

# THE EXPERT OPINION

## Papers given at the Annual General Meeting of InCoRM Paris, 25 September 2010

Prior to the Annual General Meeting which met after lunch, a morning conference was held on “The Expert Opinion”. Going well beyond the “eye of the connoisseur” or the “I certify” written on the back of the photograph of a work of art, a recent approach to the Expert Opinion is based on scientific and art historical investigation. The aim of such documentation is to establish means for authenticating works and, based on that, to further our knowledge of the history of art.

Four speakers were invited to express their views on the need for The Expert Opinion, its purpose and what it should address. Each one spoke from their particular discipline – art historian and scientist – as a collector or as a gallerist. Their papers are given here in full.

### Ariane Hofstetter, Art Historian Innocent Until Proven Guilty?

8 Authentication is a complex matter which is connected with a huge number of other questions that do not concern the problem of connoisseurship only, but also touch on aspects of economical, political, historical and, above all, ethical reception. Given this complexity, it seems to be important to discuss the extent and the limits of art history and, moreover, to make clear that art history is primarily an academic discipline and **not a service on demand**.

In the field of Russian avant-garde, art history has recently experienced a crisis. It is a crisis which on the one hand is homemade due to a lack of transparency and academic exchange, and on the other hand is to be explained by the complex history of the avant-garde itself as it has oscillated between rejection and recognition. Although the achievements of the Russian avant-garde movement are widely recognised today and a number of its representatives are finally able to claim their place in the Pantheon of art history, there are a lot of questions that still need to be asked.

This situation, which is especially attractive for basic research, has posed a problem ever since the art market began to realise a (monetary) value in Russian avant-garde art and so became highly interested in the question of authenticity. The importance of authenticity cannot be denied in the context of this emphasis on the purely financial interest of the art market, but it is important to remember that the motivation behind it is different to the one of the art historian. The question of authenticity is fundamental for the art historian because his or her understanding is based on each single work by an artist; the artist’s work is the starting and ending point of his research.

To respond to the question of authenticity art historians rely

on various methods and techniques, having to tailor their approach to the particular object and for the specific question. As this, by the way, should also be the case for a lack of provenance. A lack of provenance is truly problematic, but it is not a criterion for exclusion. It is a problem to deal with, especially since it is not surprising that the origin of many works of the Russian avant-garde is still in the dark. This is because, to put it briefly, we must recall that with the politics of the pursuit of nonconformist artists ordered by Stalin in 1932 because their art was declared “unfit” for the proletarian ideology, the accordingly stigmatized works had for decades been hushed up because they were *ne pravylno* (“not proper”), thus they were dangerous. The fact that in the Soviet Union and her constituent states, as well as in the German Democratic Republic, there still were art collectors who would not be deterred by politics has been demonstrated in detail (among other things) by Waltraud Bayer<sup>1</sup> and Christina Burrus<sup>2</sup> on the basis of different collectors’ personalities. As both art historians show, on account of their illegal status those works were traded on a tacitly approved informal market which has grown steadily since the 1970s – in parallel with the rising international commercialisation of the art scene.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore impossible to expect any type of invoice or official paper as proof of provenance.

But even in the tumultuous times between 1910 and 1925, artists seem to have given little thought to conscientious record-keeping. Art exhibitions were often documented only incompletely because they may have lasted but a few days. Besides, the financial means were extremely limited as a rule. If, nevertheless, one is lucky and an exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, it usually listed the title only, but not the measurements or the material used. Also, photographs of the exhibitions exist in rare cases only.<sup>4</sup>

Still, it may not seem impossible that even today works can appear about whose existence nothing was known up to now. The artists of the Russian avant-garde movement were gifted

with an immense amount of creativity, just as were their western colleagues. This impression is provided by exhibition catalogues that have been preserved. If, for example, the number of works listed in exhibition catalogues is compared to the documented works of an artist, a big discrepancy is to be noticed as a rule. Thus, for example, the catalogue of the Knave of Diamond's exhibition in 1916 lists a total of 60 Suprematist works that Malevich showed within the scope of this exhibition. Until today only four of these works have been identified. The destiny of the remaining 56 works is unknown.<sup>5</sup> To the discrepancy between exhibited and identified works must be added those works which never found their way to an art exhibition – artists never exhibit all the works in their studios. How many works this concerns remains in the area of speculation.

Nevertheless, even if the preoccupation with unknown, poorly documented works of Russian avant-garde artists often resembles the work of a detective who wants to solve the perfect crime, it is certain that for the art historian this means that the work must first of all be: **Innocent until proven guilty.**

It has to be the case that a questionable provenance does not immediately make a questionable work, just as a signature added afterwards to a work does not necessarily mean it is a forgery. Rather, it is necessary to reflect critically on the methods and take advantage of the achievements of the analytical sciences of chemistry and physics. The co-operation with qualified scientists who can look not only onto but also under and between the paint layers by means of the most modern high-tech instruments opens up many possibilities. And although one may say that the co-operation between art historians and scientists admittedly is nothing new, the possibilities and constraints of this co-operation have not been set out exactly to define the “cans” and “cannots” of each discipline to allow for a collaborative handling of problems.

## What the Scientist Can Do

The scientists examine the factual nature of the art object. In the event of an oil painting that would mean that he or she is able to make statements about the nature of the picture carrier (canvas, wood, etc), primers, preparatory drawings, pigments and binders, and all types of finishes such as varnishes. The scientist can tell if and when an image has been restored and to what influences it might have been exposed. Through such analysis conclusions can be drawn about how the painting was made, how it was stored, and so on.

Whereas the art historian's approach is limited to the surface of the art object the scientist can look through the art object, analysing it into every single one of its components. These investigations can support the style-critical judgment of art historians because they can complement their visual findings based on the results of the natural sciences. A special hue, like the

often cited Puni-blue, then turns out, for example, to be a blend of certain pigments. Thus the criticised “intuitive” identification of the art historian can be fleshed out by the so-called hard facts. The art historian is able to learn more about the habits of the artist, but it is also possible to make inferences about the “made nature of the object” in relation to the artist's theory – an act of analysis and interpretation which is not possible for the scientist.

It is thus time to make transparent the processes of authentication and the findings of a judgement and to formulate standards which define the basis of the scientific work. Considering the uncertainty of the art market, from a scientific point of view it would be highly questionable to banish works by Russian avant-garde artists that are “suspected of being a forgery” with an iconoclastic gesture. Rather, one should understand these works as an opportunity to close the gaps in our knowledge about the Russian avant-garde and her representatives. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that art historians must look closely before they take responsibility for the genuineness of a work of art and its attribution. Therefore I would like to state: If doubts remain after the analysis, decide against a picture.

## Footnotes

- [1] Waltraud Bayer, *Gerettete Kultur. Private Kunstsammler in der Sowjetunion 1917 – 1991*, Wien 2006; A. Raev, A. and I. Wünsche, I. (Eds.), *Kursschwankungen. Russische Kunst im Wertesystem der europäischen Moderne*, Berlin 2007, 43 – 57.
- [2] Christina Burrus, “The Valerie Dudakov Collection” in, *Journal of InCoRM* No.1 Vol 2-3 2010; Christina Burrus, *Les Collectionneurs Russes d'une revolution à l'autre*, Editions du Chêne, Paris, 1992.
- [3] Almost proverbial are the anecdotes related to the unusually well documented collection of the famous avant-garde collector Georgii Costakis. Aliko Costakis reports that her father discovered the works of his collection in the most impossible places. “My father found masterpieces in unbelievable places: in cupboards, under beds, in old chests, in cellars and attics, he pulled them down off nails on barn walls where they closed unglazed windows and preserved the scrap metal from rain and wind. A piece of art had been used instead of an oilcloth for a kitchen table on which the family took their meals.” Aliko Costakis, *Erinnerungen an Georgios Costakis. In Licht und Farbe in der russischen Avantgarde. Die Sammlung Costakis*, Köln 2004.
- [4] It is therefore not surprising that the origin of many works is still in the dark.
- [5] I would like to thank Patricia Railing for this information.

## References

**Auction Catalogue:** Russian Avant-Garde and Soviet Contemporary Art, Moscow. Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July 1988, London Sotheby's 1988.

**Hans Belting**, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?*, München, 1983.

**Hans Peter Riese**, „Die zweite Karriere der russischen Avantgarde. Das heikelste Terrain des Kunstbetriebs: Probleme der Zuschreibung der Werke und die Sorglosigkeit der öffentlichen Sammlungen“, Feuilleton der *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) vom Montag, den 18. Dezember 1995, S. 32.

**M. Reitz**, *Auf der Fährte der Zeit*, Weinheim 2003.

Ronald D. Spencer (Ed.), *The Expert versus the Object: Judging Fakes and False Attributions in the Visual Arts*, New York 2004.

**Tasos Zembylas**, „Kunst als evaluatives Konzept“ in Kulturbetriebslehre : *Grundlagen einer Inter-Disziplin*, Wiesbaden, 2004.

their analysis responds to the needs of our research, in order to minimize any risk of error, and to avoid as much as possible any misinterpretation.

Obviously all the results obtained contribute continuously to our database. This database is also enriched by exchanges we have with recognized institutions in France and abroad.

We belong to professional organisations and we regularly attend different conferences. This allows us to provide the expert with much reliable information.

In our experience, working with curator and/or expert provides important information about the knowledge of works of art.

For example, some examinations have helped to place works chronologically in the body of an artist's work thanks to the products detected.

Technical analysis has also made it possible to discover hidden pictorial elements that reveal a painter's secrets that are unknown to the scientist but may be well known to an expert of the painter.

In addition, some paintings have *pentimenti*, inscriptions, restorations. This also benefits restorers, with whom we work closely.

The collaboration between art historian, expert, technical expert and restorer is the main guarantee that gives the collector a complete knowledge of the work of art he submits.

Proofs that technical analysis can provide may establish “beyond any reasonable doubt” for the expert. Otherwise it can open other research perspectives or suggest hypotheses. That is why scientific analysis exists in order to underpin the conclusions the art expert may come to about a work.

So scientific analysis requires the greatest humility, rigour, a strong code of conduct ... and a serious commitment!

## Laurette Thomas, Scientist

### Technical Analysis of Works of Art

First of all I want to thank InCoRM for enabling us to provide some clarification about the role of technical and scientific analysis of works of art.

As we intend it in our laboratory ([www.artanalysis.eu](http://www.artanalysis.eu)), our work is to help the art historian, curator or expert to support his or her initial approach to the work of art by highlighting all that is not visible to the naked eye.

This is possible thanks to the tools we use. They rely on technical performance, always tested and adapted to these needs. It must also not be forgotten that the instruments are a continually evolving technology.

We begin by direct observation of the painting, front and back, and this allows us to record all its visible features. Then we establish a procedure for the analysis of what is specific to the work reviewed.

To do our analysis we use fourteen different instruments,<sup>1</sup> eleven of which are on-site and three of which take place at the University of Paris VI, with whom we have worked for the past 10 years.

Therefore, we undertake all the examinations ourselves on-site, while we are present to guide and direct the investigations at the University of Paris VI. This is so that

## Footnotes

- [1] Scientific imaging : HD camera, multispectral camera IR and UV, macrophoto camera, videomicroscope, 3D, thermal infrared camera, X-Ray radiography, microscopy. - Physical-chemical analysis : X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF), Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM), Energy-dispersive X-Ray spectroscopy (EDS or EDX), Raman spectroscopy, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), spectrophotometer. See, P. Railing, Laurette Thomas and Ilenia Cassan, “The Interaction of Scientific and Art Historical Investigations into Works of Art”, *Journal of InCoRM* Vol. 1, Nos. 2-3, 2010.

## Jacques Konckier, Collector

### Why Do People Start a Collection?

There is obviously no simple answer to such a question.

Kenneth Clark, the great art historian, tells us that asking such a question is equivalent to asking why people fall in love.

The reasons driving people to start a collection are manifold: Passion, curiosity, possible financial rewards, tax shelters... and more.

To which ever of these categories they belong, collectors have in common that they want to establish their reputation through the discovery and possession of desirable objects.

All of them also have in common to display, through their collection, their deeply hidden and true inner Self, this inner Self that they sometimes have difficulties in analysing. Especially when they alternate between periods of euphoria, cheerfulness, doubt, tension and sometimes despair.

Certain collectors look at their collection without seeing it, in the same way that one looks at stock certificates or at a piece of real estate bought as an investment. Those ones have realised that their collection was a way to grow richer as they buy and resell their “desirable objects”.

I do not pass judgement on anyone and certainly not on collector-speculators who, after all, have a function and in particular the important one which is to animate the Art market.

Nevertheless, I would like to concentrate here –

- on those collectors with an emotional and powerful bond with their collection, and an intensely close connection;
- on those collectors whose prime motivation is not money but passion;
- on those who, through their collection, enrich themselves first and foremost both intellectually and culturally;
- on those who, after having collected their desirable objects with discernment and good judgment, passion and dedication can, in a way, be considered as artists themselves, at least to a degree;
- on those, finally, who spend precious time and put all their heart into the search for the 5 fundamental components of any good collection. These are –

- assumed authenticity of the object
- its provenance if possible
- its objective quality
- its condition
- its rarity.

This short preamble brings me to the subject that led us to be here together today and which I was asked to discourse on: The opinion of a Russian Avant-Garde collector, or should I say, a delighted and ecstatic masochist.

By implication will also be discussed the place that the Russian Avant-Garde occupies, or should occupy (all problems being resolved), in the Art world in general and the reputation it should enjoy with the following important market players: collectors, gallery owners, auction houses, museum and exhibition curators.

How does one become a Russian Avant-Garde collector?

Or better, as this is one of the subjects which I have been asked to develop here: How did I become a Russian Avant-Garde Collector myself?

And what are the problems (not to call them nightmares) which I have encountered in the past and which I am still facing permanently in order to satisfy this passion?

I was about fourteen when I seriously came across Art for the first time. Until then my parents were using their meager financial resources mainly to feed the family and provide an education for their children.

Suddenly, as the financial situation improved a bit, they started buying art magazines and visiting assiduously the local antique shops in our home town in order to restore and furnish an old house they had acquired to replace the soulless apartment we had been living in.

Art books, reading and some museum visits satisfied my quest for knowledge during the following years. The masterpieces adorning my walls, including my barrack room in the army, were essentially reproduction posters of well known paintings.

As I started active life quite early I was lucky enough to meet socially with interesting people, most of whom are still friends today, and who influenced decisively my tastes and the way I looked at Art in general or at a specific Art piece in particular.

My first modest acquisitions were essentially focused on French contemporary Art and in particular the 1950s abstract movement.

My best friend, a very well informed and educated collector and particularly selective in his choices, besides his embryonic tribal Art collection (which subsequently became one of the best in Europe), also owned two beautiful works by David Burliuk and the Kruchenykh-Rozanova, *The Universal War*.

I must admit that I had a rather imperfect knowledge of this artistic movement but was nevertheless very much intrigued by these two very different works of the Russian Avant-Garde.

Cleverly and patiently coached by my mentor, I started accumulating avidly an impressive documentation on what would become a consuming passion which grows by the day and seems to be never ending.

Works were scarce in France at the time. I never came across an auction of Russian Avant-Garde, and I had absolutely no contact with experts or gallery owners who would have any pieces. So apart from one or two interesting visits to museum exhibitions, which only roused my passion further, I still remained unsatisfied and frustrated for a good number of years.

I was particularly lucky to initiate business contacts and regular trade with the former Soviet Union as far back as 1977 and had to travel there at least four times a year (Leonid Brezhnev was ruling the country at the time).

For a foreigner, wandering or simply moving around in Moscow at the time was quite an adventure.

But a passion is a passion, isn't it? And almost nothing can hamper it. We don't have enough time here for me to tell you in detail about all the skilful manoeuvring I had to do to make contact with Russian journalists based in France and later on with a community of intellectuals and academics in Moscow, which I believed, and I was right, could coach me and introduce me to people who might own real pieces of Russian Avant-Garde art.

I kept in contact with all those people over the years and some are among my very good friends today. I always believed that our contacts and encounters at their apartments in Moscow were secret. I was quite naïve and never suspected that every movement of mine was duly monitored, every one of my visits to Moscow duly reported and listed by the police, something which I learned years later.

A crazy French businessman with a passion for the Russian Avant-Garde was probably never considered as a potential danger to national security. Therefore I was never bothered or harassed, never interrogated and neither were my muscovite contacts...at least apparently.

Then a collector's miracle happened in 1989/1990 with the beginning of what was to be known as "Perestroika".... A dream come true for a lot of people, for sure, but certainly for a Russian Avant-Garde lover and would-be collector.

All my contacts were all of a sudden able to express themselves openly, to introduce me freely to a lot of people in the Russian Art world, and I started seeing in broad light works that until then had been in hiding.

It is then that I started making my first acquisitions.

No Malevich's or Rodchenko's at first, but beautiful works by less recognised artists, quality pieces which will

remain in my collection for as long as I live and for me will always represent more than other important pieces acquired thereafter. They are the foundation of my collection which is building slowly and carefully day after day.

I shall keep to myself the names of the people in Russia who helped me make my debut as a real Russian Avant-Garde collector. A number of them are well known to almost everyone in this room. All very respectable and respected people who during this very chaotic period in Russia went sometimes to a lot of trouble and some risk to direct and guide me in my search, who taught me precious things and who even sold me some interesting works, always trying to give an answer to some or all of the above mentioned components which confer legitimacy on a piece of Art: Authenticity, Provenance, Quality, Condition and Rarity.

Of course, one or more of these elements were missing sometimes. For all that, does it mean that an Avant-Garde piece of Art which does not have an irrefutable provenance is a fake? (One knows that many indisputable provenances have been fabricated anyway.)

Of course not. All Avant-Garde Art Historians know for a fact that hundreds of works have been kept in vaults for decades in museum warehouses in Moscow and the provinces.

And what about the hundreds of works which the artists have undoubtedly created and sold unofficially in order to improve their ordinary fare and sometimes detestable condition?

Who would dare claim that a painting whose double-checked chemical analysis proves that it has been painted without a doubt between 1912 and 1925 is a fake Exter?

Which imbecile in those days would have painted a fake Exter, a little known artist, almost penniless, thinking that he would sell it and get rich?

Almost impossible if not totally absurd.

To be a Russian Avant-Garde collector amounts to completing day after day a never ending and exhausting assault course. But I believe that I am not teaching you anything new.

The only way to see the end of it is to face up to the problem in a voluntaristic or even aggressive way and to give oneself the intellectual, scientific and financial means to try and moralize this segment of Art which certain individuals or circles are trying, sometimes successfully, to monopolize for egocentric or mercantile reasons.

It is totally inconceivable to let a dishonest clique of people, solely motivated by sheer greed, for fame or money, for themselves or their sponsors in the shadows, kidnap the

process of authentication of Russian Avant-Garde works.

It is puzzling that those self-proclaimed experts whose prime interest is neither a love for the truth nor the defense of Russian Modernism can, without any scientific or academic justification, declare as fake any piece of Art which is not theirs or does not belong to one of their friends or associates, and get away with it.

Will a group of determined people rise up and have the willpower to fight to protect the object of their passion? Will a group of devoted people, with no idea of profit in mind, make a difference and restore the artists' honour and give them back and their collectors what belongs to them and at the same time track down the real fakes and, God willing, their perpetrators?

Will this group of Art lovers and Russian Avant-Garde devotees and protectors give itself the means to efficiently oppose the false prophets and the inquisitors?

We gathered here today for the first time under the banner of InCoRM on the initiative of an apparently fragile looking lady endowed with an exceptional will power. I would like all of us to pay tribute to Patricia Railing, without forgetting Ariane Hofstetter, and the few people who helped them bring InCoRM to where it is today, with very poor financial means but a big heart and a boundless determination.

I do hope that this exceptional ground work will allow us to bring InCoRM to a new level and turn this organisation into an important actor, if not an indispensable one, in this merciless and lawless world of Russian Avant-Garde trade and authentication.

Russian modernism – but one will say that this is my own passionate collector's opinion, the one that I have been asked to voice here – is one of the most important movements of world Art history and, time allowing, I could probably debate the subject for hours.

The market of Russian Avant-Garde Art is fundamental and indispensable to its recognition and influence. This market needs calm and serenity.

Let us lay the foundations and honest rules of a nonprofit organisation ready to open its doors to any willing person eager to contribute to the basic principles of InCoRM. Let us give ourselves the means to separate the wheat from the chaff, to unmask the self-proclaimed experts and fake moral rights holders.

Let us not fail, or our passion will die.

## Susanne Orlando, Orlando Gallery The Expert Opinion

 In my paper I want to concentrate on the need for expert opinion in the past and in response to the art market in the present, and on the collaboration among experts.

The more the prices of fine art are rising the more expertises are needed by potential buyers. Going back to the 1960s or 1970s only very few buyers asked for expertises. When they saw a work of art they wanted to buy for their collection they trusted the gallery, auction house, artist or private person from whom they acquired it. The market was not nearly as developed as it is today.

In our gallery in Zürich we are concentrating on the Classic Modern Period of art: German Expressionism and Bauhaus, Swiss and French Art, and last but not least on Russian Modernism, especially Russian Avant-Garde. When talking about the expert opinion I will focus on this artistic movement from about 1908 until 1938.

### The Past

If we go back let us say forty or fifty years to the 1960s and 1970s there were mainly three leading galleries for the Russian Avant-Garde in Western Europe – Jean Chauvelin in Paris, Anneli Juda in London (both founded in 1968) and Galerie Gmurzynska in Cologne (founded in 1963). The Galerie Schlégl in Zürich also dealt partly in this field.

It was the time when, despite the Iron Curtain, there were upcoming collectors of Russian Avant-Garde among them such famous ones as Peter Ludwig (Cologne and Aachen) and Hans Heinrich Thyssen in Lugano, both of whom assembled their collections into public museums (Cologne and Madrid, respectively).

Gallerists, as for example the three above-mentioned, guaranteed the authenticity of the works exhibited and sold. Looking at art sold in auction houses in the 1960s and 1970s there were only rarely specialist experts mentioned. At that time the prices were rather low in comparison to today. Jean Chauvelin mentions in his autobiographical essay in the last *Journal of InCoRM* (Vol. 1 Nos. 2-3, 2010) that Alexandra Tomilina Larionov, the artist's second wife, sold paper works by Goncharova for under 50 French Francs each (\$10, 10€).

When collectors or galleries bought directly from the artists or their estates they mainly paid cash, just as if they would buy other items such as clothes. In addition, some of the artists or their relatives were still alive and could be contacted personally.

## The 1940s-1950s

If we go further back to the 1940s-50s and to the period of World War II and the years afterwards the situation for the artists was bad as only few enthusiastic amateurs of art collected. Often, as in the case of Alexandra Exter, Michail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova and others, artists had to pay their rent with paintings.

Already during World War I Alexei Jawlensky and Mariane Werefkin had to pay their rent in St. Prex, on the lake of Geneva, with paintings as they no longer had money being transferred to them by their wealthy families of the former Imperial Russia.

As a conclusion one can say that expertises were not needed because the artists themselves and their families or their estates could be contacted, and the prices were quite low.

## 1980s to 1990s

During the 1980s, 1990s, and even more in our millenium, the interest and the prices for Classic Modern paintings, including Russian Avant-Garde, have risen immensely, as many of you know from your own experience and from auction results published in the press.

Although paintings and paper works left the Soviet Union during the Cold War period in the suitcases of diplomats or in similar ways, the situation has changed since the fall of the Iron Curtain. As of that time many more paintings have been available and the great demand for Russian Avant-Garde has also increased in Russia. The long forbidden art – “the other art” as it had also been called – has been discovered and stumbled upon in private collections, estates, and storage rooms.

If we look at the latest auction results of oils by Malevich or Goncharova for example, prices have come up to millions of Euros, followed by Larionov, Exter and Popova.

The high prices have also attracted a new clientele of collectors, among them wealthy Russians, but also wealthy people from Western countries of whom many are more investors than collectors. They mainly buy what is supposed to be the best and the most expensive, usually with the help of curators and experts, or so-called experts, who tell them what is the best. This is not only true of Russian artists but also for artists such as Picasso, Cézanne, Kirchner, Klimt and others.

## Provenance and Scepticism

On the one hand many people have not been able to understand why, all of a sudden, more paintings have come

up in Russia long hidden away – hidden away in estates, museum deposits, storage rooms, or flats of collectors. During the Soviet Era the owners had been permanently afraid of being detected. As Russian Avant-Garde art had been made unwelcome according to the nomenclatura since Stalin, most of the paintings had not been included in catalogue raisonnés, had only been insufficiently exhibited and published in exhibition catalogues. To this day there are still very few catalogue raisonnés of the Russian Avant-Garde artists.

So on the one hand there were many paintings of the Russian Avant-Garde and on the other hand there were not enough documents about these works. A new scepticism arose beginning with the Sotheby’s auctions in Moscow in the late 1980s, early 1990s, shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain. This scepticism has increased since then and has asked for more experts. But which experts could be called in?

During the Cold War Period there had been experts in the Western countries as well as in the Soviet Union. For example, for Alexandra Exter there were Jean Chauvelin and later also Nadja Filatoff in the West, in Paris, the second home country of the artist, and there was Georgi Kovalenko in Moscow, all three having studied and exhibited the work of Exter and who are working on a catalogue raisonné of the artist. Or there were, for example, Charlotte Douglas, Jean-Claude Marcadé and Christina Lodder in the West and Dmitri Sarabianov, Selim Omarovich Khan-Magomedov and Evgeny Kovtun in the East, all claiming to be the experts knowing the Œuvre of the artists such as Exter, Popova, Kliun, Rodchenko, Malevich and others best.

## The Great Utopia, 1992

Actually a first step in the right direction was the exhibition accompanied by a very interesting and in-depth catalogue, *The Great Utopia*, in 1992 held at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt and seen in Russia, Amsterdam, and New York. It was one of the first collaborative events on a large scale for which art historians and experts as, for example, Vivian Endicott Barnett, Jane Sharp or Christina Lodder, who represented the West whereas Vasily Rakitin, Anatoli Strigaliev or Alexander Lavrentiev, the grandson of Rodchenko, stood for the East. It was a fantastic collaboration and exhibition involving all fields of the Russian Avant-Garde. The energy of all the people involved contributed to the excellent exhibition, one of the first comprehensive ones in the West, and it culminated in a dinner party for all

the people involved in the house of Svetlana Dzhafarova in Moscow in 1989 shortly after the Iron Curtain had gone up.

## InCoRM (International Chamber of Russian Modernism)

Personally, I think, it would be ideal if today's experts in the West and in the East would work together much more and write expert opinions together. But somehow this has proved to be quite difficult. I think that the founding of InCoRM in 2007 in Paris is a first step in the right direction. Its *Journal*, which now comes out two times a year, is a first platform for international art historians, scientists and restorers to express themselves about subjects around the Russian Avant-Garde. Experts from Russia, Germany, England, France, Spain and other countries have already written essays about crucial topics. This International Chamber of Russian Modernism does not issue expertises but it contributes to a better understanding of Russian Art. Therefore it should have as many members as possible and each member should look for new members.

## My Personal Experience

Patricia Railing has asked me to talk about the expert opinion from my own point of view.

For me, personally, the first sight of a painting is important, the front and the back, and if it appeals to me strongly. At this stage I neither look for typical criteria nor do I ask for expert opinion. When collectors, gallerists or museum curators have seen hundreds of good paintings I think they definitely do get a good eye, a certain experience and feeling for the authenticity of a work of art – let us say that the energy and soul of the artist speaks to the viewer and the brushstroke speaks for itself. I am often surprised by the reaction of visitors in our gallery who are stunned by the energy of Russian Avant-Garde paintings, the composition, the colours and the power they reflect.

## Scientific Analysis

If the painting appeals to me and having been happy about what I have seen I want to know more about its provenance: if it comes from the artist's estate, from a private collection, a museum or another gallery and if it has already been published in a book or museum catalogue. The third step is a scientific analysis by one of the leading persons in this field as, for example, by Dr. Erhard Jägers, Bornheim, Germany. Of course, there are also Laurette Thomas, Paris, Dr. Nicolas Eastaugh, London, and Viktor Golikov,

Moscow, to mention only the most important scientists in the field of Russian art.

## Experts

On this basis I go a step further and ask the expert of this very artist or group of artists.

In the case of Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov it is Dr. Anthony Parton, University of Durham, who has just published his splendid monograph on Goncharova, the Queen of Diamonds, we could say. This book is an example of the cooperation between Western and Eastern museums who have placed images and other material at the disposal of the author.

Or there is Madame Denise Bazetoux who is just publishing the first volume of the catalogue raisonné on Goncharova.

In the case of Alexandra Exter it is Jean Chauvelin and Nadia Filatoff who are publishing the catalogue raisonné in the very near future. There is also Georgi Kovalenko who is working on a catalogue raisonné of Exter. Personally, I would be glad if the two parties would issue one catalogue raisonné together in which the Exter works from the West and from the East would all be included.

Herman Berninger, Davos, is still the expert on Ivan Puni despite his old age. Ariane Hofstetter, Wiesbaden, who is writing her thesis on Puni and Herwarth Walden's Sturm Gallery, is following in Berninger's footsteps.

Patricia Railing is on the brink of publishing books on different topics of the Russian Avant-Garde.

In the case of Kliun it is his granddaughter, Svetlana Kliunkova-Soloveitchika, Moscow. Of course, sometimes the relatives of the artists are not interested in what has been created by their ancestors or they are only interested in money but not in the artworks themselves, which is a pity.

## If No Experts are Available

It becomes more difficult if there is either no one really responsible for or not interested in the estate or if there is no special expert for a certain artist as it is the case for Alexander Vesnin, Cyril Zdanevitch, Vadim Meller or Sergei Chekhonin, to mention only some examples. In this case I ask or try to contact well known art historians having worked in the field of Russian Avant-Garde for a long time as, for example, Professor Ada Raev, University of Bamberg, Professor John Bowlt, University of Southern California, Patricia Railing, art historian in East Sussex, Professor Mikhail German, St. Petersburg, Dr. Maria Valyaeva, Moscow, Professor Dmitro Horbachov, Kiew, Professor Dr. Gleb Pospelov, Moscow, and others. They have either given lectures, written articles and books, they have taken

part in the organisation of museum exhibitions or have written expertises on Russian Avant-Garde for a long time.

I want to conclude my paper with the following statement:

To give Russian Avant-Garde art even more publicity in the West and in the East we all should contribute to the publishing of as many books, catalogues and catalogue raisonnés as possible and to the exhibiting of as many works of art as possible in museums, galleries and on art fairs. Experts from the USA, Europe and Russia, White Russia and Ukraine should work more together. Thus the Centre Pompidou, Paris, and the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, as well as equivalent museums should be contacted to organise more exhibitions on Russian Avant-Garde with loans from Western and Eastern museums, galleries and private collectors in the near future.