Art beyond Borders

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When the French Marxist Roger Garaudy published his theory of “realism without bounds” (*D’un réalisme sans rivages*) in 1963, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) vociferously denounced him for revisionism and placed his heretical book on the blacklist. Even to the last days of the Soviet Union, conservative aestheticians and art functionaries continued to resist any attempt to revise the conception of socialist realism or to sanction an ecumenical concept of what they disparagingly called “real-
ism as a rubber sack.” Yet already by 1963 the Soviet art establishment was split into conservative or hard line and reformist, liberalizing, or modernizing camps committed to a new, “contemporary style” of realism. A more radical fringe had also emerged. Condemned at the notorious Manège Affair at the end of 1962, it formed the new margin of permitted Soviet art, coming to be known (in the West) as the nonconformist or underground art world. Indeed much of what Garaudy proposed was already under debate among reform-minded artists and critics in the Moscow art world since 1956. Against the jeremiads of the conservatives, modernizers sought a rejuvenated and elastically defined realism, a public art that could move and persuade and say something to contemporary people about the present day in a “contemporary” style. This article will consider the ways in which, beginning in the Khrushchev Thaw (c. 1953–62), the Soviet conception of socialist realism was challenged, fractured, and expanded thanks in part to encounters with art and artists of the “socialist countries” (Sotsstran) and, more broadly, to increased Soviet exposure to international socialist art, including that of postcolonial countries.

Between 1947 and 1953 Soviet cultural policy had become more deeply xenophobic, nationalistic, and autarkic than ever. At home, the newly established Academy of Arts along with the Arts Committee (which had overseen the purges in the art world during the Stalinist Terror) dogmatically insisted upon the pedigree purity of a Russian canon—based on the model of the nineteenth-century Russian realism of the Peredvizhniki—as the patrilineage of socialist realism, while “ethnically cleansing” alien influences. Modernism, identified with the West, had played a crucial constitutive and uni-


fying role as socialist realism’s “other” from the start. But with the onset of the Cold War, the conflict between the “Two Camps” of East and West, socialism and capitalism, promulgated in 1947, found its cultural expression in the confrontation between realism and modernism. From the official Soviet perspective, modernism was the instrument of Western imperialism, and the art of socialist realism—healthy, progressive, and truthful—was irreconcilably opposed to this decadent, bourgeois-imperialist, antihumanist “antiart.” Modernism was characterized by “its falseness, its belligerent antirealism, its hostility to objective knowledge and to the truthful portrayal of life in art.” The standoff between the opposing powers and their ideologies required the absolute antithesis of their cultural manifestations; no possibility for common ground or—horrible dictu!—convergence could be admitted.

In Central and Eastern Europe, meanwhile, cultural Sovietization attempted to impose Soviet Russian models of socialist realism in the newly subordinated countries. As imperial powers have often discovered, a degree of hybridization was required in order to indigenize it in local cultures. Nevertheless, the degree to which the subaltern cultures thereby exercised a reciprocal influence on the culture of the core was, at that time, limited. Assessing the channels and direction of influence of political change in this period, Jacques Rupnik noted that Soviet adaptation to change initiated in Eastern Europe first came on the agenda in the Khrushchev era. To what extent does Rupnik’s assessment also apply to cultural change in the USSR, specifically visual art practice and policy? Were developments in the subaltern states of Central and Eastern Europe a catalyst and model for change in the Soviet art establishment, and, if so, what were the vectors of this communication (or as conservatives would see it, contamination)? We will consider here both the effects of encounters with art of socialist Europe, and also


of wider exposure to European and world art. Often drawing on indigenous traditions that challenged the hegemony of European conventions of verismilitude on which Russian realism was based, the art of the socialist world and postcolonial/revolutionary movements posed particular challenges to Soviet orthodoxy.

Soviet cultural politics began to change already in the early 1950s, before the process of de-Stalinization got under way in the fraternal countries, just as the USSR initially led the way in de-Stalinization in other respects. While the CPSU continued to claim a guiding role in cultural as in political matters, the regime’s renunciation of terror and coercion as means of governing both Soviet society and its satellites necessitated accommodation with pressures for change coming both from below and from its allies abroad (although there were notable lapses: political violence was not renounced, for example, in Hungary in 1956).

In the international arena, by the mid-1950s the Cold War had entered a less tense phase. The principle of “Peaceful Coexistence” moderated the thesis of the “Two Camps,” “Socialism in one country” was abandoned, and the project of international socialism, under Soviet leadership, was resumed, along with efforts to expand Soviet influence in the postcolonial world. Autarchy gave way to the aspiration to world cultural leadership in line with the Soviet Union’s new geopolitical role. International diplomacy and exchange were reestablished, and although this has been described as a “cultural offensive” against the West, it was also a matter of readiness to learn, the better to compete. Nikita Khrushchev, Party first secretary, traveled avidly and applied the lessons of foreign experience back home, rallying his country to “catch up with and overtake the West.” The realization that superpower status in the postwar world demanded cutting-edge science and technology made it necessary to allow Soviet scientists access to the latest foreign research. In relation to culture, too, the writer Ilya Ehrenburg publicly expressed hope that it would be possible “to set against the climate of ‘Cold War’ the spirit of gen-

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uine cultural cooperation and honest competition.” Trade, tourism, scientific and cultural exchange expanded, and cultural agreements were signed with the governments of capitalist countries including France, Great Britain, and the United States as well as with the Peoples’ Democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.

The “fraternal” socialist countries represented an important resource in the push toward a new phase of technological modernization. While economic cooperation was assured by the formation of Comecon, the principle that they should pool not only their scientific but also their cultural achievements (and make these available to support Soviet development) was encoded in the CPSU’s Third Party Program adopted in 1961.

The flow of information across borders increased enormously, as did possibilities to see foreign art and meet foreigners. As a result of foreign exchange agreements in the late 1950s, the Soviet public was increasingly exposed to exhibitions of contemporary international art, from the capitalist West, from the Peoples’ Republics of Central and Eastern Europe, and also occasionally from Asia, Africa, and Latin America where the Soviet Union was extending its interests. In addition to travel and international exhibitions and festivals, foreign publications served an important role as sources of information. While the USIA (United States Information Agency) magazine *Amerika*, for example, propagandized the “American way of life” and also the latest US art and cutting-edge design, illustrated magazines from Eastern European countries were at least as influential, not least because they were more readily available at newsstands. They found a receptive audience attracted by their “Western”-seeming contents and by their modern design. As Russian art historian Iurii Gerchuk recalled: “Every decorative-painterly cover of the journal *Pol’sha* (Poland) behind a kiosk window seemed like a manifesto of new artistic possibilities. And for the ‘minders’ [of orthodoxy] the very word ‘Pol’sha’ became an odious symbol of ‘modernism’ infiltrating the country.”

Other periodicals of particular cultural importance included the Polish *Przekroj* (Profile) and, for art specialists, the East German art history journal *Bildende Kunst* (Fine art).

While international cultural exchanges were recognized as a means to reduce international tension as well as to glean useful models for selective imi-

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tation, they were nevertheless tolerated only “on condition that, under cover of such exchanges, no alien or hostile ideas are smuggled into the country.”

The easing of international relations and the expansion of transnational cultural dialogue were accompanied, as Gerchuk indicates, by intense internal ideological vigilance to counterbalance the increased access to information about foreign ideas, lifestyles and art. The party newspaper Pravda warned: “the warmer the international relations the more acute the ideological battle; there is no contradiction here.”

The mechanisms for exchange and encounter were controlled by the official bureaucracies (the Ministry of Culture, VOKs, and the cultural unions, etc.) and opportunities for person-to-person contacts with foreign artists and critics, though growing, were closely controlled in the 1950s and mostly limited to bigwigs. Although international tourism within and across the Iron Curtain developed in the decade after Stalin’s death, still only a handful of the most privileged artists traveled abroad, usually as part of a delegation. Even travel to “fraternal countries” and contacts within the Bloc were suspiciously guarded, leaving little room for spontaneous connections to be forged. Ideas from Central and Eastern Europe, where social and intellectual revolts had been endemic since Stalin’s death and where Stalinist aesthetics had never taken deep root, were potentially as corrosive as those from the capitalist world. Soviet reformers, however, sought them hungrily, as a potentially fruitful source of rejuvenation for Soviet art. For those who did have the opportunity, travel abroad left a profound impression, for example, on the young Moscow painter Pavel Nikonov, who went to Prague in 1956 as a reward for a prize-winning diploma painting.

The most immediate and large-scale impact—and the hardest for the authorities to control—was exercised by events that took place on Soviet soil, primarily in Moscow. To begin to characterize more precisely the nature and mechanisms of these influences we shall focus on two key events that took place in the year following Khrushchev’s secret speech, 1956–57: the Picasso

11 G. Zhukov in Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn’ (November 1959); Alexander Werth, Russia under Khrushchev (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1975), 231.
12 David Zaslavskii, in Pravda (7 November 1959); cited in Werth, Russia under Khrushchev, 229. The party demonstrated the limits of its tolerance by branding Nobel Prize–winning writer Boris Pasternak a traitor for his novel Doctor Zhivago in Autumn 1958.
retrospective of 1956; and the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957. The unprecedented exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*, which opened at the end of 1958, was also of signal importance, but for lack of space here the viewer is referred to my earlier publication on the subject.14 These events were pivotal in introducing foreign contemporary art to the Soviet audience. While playing a major role in the internationalization of professional art practice and criticism, they also helped to expand the horizons of the lay public, the “Soviet people,” whom official rhetoric invoked as the ultimate arbiter of art under socialism. They challenged the vaunted homogeneity of the Soviet art world, its single “method” of socialist realism, its hegemonic model of what the art of socialism should be like, and its claim to lead the socialist world.15 The challenge was the more trenchant when it came from close to home: from within the Bloc or from fellow socialists. The art of other socialist countries and “progressive artists,” I shall argue, muddied the divide and raised the specter of the uncoupling of socialism and realism. In face of insistence on the irreconcilability of the two Cold War camps and their supposedly antithetical cultures of realism and modernism, any such erosion of difference between the art of socialism and of capitalism threatened, from the conservative point of view, the integrity of socialist realism. From a reformist or modernizer perspective, however, the encounter with alternative models created an opportunity to assimilate and to legitimate a broader “modern” and international realism, one capacious enough to accommodate formal devices banned hitherto because of their identification with modernism. A “contemporary style” was put forward, as we shall discuss. It lends itself to description in mongrel terms that would be anathema to conservatives, as a “modern realism” or “socialist modernism.” As Rupnik argued “Eastern European change has often acted as a bridge for Western influences on the Soviet system.”16


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socialists. From the Soviet conservatives’ point of view, Eastern Europe, far
from playing its assigned role of insulator or buffer against malign Western
influences, acted rather as a conductor and mediator of modernism.\textsuperscript{17}

Even before Khrushchev’s momentous reassessment of the recent, Stalin-

ist past in his 1956 Secret Speech, art historians and curators embarked on a
reevaluation of foreign influence in Russian and Soviet culture. A period of
intensive reacquaintance with international art of several centuries, and also
with aspects of Russia’s own suppressed artistic heritage, began in 1954. The
USSR Ministry of Culture (established in 1953 to take over the responsibili-
ties of the Stalinist Arts Committee), began to organize exhibitions of West
European art on the basis of Soviet collections, suddenly exposing the Soviet
public to contemporary and historical foreign culture.\textsuperscript{18} The Pushkin Museum
of Fine Arts reopened in 1954 as a museum of European art. The display
began with ancient Egypt and ended with the stark, politically engaged work
of German artist Käthe Kollwitz. It included a French section that traced the
development of “realism” from the French Revolution to Millet and Courbet
but which also included, for the first time, a display of impressionist paint-
ings by Renoir, Monet, and Degas, exhumed from storage where they had
languished since the closure of the State Museum of Modern Western Art
(GMNZI).\textsuperscript{19} The tentative rehabilitation of impressionism continued with a
major exhibition of “French Art from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century”
from Soviet collections. This opened at the Pushkin Museum in November
1955 then moved to the Ermitazh in Leningrad in 1956.\textsuperscript{20}

The treatment of impressionism revealed splits in the cultural establish-
ment along the scale from reformist/liberal to conservative/Stalinist/nation-
alist in which art history—or “tradition and innovation: as it was thematized
in contemporary discourse—became a battleground. These splits would be-
come wider and more visible in the course of the Thaw. The official attitude
toward impressionism remained ambivalent or hostile; while early impres-
sionism began to be assimilated to the realist canon, conservatives still drew

\textsuperscript{17} On the “contemporary style,” see Reid, “The Soviet ‘Contemporary Style,’” 71–12; Reid, “Toward a New
(Socialist) Realism,” 217–39.

\textsuperscript{18} K. Sîtnik, “Vysokie traditsii (Zametki o vystavke frantsuzskogo iskusstva),” *Iskusstvo* 3 (1956): 40; and A.

\textsuperscript{19} Pavlov, “Novaia ekspozitsiia,” 71; See Reid, “Toward a New (Socialist) Realism,” 217–39.

\textsuperscript{20} Sîtnik, “Vysokie traditsii,” 40.
a line at the later work, maintaining that it had declined into formalist preoccupations, subjectivism, willful distortion, and “the cult of accidental, fleeting perceptions.” Beyond early impressionism, French art was still officially formalist and subjectivist. This applied to some of the most vital influences on early-twentieth-century Russian art such as Paul Cézanne, on the grounds that: “The transformation of a human being into an object of still life, so characteristic of Cézanne, was the beginning of the end of art.”

There was an important difference in approach, however. No longer must everything ideologically and artistically suspect be kept behind seven seals in order to protect the public’s innocence and quarantine pure Russian art from contamination. In the last rooms of the exhibition viewers were exposed to works by artists long labeled formalists: Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse, and early Picasso. The Ermitazh also paid special tribute to Cézanne by organizing an exhibition of his work for the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 1956.

The significance of exhibitions of Cézanne and impressionism for members of the older generation of Soviet artists cannot be overestimated. Many had continued, if tacitly, to regard this as their true bloodline, the great source of modern world art, of which they believed Soviet art to be a part. Younger artists, however, were often more interested in finding out about twentieth-century traditions, both foreign and indigenous, including the Russian avant-garde. Those seeking to uncover the suppressed history of Russian modernism were occasionally able to see still forbidden work by Malevich, Tatlin, Kandinsky, Chagall, and others in the cellars of the Ermitazh in Leningrad and the State Tret’iakov Gallery in Moscow if brave curators were prepared to risk their jobs to conduct them into the museums’ underworld. Art historian Antonina Izergina received resounding applause for daring to utter in public the names of Malevich, Filonov, and Kuznetsov, and even suggesting that some of their work...
was “infinitely more realistic than we sometimes see today.” Not everyone welcomed the more liberal line, however. For many, such work remained beyond the pale. To defend it aroused the anger and consternation of conservatives in the art establishment such as Vladimir Serov (soon to become president of the new Russian Federation branch of the Artists’ Union formed at the end of the decade) who maintained the thoroughbred Russian purity of realism. Such utterances as Izergina’s, Serov warned, reduced realism to a kind of “Noah’s ark for seven pairs of clean and one pair of unclean [species].”

While for conservatives, twentieth-century Western art remained the decadent, formalist “other” of healthy Soviet realism and any attempt at syncretic assimilation of its influence was seen as pernicious, even those on the liberal end of the art establishment during the Thaw could still not tolerate abstract art. Abstraction allegedly epitomized the “antihuman” character of capitalist culture, demonstrated international capitalism’s will to impose a uniform blankness on cultural production throughout the world, and effaced national specificity, turning art into a common currency, identical and exchangeable, like money. However the party and state authorities no longer considered total quarantine a viable method of countering its influence given the Soviet Union’s new global position.

Just months after Khrushchev had denounced Stalin’s excesses, one of the most momentous artistic events of the Thaw took place. A major retrospective of Pablo Picasso, “the most famous communist in the world after Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung,” opened at the Pushkin Museum on 26 October 1956 then moved to the Ermitazh in Leningrad from 1 to 19 December. Organized by the All-Union Society for Cultural Links with Abroad (VOKS) in honor of the artist’s seventy-fifth birthday, it was the initiative of Ilya Ehrenburg. The writer had established strong contacts with the Parisian avant-garde in the 1910s and 1920s and continued to act as a cultural ambassador during the Stalin period, although he was regarded with suspicion as a conduit of pernicious foreign influence. Under Khrushchev he took an active

25 RGANI, f. 5, op. 17, d. 498, l. 97.
26 While the different positions are presented here a binary of extremes, in fact it was a sliding scale and individual positions were fluid, contingent upon particular situations.
28 RGANI, f. 5, op. 17, d. 498, ll. 97–98.
role in promoting acceptance of modern Western art in the Soviet Union and breaking down the chauvinism of the cultural Iron Curtain.\textsuperscript{29} The fact that Picasso was a card-carrying communist—and in 1950 had even received the Lenin Peace Prize for his 1949 dove poster\textsuperscript{30}—made this exhibition possible. Moreover it was not hidden away in some marginal space where only a few specialists might see it, but displayed in the USSR’s most prestigious central museums of Western art, which enshrined the classical art and European Old Masters, the approved world heritage on whose shoulders Soviet culture was suppose to stand. But as a cultural representative of communism, Picasso presented a paradox that challenged the Cold War binaries.\textsuperscript{31} For here, in one person, a commitment to the struggle against capitalism was combined with avant-garde aesthetics, which the Soviet epistemological order assigned unambiguously to capitalism. This was definitely not realism as the Soviet authorities or public knew it; his was the kind of work that in the Soviet Union would be denounced for formalism, antihumanist deformation, and the defamation of the image of man. It was not art that could satisfy the social command according to the socialist realist criterion of “narodnost’,” to be “understood and loved by the people.” How could a communist artist paint in this “antihuman,” subjective, and incomprehensible way?

Whatever doubts there might be about its \textit{narodnost’}, the Picasso exhibition attracted large crowds. In retrospect it took on almost mythic importance as an event that encapsulated the spirit of the Thaw. In the late 1970s, a mere reference to the Picasso exhibition was enough to trigger a generation’s shared nostalgia for the 1950s and for the \textit{Sturm und Drang} of their own youth, as in Viktor Slavkin’s popular 1979 play \textit{Vzroslaia doch’ molodo-go cheloveka} (The adult daughter of a young man).\textsuperscript{32} It was seminal not only

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\textsuperscript{31} As Sarah Wilson notes, “the mobilization of Cold War intellectuals required transportable and reproducible art works plus film and souvenirs.” Ibid., 29.

for the chance it offered to study hitherto forbidden examples of modernist art, but because it provided a forum for lively, spontaneous public discussion of contemporary culture, as Vladimir Slepian, a young Moscow art student, later recalled:

Every day at the exhibition I met outstanding writers, musicians, scientists, actors, and painters. But the most numerous spectators were young people, who, excited by the discovery of a personal and revolutionary art, filled the hall from morning till evening. Right there, in the halls, discussions were held on such subjects as aesthetics, trends in painting, and the status of Soviet art.33

In addition to the impromptu discussions that arose in the lines and before the paintings, students organized unofficial debates in a number of higher education institutions. These not only discussed Picasso and modern art in general; they even raised such politically dangerous topics as “the artist’s creative freedom.”34 The effects of the exhibition on the Moscow and Leningrad public, far exceeding those of a narrowly artistic event, alarmed the Central Committee. Its Culture Department reported, when the exhibition moved to Leningrad, that viewers, especially students, were taking an “uncritical attitude” to the formalist works shown in the exhibition, declaring Picasso to be the pinnacle of contemporary world art, while denigrating Soviet art and the method of socialist realism.35

Two attempts were made to hold an informal public debate on Arts Square in Leningrad, the second of which, on 21 December, was broken up and the instigators arrested. “Party organs conducted the necessary work with them,” the Central Committee report noted ominously. Not to be deterred, some of the students then appear to have gate-crashed the Leningrad Artists’ Union where artists and members of the public were gathered to discuss the Union’s routine exhibition. The students praised the “formalist” work of Picasso, saying that only people of high artistic culture could appreciate it and that it was because such people were few in the Soviet Union the work of Picasso was

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34 Ibid., 57.
35 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 27, ll. 102–5.
deemed inaccessible. Respected art historian Mikhail Alpatov declared in the reformist literary newspaper Literaturnaia gazeta that everyone had a civic duty to know the work of Picasso, calling it the greatest phenomenon of the present day, which reflected the strivings of the twentieth century.

The public response to the Picasso show, and the twitchiness of the authorities, have to be understood in the context of the volatile atmosphere of late 1956 after the Secret Speech, which was pervaded by uncertainties concerning the effects and limits of reform, and by a sense that, for better or for worse, anything could happen. The artistic communities of Moscow and Leningrad were suspected as hotbeds of revanchism. A three-day discussion on “The Future of Soviet Art,” held in Leningrad in December 1956, while the Picasso exhibition was under way, gave further worrying evidence of this “politically unhealthy mood.” One speaker condemned collectivization (whose legitimacy Khrushchev’s secret speech had carefully left unchallenged, pre-dating Stalin’s “excesses”) as a national tragedy and spoke of the regime as the “socialist monarchy,” even comparing it unfavorably to the British monarchy: it suppressed the people’s sense of beauty and truth whereas the latter existed to educate this sense. Art historian Moisei Kagan also questioned the legitimacy of the USSR Academy of Arts, founded in 1947, calling it a revival of a feudal institution.

The response to Picasso set alarm bells ringing about the emergence of “alien, antiparty” views. For those eager for liberalization, on the other hand, it was almost an equivalent in cultural terms to the momentous Secret Speech earlier that year. Anxieties concerning the effects of Khrushchev’s speech and of cultural liberalization in the Soviet Union ran high in the autumn of 1956, and were exacerbated by the uprisings in Poland and Hungary. The impact of the Picasso exhibition, and its mythical status in memories of the Thaw, may be due in part to the coincidence that it opened the day after news was released in the Soviet press about the political crisis in Hungary. The hopes of a cultural breakthrough in Soviet cultural policy, which the exhibition symbolized, contrasted poignantly with the threat that the events
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in Eastern Europe would result in renewed isolation from the West. For the CPSU held the ideological revisionism of the Polish and Hungarian intelligentsia responsible for the 1956 uprisings in those countries.

The Soviet authorities had reason to fear the influence of Central and Eastern European cultural as well as political developments on the Soviet intelligentsia. Revisionist Marxist philosophy and economic thought flourished. And, since Stalinist socialist realism had only been imposed in the “fraternal countries” after the war, prewar avant-garde tendencies such as abstraction, constructivism and colorism were quick to revive, especially in Poland, while new trends influenced by surrealism, existentialism, and Art Informel established themselves from 1956.

Young people were considered the most susceptible to the blandishments of Western culture. Conservatives stereotyped young people who took an interest in modernist art as affected, work-shy youth, who considered themselves above the interests of the ordinary Soviet Russian people. Thus they tarred them with the same brush as the stiliagi, the youth counterculture that emerged in the postwar period, which emulated Western dress and dance styles, and which was anathematized in public discourse in terms of decadence and contagious disease, criminality, and anti-Soviet inclinations. Today, such thinking went, they slavishly imitate Western styles; tomorrow they will betray their country. The problem of young artists and viewers—

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40 Rubenstein “Ilya Ehrenburg,” 61; German, Slozhnoe, 287–88.
41 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, l. 178.
the emerging generational conflict that threatened to split apart the mythical unity of the Soviet artistic “family”—was seen as a ticking bomb.46

Yet the urge to batten down the hatches once more against pernicious foreign influences—and especially those likely to corrupt youth—was in tension with Moscow’s aspiration to cultural as well as political leadership of the socialist world. Both in domestic cultural policy and in relation to the threat of foreign culture, a new approach was adopted toward maintaining loyalty, based on competition and carefully contextualized exposure.47 In spite of the cultural and political retrenchment that followed the Polish and Hungarian uprisings—and the return to brutal means of suppression especially in regard to the latter—international cultural diplomacy continued to expand under the new policy of peaceful coexistence and competition with the West. At the very time when the forces of retrenchment appeared to have the upper hand, in late July and early August 1957, an event of signal importance for de-Stalinization in artistic and popular culture, the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, took place in Moscow.

Biennial World Festivals of Youth and Students were a Cold War institution begun in 1947 to resuscitate the project of the defunct Communist Youth International and rally the youth of the world behind the banner of international socialism.48 The majority of the foreign delegations attending the festival came from socialist or postcolonial countries, or represented left-wing, “progressive” groups from capitalist countries. Yet, whatever its intended role as an instrument of the Cold War and expansion or consolidation of the socialist camp, the 1957 festival had an irreversible impact on the society and culture of its Soviet host and was a turning point in Soviet acquaintance with the breadth of contemporary world culture. Temporarily transforming Moscow into a lively, cosmopolitan city after years of cultural isolation, the

46 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (Rossiskiy Gosudartsveiy Arkhiv Sotsialno-Politicheskoj Istori, RGASPI), f. M-1, op. 4, d. 871, l. 203–6; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 797, ll. 1–15; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 829; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 972, ll. 54–55; RGANI, f. 5, op. 16, d. 47, ll. 41, 81, 113; RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 70, ll. 23–24, 74–77; RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 23, l. 22; RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 84, ll. 66–69.
47 TsAOPIM (Moscow Central Archive of Social and Political History) f. 4, op. 139, d. 54 (Protokol sovesh-chnia sekretar zemliachestv inostannkh studentov, March 1962).
sudden influx of large numbers of young people from all over the world, with their unfamiliar and diverse dress styles and relatively unconstrained behavior, changed forever the horizon of aspirations of Soviet young people. The event was remarkable for “the very spirit of free communication, the universal loosening of inhibitions.” Khrushchev’s son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, went so far as to say that it signaled the emergence of an open society. Gerchuk recalls, “These two bright, summer weeks gave us a sense of the interconnectedness of contemporary world culture and the possibility of fruitful, creative dialogue with young artists of various countries.” Artists later associated with the nonconformist or underground art world, Vladimir Nemukhin and Iurii Sobolev, likewise recalled the festival as the moment of revelation, when they first discovered a sense of commonality with foreigners and their art, which they had been taught to regard as inimical.

The festival included two art exhibitions, organized jointly by the USSR Artists’ Union and the Ministry of Culture: an All-Union Youth Exhibition, representing young artists from throughout the Soviet Union and an International Exhibition of Fine and Applied Art, held in Gorky Park from 30 July to 20 August 1957. Following on three years of intensive acquaintance with long-suppressed or neglected aspects of Western and Russian art, the International Exhibition presented young Soviet artists with an exhilarating, if indigestible, mélange of contemporary tendencies from around the world, including, Italian neorealists, East German expressionists, surrealism (from Japan), Art Informel, action panting, and geometric abstraction (from Iceland). It occasioned heated debate between the Soviet hosts and their foreign guests concerning the relative merits of realism and abstraction, but also breached the boundaries of realism. If realism and socialism were to remain coupled, in opposition to Western modernism, then realism itself had to be unbound, liberated from dogma, and internationalized.

49 “Drugoe iskusstvo”, vol. 1, 38.
50 Aleksei Adzhubei. Te desiat’ let (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 119.
52 Golomenshok, “Unofficial Art,” 89.
53 Archive of the USSR Artists’ Union Directorate, Moscow, op. 2, d. 2218.
54 Mezhdunarodnaia vystavka izobrazitel’nogo i prikladnogo iskusstva. Katalog (Moscow: VI Vsemirnyi festival’ molodezhi i studentov, 1957).
55 Gerchuk, ”Iksusstvo ‘ottepeli’ v poiskakh stilia,” 27.
One of the most important innovations of the festival was an international art studio, set up on the initiative of the Komsomol organization of the Moscow Artists’ Union in Gorky Park. There, artists from fifty-two countries could work together and share ideas. An informal and uncensored rotating exhibition of studies and drawings produced in the studio was hung on its walls. The very idea of such a spontaneous and unvetted display was radical in Soviet terms. So was the informality and intimacy of the contact with foreigners. Here, Soviet artists could watch, talk with, and even work alongside the international guests, studying their methods and exchanging ideas. Participants included representatives of neorealist, expressionist and abstract tendencies from all around the world. Although the US State Department officially disapproved of American participation in the festival, regarding it as a communist propaganda exercise, contemporary American modernism was represented by a minor action painter, Harry Colman, who attended unofficially. Colman gave a lecture on contemporary North American art, illustrated with color reproductions of de Kooning and Pollock, and gave a public demonstration of action painting. At a discussion after his performance, Colman’s unabashedly modernist view of art as self-expression collided with the Soviet credo—which, in face of the threat of abstraction, united reformist and conservative members of his audience—that art’s primary purpose was social cognition. “The main thing for the artist is to express his essence,” Colman asserted provocatively. "Realism has grown old, the art of the future is abstraction!"

While the official Soviet view of abstraction remained irreconcilably hostile, some Soviet artists agreed with Colman. Until 1957, even the most au-

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dacious artists had rarely ventured beyond a mildly expressionist or post-impressionist figuration. But the broad exposure to contemporary Western developments at the World Festival of Youth and Students, combined with occasional, still mostly illicit, opportunities to see examples of suppressed Russian nonobjective art from the 1910s and 1920s, spurred some more radical Soviet artists to abandon recognizable figuration in their work from late 1957.\(^\text{62}\) What nonconformist artist Anatolii Zhigalov has called the “development of contemporary Western art on Russian soil,” which, at the end of the Khrushchev period, would be consolidated as a parallel or underground art world, began here at the World Festival of Youth and Students.\(^\text{63}\) Some were drawn to the modernist conception of art as individual self-expression, or to the surrealist idea of liberating the irrational depths of the individual psyche—precisely those aspects vilified in official responses to contemporary abstract art.\(^\text{64}\) Having watched Colman create his gestural painting, Anatolii Zverev, a young painter who had been expelled from art college, adopted a kind of automatic painting using spontaneous brushstrokes, frenzied scratching and unmixed squirts of paint straight from the tube.\(^\text{65}\) At the Festival Studio in Gorky Park, Zverev produced a drip painting in one hour before an audience of admiring foreigners. The international jury, chaired by David Siqueiros, awarded him a gold medal for this work.\(^\text{66}\)

Many artists who subsequently became associated with the artistic underground recall the festival as a founding experience.\(^\text{67}\) For others, such as painter Pavel Nikonov and critic Aleksandr Kamenskii, who subsequently became movers and shakers in the reformist wing of the official art world, the festival was as formative as it was for more radical dissenters. But they drew different


\(^{65}\) Golomshток, “Official Art,” 89.


\(^{67}\) See “Drugoe iskusstvo”.
lessons from it. Their attention was gripped not by abstraction or surrealism but by modern, expressive forms of realism they found in the work of Mexican, Belgian, and other artists. A recent graduate from the Moscow Surikov Art Institute, Nikonov’s eyes had already been opened by his recent visit to Prague, where he encountered, for the first time, the work of the prerevolutionary Russian avant-garde in private collections. He later recalled his response to the range of foreign tendencies at the festival’s *International Exhibition*: “In the West art was quite different. In our section everything was dead, some kind of tortured academicism. It had to be done differently. But how?”

Nikonov’s 1956 diploma piece, *October*, was included in the Soviet section of the International Exhibition and was awarded a silver medal. It was an austere painting that attempted to strip away the clichés from the representation of the Revolution. In place of large, choreographed crowds, narrative action and demonstrative gesture, the stock-in-trade of Stalinist representations of the revolution, the painting aimed for maximum dramatic intensity through minimum means. A sense of pent-up energy and apprehension was conveyed largely through the contrast of light and shade and the silhouettes of the groups of figures, which betrayed Nikonov’s interest in the work of Aleksandr Deyneka, specifically the latter’s 1928 painting about the Civil War, *The Defense of Petrograd*. Deyneka, an associate of the cosmopolitan, postcubist, and expressionist Society of Easel Painters (OST) in the 1920s, had only recently emerged from under the pall of “formalism,” but rapidly became a paragon of “contemporaneity” for young artists.

The more avant-garde, abstract, or surrealist work shown at the festival did not offer a viable answer to Nikonov’s question, how to breathe new life into Soviet art. Along with other young artists and critics associated with the reformist “left wing” of the Moscow Artists’ Union, Nikonov sought a figurative but emotionally intense form of painting with a public, civic purpose. How to inject realist painting with renewed power to speak persuasively to contemporary publics in the service of socialism/class struggle? The values of socialism still remained inseparable from realism, but the formal language

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68 Kamenskii, “Razmyshleniia na festival’noi vystavke,” 3.
and parameters of “realism” were now open to reassessment. As art historian
German Nedoshivin put it, “Where is the new realistic form?”

Answers to Nedoshivin’s and Nikonov’s question had already begun to
appear both in words and in practice. At the festival, an ecumenical defini-
tion of realism was put forward by Mexican graphic artist Arturo Garcia Bus-
tos, speaking at a two-day public debate. Mexican artists, he declared, see

art as a means of communication between peoples, taking on whatever form
the artist considers the most clear and eloquent. Such is our understanding
of realism, but this realism of ours is suffused with passion, it participates in
the struggle and is not a simple mirror. Our realism, reflecting life, includes
the artist’s individual interpretation of its phenomena.

This broad conception of realism would have struck a chord with many
a young idealistic Soviet artist. Foreign interpretations of realism displayed
at the Moscow festival departed significantly from the Soviet canon with its
nineteenth-century Russian models. They presented an engaged, passionate,
and popularly accessible art in which the human figure remained central, but
where meticulous verisimilitude, naturalistic detail, etc., were no longer man-
datory. Many works used expressionist devices such as deformation, hyper-
bole and spatial distortions, vigorous, “expressive” brush marks, stark tonal
contrasts, or deliberately crude line, and, contrary to the norms of socialist
realism, had a somber, critical, even pessimistic tone. This was exemplified by
the contemporary Mexican mural artists and printmakers, the work of Ital-
ian neorealists, and the Belgian realist Roger Somville. Somville, whom Serge
Fauchereau, in his essay for this book, calls “the only true European heir of
Mexican muralism” was awarded a gold medal at the festival for his Miner
from Borinage, a painting which particularly aroused Nikonov’s interest.

An outspoken champion of realism in his art and writing, Somville was com-
mitted to a new public art celebrating people’s labor, struggles, and suffer-
ing as well as their joys, exposing the realities of the class struggle continuing
in the present day. He called for realist art to be dynamic in its method and

70 RGALI, f. 2465, op. 1, d. 75, ll. 11, 14.
72 Dekhtiar’, Pavel Nikonov, 11–12.
style; it must constantly break new ground and avoid ossifying into comfortable clichés. Messages of this sort, proselytized at the festival, found a ready audience among young Soviet artists who were still committed to a socialist, public art, trying to reform and regenerate Soviet realism from within. Other “progressive artists”—the term used for politically sympathetic residents of capitalist, nonaligned, or postcolonial states—including West European communist party members such as Picasso—were also influential, including the French artists Fernand Léger (whose work would be shown in Moscow in 1963) and André Fougeron.

Contemporary Polish posters shown at the festival were another important revelation for those, like Nikonov, seeking to “do realism differently.” As characterized by a Polish delegate, the posters demonstrated “the artist’s great emotional engagement, trying to create images that can capture the viewer, lapidary and laconic form, humanism of content.” It was this quality of compressed emotionality that the young sculptor Ernst Neizvestny had in mind when he concluded a speech at the conference by calling for “the realism of Whitman and Mayakovsky, for a realism that can fire people’s hearts with a single syllable.” The World Festival of Youth and Students demonstrated the diversity of contemporary forms of realism, suggesting that, within the bounds of the modern public’s comprehension, a range of styles was possible. The young critic Kamenskii urged tolerance toward the foreign art shown there, for “we cannot enter another monastery with our own code of practice.”

In the international socialist context, the term “realism” began to be used almost interchangeably with a new term, the “art of humanism.” This corresponded to the “socialist humanism” which the socialist world camp claimed as the sign of its moral superiority over capitalism. The term “humanism” appears to have been appropriated from Western revisionist Marxist discourse, perhaps in order to harness a potentially dangerous concept. In the thought of Roger Garaudy, humanism implied a syncretic reconciliation of Marxist
and Christian approaches to the problem of man in contemporary society. In the debate at the festival, realism—reconstituted as the “art of humanism”—emerged as a kind of united front, a socialist international style of modernity to set against that other international style, the “antihuman” art of modernism. International modernism acted as the cultural arm of imperialism, denying human experience, suppressing national specificity, and imposing abstraction’s “cosmopolitan uniformity”; realism, by contrast, placed “man” at the center and was the guarantor of national cultural autonomy and diversity. In the context of “peaceful competition,” the international role to which the Soviet Union aspired made it necessary to adopt an ecumenical approach to realism. If it was to present itself as the patron of national self-determination movements and recruit voluntary adherents from within the postcolonial world, it had to counter capitalist propaganda’s accusations and demonstratively reassure its potential allies that it would respect their autonomy and national diversity.

But just as Garaudy’s revisionist conception of humanism entailed a synthesis of two antithetical ways of comprehending the world, Christianity and Marxism, so, too, the new realism required at least partial reconciliation with its antithesis—modernism. It proposed the legitimacy (or at least “critical assimilation”), in socialist art, of formal, expressive devices that, in Stalin-era discourse and practice, had become inseparably identified with modernism. As Nedoshidev argued, to reject all stylization and expressive deformation as departures from realism, as conservatives did, was to impoverish socialist realism, and make far too generous a gift to the capitalism by leaving modernism in full possession of all these expressive means. Was this erosion of the defining antithesis “realism versus modernism” under the influence of international developments in realism—a historically legitimate, indeed dialectical process, or did it smell of convergence?

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The expression of contemporaneity had become, once again, as in the 1920s, an internationalist project, defined, as novelist Iurii Nagibin declared in 1960, as much by Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera as by any Russian artist. Some saw the artistic events as an opportunity to consolidate a world movement of “democratic” realism—or the “art of humanism” as Soviet ideologues began to call it. Others such as Nedoshivin spoke of an international revolutionary art. This new internationalism required loosening the narrow doctrinaire canon of socialist realism and embracing an ecumenical approach to style, form, and medium. It implied recognition that realism was culturally contingent and historically mutable, and that different forms were needed for different geographical contexts, social conditions, and cultural traditions. The new, unbound conception of realism could even be stretched to embrace art that drew on non-European traditions of representation, such as contemporary Chinese art in the Goxua tradition, an exhibition of which was held in 1957 at the Pushkin Museum. Picasso, in spite of his radical departures from verisimilitude, had been shown (if not widely accepted) because he was classed as a communist or “progressive” artist, and certain works such his Massacre in Korea could even be recuperated as “critical realist.” However, his inclusion presented a major challenge to the norms and integrity of Soviet realism. Other politically sympathetic foreign (“progressive”) artists also began to be exhibited in Moscow, despite misgivings concerning the challenge they would present to Soviet norms, and aroused great interest among young Soviet artists. A number of exhibitions of Mexican artists, including Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Orozco, were held between 1955 and 1963.

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85 RGALI, fond 2943, op. 1, ed. khr. 916 (stenographer’s report of meeting of Moscow artists with Chinese artists, 29 April 1957).
They exercised a vital influence on Soviet printmaking and stimulated the revival of monumental art in the late 1950s, in combination with the example of Fernand Léger. 88

For reformist Soviet artists, one of the most fruitful encounters in the 1950s was with the “progressive artists” of contemporary Italy, the postwar critical realists Renato Guttuso, Gabriele Mucchi, Ernesto Treccani, Armando Pizzinato, Ugo Attardi, and others. Soviet public acquaintance with the Italian “neorealist” painters (as they were known in the Soviet Union by analogy with the eponymous movement in film) had begun in 1954. Although not universally accepted, neorealist painting was legitimated as an antifascist movement dedicated to the critical exposure of the social injustices of postwar capitalism. 89 These artists were characterized by attention to the harsh reality of ordinary working people’s daily lives and cultivation of the appearance of unembellished truth, their terse, undemonstrative, working-class heroes, expressive but unbeautiful brushstroke, their use of expressionist devices such as unfamiliar angles of vision and exaggerated, even grotesque depiction, and their rejection of narrative. All this exercised a significant influence on the development of a new Soviet realism during the Thaw. 90

Guttuso and Mucchi exemplified the potential of expressive deformation to provide the formal means for a trenchant new realism. Modernist concerns and devices which had been indiscriminately condemned for “formalism,” “subjectivism,” and “deformation” since the 1930s began to be recuperated under the sign of “contemporaneity.” Expressionism had been excommunicated from socialist realism along with other formalist manifestations of bourgeois ideology. Georg Lukács had fatally discredited it in his essay “The Rise and Fall of Expressionism,” written in the year socialist realism was ratified, 1934, where he closely identified expressionism’s primitivist anti-intellectualism with the ideology of National Socialism. Since the war, however,

artists and art historians in East Germany had succeeded in cleansing expressionism of this association with fascism, selectively rehabilitating the historical movement, recuperating those elements that could constitute a usable heritage for the socialist Germany, and making its formal devices available for development in contemporary practice.\footnote{David Elliott, “Expressionism: A Health Warning,” in \textit{Expressionism Reassessed}, ed. Shulamith Behr et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 44–45.}

In October 1956 the East German art journal \textit{Bildende Kunst} published an important polemic by Wolfgang Hüttr on “Realism and Modernity” which foreshadowed and may have directly influenced Soviet reformist discussions. Hüttr proposed that modern industrial society had transformed human consciousness as a result of which a new artistic form was required.\footnote{Wolfgang Hüttr, “Realismus und Modernität. Impulsive Gedanken über ein notwendiges Thema,” \textit{Bildende Kunst} 10 (1956): 565; and compare Martin Damus, \textit{Malerei der DDR: Funktionen der bildenden Kunst im Realen Sozialismus} (Hamburg: Rowohls enzyklopädic, 1991), 142.} He distinguished between “modernity in art” (defined as a correspondence to contemporary experience, a defining principle of realism), and “modern art” or modernism (which, he claimed, was no longer modern but regressive). But he proposed that the question of the “heritage” had been treated too narrowly and that the baby had been thrown out with the modernist bath water. Artistic modernity was not only a matter of theme but also \textit{of form}. In search for an artistic language that expressed the spirit of contemporaneity—that is, socialist modernity—artists should appropriate the positive aspects of modernism. These included the language of expressionism, which, he reminded the reader, had served as the medium for a socially critical art in the earlier twentieth century.\footnote{Hüttr, “Realismus und Modernität,” 565–67.}

Although conservatives still vigorously opposed it, the legacy of expressionism also began to receive a more insightful and selectively favorable treatment in the Soviet Union, a process in which the developments in East Germany were clearly influential. In summer 1958, an exhibition of German expressionist works on paper from the 1920s and 1930s (presumably sent by the German Democratic Republic to cement cultural relations), was held at the prestigious USSR Academy of Arts. The work of Otto Dix, George Grosz, Lea Grundig, Hans Grundig, Max Beckmann, and Käthe Kollwitz shown there substantiated Soviet reformers’ growing conviction that expres-
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ductive formal devices associated with modernism could serve the expression of a "socialist humanism" and help to rejuvenate realism. A crucial rhetorical distinction was drawn between “left” or progressive expressionism—critical of capitalism and militantly opposed to fascism—and reactionary expressionism. Soviet critic Igor’ Golomshtok reviewed the German exhibition in terms that pointed up its relevance for contemporary developments in Soviet art. The work of Kollwitz and Lea Grundig, employed, he wrote, a passionate language of distorted forms and stylized (uslovnuye) compositions, synthetic, emotional images and broad, social generalizations that demanded the viewer’s active perception. “Generalized, laconic, and intense,” it was, in short, “genuinely contemporary in style.” The work of those politically engaged artists substantiated reformers’ belief that expressive, nonnaturalistic formal devices associated with modernism were not inevitably the vehicle of bourgeois ideology, as Stalinists still objected, but could also serve the expression of contemporary “socialist humanism.”

The possibility of a fruitful convergence of realism and modernism (although couched in more politically astute terms) became a matter of vigorous debate in the Soviet art establishment during 1958, when, for the first time since the 1920s, it became possible to begin to come to terms with the experience of modernization, which the country had undergone since 1917. Between 1958 and 1962 reformists artists and critics debated the nature of contemporaneity, arguing, like Hütt, that rapid progress and the advance of world communism effected corresponding transformations in human consciousness, which must in turn be reflected by the renewal, indeed modernization—of the language of art if it was adequately to correspond to contemporary experience. New times demanded new forms.

In summer 1958 aesthetician Nina Dmitrieva launched the discussion in the Soviet press with a manifesto announcing the advent of the “contempo-

94 The German artists “achieved enormous aesthetic expressiveness thanks to the generalization of artistic form, the uslovnost’, and sometimes the direct deformation of visual images (and not in spite of them as it has sometimes been customary to say here),” I. Golomshtok, “Vystavka nemetskoi grafiki,” Moskovskii khudozhestvennik 14, 30 July 1958. A conference on expressionism was held in the Institute of Art History, 6–10 October 1961: RGALI, f. 2465, op. 1, ed. khr. 391, 392. An exhibition of photomontages by John Heartfield was also held in 1958 (Pravda, 6 July 1958); Zhilina, Kul’turnaia zhizn’, 315.


rary style" (sovremennyi stil’). As she described it, this was a modern period style embracing all aspects of visual culture. Its hallmarks were “synthesis, laconicism, and expression.”97 Emphasizing formal innovation and specifically pictorial means of expression, her conception of a modern form of realism was inspired by the Brechtian synthesis of modernism and realism of the 1920s and 1930s, the heyday of international communism. Dmitrieva’s formulation of the contemporary style bore much affinity to—and may have been directly influenced by—the East German discussion on “Realism and Modernity” in 1956.98 Dmitrieva argued that rapid progress and the advance of world communism would effect corresponding transformations in human consciousness which must, in turn be reflected by stylistic change, if it was adequately to express the experience of modernity (contemporaneity). While maintaining the emphasis on art’s relation to reality, this gave greater weight to subjective experience of that reality. It implied, like Hütt, that technological modernity had engendered a new kind of consciousness that required a new, more stylized and explicitly artificial (uslovnyi) language to embody it.99 Rejecting verisimilitude as the chief criterion of realism in favor of a broader correspondence to contemporary vision, nonnaturalistic devices, and conventions, Dmitrieva and other reformist critics and artists sought to recuperate the example of early modernism, indiscriminately condemned for “formalism,” “subjectivism,” and “deformation” since the 1930s.100 Its hallmarks were defined as synthesis, generalization, laconicism, expression, and monumentality.101 Detail was to be reduced, narrative compressed, and emotion to be

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98 Hütt, “Realismus und Modernität,” 565; Damus, Malerei der DDR, 142.


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conveyed by specifically pictorial means in order to engage the modern viewer in an immediate, visual way, rather than through the pedantic illustration of a narrative for which Stalinist art was now anathematized. “It is no longer enough to show the viewer something,” Dmitrieva wrote. “It is necessary to arouse him to think about the great social problems of contemporaneity, but . . . the path to thought lies through the emotions.” It was a “realism of a new type—one might say, a militant realism, which speaks in the name of the people.”

Dmitrieva had in mind the work of young artists, such as Nikonov and his colleague Nikolai Andronov, who were increasingly audaciously rejecting the monopoly that a simplified and distorted “Russian tradition” had come to hold over the definition of realism. The Russian Realist School was no longer the—or even a—model for contemporary socialist art, according to young critic Liudmilla Bubnova. Reviewing an exhibition of young artists, including Nikonov and his colleague Nikolai Andronov, in 1958, Bubnova consigned this model of realism to history: “The calm, narrative character of the art of the Peredvizhniki, on which our artists have, in the main, based themselves, can no longer fully satisfy the young. . . . [It] is valuable for its high civic ideas, but its themes and its pictorial language . . . are the themes and language of the nineteenth century.” The young Moscow artists, on whose work Bubnova based her conclusions, engaged in defining a new, expressive form of realism, a “contemporary style” suitable to Soviet people’s experience of modernization, urbanization, and social upheaval.

As the Soviet Union under Khrushchev abandoned “socialism in one country” to reclaim leadership of the international socialist movement, reformist aestheticians presented the development of a “contemporary style”—the new style of socialist modernity—as an international project, of concern to all socialist artists, not only Soviet. “In attempting to define a “socialist style,” wrote Nedoshivin, “it is necessary to examine the shared features of realism in the twentieth century, not only Soviet art.” In face of accusations of willing the convergence between realism and modernism and, by extension, between socialism and capitalism, it was surely quite legitimate, they argued,

103 Bubnova, “V poiskakh ostrogo sovremennogo vyrazheniia.”
104 See Reid, “De-Stalinization and the Remodernization of Soviet Art.”
for the new international, socialist style to draw on an ecumenical range of twentieth-century, figurative models, foreign as well as Russian.\textsuperscript{105} What mattered was not the choice of formal devices but the content or worldview they were used to express. Thus the new global position of the Soviet Union and exposure to international contact not only inspired but were used by reformers to promote their agenda and to legitimate the liberation of the forms of realist painting from the bounds of dogma and national tradition.
