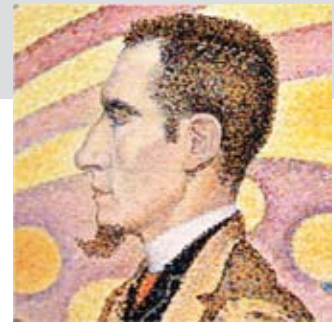


INTERVIEW

Ivan Morozov Talks to Félix Fénéon in 1920



In early 1920, Félix Fénéon, the Paris art critic who had championed Neo-Impressionism and Symbolism, talked to the Moscow collector, Ivan Morozov; the interview, “Ivan Morosoff”, being published in the *Bulletin de la vie artistique* on 15 May 1920. Morozov’s vast collection of late 19th and early 20th century French and Russian painting (including Mashkov, Goncharova, Larionov) had been nationalised following the October 1917 Revolution and was now called the Second Museum of Western Art. This interview gives a picture of the consequences of Bolshevik art policy for both the private collector and the emerging Avant-Garde.*



It was in 1903 that he acquired his first Impressionist works – a Sisley, a Renoir, a Monet. Every year from that time until the war, this Moscovite left his cotton mills and their fifteen thousand workers [in the city of Tver] to come to Paris. Was there an exceptional work on the market by an acclaimed painter? Had a new trend been added to the already large repertory full of old illusions? Perhaps an artist had come to light?

And barely off the train, he settled himself into the easy chairs of the art galleries [Vollard, Bernheim Jeune, Durand-Ruel], the ones that are deep and low, so the collector did not have to get up to see the succession of paintings that were passed before him like frames of a film. Having engaged his particularly discerning eye, Mr. Morozov was too tired in the evening to even go to the theatre. After days at this pace, he left for Moscow having seen only paintings, taking a few chosen pieces with him. In 1913, his collection was world famous.

With his wife, his daughter and niece he left Russia last June [1919] (where he had lived without interruption for the past five and a half years), emigrating to Switzerland and residing in Interlakin, Ouchy, and Lausanne. Now it would be possible to find out about the fate of his collection. As of his first words he was reassuring:

– It’s intact. Not one of the four hundred and thirty works of Russian art, or the two hundred and forty French works has suffered. The collection is still in the same palace in which I put it together, the walls decorated by [Pierre] Bonnard’s *Spring and Autumn*, and *the Story of Psyche* by [Maurice] Denis [see illustrations herein]. But it was nationalised, as were my factories, and it is the “Second Museum of Western Art”.

– The second? And which is the first?

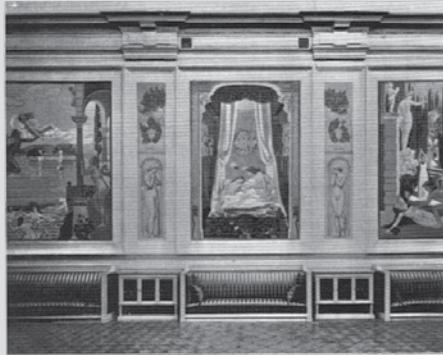
– It is made up of the collection of French works by our mutual friend, Serge Shchukin, and his daughter, Mme Ekaterina Keller, is in charge of it.

– But you, have you been able to remain in control of the second museum?

– The government appointed – how do you translate *saveuichi*? – as manager (you would say director or curator) – the sculptor, Boris Ternovets, student of Bourdelle, and appointed me as the deputy manager, giving me three rooms and opening the rest of the house to the public. There he has developed a system similar to my own: during czarist times I gave free access on Sunday mornings to those interested and, providing formalities that were hardly tyrannical, artists and critics could come on other days except on Mondays. As deputy



Ivan Morozov Mansion, Moscow (Modern photograph)
Interior views of Maurice Denis, *The Story of Psyche*, 1908 (below)



manager, I had to collaborate on a complete catalogue and talk a little to the visitors. Ekaterina Sergeevna did the same in her father's museum. It gave us pleasure to pay tribute to the art of your country. The works were there, supporting what we said, and the audience was not misbehaved.

– Because you have been in such direct contact with the people, can you tell me, Ivan Abramovich, which among our painters pleased your visitors the most.

– Cézanne. I could have shown them twenty examples of his genius: two *Montagne Victoire* (sic), the *Young Girl at a Piano*, a *Jas de Bouffon*, a portrait of his wife, etc. [See illustrations, herein.] You know all of them, or nearly all. Van Gogh was also very admired. And Derain. And Picasso, but of the latter I own only three canvases [*Harlequin and his Companion (Les deux saltimbanques)*, 1901, *Young Girl on a Ball (Fille à la boule)*, 1905, *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*, 1910]. This Spaniard and Henri Matisse were more widely represented in M. Shchukin's collection.

– You have mentioned several French painters from your museum. Can you complete the list?

– Degas, Camille Pissarro, Gauguin (about twelve, most of them being of Polynesia), Lebourg, Simon, Henri-Edmond Cross, Maillol (four statues, seven statuettes), K.-X. Roussel, Vuillard, Louis Valtat, Lebasque, Marquet, Puy, Guérin, Espagnat, Vlaminck, Flandrin, Friesz, Chabaud, Herbin. – But if I don't mention Seurat it's not because I've forgotten him but because this is a gap in my collection.

– During this period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, your own artists have not been able to practise their profession, obviously.

– They are thought of by the government as workers doing a useful job, and this makes it possible for them to support themselves. Under the presidency of [Vladimir] Tatlin, an organism came into being that brings together the extreme artistic left [i.e., Museum Board and Museum of Artistic Culture]. Among the most active individuals I can mention are [Ilya] Mashkov and the woman painter, [Sofia] Dimshits-Tolstaya. This committee is not without analogy to your Society of Independent Artists; neither jury nor prizes. But large government subsidies are available to it which make exhibitions and purchases possible. In Moscow during the winter of 1918-1919, the last that I spent in the capital, the committee organised no less than ten exhibitions [the State Exhibitions], each one made up of artists of related trends. Together with Mashkov and Tatlin, those who seemed to me to be the most interesting were Kuprin, Kuznetsov, Konchalovsky, Krimov, Chagall and Falk. The painters from the right [i.e., traditional] also organised a committee, but it is aimless, the public powers being indifferent to it. Many of the avant-garde painters – and I will again mention Tatlin and

Mashkov – have become teachers [in the State Free Art Studios, SVOMAS]. Concurrently, the old teachers have continued their preaching. And the courses are, my goodness, very well attended because the students are free to choose their teachers and the student body gladly abandons academic routine – in Russia as everywhere else. Some young artists adventurously emigrated to the provinces – to Saratov, to Viatka, etc. – in order to create centres of artistic propaganda. From this problems sometimes resulted for Museum No. 2. I saw a delegate arrive who, claiming that his city did not possess a Cézanne or a Derain, came to requisition one in Moscow where, he said, there were excess numbers of them. Against these claims the integrity of the museum had to be protected. I sought help in the authority of Igor Grabar, painter and art historian, the right arm of Mme. Trotskaya.

– The wife of Trotsky? Does she have a role, then?

– She directs a committee whose duties will be better explained by an example. In more than one place in the Republic popular uprisings could be feared or where movements of troops threatened the security of paintings, statues, secular and religious objects having historical, documentary or aesthetic value. At the request of the owner, or by acting spontaneously when the latter was negligent or had left his home, the committee of Mme Trotskaya, with the assistance of competent commissions, brought them to Moscow in the name of a commitment to scholarship and exhibited them ceremoniously. Unbelievable marvels appeared in just a day.

– In such activity, must one be grateful to the citizen or to the State?

– Let us say, if you like, according to individual initiative, but often suggested and always supported by Lunacharsky and his followers.

– Lunacharsky, the minister?

– Yes, the commissar of the People's Public Instruction and Fine Arts [Narkompros].

– He did not, it seems, prevent the muzhiks from tramping through the Rembrandts at the Hermitage in Petrograd in their boots.

– The muzhiks are not that unpractical. No, nothing troublesome, as far as I know, occurred in any museum, either in Petrograd or elsewhere. The important works in the Hermitage were sent to Moscow at the time, now some time ago, when it was thought that Petrograd would fall. They are held at the Kremlin waiting to be returned. The Louvre took similar precautions in 1914 and in 1918.

– But what about the Tretyakov Museum in Moscow?

– It has nothing to complain about. Its listings were cursory and approximate. The new manager, Igor Grabar about whom I spoke, goes a step further: he requires all the details about the



Cézanne Room, Ivan Morozov Mansion, Moscow, 1913

Top row, left to right: 1 • *The Overture to Tannhäuser* or *Young Girl at a Piano*, 1867-8

2 • *The Smoker*, 1895-1900 3 • *Still Life with a Curtain*, 1894-5

Bottom row, right: 6 • *Pool with a Bridge*, 1895-8

Not shown: 4 • *Large Pine near Aix*, 1895-7 5 • *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire*, 1900



1 •



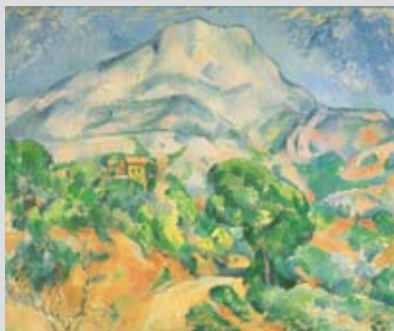
2 •



3 •



4 •



5 •



6 •

format, the subject matter, the materials; signatures have been photographed and, enthusiasm acknowledged to have been a bit excessive, even recorded their length. Archival research and examination of the originals have made it possible to correct attributions, to identify numerous subject matters, to establish dates. All this was very difficult given the variety of objects of which the Tretyakov museum is made up.

– Please explain.

– The collection comes from the brothers having this name, two owners of linen mills, the one, Serge, a collector of Russian art, the other, Paul, a collector of Western art and especially landscapes by your masters of 1830 (Corot, Rousseau, Dupré, etc.). To this was added in 1904 the donation of Michel Morosoff [Mikhail Morozov] of a Manet (the sketch of the *Cabaret of Reichshoffen* that Manet painted twice), a Renoir (the full-length portrait of Jeanne Sumary which the *Bulletin de la vie artistique* of 1 January reproduced, attributing it to my own collection), a Monet, two Gauguins, a Carrière, a Van Gogh, a Bonnard, and a Denis.

– Is there a relation between you and this Michel Morosoff?

– Close. He was my brother, older by about a year. I was born in 1871. He died at the age of thirty three in 1904. He is the author of a *Life of Charles V*, among other works. He published art criticism in the newspapers as well as letters from Egypt. When we were teenagers we took lessons from Korovin for two years, once a week.

– So you are a painter?

– Oh! painter! In 1892, '93 and '94 when I was a student at the Zurich Polytechnic, tired of doing drawings, I painted oil landscapes on Sundays. Since then I have not held a brush in my hand. I know too much about painting to be so bold.

– But today you have the leisure and suffer less from rheumatism...

– Perhaps I will think about that, smiled Ivan Abramovich. You can give me the address of an artist's colourman.

Only matters of art interest us. We took leave of Mr. Morozov without asking his opinion about the political and economic situation in his country. In fact, there is enough enlightened opinion to be found in the Western press which is always well informed.

Bulletin de la vie artistique, Paris, 15 May 1920
“Ivan Morosoff”, in Félix Fénéon, *Au-delà de l'impressionnisme* Paris: Editions Hermann, 1966
Translated from the French by Patricia Railing
Illustrations have been added

* Ivan Morozov (1871-1921) is seen in a detail from the portrait by Valentin Serov (1910, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). The detail of Félix Fénéon (1861-1944) is from Georges Seurat, *Around the Enamel of a Background Rhythm with Beats and Angles, Tones and Colours, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890* (David Rockefeller Collection, New York). On the Morozov family, Ivan Morozov and the fate of his collection see, www.morozov-shchukin.com.

Bibliography

Félix Fénéon, “Ivan Morosoff”, in Félix Fénéon, *Au-delà de l'impressionnisme* Textes réunis et présentés par Françoise Cachin. Paris: Editions Hermann, 1966, 152-157.

Boris Ternavets, “The Museum of Modern Western Art in Moscow (The Morozov Section)”, 1922-1923. In, Ilia Dorontchenkov, *Russian and Soviet Views on Western Art*. Charles Rougle, translator, Nina Gurianova, consulting editor. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 96-99.

L'invitation ou Voyage. L'avant-garde française de Gauguin à Matisse de la Collection du Musée de l'Ermitage. Musée des beaux-arts, Montreal and, Museum of Fine Arts, Ontario, 2002.

Beverly Whitney Kean, *French Painters, Russian Collectors. The Merchant Patrons of Modern Art in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*. New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983.

Oleg Yakovlevich Neverov, *Great Private Collections of Imperial Russia*. Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovsky and H. H. Nicholas Romanov, Prince of Russia, Introductions. London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.