

Foreword, Exhibition of Original Icon Paintings and *Lubki*, 1913



Exhibition of Original Icon Paintings and *Lubki* (*Vystavka ikonopisnykh podlinnikov i lubkov*) was organised by Mikhail Larionov, 24 March - 7 April 1913, and held in the Moscow Art Salon, Bolshaia Dmitrovka 20. The exhibition was contemporary to the Target exhibition, also organised by Larionov and on view in the Moscow Art Salon 24 March to 7 April 1913. The Foreword / *Predislovie*, by Larionov, had appeared previously in the 19-24 February 1913, First Exhibition of *Lubki* from the Collection of V. K. Vinogradov, held in Moscow. The *Lubki* the icon have been added here. Photograph of Mikhail Larionov, 1913.

12

The long-awaited boor came forth, and he was surprised because he chanced upon an epoch in which to discover oneself was considered a style. And he put forth a foot into the future yet took a step back. Like a scorching coal his tongue quivered trying to escape his parched throat. But he was forced to look lovingly, with the eyes of a brazen and cowardly slave, like a jackal, at his own face raging like a wild cat, and to die like Narcissus because that is how times were, and because the present took vengeance on the past. He who has given himself over to the hands of impoverished Time is doomed to perish at the hands of one of Time's three hostile daughters.

(Rhada Bai, Chapter 7)

During the reign of the Assyrian emperor Hammurabi an exhibition of Russian, Chinese, Japanese, French, and other *lubki* of the 19th and 20th centuries was organised. They caused such a commotion of artistic feeling that time was killed by the supra-temporal and the supra-spatial. The feeling thus aroused reigned as an autonomous eternity.

(From an unpublished history of art)¹

The painter Paul Cézanne lived during the reign of Rameses II. The creator of the scribe Theabad Randai lived, worked and died in Aix-en-Provence. An historical reference the accuracy of which – with

surprising clarity – enhances the viewpoint of whoever is addressing a work of art directly. For the value and the goal of a work of art is not judged from the point of view of time. The definition and analysis of art are concerned only with art itself, and in all other cases by what is around it.

(Extract from an unpublished history of art, Ch. 3)

It is probably quite useless to know exactly when the *lubok* first appeared, and the Russian *lubok* in particular. I refer those who are interested to the work of Rovinsky where they will find the relevant information on this question. Futurism, which is the most astonishing, the most modern theory, can be transposed to Assyria or to Babylon, just as from Assyria, the cult of the goddess Astarte, the teachings of Zarathustra, can be transposed to what is called our time. The sensation of the new, with all its interest, will not disappear as a result since in their essence, in their development, their movement, epochs are different, and only unfortunate small minds study them from the point of view of time. These two epochs can exist happily as perfect equals in the new, in what we call the future. For in the very essence of the principles that they express, they are of equal value and time, that is, the definition of laws that regulate what exists without its mediation plays no role. He who says he is looking towards the future, referring to time, limits himself to the point of ceasing to exist and blinds himself forever.

He who sees in Futurism the theory of the future sees Impressionism as a first impression and Cubism as the simple



1 • Song. Lubok, 1894, Lithograph, 34.4 x 44.7 cm. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

movement of the plane becoming a geometric construction just as literally. Futurist theory can be examined as a supra-temporal movement.

Considering the *lubok* in the same way, we have the highest sensation of our artistic epoch and the strivings of our emotions acquire such a force that the artistic image, in the perception of art through the feelings, rise up with a burst equal to that which was present at the moment of its creation. For life and sensations aroused by a work of art are supra-temporal.

The moment of understanding a work of art and the result of this understanding have nothing to do with what we call time.

In their very essence, works of art differ according to the form in which they are perceived and by which they are recreated.

The *lubok* is varied: *lubki* printed from copper or wood plates, hand-coloured or stencil, color circumscribed by the outline or bleeding over the edges, which in fact is not the result of chance but is a fully intentional and established tradition, confirmed by the fact that even today the Old Believers continue to colour their *lubki* in this way. Because collectors of *lubki* admire this technique, there are not just dozens of them but hundreds of thousands of them. [1 •]

There are several styles of contours in the *lubok*. Most often, the contour is very free, making it possible to show the object as a whole on different planes, from different points of view and in one image. This, we say, is the primitive vision of

an object, seen from different aspects. The object in itself is not destroyed, it is simply developed in several places on the plane. But in other *lubki* there are more complex constructions. The object is shown from different points of view at the same time (as in our contemporaries Picasso or Braque). This distortion in the *lubki* and by our artists today is in fact the best proof of the destruction of time. For it makes it possible to show at once what is not visible except in moving around the object with the eye, which takes a certain time. [2 •]

The *lubok* is painted onto trays, snuff boxes, glass, wood, ceramic tiles, tin (for example, still today signboards display an astonishing variety of techniques). Printed fabric, stencils, embossed leather, brass icon-cases, beads, glass beads, embroideries, stamped gingerbread, moulded pastry (an art that is still alive in our bakers and pastry-makers).

Wood sculpture, following its own course or continuing classical Russian forms.

Weaving, lace, etc.

All this belongs to the *lubok* in the broad sense of the term, and all this is great art. A wonderful example of the *lubok* painted on wood is the painted wardrobe in the Museum of the Stroganov Institute. Among other qualities, the painter was guided by popular prints and made what we call copies. In this regard, a few words on the copy. The copy does not exist in the sense that has been given to this word until now. What exists is a work of art to which a print, a painting, nature, etc., serve as a point of departure.



2 • *Archangel Michael*, 1882
Coloured lithograph, 33.1 x 35.8 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



3 • *St. George and the Dragon*, 1450-1500
Novgorod

If we were convinced that the copy does not exist and has never existed, that it exists only in representation, but has never existed in reality and cannot exist, no one would continue to admire what is called an original work.

Those marvels of pictorial mastery and inspiration that we find in the 13th century icons of the Smolensk *Mother of God* and the *Archangel Michael*, shown in the Exhibition of Ancient Russian Art [at the Imperial Moscow Archeological Institute, early 1913], contain the elements of what is called a copy and the technique of the *lubok*. [as 3 •]

Translated from the Russian by
Anthony Parton

Endnotes

- [1] [Larionov is quoting here and in the following excerpt from Chapter 3 in a book he and his brother Ivan had begun in 1905, *History of Painting Outside Time (Istoria zhivopisi vne vremeni)*, but which was never published. Translator.]