

Natalia Goncharova's canonization in Europe after 1945

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Introduction

The Russian avant-garde artist Natalia Sergeevna Goncharova (1881-1962) is considered to be one of the major female artists of the early twentieth century. Of all female artists internationally, her works are now among the most expensive; however, the canonization process of her work was quite sluggish. The aim of this paper is to trace the way Goncharova entered the canon of modern art in Europe. In doing so, it will show how differently the canonization processes of male and female as well as exile and non-exile artists from Russia developed in the twentieth century. Therefore, it is important to mark the milestones in Goncharova's case of canonization:

1. The first acquisitions of her works by Musée National d'Art Moderne in 1950 and by the Tate in 1952.
2. Her recognition within the feminist context in the 1970s, which started with the exhibition *Woman Artists 1550-1950*.
3. Goncharova's rising prices on the art market in the 2000s.

To understand these three turns it is necessary to observe the cultural-political situation after 1945 in order to contextualize the reception of Russian avant-garde in the West and to answer the following questions: Why was Goncharova 'discovered' so late compared to other artists, particularly male artists of the Russian avant-garde; in other words, how does Goncharova's canonization relate to the canonization of Malevich, Tatlin and especially of Mikhail Larionov? Who were the main actors in promoting her work? This analysis will provide a detailed understanding of the way early Russian art was promoted in Germany, France and England in the post-war period and how it became a part of the modernist canon in art history. The Russian avant-garde entered the canon of art history during the Cold War. The interest in Russian progressive art of the early twentieth century began to increase in Germany particularly because of the cultural circumstances that ensued after 1939-45 war. Beginning in the early 1950s, German art historians and artists, such as Werner Hofmann, Will Grohman and Fritz Winter, endeavoured to rehabilitate art that the Nazi regime declared 'degenerate'. Gradually, they were able to reconstruct the European art scene of the 1920s and early 1930s, recognizing avant-gardists from Russia such as Kasimir Severinovich Malevich, Vladimir Yevgraphovich Tatlin or El Lissitsky in the process. The promotion of these artists, however, was not based solely on

their work, which was considered outstanding, but recognition also assumed a certain value within Western cultural diplomacy.¹

Due to the difficult political situation between Eastern and Western Europe after 1945, information about the avant-garde movement was very fragmented and often inaccessible. It was impossible for Western researchers to obtain reliable information from the cultural officials of the Soviet Union and it was even more difficult to obtain information from unofficial sources. Therefore, the main sources were private and institutional collections in the West and oral history provided by avant-garde artists themselves and by people who knew them. Many influential figures of the avant-garde movement were still alive in the 1950s; however, founders of Suprematism and Constructivism within the Russian avant-garde, Malevich and Tatlin, provoked major interest amongst art historians. They were fascinating figures, and by the time they were recognized abroad, they had been leaders of the most progressive artistic movements of their time.²

In the late 1970s, another fact about the Russian avant-garde gained attention: the remarkable number of female artists involved in this movement who were initially overlooked and first 'discovered' in the 1970s. One of the most famous representatives not only in art history but on the art market today is Goncharova. Others include Olga Vladimirovna Rozanova, Alexandra Alexandrovna Exter, Lyubov Sergeevna Popova, Nadezhda Andreevna Udaltsova – the five most famous among the numerous female avant-gardists.³ Still, Goncharova's recognition came rather late compared to male artists like Malevich and others. Although since the 1970s Goncharova has been recognized as one of the influential modern female artists, she shared the fate of many of her peers: Goncharova was usually presented in exhibitions not as an exceptional artist, which she undoubtedly was, but as the wife of the artist Larionov, which accounts for her late recognition in one regard. Therefore, this case study can be considered a *pars pro toto* for many other female artists. More or less fifty years after her death Goncharova has been included in the canon of international modernism, and since the early 2000s, the number of scholarly publications and exhibitions has grown considerably both in Russia and in the West. Still, compared to famous male avant-garde figures, this is very late – even though Goncharova was considered a major and progressive artist during her lifetime.

Goncharova's legacy in Europe 1914-1990s

Natalia Goncharova was born in 1881 in the Tula Province, a village south of Moscow. Ten years later, her family moves to the Russian capital. It was here that she met Mikhail Larionov in 1900, an artist who became her work and life partner until her death in 1962. Goncharova was artistically very productive, and between 1905 and 1914, she showed her work at numerous exhibitions nationally and internationally. Among them were the *Russian Art Exhibition* in Paris (1906) organized by Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev, the *Golden Fleece* exhibitions (1909 and 1910),

¹ Elena Korowin, *Der Russen Boom. Sowjetische Ausstellungen als Mittel der Diplomatie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Cologne: Böhlau, 2015.

² Korowin, *Der Russen Boom*.

³ Ada Raev, *Russische Künstlerinnen der Moderne (1870-1930). Historische Studien, Kunstkonzepte, Weiblichkeitsentwürfe*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002.

Union of Youth exhibitions in Riga (1910), *Jack of Diamonds* (1910), *Donkey's Tale* in Russia (1910), *Blauer Reiter* in Munich (1912), *Der Sturm* in Berlin (1912), *French and Russian Artists* in London (1912). She took part in debates, wrote open letters to the press and was, overall, an active public person. In 1912 she wrote the *Rayonist Painting Manifesto* together with Larionov. Goncharova was well known in Russia in the 1910s, because of her progressive views on art, which were particularly controversial coming from a woman. Without a doubt, she was one of the leading figures in the Russian avant-garde scene, especially after her huge retrospectives in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 1913 and 1914. This early and very fruitful time of her career is well researched: several monographs and exhibition catalogues, in particular, recognise her artistic development during the Russian period.⁴ In 1914 she worked as a stage designer in *Le Coq d'Or* for Sergej Pavlovich Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* in Paris for the first time, heralding one of the turning points of Goncharova's career. The great impresario invited her and Larionov to return to Paris in 1915 to work for the *Saisons Russes* on a permanent basis. The artists grasped the opportunity and stayed with the company until Diaghilev's death in 1929. In France Goncharova continued painting, exhibiting and organising artists' meetings. She was also working for the fashion house *Myrbor* and presented her designs for women's dresses in *Vogue* magazine in 1927.⁵ Before the 1939–45 war both artists received French citizenship and remained in France. Goncharova's fame in Europe was dominated by her work for the *Ballets Russes*. Her reputation was based predominantly on the costume designs for *Le Coq d'Or* (1914) and *Les Noces* (1923), and although she was not officially designated as the designer in other productions, she continued to contribute to the designs, playing a prominent role in *Chout* (1921) and *Renard* (1922) where Larionov was the main costume designer.

The first years after the 1941-1945 war were difficult for the artists – the ballet companies were scattered around different corners of the world, and there were no new assignments in sight. Even in the field of fashion, where Goncharova was quite comfortable before the war, jobs were scarce in the late 1940s. Both artists were now over sixty, and new generations of artists and designers were dominating the scene. However, mediators and advocates of Larionov's and Goncharova's work continued to stress their importance in the development of modern and contemporary art.

In autumn of 1948, the artist and art-critic Michel Seuphor returned to Paris. Before the war, he was well known in the international art-scene, associated with Dutch, Belgian and French avant-gardes, and founded the artist group *Cercle et Carré* in Paris in 1929, which strongly supported abstract art movements.⁶ He knew Goncharova and Larionov from that time

⁴ Selection: Eli Eganbury, *Natalia Goncharova, Michail Larionov*, Moscow: Z. A. Muenster, 1913; Mary Chamot, *Goncharova. Stage Designs and Paintings*, London: Oresko Books, 1979; Gleb Pospelov, *Karo-Bube. Aus der Geschichte der Moskauer Malerei zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1985; Evgenia Petrova, *Natalia Goncharova: The Russian Years*, Bad Breisig: Palace Editions, 2006; Jane Sharp, *Russian Modernism between East and West: Natalia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁵ Chamot, *Goncharova*.

⁶ Rajesh Heynickx, 'Similarity and Incompatibility, The Aesthetics of Michel Seuphor and Jacques Maritain', in Rajesh Heynickx and Jan De Maeyer, *The Maritain Factor: Taking Religion into Interwar Modernism*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010, 57-59.

and appreciated their works. When Seuphor returned to post-war Paris, he revived his previous contacts, made plans for exhibitions, and actively participated in rekindling the art scene and reconstructing it in France. He became a great authority on abstract art in general, arranged exhibitions and wrote several influential texts on abstraction in the arts.⁷ Because of this fundamental focus, he was especially interested in Larionov's and Goncharova's *Rayonism*, their most abstract style. Shortly after they reunited in 1948, Seuphor quickly organised an exhibition for the two artists in Galerie des Deux Iles in Paris: *Le rayonnisme 1909-1914. Peintures de Michel Larionov et de Nathalie Gontcharova* (Rayonism 1909-1914: Paintings of Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova) from 6 to 18 December 1948. In the catalogue, he stated that, although nearly forgotten, Goncharova and Larionov deserved recognition as the forerunners of abstract art in the early twentieth century.⁸

In 1949 Seuphor was invited by Aimé Maeght, an art dealer and gallery owner, to organise the exhibition *La Musée de Grenoble présente les premiers maîtres de l'art abstrait: I. Les recherches préliminaires. II. Épanouissement de l'art abstrait 1949* at the Maeght Gallery in Paris. Here Goncharova and Larionov were represented together within the European art scene.⁹ In the Maeght Gallery exhibition, they presented two works from the Rayonist period: *Glass* (1912) by Larionov and *Cats (rayist [sic] percep.[tion] in rose, black, and yellow)* (1913) by Goncharova. Today both paintings are in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum collection in New York. Despite Seuphor's efforts at the time, their work was not bought in 1949 and the artists remained at the periphery of the French art scene.¹⁰ *Nouvelle École de Paris* was dominated by young abstract artists of Tachisme such as Wols, Jean Dubuffet and Pierre Soulages. Major institutions were interested in Malevich, Vassily Vassilevich Kandinsky and other avant-garde masters. In that particular cultural atmosphere, Goncharova's paintings appeared too figurative and naïve in form, resembling too closely her primitivist style, to be popular in France of the 1940s and 1950s. Jane Sharp writes that Goncharova's work was frequently labelled 'decorative' and 'eclectic'.¹¹ However, her distinctive ornamental language contributed to the success of the stage designs for the *Ballets Russes*. These ornamental, ethnic elements which dominated Goncharova's oeuvre were apparently not 'in fashion' after the war; for this reason, Seuphor explicitly chose to exhibit her Rayonist works in early postwar exhibitions.¹² Furthermore, her primitivism and spirituality, were not in demand in post-war France even though in many abstract movements of this period feature such elements can be found. Kandinsky, Soulages and the CoBRA-group, for example,

⁷ Michel Seuphor, *L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres*, Paris: Maeght, 1949; Michel Seuphor, *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite*, Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1957; Michel Seuphor, *La Peinture abstraite, sa genèse, son expansion*, Paris: Flammarion, 1962.

⁸ Michel Seuphor, in Jessica Boissel, ed, *Nathalie S. Gontcharova, Michel F. Larionov et les collections du Musée national d'art moderne*, Musée national d'art moderne Paris, Paris: Editions de Centre Pompidou, 1999, 240.

⁹ Other exhibited artists were, among others, Jean (Hans) Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Joseph Delteil, Guy Habasque, Vassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, Francis Picabia, Alberto Magnelli, Piet Mondrian, Franz Marc, and Malevich.

¹⁰ Alla G. Lukanova, *Natalia Gontscharova 1881–1962*, volume of the series: *Chudozhniki russkoi emigracii*, Moscow: Isskusstwo XXI vek, 2017, 471.

¹¹ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 14.

¹² Seuphor, *L'Art abstrait*.

were stressing their spiritual concepts, and the Tachisme movement was characterized by expressions of dramatic visions and tensions. Goncharova expressed a very self-conscious identification with the rural and Asian 'other' in her primitivism, especially in the Russian period.¹³

Sharp also argues that Goncharova 'alternately accommodated the Western tradition and undermined its key feature: the progressive master narrative of a singular, individual language or style.'¹⁴ She continues by explaining that Goncharova's paintings are filled with Western and Eastern details, scattering the audience's ability to locate what was unique to Russian culture in her oeuvre.¹⁵ This is true to an extent: early in her artistic career, Goncharova developed her concept of *Vsechestvo* (Engl. 'everythingness') – a concept which seems very contemporary today, but which was more of a hindrance for her reception at the time. Goncharova writes about *Vsechestvo* as the idea of everythingness giving the artist the possibility to apply any style regardless of time and origin: '(...) artwork does not depend on the time and place of its creation, therefore the works of Cézanne and those of the Egyptian craftsmen are still contemporary and of value.'¹⁶ Other Russian avant-gardist have a manifold oeuvre, but Goncharova's multiplicity of skills and her strategy of assimilating different styles distinguishes her. Malevich or Tatlin, students and colleagues of Larionov and Goncharova also explored the Western artistic movements in their work such as Cubism, Futurism and Neo-Primitivism. What sets these artists apart is the way of dealing with their inventions in the early years.

Goncharova and Larionov extended their artistic exploration with the development of Rayonism after 1911, which was a continuation of their previous Cubo-Futuristic works, and both seemed to be less concerned with their public reception. By contrast, Malevich and Tatlin were radically breaking with traditional art and also always interested in broader public recognition. Both artists were in a constant race for the dominant position in artistic visions of the new world, setting aside painting to concentrate on Suprematist or Constructivist ideas in other media. After the outbreak of the October Revolution in 1917, such artists were given the opportunity to develop their concepts on a large scale, and many did so, supporting the political and societal changes with their art. By that time Larionov and Goncharova were already based in France and therefore observing the developments in Russia from a distance. They supported Diaghilev until 1929 and thereby presented another idea of Russia and its culture: that of a pre-revolutionary, pre-Soviet and cosmopolitan culture in exile. They were no longer seen as members of the Russian avant-garde which was then following the boundless concepts of Suprematism and Constructivism.

It is important to understand these developments for they shape Goncharova's position in the art world and help to illuminate why it was difficult for contemporaries at the time to label her art production in the post-war era. Goncharova and Larionov, therefore, belonged to the previous generation and were neither seen as representatives of contemporaneity in France nor as the radical avant-gardists that were being rediscovered in the late 1950s in Europe.

¹³ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 213-220.

¹⁴ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 23.

¹⁵ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 23.

¹⁶ Irina Lebedeva, ed, *Natalia Goncharova. Between East and West*, Moscow: Tretyakov-Gallery, 2013, 11.

Back to the ballet

Outside of Russia, Goncharova is known more for her stage designs for Diaghilev's *Saisons Russes* than for her art as a painter.¹⁷ Essentially, she put herself in this situation by working for the Ballet Russes for so many years. However, during the post-war period, Goncharova and Larionov were somewhat forced to apply their experience and knowledge as ballet and theatre designers anywhere they could to earn a living. As Goncharova's Russian biographer Vladimir Leonidovich Polushin writes, Larionov was eager to find new ways of working with the ballet in 1946; however, his first ideas for a *Ballet of Antilles* or a new Russian ballet in Monte-Carlo were never realised.¹⁸ And when new companies were founded, Larionov and Goncharova played only a marginal role in their development.¹⁹ In 1949 Larionov contacted the well-known ballet historian and critic at the *Observer* Richard Buckle who had been editing the magazine *Ballet* since 1939. Larionov wanted Buckle to publish his article 'Diaghilev and His First Employees' in the issue dedicated to Diaghilev twenty years after his death, and Goncharova contributed her recollections of the staging of the ballet *Les Noces* from 1923. In 1954 Buckle planned a groundbreaking and today forgotten exhibition about Diaghilev which sparked Goncharova's career to take off again, her work being shown in this project during the Ballet Festival in Edinburgh.²⁰

For this exhibition Buckle involved many of Goncharova's works: One large gallery (Gallery V) was completely reserved for her and Larionov: twenty-two drawings for *Le Coq d'Or* (1914), several costume designs for *Liturgie* (1915) and *Rapsodie Espagnole* (1915) – projects that were never realised. There were also designs for *Sadko* (1916), *Contes Russes* (1917), *Le Mariage d'Aurore* (1922), *Les Noces* (1922), *L'Oiseau de Feu (revival)* (1926), *La Nuit sur le Mont Chauve* (1924) and *Fair at Sorochinsk* (1926). In Gallery XIV there were drawings by Larionov showing Diaghilev together with Goncharova and Massine. In total, Goncharova showed seventy works and Larionov twenty-six.²¹ Some journalists today stress that Buckle rediscovered Goncharova and raised international interest in her art.²² This was just partly the case: Goncharova was recognised as a stage designer in this exhibition; it showcased her prominent role for the *Ballets Russes*, and the critics were enthusiastic about her works. This exhibition was the first to show her work in stage design on such a large scale, and it was her first exhibition in England, but it did not gain her recognition as an artist.²³ At this time, theatre specialists and the public, in general, showed a particular interest in the *Ballets Russes*, as is evident by the turnout and critic

¹⁷ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 14.

¹⁸ Vladimir Polushin, *Natalia Goncharova. Zariza Avantagarda*, Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2016, 444.

¹⁹ Polushin, *Natalia Goncharova*, 445.

²⁰ Roy Strong, 'Richard Buckle. Ballet critic who revolutionized exhibition design and wrote biographies of Diaghilev and Nijinsky', in *The Guardian*, 13 October 2001.

²¹ Richard Buckle, ed, *The Diaghilev Exhibition*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Festival Society, 1954, 19-21, 35.

²² Kate Taylor, 'Who was Natalia Goncharova?', in *New York Sun*, 26 June 2007; accessed 12 June 2017. <http://www.nysun.com/arts/who-was-natalia-goncharova/57312/>.

²³ Mary Chamot wrote in 1979 that Buckle had a special admiration for the works of Goncharova and Larionov, and that critics who saw the exhibition stated that this was the most beautiful room of the whole show. Mary Chamot, 'En Angleterre', in Tatiana Loguine, ed, *Gontcharova et Larionov: Cinquante ans à Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971, 93.

to the Remembrance Festival and new stage productions, which in turn fed the interest in Goncharova's work. In Paris of 1952 she had a monographic exhibition of theatre designs in Galerie de l'Institut, exhibiting four times in this gallery from 1949 to 1960.²⁴ In 1953 she was featured at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in an exhibition entitled *French and Russian Drawings for Theatrical Productions*; in the same year Goncharova showed her works in a solo exhibition in Galerie 25 in Paris.²⁵ In this period Goncharova's works were either presented in the context of stage design or together with her partner Larionov in relation to their joint legacy. They were shown mostly in smaller private galleries in France; it would take decades before she received the chance to exhibit her artwork — art beyond design — in a solo show in an important European museum.

The first turn: noteworthy acquisitions

On 24 July 1950 Larionov suffered a stroke and was hospitalised for several months. Their difficult financial situation became even more troublesome. Polushin wrote that Goncharova started selling well-known old works for theatre to be able to provide Larionov medical help. Mark Slonim, who helped her to find new buyers, wrote on 14 March 1951 that he managed to sell four *Apostles* for \$50 each and an *étude* for *Le Coq d'Or* for \$130.²⁶ The first acquisition by the French State was in May of 1951; the Musée National d'Art Moderne bought one work from each artist on the recommendation of two influential Parisians: the director of the museum Jean Cassou and the principal inspector of fine arts Raymond Cogniat. They had visited Goncharova and Larionov in their studio before the war.²⁷ When Larionov fell ill, and Goncharova's financial situation became more dire, Cogniat wrote a letter to the General Directorate for Arts of the French State explaining the artists' situation and pointing out that the museum collection did not yet include works by the artists.²⁸ Cogniat suggested Cassou to buy Goncharova's painting *Spanish Woman with Fan* (1920s) from her figurative and colourful series completed while in exile for 60,000 francs and Larionov's Rayonist *Woman at the Window* (1911-12) for 70,000 francs. Cassou agreed, and the two paintings became the first acquired from a state museum after the war. This acquisition is an exceptional event in the process of Goncharova's canonisation, marking the first major turn because the prices for the works were comparatively high for that time.²⁹

In 1952 Goncharova's works were part of the exhibition *Twentieth Century Masterpieces. Painting and Sculpture* in the Tate Britain Gallery. This exhibition was shown in Musée d'Art

²⁴ Irina Vakar, 'Natalia Goncharova, Between East and West', in Lebedeva, *Natalia Goncharova*, 414-416.

²⁵ Vakar, in Lebedeva, *Natalia Goncharova*, 414.

²⁶ Polushin, *Natalia Goncharova*, 448.

²⁷ Germain Viatte, 'Sur la constitution du fonds Larionov – Gontcharova', in Boissel, *Nathalie S. Gontcharova*, 7-10.

²⁸ Polushin, *Natalia Goncharova*, 448.

²⁹ For the comparison of development of market prices for modern German art between 1925 and 1955. See: Gesa Jeuthe, *Kunstwerte im Wandel. Die Preisentwicklung der deutschen Moderne im nationalen und internationalen Kunstmarkt 1925 bis 1955*, Berlin: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011.

Moderne, in Paris before where it was part of the International Festival of the Arts.³⁰ In 1953 Sir John Rothenstein, director of the Tate Gallery London, initiated a purchase of the works *Linen* (1913), from Goncharova's Cubo-Futuristic period, and *Three young women* (1920) and *Nocturne* (1913-14) by Larionov.³¹ Eugene Mollo, a Russian immigrant artist and friend from Great Britain, mediated the acquisition of the three works.³² He arranged for Rothenstein to visit the artists in 1954, though not before reminding Larionov that their older works from their Cubo-Futurist and Rayonist Russian period would bring them a greater source of income. Ultimately, the Trustees of the Gallery acquired the pieces.³³ These first acquisitions not only allowed for her financial security, but they were significant for Goncharova since her works entered European institutional collections.

In 1957 the interest in Russian art began to increase – stimulated in part by an exhibition of Malevich's art which toured across Europe. Hugo Häring had been safeguarding a great part of Malevich's Suprematist works which the artist left in Germany in 1927, and he gave his permission to show the pieces in an exhibition tour.³⁴ It was a post-war milestone intended to develop a modernist narrative that would include Kasimir Malevich and the Russian avant-garde, and the interest in Russian avant-garde continued to spread to other museums and commercial galleries.³⁵ This awakened recognition, however, continued to exclude Goncharova since she was not technically considered a part of the avant-garde which accommodated communist and socialist ideas.

In October 1958 Goncharova had an exhibition in the Parisian society Saint-Germain-des-Prés *Nathalie Gontcharova: oeuvres récentes* where she showed new works inspired by the Soviet Sputnik. Although she was already ill and could hardly paint, she still embarked on this new series of works. This series attested to her enthusiasm for the scientific achievements of the Soviet Union and showed a new side of her creative possibilities. In these pictures, she was turning towards minimalist abstraction.³⁶ In 1957 Goncharova's illness led her to turn down several offers to participate in group exhibitions in London and the USA.³⁷ Still, in 1957 she participated in an exhibition on abstract art in *Saint Etienne Art abstrait: les premières générations. 1910-1939*, showing her Futuristic work *Lady with a Hat*, 1913.

³⁰ Arts Council London, ed, *XXth Century Masterpieces: An Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture at the Tate Gallery*, Arts Council London, 1952.

³¹ Polushin, *Natalia Goncharova*, 481.

³² Anonymous, 'John Mollo', in *The Times*, 28 October 2017, accessed 6 November 2017.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/obituary-john-mollo-z8p8xk6kv>.

³³ Polushin, *Natalia Goncharova*, 456; here he is citing Mary Chamot, *Goncharova*, 1979, 21.

³⁴ It was shown in the Stedelijk Amsterdam, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, Kunsthalle Bern, Galleria Nazionale dell Arte Moderna Rome. See: Éva Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East European Art', in Cornelia Klinger, ed, *Blindheit und Hellsichtigkeit; Künstlerkritik an Politik und Gesellschaft*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014, 63-64.

³⁵ Forgács, in Cornelia Klinger, *Blindheit und Hellsichtigkeit*, 64.

³⁶ V. Ryndin as cited by Vakár, in Lebedeva, *Natalia Goncharova*, 11-29, 28.

³⁷ Vakár, in Lebedeva, *Natalia Goncharova*, 28.

Mary Chamot's and Camilla Gray's agency for Goncharova's art

During the 1954 ballet festival in Edinburgh, Goncharova met Mary Chamot, who, along with Camilla Gray were very close to both artists and would later become two of the first Western art professionals to establish Goncharova in Europe through new research, publications and exhibitions.³⁸ Gray was working on a book about Russian art of the early twentieth century, which is still one of the most important books about this period today. In 1960 Gray and Chamot organised a comprehensive retrospective on Larionov and Goncharova in the UK, a birthday exhibition for the artists who were turning eighty in 1961. For this show they collected forty-three paintings by Larionov and 123 by Goncharova and managed to get the City Art Gallery Leeds, City Art Gallery Bristol and Brook Street Gallery London to stage it from September to December 1961.³⁹ Gray and Chamot intended to show all of Larionov's artistic periods and Goncharova's artistic development. This exhibition tour led the Victoria and Albert Museum to acquire Goncharova's sketches of the costumes for *Coq d'or* and *Les Noces*, other lithographs and an album of drawings from 1918–1924.⁴⁰

Chamot had a Russian background and was Assistant Keeper at the Tate Gallery since 1949. By 1960 she had enough contacts to organise the Goncharova Larionov show for the Art's Council of Great Britain. Gray was almost forty years younger than Chamot and came from a family of art historians. After seeing the Diaghilev exhibition 1954, she decided to move to Moscow and study dance at the Bolshoi Theatre.⁴¹ She did not finish her education in Moscow but rather returned to England a few years later. Fascinated by Russian art she began writing articles about Malevich and Lissizky in 1958–59.⁴² By this time she had already started the research for her ground-breaking book *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*, which was published in 1962. She received influential support from Herbert Read, Kenneth Clark, Isaiah Berlin and Alfred Barr. The latter visited the Soviet Union in the 1920s and was in close contact with the avant-gardists, especially Alexander Mikhailovich Rodchenko and Varvara Fedorovna Stepanova. Barr assisted Gray in gaining access to collections and archives in the Soviet Union.⁴³ Nikolai Ivanovich Khardzhiev, the most experienced collector of the Russian avant-garde movement, corrected her manuscript. With her book Gray also intended to publish unknown works from Soviet collections⁴⁴ and used her contacts for this goal, collaborating with collectors and artists of the Russian avant-garde who were still alive at that time: Dmitri Vladimirovich Sarabianov, George Dionisovich Costaki, Naum Gabo, David Davidovich Burliuk, Antoine Pevsner and of course Larionov and Goncharova.

³⁸ Lukanova, *Natalia Gontscharova 1881–1962*, 8.

³⁹ Mary Chamot, Camilla Gray, eds, *A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Designs for the Theatre. Larionov and Goncharova*, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1961.

⁴⁰ Lukanova, *Natalia Gontscharova 1881–1962*, 8.

⁴¹ Robin Milner-Gulland, *Gray Camilla*, in Vassily Rakitin and Dmitri Sarabianov, eds, *Encyclopedia russkogo avantgarda*, Moscow: Global Expert and Service Team, 2013, 227–228.

⁴² Milner-Gulland, in Vassily Rakitin and Dmitri Sarabianov, eds, *Encyclopedia russkogo avantgarda*, 227–228.

⁴³ Marian Burleigh-Motley, *Introduction*, in Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1986, 6.

⁴⁴ Burleigh-Motley, in Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, 7.

Gray also shared the widely held view that the work of Goncharova and Larionov lacked the singlemindedness and logical development of Malevich's and Tatlin's work, but admitted that they played a crucial role in the development of Russian art up to 1914 and that they were particularly groundbreaking for their students, as well as for Malevich and Tatlin.⁴⁵ Ultimately, Gray's *The Russian Experiment in Art* from 1962 was one of the first books showing the comprehensive importance of the Russian avant-garde in the international development of art in the twentieth century; before this publication, the movement had been recognised on a very fragmentary basis by a few professionals in the West.

The book also has limitations, as Gray herself admits. She was particularly intrigued by the rumoured confrontation between Malevich and Tatlin, between Suprematism and Constructivism – a somewhat simplified view which is reflected in the book. This is why, beyond Goncharova, artists such as Pavel Nikolayevich Filonov were not given their due place in the book although their analytic art with mystical elements shaped many later artistic oeuvres. According to the British literary critic and researcher Robert Rainsford Milner-Gulland, Gray's pedantic, chronologically arranged narrative and interesting details have a much greater impact on the readers than her analysis does.⁴⁶ Regardless of the criticism and the fact that it marginalised other artists like Goncharova and Filonov against the background of the Malevich-Tatlin narrative, *The Russian Experiment in Art* provided insight into the projects and ideas of the Constructivists and Suprematists. It not only brought them back into the consciousness of the English-speaking world but exemplified that among the most radical trends in the art of the twentieth century, Constructivism and Suprematism arose in Russia on the eve of the revolution. The book was soon translated into German (1963), Italian (1964) and French (1968).

After Gray's early death in 1971, her book was reprinted in New York in a smaller edition titled *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922*, and in 1986 it was presented in London as a revised and expanded edition by the art historian Marian Burleigh-Motley. She stated that many Western specialists in the field, such as Troels Andersen, Andrei Nakov or John E. Bowlt still cite *The Great Experiment*, which seems to prove its continued value.⁴⁷ The focus in the 1980s was also on Suprematism and Constructivism, so again, Goncharova fell through the reception grid.⁴⁸

Following the exhibition tour prepared by Chamot and Gray in the UK, a retrospective in Musée d'art modern de la ville de Paris entitled *Gontcharova, Larionov* was curated by Marie-Claude Dane in 1963.⁴⁹ Although this exhibition raised more interest in their works, it once again entangled the artist's names together. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rediscovery of Russian avant-garde art was in full swing. There were numerous exhibitions throughout Europe and the US. Khardzhiev organised a Larionov-Goncharova exhibition in the Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow in 1965. This was the first and only post-war exhibition for Goncharova in Russia after

⁴⁵ Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, 96.

⁴⁶ Milner-Gulland, in Vassily Rakitin and Dmitri Sarabianov, eds, *Encyclopedia russkogo avantgarda*, 227-228.

⁴⁷ Burleigh-Motley, in Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, 6.

⁴⁸ Korowin, *Der Russen Boom*, 265-274.

⁴⁹ Marie-Claude Dane, ed, *Natalia Gontcharova, Michel Larionov*, Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1963.

1913. Khardzhiev, a friend of the artists, also persistently tried to convince his Soviet colleagues to acknowledge their works, but the cultural and political situation did not allow it.⁵⁰

Ten years after Goncharova's death, Mary Chamot published a monograph about her friend in French: *Nathalie Goncharova* (La Bibliotheque des Arts Paris 1972), and in 1979 she finished the English book *Goncharova. Stage Designs and Paintings* (Oresko Books London), which were the first important monographs about the artist. But since the first monograph was published in French, not in English or Russian, it slowed the pace of Goncharova's canonisation. Just the same, Goncharova remained unrecognised as a significant Russian avant-gardist until 2008 when her work appeared at the first major auction sales. As Sharp concluded in 2006:

Ironically, although her theories about national identity as well as her engagement with art production technologies would seem to make her art well attuned to today's global intermingling of cultures, Kandinsky, Malevich, Popova, and Rodchenko all have received the tribute of retrospectives in the West, whereas neither Goncharova nor Larionov seem destined for such recognition.⁵¹

Second turn: Feminist art history since the 1970s

An interesting new turn in the reception of Goncharova's art occurred in the 1970s when art historians began analysing art history from feminist perspectives, favouring female artists and including them in a revised canon of art history. In 1976-77 Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin curated their legendary exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950* in Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This exhibition was shown throughout 1976 and 1977 in The University Art Museum in Austin, Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh and the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York. This exhibition opened up a new approach to art history and was the first of its kind in a museum. Eighty-three artists from twelve countries showcased important female contributions to the history of art. One of them was Goncharova with six works.⁵² This show was a starting point for a new reception of the artist: Her contribution was analysed independently of the Larionov-Goncharova partnership, and she was recognised as a member of the female Russian avant-garde. As a continuation of this pioneer approach, the Gallery Gmurzynska displayed *Künstlerinnen der Russischen Avantgarde 1910-1930* (Women Artists of the Russian Avant-Garde) in 1979. This new reception has been developing, gaining particular awareness.

Still, Goncharova did not have a solo exhibition in a major art institution until the late 1990s, and until then her work was still strongly entangled with Larionov's. This entanglement exhibited a very special pattern similar to the relationships of artists like Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel: the pattern of male master and female student. In the ballet exhibition catalogue's short portrait in 1954, Goncharova's décors were central; her artistic work was described in close association to Larionov, who was thought to inaugurate a short-lived style

⁵⁰ Alla Lukanova, 'O vystavke zhivopisi M.F. Larionova i N.S. Gontscharovoj v Tretjakovskoi Galeree', in Georgi Kovalenko, *N. Gontscharova M. Larionow. Issledovanija i publikazii*, Moscow: Nauka; 2003, 88.

⁵¹ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 254.

⁵² Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland, eds, *Women Artists 1550-1950*, for Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

known as Rayonism.⁵³ The catalogue's portrait of Larionov is very interesting in this context since he was characterised as showing a more constant awareness of contemporary trends and a tendency to theorise about them, pointing out his works in the constructivist style in the context of the 1929 revival of the ballet *Renard*.⁵⁴ These characterisations leave the impression that Larionov was more concerned about contemporary art and that he was even more active in these regards; however, the description does not correspond with the facts evident in the oeuvre of both artists.

In *Russian Experiment in Art*, Gray draws a clear hierarchy between the two artists, seeing Larionov as the leader and Goncharova as his pupil.⁵⁵ This interpretation of their partnership remains steadfast in Gray's preface from the exhibition of 1961, which is significant because Gray knew both artists personally. Despite recognition as an artist in major museums, this publication illustrates why Goncharova was still not recognised as an independent artist in her own right in that time.⁵⁶ Her reception and her name had always been entangled with Larionov in exhibitions since the 1940s, thereby giving the impression that Goncharova was only an epigone and not a contributing artist to the development of new Russian art to the extent that Larionov was. However, at the same time, Gray writes that even Malevich went through Goncharova's school and was unquestionably copying her works.⁵⁷ But the initial institutional research on Goncharova was still not specialised solely on her; it continued to merge her and Larionov together. One of the reasons for this has to do with the problematic transfer of the artists' joint archive from Paris to Moscow, the impacts of which lasted until the late 1990s.

The transfer of Goncharova and Larionov's archive between Russia and France

Goncharova's first large-scale exhibition with forty oil paintings and numerous works on paper, illustrations and designs,⁵⁸ took place in Paris more than three decades after her death and was presented together with Larionov. The exhibition *Nathalie Gontcharov, Michel Larionov* in 1995-96 was opened at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou.⁵⁹ It then travelled with minimal alterations to the Foundation Pierre Giannadda in Martigny and to the Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta in Milan. Sharp called it the first posthumous breakthrough for Goncharova and Larionov, the Centre Pompidou being the first internationally renowned institution exhibiting their art.⁶⁰ Without a doubt, it was the beginning of a process of recognition of Goncharova outside of Russia. But why did it come so late? One of the crucial reasons is tangled up in the complex case of their archives, which was only finally resolved in

⁵³ Buckle, *The Diaghilev Exhibition*, 58.

⁵⁴ Buckle, *The Diaghilev Exhibition*, 60.

⁵⁵ Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, 96.

⁵⁶ Gray, Chamot, *A Retrospective Exhibition*, 2.

⁵⁷ Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, 134.

⁵⁸ Among those were the sixteen paintings and forty-three works on paper, which the USSR handed over to France from the Goncharova and Larionov archive. See: Boissel, *Nathalie S. Gontcharova*, 6.

⁵⁹ Boissel, *Nathalie S. Gontcharova*.

⁶⁰ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 15.

the early 1990s. In 1955 Larionov and Goncharova married with the intention of inheriting the works of the other. Goncharova died in 1962, and after Larionov's death in 1964, his second wife Alexandra Tomilina managed the archives of both artists. Between 1965 and 1986 her attempts to organise exhibitions were arduous. In the late 1960s, she donated Goncharova's piece *Evangelists* (1911) to the Russian Museum in Leningrad.⁶¹ Finally, Tomilina, who was living in France at the time, bequeathed all of the works in her possession to the Soviet government in exchange for a small monthly pension. This caused serious complications and legal battles between France and the USSR⁶² when, in the fall of 1986, the archive was transferred from Tomilina's house to the Soviet Embassy. French inheritance tax was very high and French cultural property export regulations were strict, and to avoid paying nearly sixty per cent of the total value in taxes, the Soviet government smuggled the archive back to Russia.⁶³ From 1986 to 1992, until Russia and France could negotiate the issues of tax evasion and smuggling of cultural property, the archive was inaccessible.

This is one way to tell the story. The other is to reference the last wish of the two artists: that their works be transferred to the Tretyakov Gallery. In the typical cultural-political manner of the Russian government, the gallery curators stated their case.⁶⁴ When the question of the inheritance and archive was resolved, a large part of the archive remained in the Tretyakov Gallery⁶⁵ while a total of sixty-six works remained in France as inheritance tax, of which sixteen paintings, twenty-four designs and sixteen templates were by Goncharova.⁶⁶ Until then, the administration of the Tretyakov Gallery had denied most scholars access to hundreds of paintings, drawing and documents.⁶⁷ New research and exhibitions of Goncharova and her work could finally begin after the legal dispute ended in 1992. This debate also marked the self-imposed importance of the Tretyakov Gallery regarding Goncharova's works; ultimately, it owned the greater part of the archive: 390 paintings and several thousand graphic works.⁶⁸ Before the exhibition activity started in 1999 in Russia, the last solo exhibition of Goncharova was her show in Petrograd and Moscow in 1913-14. After the court proceedings in the 1990s and the processing of the archive, which also took several years the first exhibitions of her work from

⁶¹ Gleb Pospelov, 'Der Nachlass von Natalja Gontscharowa', in Beate Kemfert, ed, *Natalja Gontscharowa. Zwischen russischer Tradition und europäischer Moderne*, for Opelvillen Rüsselsheim, Ostfildern: Hantje Cantz, 2008, 61-65, 63.

⁶² Taylor, 'Who was Natalia Goncharova?'

⁶³ Konstantin Akinsha, Grigorii Kozlov, Oleg Bergazov and Sylvia Hochfeld, *Paris-Moscow: the strange, illegal journey of the Larionov-Goncharova archive*, in ARTNews, 3 March 1993, accessed 14 March 2018. <http://www.ire.org/resource-center/stories/14416/>.

⁶⁴ Kemfert, 'Das Leben von Natalja Gontscharowa', in Kemfert, *Natalja Gontscharowa*, 9-25, 24.

⁶⁵ Akinsha, Kozlov, Bergazov and Hochfeld, *Paris-Moscow*.

⁶⁶ Pospelov, in Kemfert, *Natalja Gontscharowa*, 64; Anonymous, Catalogue of the Collection from Centre de George Pompidou, Paris, accessed 13 March 2018. http://catalogueexpositions.referata.com/wiki/Nathalie_S._Gontcharova,_Michel_F._Larionov,_et_les_collections_du_Mus%C3%A9_national_d%27art_moderne.

⁶⁷ Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 254.

⁶⁸ Irina Vakar, who is responsible for the Goncharova Archive, mentioned that the graphic work is not yet inventoried in a single document, but consists of about 5,000 works. (Telephone interview with the author on 4 April 2018).

the Tretyakov Gallery collection were *Mikhail Larionov – Natalia Goncharova: shdevry is Parizhskogo nasledii: Zhivopis'* (1999) and *M. Larionov, N. Goncharova: Parizhskoe nasledie v Tre'tiakovskoi galeree* (1999). These exhibitions were curated by Natalia Borisovna Avtonomova, Alla Gennadievna Lukanova and Evgeniia Anatolevna Iliukhina. The catalogues created in connection with these exhibitions represent the first research by a younger generation of scholars conducted in Russia on both artists and have become important references about their work.⁶⁹ Although Sarabianov, Elena Veniaminovna Basner and Gleb Gennadievich Pospelov have researched on Goncharova for decades, very few articles and books were published in Russia until the late 1990s. It becomes evident that while in Europe, after the court proceedings, there was one large-scale exhibition (1995-1996) organised by Jessica Boissel at the Centre Pompidou, the Russians were busy revising Goncharova's and Larionov's histories out of the remaining fragments; in other words, research and exhibition projects were divided.

Just the same, the first crucial institutional research was not on Goncharova alone but continued to merge her life as an artist with Larionov's. Both the exhibitions and the publications failed to acknowledge her as an individual artist with her own artistic language. What's more, she was presented in group exhibitions where the focus was either on the overall early progressive artistic ideas of the avant-garde⁷⁰ or gender-centred themes, as exemplified in *Amazons of the Avant-Garde* 1999–2001. These representations have lasted for decades, which is why the recent art market is now playing a significant role in the canonisation of Goncharova and marks the third and last turn.

The third turn: Goncharova and the art market of the 2000s

In the article 'Who was Natalia Goncharova?' Kate Taylor wrote in the *New York Sun* on 26 June 2007 that the public may not have heard of the most expensive woman artist today, whose painting *Picking Apples* (1909) was sold at Christie's Modern and Impressionists sale in London to a private European collector for £4.9 million, or \$9.8 million, besting the auction records for more famous female artists like Georgia O'Keeffe and Mary Cassatt.⁷¹ Taylor points out that forty-five years after her death Goncharova is still not known as a part of a general canon of modernist artists. For decades numerous scholars were convinced of the quality of Goncharova's work, but no significant monographic exhibitions appeared in the West.⁷² Only first with the success of Goncharova's works at international auctions where she suddenly became the most expensive female artist in the world did the general public begin to take notice of her. One year later on 24 June 2008, the painting *Les fleurs* (1912) was sold in London for \$10.8

⁶⁹ Lukanova, *Natalia Gontscharova 1881–1962*, 9.

In St. Petersburg Elena Basner curated *Natalia Goncharova: The Russian Years* (2002), another crucial step towards reestablishing Goncharova's art in Russia.

⁷⁰ For example: 2004 *Great Expectations: Art of the Russian Avant-Garde* (Jerusalem), 2005 *Russia! Nine Hundred Years of Masterpieces and Master Collections* (New York, Bilbao), 2007 *Bonjour Russland!* (Düsseldorf).

⁷¹ Taylor, 'Who was Natalia Goncharova?'

⁷² John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt, eds, *Amazons of the Avant-Garde*, New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2003.

million to a Russian collector. In 1985 the gallerist Bernd Göbel acquired the piece for 210,000 German Marks and later sold it to Alfred Hoh, a German art collector.⁷³ In 2010 Goncharova once again broke the record price for female artists when her painting *Espagnole* (1916) was sold at Christie's to an unknown buyer for \$10.2 million.⁷⁴ Since the early 2000s Russian art has been fetching high prices at Sotheby's, and without a doubt, Goncharova was among the highlights.⁷⁵ The climbing prices on Russian art is accredited to the rise of wealthy Russian art collectors entering the art market in this period.⁷⁶ Art had become an important financial investment and a status symbol, and at that time Russian collectors preferred Russian art at auctions.⁷⁷

Although private collectors tend not to lend their pieces to museums, Goncharova's market success had a direct impact on her presentation in museums. For example, her first retrospective was presented in Germany in 2009, just two years after her first auction highs: *Natalia Gontscharowa. Zwischen russischer Tradition und europäischer Moderne* (Natalia Goncharova. Between Russian Tradition and European Modernity). This exhibition was organised by Alla Chilova, a former Tretyakov curator who became a freelancer after emigrating to Germany. In recent years, she has been active in presenting Russian avant-gardists, organising an exhibition about Malevich and his influence in Vaduz, Lichtenstein and Baden-Baden, Germany (2008–2009). As mediator, Chilova built up and secured the contacts between Western museums and the Tretyakov Gallery and helped to organise the transportation of the works.⁷⁸ Chilova states that she had had the idea to exhibit Goncharova since 1998, but no German institution was interested in showing her work. When talking to museum curators, they all expressed the same concerns: Goncharova was not sufficiently well known to attract ample visitors to the museum.⁷⁹ But that was before the great success at the auctions. After her works were sold for millions, the interest was tangible. Chilova was prepared and was able to organise a retrospective exhibition in Germany which toured in Opelvillen in Rüsselsheim, St. Anne's Museum in Lübeck and Erfurt's Angermuseum. The majority of the exhibition – ninety per cent of the sixty-six artworks – were loans from the Tretyakov Gallery from their incorporated archive. This show involved all periods, from the early Cubo-Futurism to her Sputnik series from the 1950s.⁸⁰ Just the same, a monographic presentation with top-class works was presented in comparatively small museums; indicative of a continued reluctance among more notable institutions. Regardless of

⁷³ Matthias Thibaut, 'Jäger und Sammler', in *Tagesspiegel*, 21 June 2006, accessed 21 November 2017. <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/jaeger-und-sammler/1261398.html>.

⁷⁴ Christie's, *Sale 7831, Impressionist/Modern (Evening Sale)*, 2 February 2010 in London, accessed 8 March 2018.

<https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/natalia-gontcharova-1881-1962-espagnole-5289408-details.aspx>.

⁷⁵ Anonymous, 'Broken records: the most expensive painting ever sold at a Russian auction', in: *Calvert Journal*, accessed 12 June 2017. <http://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/1060/most-expensive-russian-painting-auction-roerich>.

⁷⁶ Anne Reimers, 'Das Material fließt aus den Sammlungen', in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 June 2008.

⁷⁷ Nikita Lobanov-Rostovskij, 'Crupnejschije collezionery russkogo issustva', in *Orloff Magazine*, accessed March 2018. <http://orloffmagazine.com/content/krupneyshie-kollektionery-russkogo-iskusstva>.

⁷⁸ Telephone interview with the author, 5 July 2017.

⁷⁹ Telephone interview with the author, 5 July 2017.

⁸⁰ Kemfert, *Natalja Gontscharowa*.

attempts by scholars, the art historical discourse on Goncharova was still in its infancy in 2009, perhaps still in part because of the Russian-European tensions which have guided political relations since the Cold War.

Science and forgery

There is another reason why the work *Picking Apples* received so much attention: it was very well documented, and its provenance was impeccable.⁸¹ In recent years, Russian avant-garde art has frequently appeared in the headlines in connection to numerous international counterfeiting scandals. Within the last two decades, Exter and Goncharova (both Russian exile artists in France) have become the two most forged female artists in history.⁸² The rising prices for these works since the 1960s and the fact that many artists could not or did not document their oeuvre carefully, opened the opportunity for production of enormous amounts of fakes worldwide, also because in Soviet times it was very easy to fabricate a false provenance for any work. In 2010 the English art historian Anthony Parton and the French cataloguist Denise Bazetoux published the monographic books *Goncharova: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova* and *Nathalia Gontcharova: Son Oeuvre, entre tradition et modernité*.⁸³ The latter book by Bazetoux was considered a *catalogue raisonné* of the artist. These volumes sparked an unusual press conference, which was held on 26 April 2011 in Moscow. Russian experts claimed that both books are full of fakes: In Parton's book, 150 forgeries of 600 reproduced works were counted, and Bazetoux' *catalogue raisonné* was said to show sixty to seventy per cent fakes of the 1,500 illustrated works.⁸⁴ The experts who appeared at the press conference were the businessman and collector Petr Olegovich Aven, the head of the Russian government's Department for the Protection of Cultural Property Viktor Vasilievich Petrakov, the Tretyakov Gallery director Irina Vladimirovna Lebedeva, senior researcher Irina Anatolevna Vakar, art historian and publisher Andrei Dmitrievich Sarabianov and James Butterwick, a Russian art dealer from London. The question arises as to why such a scientific dispute was abruptly carried out and at the state level. Possible answers can be found in the article by Sylvia Hochfield for *ARTnews*. Here she writes that, first of all, curators and researchers from the Tretyakov see themselves as the guardians of Goncharova's legacy. In the case of the publications, Petrakov even stated that there was a letter prepared 'by the Russian Minister of Culture, Aleksandr Alekseyevich Avdeev to be sent to the French Minister of the Internal Affairs, requesting the French government to act on the matter.'⁸⁵

⁸¹ Christie's, *Sale 7404, Impressionist and Modern Art (Evening Sale)*, 18 June 2007 in London, accessed 13 March 2018. <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/natalia-goncharova-1881-1962-picking-apples-4935392-details.aspx>.

⁸² Sylvia Hochfield, 'Protecting Goncharova's Legacy', 1 July 2011, in *ARTNews*, accessed 1 January 2018. <http://www.artnews.com/2011/07/01/protecting-goncharovas-legacy>.

⁸³ Anthony Parton, *Goncharova: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova*, Suffolk: ACC Art Books, 2010; Denise Bazetoux, *Nathalia Gontcharova: Son Oeuvre, entre tradition et modernité*, vol. 1, New York: Ursus Books, 2010.

⁸⁴ Hochfield, *Protecting Goncharova's Legacy*.

⁸⁵ Hochfield, *Protecting Goncharova's Legacy*.

There was another important reason for these allegations; the Tretyakov Gallery was in the process of preparing an exhibition for 2013 with a monographic catalogue on Goncharova which was intended to become a standard work for scholars and researchers. Hochfield cites Irina Lebedeva, who was worried about the Tretyakov project since it was meant to give Goncharova 'her true place in Russian art history', but that these publications created 'an unpleasant aura of scandal that will not benefit the artist's reputation.'⁸⁶ According to Lebedeva and her scientific committee, most of the illustrations in Parton's collection were unknown works without detailed description and provenance. Parton replied that he had written a critical monograph and therefore in the chosen format it was not necessary to provide such detailed descriptions of every work. He continued by mentioning that he had to respect the wishes of private collectors to remain anonymous.⁸⁷ The illustrated works were identified as fakes because they were copies of the same work in different media; however, Russian experts are certain that Goncharova rarely made copies of her own paintings and the copies reproduced in Parton's book were also of dubious quality.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Russian experts criticised the lack of standard information about the paintings. Overall, the dispute between Russian and European experts was led in an emotional tone and in short, was essentially about the interpretative authority claimed by all parties regarding Goncharova's legacy and work. The International Chamber of Russian Modernism (InCoRM), founded in Paris in 2007 by independent art historians and scientists specialising in Russian Modernism,⁸⁹ claimed that Parton and Bazetoux were 'viciously attacked', pointing out how upset the researchers from the Tretyakov Gallery were because the authors had not consulted them during their research.⁹⁰ In their letter, the curators closed by declaring that such unprofessional publications in the West reproducing works of dubious quality and fakes continue to destroy the popularity of Russian artists. Essentially, these Western authors seemed to deliberately overlook Russian institutions as sources of valid information and knowledge, which in turn, is not only devastating for joint scholarship on Goncharova but also for cultural rapprochement overall.⁹¹

Conclusion

This article attempts to find reasons for Natalia Goncharova's late discovery by marking three turns in her reception process. One of these turns took place during her lifetime with the acquisitions of her and Larionov's works by the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris and the Tate Gallery London. The works were bought for very high prices regarding the artists' periphery position at that time. Goncharova's exhibition activity ended in the 1960s: There were some group shows, but these did not activate the art-market nor help to introduce her into the art-historical canon. The rediscovery of Malevich through Gray's book, which informed the

⁸⁶ Hochfield, *Protecting Goncharova's Legacy*.

⁸⁷ Hochfield, *Protecting Goncharova's Legacy*.

⁸⁸ Goncharova's attitude towards copies is a very complex one; she had a sophisticated appreciation of copying and its relation to concepts of originality. See: Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 174-203.

⁸⁹ International Chamber of Russian Modernism Homepage, accessed 8 March 2018. www.incorm.eu.

⁹⁰ Hochfield *Protecting Goncharova's Legacy*.

⁹¹ Hochfield, *Protecting Goncharova's Legacy*.

Western public's reception of Russian art, led to the rise of Suprematist and Constructivist traditions rather than the early avant-garde movements.

After Camilla Gray, a younger generation of art historians and professionals have also been responsible for this growing recognition. Since the 1970s Troels Andersen, John E. Bowlt, Nicoletta Misler, Charlotte Douglas, Jane Sharp and others have conducted extensive research on the Russian avant-garde. John E. Bowlt was the organiser of the touring exhibition *Amazons of the Avant-Garde* which instilled the concept of great female talents within early twentieth century Russia. This exhibition was in a way a continuation of the second and crucial turn in Goncharova's canonisation process: the feminist reading of art history and re-discovery of female positions as started by *Woman Artists 1550–1950*. In Bowlts's *Amazons of the Avant-Garde*, Goncharova was presented among other female artists who were part of the progressive art movement in Russia from 1870 to 1930; fifteen Goncharova pieces were exhibited solely from her early period of Expressionism, Cubo-Futurism and Rayonism in Russia 1907–1914. In the context of the other women artists, which included Exter, Popova, Rozanova, Stepanova and Udaltsova, it is Goncharova who was the first female painter in Russia to achieve as much recognition in her home country as she did before leaving for Paris – a formidable accomplishment that other female artists could only dream of.

The third turn, and Goncharova's decisive breakthrough, was caused by the auctions in the first decade of the 2000s. Suddenly she was in the public eye and the interest in her work has continued to grow steadily. The negative publicity around Parton's and Bazetoux' publications also gained media attention and brought Goncharova into the public view. Finally, from 16 October 2013 to 16 February 2014 the State Tretyakov Gallery exhibited its major retrospective on Goncharova in Russia alongside works from the French part of the inheritance and other public and private lenders: *Natalia Goncharova. Between East and West*. The catalogue was printed in English and Russian. The exhibition presenting 400 works from international institutions showed the entire breadth of the artist's work: the early period, theatre designs, costume and design for clothing, book illustrations and her artwork throughout these stages. At this point it is evident that Goncharova's canonisation in Russian art history has been accomplished with this exhibition; however, the same cannot be said for the West's perception of her legacy. The title of the exhibition and the corresponding books about the artist seem to indicate her state of being in between: between East and West, between tradition and modernity, between stage design and art, between Larionov's influence and her own impulses. This comprehensive and illuminating exhibition was only shown in Moscow and did not travel internationally. The preceding circumstances and this well-timed show sparked recognition within Russia; yet it remains to be seen what kind of influence these factors might have on Western notions of this artist, who, in the meantime, will remain 'in between'.

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