity certificate.

But how can we know the origin of a painting whose negotiation often did not give rise to any official purchase certificate (which is not surprising considering the circumstances)? The absence of origin is also a result of Goncharova’s and Larionov’s accumulation of a significant number of pieces they brought from Russia in their Parisian apartment – another part of this production was sent to them by a friend from Moscow in the late 1920s. The dissemination of these artworks or their storage in a furniture warehouse when Alexandra Tomilina died happened in very obscure circumstances. Similarly, how can one prove the authenticity of pieces that were given as gifts by the artist to shopkeepers of the neighborhood for instance? This was the means of payment that A. Tomilina continued to adopt after Larionov’s death.

But in the absence of “origin”, can we provide evidence that the piece was displayed in an exhibition during the artist’s lifetime?

The exhibition catalogues at the time are not helpful at all

because they do not contain any reproductions or measurements. The numbers written by the artist on the backs of paintings did not always correspond to the one attributed to them when they were placed on display.

The collector’s name, which is mentioned at times, is not an irrefutable piece of evidence either because it is often very difficult to clearly identify the actual painting among several other pieces that have similar or far too vague titles – like “landscape” or “still-life” for instance. With the exception of a few reproductions, only a few titles can be identified with certainty even on Eli Eganbury’s 1913 list.

We know for sure, however, that Goncharova was a hard worker who painted relentlessly day and night. In order to have a realistic idea of her work, we cannot forget that she made a first selection and she often realized several preparatory pieces of work – sometimes very completed ones – before choosing the paintings for an exhibition.

In her book published in 1972 (*Gontcharova*, page 108), Mary Chamot explains that even after leaving Russia, Goncharova kept making easel paintings (even though she devoted herself very largely to Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet costumes and decors), in particular still-lives and flowers, which she sold easily during the War and the occupation, but also landscapes which are very close in style to her impressionist beginnings. So it is not surprising that the paintings that she did towards the end of her life were attributed to the beginning of her career, although they are in reality something like “replicas”, made from memory.

This confusion has allowed for dishonest or uninformed minds to contest the authenticity of these pieces. These individuals would do better to consider the statement that Goncharova once made in front of her students: “It has been years since I painted this, but I’m modifying it today. I am working again on it. Do not ever destroy your paintings, you will be able to work on them again afterwards.”

This quotation is taken from Tatiana Loguine’s book, *Natalia Gontcharova et Michel Larionov – 50 ans à Saint-Germain-des-Près – Témoignages et documents* (Paris, Klincksieck, 1971, p. 230). One should read and re-read these memoirs of a very close friend of Natalia Goncharova.

Translated from the French by Anita Hayem-Ghez