Making the Avant-garde Russian: The Formation of the National Art Canon on the Example of Exhibition Catalogs

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Abstract

The Russian avant-garde represents the most well-known period of Russian art globally, however, its national attribution is actively contested in academic literature. Despite that, the formation of the canon of the Russian avant-garde as specifically Russian was largely overlooked in the research field. This thesis aspires to begin exploring this research gap on the example of exhibition catalogs from the 1920s, the second half of the 20th century and, finally, the 2010s. Based on the qualitative textual analysis, inspired by insights from narrative analysis, discourse analysis and art-historical research, this thesis shed light on how different artists, who were active in the beginning of the 20th century in the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union, were positioned within the same national canon. The analysis revealed that the October Revolution and the geographical locations of various institutions, exhibitions and art groups were important for the formation of the canon, as well as the emphasis on the influence of folk Russian tradition, Orthodox icons and the Russian literature of the 19th century. The essentializing statements about the inherent radicalism and maximalism of the Russian people also contributed to the discursive reification of the canon. It was also revealed that the canon of the Russian avant-garde has proven to be quite stable, aside from artists, whose artworks were mainly kept in collections outside of Russia, which demonstrated the role of the institutional context in the formation of national canons.

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Introduction

The Russian avant-garde is undoubtedly the most well-known period of Russian art globally. According to the estimations of Christie's auction house, four of the most expensive Russian paintings are created by Kazimir Malevich, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Leon Bakst and Natalia Goncharova[1], all of whom are considered to be representatives of the Russian avant-garde. In the post-Soviet period Russian avant-garde became an important export product for Russian cultural diplomacy. According to Sargsyan's calculations, from 2000 to 2012, there were 120 exhibitions of the Russian avant-garde organized outside the country, whereas in Russia during the same period only 60 exhibitions took place. Also, as Sargsyan estimated, the number of exhibitions of the Russian avant-garde organized abroad steadily increased[2]. The Russian avant-garde was also considered a source of positive national identity. For instance, the head of the State Tretyakov Gallery Zelfira Tregulova once declared:

> I consider the Russian avant-garde part of Russian identity. Statements of the avant-garde celebrate a paradoxical idea, the desire for the absolute, the prophetic utterance. And Russians have always strived for the absolute form and the absolute self."[3]

However, the national belonging of this movement was certainly contested, especially among Ukrainian art historians. For instance, Gorbachev argued that the Ukrainian dimension of Kazimir Malevich's was largely overlooked, considering that at certain periods of life, Malevich identified as Ukrainian and also spent a significant part of his life on the territory of contemporary Ukraine[4]. Shkandrij also explores the connections of artists who are usually

[1] "50 years of Russian Art masterpieces at Christie's," *Christie's*, December 11, 2019, https://www.christies.com/features/50-years-of-russian-art-at-christies-9747-1.aspx#:~:text=We%20currently%20hold%20the%20record,realised%20%C2%A38%2C980%2C500%20in%202007.

[2] Sargsyan Narine, "Vystavki russkih avangardistov za rubezhom: predvaritelnye itogi issledovaniya," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta* 19, no. 1 (2014): 113 – 115.

[3] Anastasia Petrakova, "Zelfira Tregulova: "My nahodimsya na poroge gumanitarnoj katastrofy," *The Art Newspaper Russia*, May 25, 2016, https://www.theartnewspaper.ru/posts/3075/.

[4] Dmitro Horbachov, *Vin ta ia buly ukraintsi: Malevych ta Ukraina* (Kyiv: SIM studiia, 2006).

considered to be representatives of the Russian avant-garde such as Kazimir Malevich and David Burluik to Ukrainian folk culture, geography and art circles[5]. The national attribution of the pre-Soviet and Soviet was also the central topic of the project "To whom does the avant-garde belong? Malevich-project", jointly created by Ukrainian and Russian artists in 2019. The project included two performances, theoretical essays and interviews documented in the publication in 2019[6].

The contestation of the term "Russian avant-garde" is to a certain extent predictable, because from the beginning of the 1920s until the collapse of the Soviet Union, state borders have been changing. And many artists, who were born or worked on the territory of the Russian empire or the Soviet Union, today would not be considered Russian.

Literature review

The fact that the national dimension of the Russian avant-garde is contested indicates its canonical character. Locher defines art canon as a relatively stable system of references produced in a specific historical context[7], which gives orientation in the complicated universe of various objects, stories and personalities[8]. These objects of reference are chosen by agents who have access to the production of knowledge in the art field, such as critics, art historians, dealers, and collectors, who represent different groups and institutions. Yet, despite relative stability, canons are still open for modification, revision and even rejection in the ongoing

[5] Myroslav Shkandrij, *Avant-Garde Art in Ukraine, 1910-1930: Contested Memory* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019).
[6] Krasnaya Shapana, "To whom does the avant-garde belong? Malevich-project", *issuu.com*, April 24, 2019, https://issuu.com/krasnayashpana/docs/issueeng.
[7] Hubert Locher, "The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks,* ed. Matthew Rampley (Leiden, Boston: E. J. Brill, 2012), 32.
[8] Locher, "The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History", 33.

process of knowledge production. Therefore there are always competing canons, for example, canons embodying national identity or canons for groups of individuals within it. And each canon has its own specific history, purpose and structure[9].

The classification of art based on national canons became dominant in the 19th century, as the nation-state as the form of actual or desired political organization gained more and more legitimacy. And there were two of the most influential institutional sites that contributed to the establishment of national canons as the dominant system for the classification of art. Moderns museum and art history[10], which are intrinsically linked with each other and the production of narratives that create the impression of a continuous tradition, contributing to the sense of the nation as a stable, enduring, vehicle of cultural, social and political identity[11]. As Nelson pointed out, the construction of a national art canon is fundamental to the constitution of the "imagined community" of the nation[12].

The idea about national schools or even "national character" of art has been developing from the second half of the 18th century until the middle of the 19th century. According to Michaud, in the second half of the 18th century, the hegemony of classical antiquity as a universal aesthetic ideal started to be challenged by the idea that art style was indistinguishable from the life of a people. And Winckelmann was the first who introduced the concept of "national character" of art[13]. The definition of "national schools" was

[9] Locher, "The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History", 34.
[10] Locher, "The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History", 36 – 37.
[11] Matthew Rampley, "The Construction of National Art Histories and the "New" Europe," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley (Leiden, Boston: E. J. Brill, 2012), 246.
[12] Robert S. Nelson, "The Map of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (March, 1997): 32.
[13] Eric Michaud and Hèléne Amal, "Barbarian Invasions and the Racialization of Art History," *October* 139 (2012): 68.

advanced until the middle of the 19th century, particularly by Krugler[14], as Joyeux-Prunel noted. Overall, the role of art history in the reification of national schools was thoroughly explored. For example, Kaufmann demonstrated how early positivist scholarship on the geography of art, based on "objective" factors such as geographic landscape, climate and accessible materials, contributed to the reification of national divisions within art history[15]. He also pointed out the important role of racial science in the justification of national divisions of art, based on "natural" traits of people belonging to different nations[16]. Michaud's focus is on the role of art history, dating back from the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century, in the emergence of nationalist, racial and even racist categories applied for categorization of the art field[17].

Despite tremendous changes that happened in the academic landscape after the end of WWII, as Kaufmann argued, appeals to "national character" in art history continued to strive, for example, in Pevsner's "The Englishness of English Art", or Panofsky's "The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls-Royce Radiator"[18]. The classification of art, based on the national categories, turned out to be persistent in the public discourse and academic literature up to this day. According to Locher, much, if not most, "normal" everyday art-historical research continues to be conducted within the paradigm of the modern nation state and national art, despite all the criticism of limitations of the nation-based paradigm[19].

[14] Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Art History and the Global: Deconstructing the Latest Canonical Narrative," *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 3 (2019): 419.
[15] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 17 – 68.
[16] Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art*, 68 – 88.
[17] Michaud, "Barbarian Invasions and the Racialization of Art History," 59 – 76.
[18] Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art*, 91 – 93.
[19] Matthew Rampley, "Introduction," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley (Leiden, Boston: E. J. Brill, 2012), 3.

The influence of art history on establishing the definition of "national schools" and creating particular national schools was determined by the fact that art history relied on institutions that also aimed at developing national canon. As Rampley noted, the discipline of art history was underpinned by state-funded institutions of higher education and the broader apparatus of art-historical research, including the funding of scholarly publishing and of art galleries and museums[20]. Art history, as a discipline that was established in the second half of the 19th century and mostly in German universities, mainly relied on the museum, as Poulot outlined[21].

In the second half of the 19th century, national museums of art, following similar trends in art historical literature, diversified their collections by displaying national schools of art related to Romantic ideals of popular culture and history. Tomlinson demonstrated how the arrangement of artistic works by national schools reflected the emergence of the still dominant classification of art. He noted that when national art museums defined their "own" schools, they became more consistent in defining others[22]. Interestingly, nationalist framing of artworks led to internationalism, essential to the development of art exhibitions since the 1850s[23]. Joyeux-Prunel demonstrated that universal or international exhibitions that became prominent after the 1850s due to the advancement of the transportation system were organized by national schools, which led to further reification of the latter[24]. Following

[20] Rampley, "The Construction of National Art Histories and the "New" Europe," 233.
[21] Dominique Poulot, "The changing roles of art museums," in *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe 1750 - 2010: Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change*, ed. Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius (London: Routledge, 2015), 99.
[22] Janis A. Tomlinson, "State galleries and the formation of national artistic identity in Spain, England, and France 1814-1851," in *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siecle Europe*, ed. Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.
[23] Tomlinson, "State galleries and the formation of national artistic identity in Spain, England, and France 1814-1851," 36.
[24] Joyeux-Prunel, "Art History and the Global", 419.

universal exhibitions, Baetens noted, commercial galleries also adapted the classification of art based on national schools, introducing the system of "national branding" in the art field[25].

The hegemony of national schools was established not only due to state-backed attempts, as literature dedicated to various agencies in the establishment of national art canons convincingly demonstrated. The role of intellectuals, private patrons, art dealers, art critics, and artists was significant. Sheehan highlighted how the activities of German intellectuals and their private patrons contributed to the establishment of national museums and subsequently national canon of art[26]. Joyeux-Prunel[27] and Tomlinson[28] demonstrated that art magazines also contributed to the nationalization of art, Baetens paid attention to the role of auction catalogs in this process[29]. Exploring the case of German art in the 19th century, Belting demonstrated how artists themselves were actively engaged in creating of the German art school[30].

Overall, art history, various state and non-state institutions and individual agents constituted the system of knowledge based on nationality, which serves as the discursive basis for engagement with art even today. The avant-garde art was also embedded in the national model of an art museum, introducing "the tradition of the new", as Poulot pointed out. He argued that each nation pursued its position in the new history of art according to the ability

[25] Jan Dirk Baetens, "The General Exhibition of Pictures of 1851: National Schools and International Trade in the Mid-Victorian Art Market," *Visual Culture in Britain* 17, no. 3 (September 2016): 270–89.
[26] James J. Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[27] Joyeux-Prunel, "Art History and the Global", 419.
[28] Tomlinson, "State galleries and the formation of national artistic identity in Spain, England, and France 1814-1851," 36.
[29] Baetens, "The General Exhibition of Pictures of 1851", 282.
[30] Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

of its artists to make innovations and to have a recognized influence in the field[31]. Consequently, avant-garde became an important part of contemporary national branding strategies[32].

As Ben-Asher Gitler argued, writing national art history entails the construction of a canon that highlights certain artists, architects, movements and phenomena. This process, in effect, creates national art histories[33]. The selection of particular artists, artworks and movements, that should be included in national canons, are usually based on the following approaches. The first one is based on a specific national style, either elaborated by artists on purpose or later attributed by external analysts[34]. The second one corresponds to subject matter depicted in paintings, for example, national landscapes, scenes of rural life etc. The third one is related to geography in a broader meaning. For example, the origins of a painter or her activities or fame in specific locations[35]. However, the third criteria is often at odds with the self-identification of the particular painter. Perkinson demonstrated that national canon might be constructed through an anachronic ascription of national identity to painters who lived at the time, when nation-states and subsequently national identification were non-existent[36]. Smith pointed out that in many cases, artists did not identify with the nation-state at all, but rather with smaller regions. In these cases, national identification is ascribed based on the depiction

[31] Poulot, "The changing roles of art museums," 90.
[32] Victoria Rodner and Finola Kerrigan, "From Modernism to Populism – art as a discursive mirror of the nation brand," *European Journal of Marketing* 52, no. 3/4, (2018): 882-906.
[33] Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler, "Some notes on Applying Postcolonial methodologies to Architectural history research in Israel/Palestine, in *Narratives Unfolding: National Art Histories in an Unfinished World*, ed. Martha Langford (Montreal & Kingston London Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 100 – 101.
[34] Stephen Perkinson, "From 'Curious' to Canonical: 'Jehan Roy de France' and the Origins of the French School," *The Art Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (2005): 521.
[35] Anthony Smith, "'The Land and Its People': Reflections on Artistic Identification in an Age of Nations and Nationalism: The Land and Its People," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (January 2013): 87–106.
[36] Perkinson, "From 'Curious' to Canonical," 510.

of particular subjects associated with the nation-state[37]. The instability of national borders was also reflected in the formation of national canons. Kaufmann demonstrated that Nazi Germany appropriated artists, who were active throughout annexed territories[38]. Consequently, national canons are constantly challenged since, in many cases, definitive national attribution of particular artists, artworks or even artistic movements is difficult to achieve.

In response to the continuous presence of national frameworks in art-historical discourse, a significant amount of literature was dedicated to art history in particular national settings and its influence on canon formation. And scholars engage with this topic, employing different methodologies and theoretical approaches. For example, Ozpinar conducted discourse analysis and revealed how accentuation or downplaying of minority identities of artists influenced the narrative about Turkish national art[39]. Ben-Asher Gitler demonstrated how the lack of post-colonial lens impacts architectural history in Israel/Palestine in the framework of "critical historiography"[40]. Dovydaitytė's article, dedicated to the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, demonstrates how the newly established national museum combines two different narratives about national art history, conventional and critical towards the traditional canon of art-historical writing.[41]

[37] Smith, "'The Land and Its People'," 101 – 103.
[38] Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art,* 86.
[39] Ceren Ozpinar, "Playing Out the "Differences" in "Turkish" Art-Historical Narratives,*"* in *Narratives Unfolding: National Art Histories in an Unfinished World, ed.* Martha Langford (Montreal & Kingston London Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 42 – 62.
[40] Gitler, "Some notes on Applying Postcolonial methodologies to Architectural history research in Israel/Palestine", 100 – 123.
[41] Linara Dovydaitytė, "Post-Soviet Writing of History: The Case of the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 19, no. 3-4 (2010): 105 – 120.

The construction of the canon of Russian art, including modernist art, was extensively explored in academic literature. However, most of these works are based on sources dated back to the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The central focus of this literature is either ideological activities of artists themselves, the role of museums and galleries or tsarist cultural politics since the second half of the 19th century. In many cases, scholarship demonstrated how different activities of all these agents simultaneously led to the reification of the national art canon.

For instance, Vishlenkova traced how the idea about the Russian school emerged from the second half of the 18th century to the 1830s, based on commissioner's notes, press publications of art critics, and activities of The Academy of Arts at that time[42]. Valkenier explored how the narrative about the artistic group "Wanderers" as the founder of a specifically Russian school was shaped by art critic Vladimir Stasov, whose writings were later uncritically reproduced in Soviet historiography[43]. She also pointed out how Pavel Tretykov, a wealthy manufacturer, patron and the founder of one of the first galleries of Russian art, influenced the development of "Wanderers" in a more nationalist way by commissioning[44]. The role of Tretyakov was also emphasized in Dianina's analysis of press publications in the second half of the 19th century. She argued that Tretiakov's taste in acquisitions, based on realism and depiction of everyday life in Russia, became the standard by which critics and the public alike evaluated Russian art at that time[45].

[42] Elena Vishlenkova, "Picturing the Russian National Past in the Early 19th Century," *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 60, no. 4 (2012): 489–509.
[43] Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, "The Peredvizhniki and the Spirit of the 1860s," *The Russian Review* 34, no. 3 (1975): 247–65.
[44] Valkenier, "The Peredvizhniki and the Spirit of the 1860s," 259 – 261.
[45] Katia Dianina, "MUSEUM AND MESSAGE: WRITING PUBLIC CULTURE IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 2 (2012): 173–95.

The role of private patrons and governmental patronage in the canon formation was also explored in literature dedicated to the emergence of the Russian style. Merchant and private patron Savva Mamontov, who established the Abramtsevo colony near Moscow, was particularly active in encouraging artists to explore rural traditions and incorporate them into their artworks[46]. Shevelenko demonstrated how the cultural policy of Alexander III and later Nicholas II mirrored the aspirations of the Abramtsevo colony on the example of the Russian pavilion of the World's Fair Exhibition in 1900 in Paris and reforms in art education[47].

Overall, Shevelenko's book represents quite detailed research on how Russian artists, art critics and officials contributed to creating the national school in the beginning of the 20th century. Analyzing various publications and memoirs, she demonstrated that the national question was at the center of discussions concerning art production at the turn of the 20th century due to the ambiguous position of Russian art in the West. Shevelenko[48], as well as Kennedy[49], argued that Western reception of Russian art at the turn of the 20th century determined how the Russian avant-garde had been developing in the 1900s and early 1910s. They noted that the Western public wanted to see Russian art as specifically national, not just as another branch of European art. Artistic searches for the national art and its representation in group exhibitions and publications were documented by Shevelenko[50] and Sharp[51]. They demonstrated that such artists as Nataliia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Burluik brothers

[46] Alison Hilton, "From Abramtsevo to Zakopane: Folk Art and National Ideals in Russia and Eastern Europe," *Russian History* 46, no. 4 (2019): 241–61.
[47] Irina Shevelenko, *Modernizm kak arkhaizm: natsionalizm i poiski modernistskoĭ estetiki v Rossii* [Modernism as Archaism: Nationalism and the Search for Modernist Aesthetics in Russia] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 58 – 113.
[48] Shevelenko, *Modernizm kak arkhaizm*, 326 – 357.
[49] Janet Kennedy, "Pride and prejudice : Serge Diaghilev, the Ballet Russes, and the French public," in *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siecle Europe*, ed. Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90 – 115.
[50] Shevelenko, *Modernizm kak arkhaizm*, 474 – 490.
[51] Jane Ashton Sharp, *Russian Modernism between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

were heavily invested in the creation of national art, drawing inspiration, for example, from Orthodox icons for formulation of the Russian version of futurism.

Cohen explored how artistic and, to a large extent, political debates around 1916 about artworks that should be represented in Tretyakov Gallery influenced the canon of Russian art. The fact that after all disputes, modernist painters such as Alexander Benois, Vladimir Tatlin, Lyubov Popova, and others finally entered the museum significantly shaped the canon of Russian art, entering the space for cosmopolitan tendencies and radical experiments[52].

Overall, the literature dedicated to the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon mainly concentrated on historical sources dating back to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. There was little scope of works on how the Russian avant-garde was canonized after formalist experiments were prohibited and Social Realism was imposed as the universal art canon in the Soviet Union. Marcadé[53] and Forgács[54] suggested a descriptive historical perspective on how the pre-Soviet and early Soviet avant-garde was rediscovered in the West in the 1960s. However, both of these works were not dedicated to the issue of canonization of the Russian avant-garde.

At the same time, the canon of Russian avant-garde was indeed contested in academic literature dedicated to Ukrainian avant-garde as an artistic phenomenon appropriated by the

[52] Aaron J. Cohen, "Making modern art Russian: Artists, Moscow politics and the Tretyakov Gallery during the First World War," *Journal of the History of Collections* 14, no.2 (2002): 271 – 281.
[53] Jean-Claude Marcadé, "The Russian Avant-Garde Today," *vania-marcade.com,* September 12, 2019, https://www.vania-marcade.com/the-russian-avant-garde-today-2.
[54] Éva Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism: Russian Art and the International of the Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

overarching term "Russian avant-garde"[55]. The literature about Jewish avant-garde in the Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union also challenges the homogeneity of the Russian avant-garde narrative[56]. Even though the national belonging of the avant-garde became the focus of artistic inquiry, academic literature and public discussions, there was a noticeable lack of research about the emergence of the national dimension of pre-Soviet and early Soviet avant-garde from the middle of the 20th century to contemporary times. The term "Russian avant-garde" was contested, however its emergence as particularly Russian did not receive enough attention in academic literature. This thesis will contribute to the covering of this research gap and provide answers to the following research questions:

1) How was the canon of the Russian avant-garde as specifically Russian formulated and transformed across different historical periods?
2) What were the main discursive features of the nationalization of the Russian avant-garde?
3) What kind of contextual features were important for the construction of the Russian avant-garde canon?

Taking into account the decisive role of museums and art history in canon formation, I will focus my analysis on exhibition catalogs that simultaneously represent curatorial decisions and historical narratives employed for the justification of displaying certain objects and artists within the same canon. However, the choice of particular exhibition catalogs needs additional justification with regard to historical features of displaying pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde in different historical periods.

[55] Myroslav Shkandrij, *Avant-Garde Art in Ukraine, 1910-1930: Contested Memory* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019).
[56] Ruth Apter-Gabriel and Muze'on Yiśra'el, eds., *Tradition and Revolution: The Jewish Renaissance in Russian Avant-Garde Art, 1912-1928* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1987).

Sampling strategy

The history of displaying pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde in museums could be divided into three periods. The first period corresponded to pre-Soviet and early Soviet periods, before Socialist Realism was imposed as the universal art style and formalist experiments were prohibited. At that time, artists exhibited their works both within the country and abroad. Regarding the first period, the exhibition catalog of "The first Russian Exhibition" in Berlin in 1922 appears a fruitful source for analysis for various reasons[57]. First of all, it was the first time when modernist artists from the former Russian empire organized an extensive group exhibition after international isolation caused by the First World War and subsequent civil war in the former Russian empire[58]. Secondly, they positioned themselves as Russians for a foreign audience that, in the future, would take the lead in the continuing process of the construction of the Russian avant-garde canon. Overall, the exhibition catalog of "The first Russian Exhibition" suggests an opportunity to explore how artists themselves imagined the canon of Russian modernist art and what kind of narrative they told about it.

The second period is usually associated with the rediscovery of Russian avant-garde in the West in the 1960s. The book "The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922" written by British scholar Camilla Gray[59], who traveled to the Soviet Union and got access to previously unseen or forgotten artworks, was considered to be a key publication that inspired significant interest in pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde. After that, exhibitions of Russian avant-garde started to take place in the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Germany, and the United States. Some of them were even organized in cooperation with the Soviet Union even though avant-garde was

[57] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung [First Exhibition of Russian Art]* (Berlin: Van Diemen Gallery, 1922)
[58] Eckhard Neumann, "Russia's 'Leftist Art' in Berlin, 1922," *Art Journal* 27, no. 1 (1967): 20.
[59] Camilla Gray and Marian Burleigh-Motley, *The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863 - 1922* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007)

officially prohibited in the country since the 1930s[60]. Another important event related to the growing popularity of pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde was the emigration of the main collector of these works George Costakis. In the late 1970s, he left the Soviet Union with a small part of his collection, which later was exhibited, for instance, in the Guggenheim museum[61].

The selection of exhibition catalogs from the second period, from the 1960s to the 1980s, is more challenging due to the fact not all sources are easily accessible. Keeping in mind that this selection is undoubtedly arbitrary, I have decided to analyze three very different exhibition catalogs. The first one is dedicated to the first systematic exhibition of the Russian avant-garde in the West[62] "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" organized in 1962 at London's Grosvenor Gallery[63]. This catalog is rather short, comprising just two pages of text. The second significant source from this period is the "Moscow-Paris, 1900-1930" exhibition catalog. "Moscow-Paris 1900-1930", held at the National Museum of Modern Art located in the Center Pompidou in Paris in 1979, and two years later at The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, was the first extensive display of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde from Soviet museum storages. I will analyze both French[64] and Russian[65] versions of the catalog. The third catalog from this period that will be explored is published in accompaniment to the exhibition "Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections

[60] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism*, 219 – 237.
[61] Jean-Claude Marcadé, "The Russian Avant-Garde Today," *vania-marcade.com*, September 12, 2019, https://www.vania-marcade.com/the-russian-avant-garde-today-2.
[62] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism*, 226.
[63] *Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art (1902-1922),* (London: Grosvenor Gallery, 1962).
[64] Centre Georges Pompidou and Soviet Union, eds., *Paris-Moscou, 1900-1930* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979).
[65] Centre Georges Pompidou and Soviet Union, eds., *Moskva — Parizh, 1900 – 1930*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Sovetskiy Khudozhnik, 1981), 29.

from the George Costakis Collection" at the Guggenheim museum in 1981[66]. As was mentioned above, Costakis is considered to be the main collector of the Russian avant-garde, and it is fruitful to trace his role in the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have been various exhibitions of the Russian avant-garde both within the country and abroad. Russian cultural diplomacy was actively promoting modernist art from national collections. In order to capture the post-Soviet Russian narrative about the avant-garde, I will analyze catalog of the "Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-gardes" exhibition that took place in 2016 in Albertina museum in Vienna, and was organized in cooperation with the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg[67]. This particular exhibition appeared fruitful for the analysis because it was aimed at demonstrating the Russian avant-garde as a whole movement, not its specific representatives, stylistic branches, or periods. Also, most of the loans for this exhibition were provided by the State Russian Museum which indicated the decisive role of Russian institutions in the canon formation in the framework of the "Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-gardes" exhibition. I intentionally choose to focus on the exhibition catalog from the relatively late post-Soviet period, to capture the established discourse on the Russian avant-garde, formulated by Russian cultural institutions and exported abroad. Presumably, in the 1990s or 2000s, the idea of the Russian avant-garde in Russia was significantly more ambiguous due to the less research, and the lack of substantial curatorial and publishing experience on the subject matter.

[66] Margit Rowell and Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection.* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1981).
[67] Elena Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes* (Saint Petersburg, Munich: Palace Editions in cooperation with Hirmer Verlag, 2016).

Due to the limited access to Russian catalogs and the fact that most exhibitions of the avant-garde that took place in Russia are usually quite peculiar in their focus and rarely dedicated to Russian avant-garde in general, these sources will not be covered in this research.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on qualitative textual analysis, which combines approaches from narrative and discourse analysis and takes into consideration insights from theoretical inquiries of comparative art history. This synthetic methodological approach appears to be fruitful for the analysis of such complex processes as a canon formation.

The narrative analysis framework will be applied to systematize stories that are told about the avant-garde, and its relation to Russia. Herman and Vervaeck argued that any narrative text consists of three levels. The first one is a story, an abstract construct that the reader has to derive from the concrete text. The second one is narrative, which corresponds to the concrete way in which events are presented to the reader. The third one is concerned with formulation — the entire set of ways in which a story is told[68]. The last two levels are more concerned with formal features of how narratives are presented, whereas the first one corresponds to the particular content of the narrative.

In this research, I will concentrate on the first level (story), which is to be analyzed based on the three main analytical categories: actions/events, actants, and setting. Actions/events can bring the linear development of events, or serve as straightforward or quite symbolic

[68] Luc Herman, Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 41 – 45.

descriptions, that do not influence the horizontal progress of the story[69]. Actants are subjects and objects that are involved in events[70]. In the case of exhibition catalogs, they will be predominantly represented by artists, their artworks, institutions etc. And finally, settings, which are indexes that indicate specific time and place in which events take place[71]. Settings are especially illustrative for this analysis because the category of space is crucially important for the construction of a national canon. Overall, I will explore (1) descriptions, formulated in a national fashion, (2) interrelation between settings, predominantly spatial, actants (artists, art groups, institutions etc) and their actions/events (for instance, organizing the exhibition or creating a set stage design).

In order to engage deeper with the discursive construction of the Russian dimension of avant-garde, I will employ Reisigl's framework for analysis of discursive strategies that are usually used for the articulation of individual or collective, transnational, national, or local identities[72]. However, I slightly modified it for the particular research in question:

Nomination. How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes, and actions named and referred to linguistically? *What kind of people, objects, and spaces are nominated (or not nominated) as Russian?*

Predication. What characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events, and processes? *What kind of characteristics are attributed to people, objects and spaces which are nominated (or not nominated) as Russian?*

[69] Herman, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, 46 – 52.
[70] Herman, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, 52.
[71] Herman, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, 56 – 57.
[72] Martin Reisigl, "The Discourse-Historical Approach," in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, ed. John Flowerdew, John E. Richardson (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 52.

Argumentation. What arguments are employed in the discourse in question? *How was the Russiannes of avant-garde justified? Or, more specifically, how were particular artists, art groups, institutions, and their activities related to Russia?*

Perspectivisation. From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?

Considering perspectivisation, I will situate exhibition catalogs in a broader context. For instance, the institutional context surrounding the production of exhibition catalogs will be taken into account, as well as the socio-political contexts that had an impact on its creation. In order to grasp the more nuanced picture, I will refer to the secondary literature, dedicated to these exhibitions, and publications in media, such as critical reviews, interviews with curators etc.

Limitations

The limitations of this research are quite obvious since my analysis will be focused only on one type of source, which is an exhibition catalog. The role of academic literature, public discourse in media, auction catalogs, and other types of texts in the formation of the national canon could not be denied. However, the format of the thesis implies reasonable limitations, and I find the focus on exhibition catalogs beneficial for the clarity of sampling strategy and illustrative, considering the role of museums and art history in the formation of the art canon.

Another limitation lies in the field of accessibility of catalogs and quite arbitrary selection of particular sources. It is undeniable that on the historical scale some exhibitions might be more influential in the formation of the canon than others, but it is genuinely hard to measure such things, especially in the post-Soviet period. If the selection of catalogs from the 1980s presumably corresponds to the criteria of popularity and novelty, the choice of catalogs from

the 2010s is rather aimed at capturing the established discourse on the Russian avant-garde, formulated by Russian cultural institutions and exported abroad.

"The First Russian Exhibition" in Berlin (1922)

"The First Russian Exhibition" took place in Berlin in 1922, and became the first major exhibition of Russian art abroad after WWI and the subsequent economic blockade of the Soviet Union. As various literature about the exhibition demonstrated, the organization of "The First Russian Exhibition" was extremely chaotic, and many details about its preparation are still unknown. For example, Bérard found out that there were two projects of the exhibition. The first one was formulated by Soviet authorities and aimed at showing economic and productive accomplishments. According to this project, artworks would not be the central focus of the exhibition. The second plan was dedicated solely to art, and ended up being shown to the Berlin public since German authorities were explicitly against the idea of a politically charged exhibition[73]. The latter project, as Bérard argued, was mostly promoted by Willi Münzenberg, chairman of Workers' Relief for Russia, a humanitarian organization emanating from the Comintern[74]. Münzenberg, inspired by domestic propagandist activities of Soviet artists, was the one who believed that purely artistic achievements might be employed for promoting the positive image of the Soviet Union in the West[75]. Bérard pointed out that the communication about possible content of the exhibition was so hectic that the Soviet Union even managed to transport propagandist materials, such as charts and diagrams, to Berlin[76]. However, as a result, only artworks were displayed in the Galerie van Diemen, where the exhibition took place.

[73] Ewa Bérard, "The 'First Exhibition of Russian Art' in Berlin: The Transnational Origins of Bolshevik Cultural Diplomacy, 1921–1922," *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 2 (2021): 164–80.
[74] Ewa Bérard, "Exhibition Items from a Sealed Train: The First Exhibition of Russian Art in Berlin, 1922: A Documented History," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 170, no. 4 (2021): 103-128.
[75] Bérard, "The 'First Exhibition of Russian Art' in Berlin", 172.
[76] Bérard, "Exhibition Items from a Sealed Train", 118 – 121.

According to various literature, it is difficult to accurately trace how the selection of particular artworks and curatorship of "The First Russian Exhibition" were set up. But some facts are known due to the accessibility of documents. First of all, artworks that arrived from the Soviet Union to Berlin and were later exhibited, were selected by People's Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, whereas the head of the IZO NARKOMPROS David Sternberg actively participated in the organization of the exhibition[77]. Secondly, Forgacs argued that, according to photos that were taken during preparation for the exhibition, artists such as Natan Altman and Naum Gabo also participated in the organization of the show. El Lissitzky, who designed the catalog, was involved as well[78]. However, generally Soviet artists, whose artworks were displayed in Berlin in 1922, did not travel to Germany to interpret their works, which resulted in confusion about definitions of particular art movements, and connections between oftenly conflicting tendencies in Soviet art[79]. Thirdly, Bérard paid attention to the fact that retrospectively Soviet authorities claimed that the exhibition was organized by IZO NARKOMPROS, however the role of German organizers should not be underestimated. She claimed that Münzenberg not only negotiated with German authorities in order to organize the exhibition, but also came up with an idea to cooperate with Russian emigrants. As a result, artists, who emigrated from the Soviet Union such as Wasiliy Kandinsky, David Burluik, Marc Chagall and Ivan Punin, displayed their artworks at "The First Russian Exhibition". However, as Bérard noted, it remained unknown who exactly decided to include artworks of these artists in the list of common "Russian" achievements and when this decision was made[80].

[77] Éva Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism: Russian Art and the International of the Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 133.
[78] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism,* 133 – 134.
[79] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism,* 134.
[80] Bérard, "Exhibition Items from a Sealed Train", 117.

Turning to the analysis of the catalog, it is important to note that it contains only four rather short articles, written by David Sternberg, Reichskunstwart (Imperial Authority of Art Matters, equivalent to Minister of Art and Culture in Germany) Edwin Redslob and socialist activist and writer Arthur Holitscher. The author of the most detailed last text, aimed at describing the content of the exhibition, is not mentioned. However, Forgacs pointed out that Naum Gabo claimed that it was Sternberg, who probably did not want to sign two contributions in the same catalog[81].

The opening article, written by Sternberg, does not contain lots of detail about the national character of displayed artworks, however certainly identified them as Russian:

> Russian art is still young. The great majority of our people first came into contact with after the October Revolution and only then were they able to infuse new life into the dead, official art that in Russia, as everywhere else, was regarded as 'high art.' At the same time the Revolution threw open new avenues for Russia's creative forces.[82]

Overall, Sternberg's article did not engage deeply with the national features of the displayed art. Holitscher's article is somewhat familiar since it mostly discusses the relationship between art and revolution without notes on the Russianness of displayed artworks. Edwin Redslob's text, however, is mostly dedicated to the issue of national art.

First of all, Redslob points out that artists who are represented at "The First Russian Exhibition" are rather children of their time than of their people, but he finds it typical for contemporary times and not contradictory to the expression of national character. Redslob mentioned that Russian artists and Russia in general for a long time strived to join Europe.

[81] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism,* 135.
[82] Sternberg David, ""Foreword" to the Catalogue of the First Exhibition of Russian Art", Van Diemen Gallery, Berlin (1922)", trans. Nicholas Bullock, in *The Tradition Of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 71.

However, in his opinion, in order to become European, one should express her own nationality. Redslob wrote:

> Russians are more welcomed, the more they are Russian [...] The more nationality is fulfilled in you, the more your work belongs to Europe and thus to the world.[83]

Redslob found the Russianness of artworks displayed at this exhibition in ornamental and coloristic peculiarities, as well as embeddedness in traditions of primitive art, folk art and "the spiritual vastness of the East", without mentioning particular art groups, artists or artworks as examples. At the same time, he considered that national character could be identified not only in Russian art. It is a rather universal quality, and one can see the Dutch in Bart van der Leck, the German in Paul Klee, the French in Pablo Picasso[84].

Redslob's opinion about the presence of national character in any European art certainly mirrored aspirations of some Russian artists, such as Nataliia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov and the Burluck brothers, who in the beginning of the 1910s were heavily invested in pursuing the Russianness of their art instead of following broader European trends. Their works were characterized by peculiar colors, forms and motifs, drawn from Russian folklore, Orthodox icons and the everyday life of the peasantry. The Easternness of their art was another important stance, since they believed that Western art drew inspiration from the East and then surpassed it to others. These artists proclaimed that they would approach the East directly, without European intermediators[85]. However, it is impossible to claim that all artworks that have been displayed at "The First Russian Exhibition" corresponded to these popular but certainly not universal ideas about the necessity to establish "artistic national

[83] Edwin Redslob, "II", trans. my own, in *Erste russische Kunstausstellung [First Exhibition of Russian Art]* (Berlin: Van Diemen Gallery, 1922), 5.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Irina Shevelenko, *Modernizm kak arkhaizm: natsionalizm i poiski modernistskoĭ ėstetiki v Rossii* [Modernism as Archaism: Nationalism and the Search for Modernist Aesthetics in Russia] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 476 – 478.

independence", as David Burluck put it in 1913[86]. For example, Suprematism, as Malevich claimed, "originated neither from the West nor from the East"[87], emphasizing its universal character.

The last article in the catalog consists of the description of art groups, artists and artworks, represented at "The First Russian Exhibition". It is notable that only Moscow or Petrograd-based art groups are mentioned. Since the exhibition ambitiously aimed at capturing Russian art in general, not only its latest tendencies, it started with Moscow-based "Wanderers", "who fought official academism" and, as I mentioned before, were pioneers of the depiction of everyday life in Russia. The next group is Petrograd-based "The World of Art", which has been the most active from 1898 until 1904. In the article, it was mentioned that representatives of this group criticized the "Wanderers" for clinging more to the content, than to the artistic qualities of the painting[88]. Another art group from Moscow "The Jack of Diamonds", which actively functioned from 1909 until 1914, was represented by artworks of Pyotr Konchalovsky, Ilya Mashkov, Aristarkh Lentulov, Vasily Rozhdestvensky and Robert Falk[89].

Also, already mentioned and other artists were grouped according to their belonging to particular art styles, and in some cases, the specific Russian interpretation of these styles was highlighted. For instance, Russian impressionism "[was] more associated with Levitan's[90] school than with European Impressionism"[91], whereas Cubism was believed to develop

[86] Shevelenko, *Modernizm kak arkhaizm*, 46.
[87] Kazimir Malevich, *Sobranie Sochinenii v Piati Tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes] (Moscow: Gileia, 1995), 181.
[88] "Introduction", trans. my own, in *Erste russische Kunstausstellung [First Exhibition of Russian Art]* (Berlin: Van Diemen Gallery, 1922), 11.
[89] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 12.
[90] Isaac Levitan is Russian-Jewish painter, who is famous for landscapes depiction.
[91] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 10.

independently from the European movement and as result appeared to be less schematic. Overall, the following art styles and its representatives were mentioned: Cézanne school (Mashkov and Lentulov), Expressionism (David Burluik, Marc Chagall, Nikolay Sinezubov)[92], Primitivism (Martiros Saryan, Yakov Pain, Iosif Schkolnik, Naum Aronson and others), Cubism (Nadezhda Udaltsova, Antoine Pewsner, Aleksey Morgunov, Ivan Puni, Mikhail Ledantiu and mostly unknown young painters, whose names were not even mentioned in the article), Suprematism (Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Kliun, Olga Rozanova, Lyubov Popova, Alexandra Exter, El Lissitzky, Alexander Drevin, Pavel Mansurov and to a certain extent Alexander Rodchenko)[93]. Vladimir Tatlin was called representative of the Constructivism branch, whereas Rodchenko was the leader of "the art of production". David Sternberg, Konstantin Medunetzki, Petr Mituritsch, Gustav Klucis, Karlis Joganson are mentioned as artists who "work in the same way [as Rodchenko], but very individually"[94]. The theater department was represented by Georgy Yakulov and Altman, who worked for theater decorations in a constructivist manner[95]. At the same time, some artists were mentioned as ones who could not be identified as a representative of any existing art group, school, or style. Among them were Pavel Filonov, Varvara Stepanova and Vladimir Baranov-Rossine[96].

Overall, the belonging of particular artists to the Russian art in this particular catalog is not obvious. Only three Moscow and Petrograd-based art groups were mentioned, as well as the specific Russian interpretation of Impressionism and Cubism. Also, the term Russian avant-garde (or Russian modernism) did not appear yet at that moment as the distinctive concept,

[92] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 11
[93] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 12.
[94] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 13.
[95] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 14.
[96] *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, 12.

therefore artists, who later would be canonized as its representatives, were not separated from older, more conservative figures. Also, as we can see from the rest of the catalog, not all artists that were represented in the exhibition were mentioned in the last article. For example, the now famous sculptor Alexander Archipenko was mentioned only in the list of participants of the exhibition, whereas artists who are significantly less-known nowadays, such as Mikhail Ledantiu and Yakov Pain, deserved to be placed in the introduction. Not to mention the fact that at "The First Russian Exhibition" artworks by unnamed students and workers were also displayed as examples of Russian art. Considering the content of the catalog, one can argue that this exhibition started to form the canon of Russian avant-garde, but was certainly far from the established version. At least due to the bewildering classification of art movements represented at the exhibition. As Forgacs noted, for example, expressionist artworks of Kandinsky were equated with Malevich's suprematism, Tatlin was attributed to constructivism, despite the fact that he did not consider himself representative of this movement. Forgacs named other confusions and concluded that these mistakes were later reproduced in the later writings on the Russian avant-garde[97].

Another important aspect of the exhibition that significantly influenced the canon formation was the selection of particular artworks. There are very conflicting assessments on the scale of representation of the latest non-figurative modernist art. For example, Forgacs argued that the most progressive artists were represented in less than one-fifth of the entire show[98]. She explained it by the fact that in 1922 avant-garde was not yet prohibited, but it was already disapproved by Soviet authorities[99]. The dissatisfaction with the most ambitious examples of Soviet modernist art was clearly reflected in Lunacharsky's article, published after the show in

[97] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism,* 136.
[98] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism,* 137.
[99] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism,* 134.

one of the main Soviet newspapers "Izvestiya"[100]. However, in the very same article Lunacharsky explained that the selection of artworks was significantly influenced by the fact that the exhibition was aimed to raise money for famine relief, and therefore displayed works should be available for sale. "Leftist" artists, as he claimed, agreed to sell their artworks for a lower price, than "rightist" ones[101]. Also, to decrease the cost of the exhibition, NARKOMPROS decided to display artworks already owned by the state, as Forgacs noted. Overall, "The First Russian Exhibition" certainly did not represent a perfectly curated selection of the best artworks, in accordance with NARKOMPROS taste. Rather the exhibition was organized with many limitations on both the German and Soviet sides. Nevertheless, art critics managed to form their opinions about the latest examples of Russian art. And in many cases, these opinions were based on essentialization of national traits of particular artists or Russian art in general, which later would be reproduced in newer exhibition catalogs.

For instance, German art historian and publisher of the magazine "Das Kunstblatt" Paul Westheim claims that Russian artists, like anyone else in Russia, are driven by a fierce compulsion to create anew, and the idea that presides over the Russian world is that everything has yet to be and must be done. There is no such a need for Western artists, he writes, because of centuries of traditions that have supplied them with tested methods of artistic creations. Westheim believes that France has enough vitality to renew itself from its

[100] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Russkaya vystavka v Berline [Russian Exhibition in Berlin]", trans. my own, *Izvestiya*, December 2, 1922, 2.
[101] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Russkaya vystavka v Berline [Russian Exhibition in Berlin]", *Izvestiya*, December 2, 1922, 2.

inner resources. Russian artists, on the contrary, aim at giving art a new Archaic Period. As a rather vague justification, Westheim cited Dostoevsky[102]:

> As soon as we Russians have reached the shore, and have brought ourselves to believe that it really is the shore, we at once begin to look forward to the ultimate frontier. Why is this? If one of us is converted to Catholicism, he immediately turns Jesuit, and the blackest Jesuit of them all; if he becomes an atheist, he will immediately call for belief in God to be eradicated, by force if necessary [...] To become an atheist is so easy for a Russian! More than for anyone else in the whole world. Nor do Russians turn into ordinary atheists; far from it. Atheism to them becomes a new faith. They believe in it, without even noticing that they are believing in a zero[103].

Overall, Westheim suggested two explanations for the peculiarities of Russian art, and particularly non-representational art such as Suprematism and Constructivism. The first one lies in the lack of a rich tradition of painting due to historical circumstances, which results in the need to explore the basics of artistic methods from the very beginning. The second one is based on vague ideas about the Russian national character, which is inclined towards radicalism and the urge to create something completely new[104].

For Hungarian modernist artist and writer Lajos Kassák, ideas about the specificity of Russian art are, on the contrary, embedded in specific political and economic conditions of the revolutionary country. As he noted, "during the European economic and cultural blockade an utterly new social system has passed its test of strength in Russia, and new advances in the visual arts began to unfold". He argued that after the decline of Russian literature, figurative art took its place[105]. For Kassák Suprematism "is the first movement where the Russian, the Asian power joins the European forces [...] by getting rid of every externality deposited by

[102] Paul Westheim, "The Exhibition of Russian Artists (1922)," trans. David Britt, in *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy Benson and Éva Forgács (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 405 – 407.
[103] Westheim, "The Exhibition of Russian Artists (1922)," 406.
[104] Westheim, "The Exhibition of Russian Artists (1922)," 405 – 407.
[105] Lajos Kassák, "The Russian Exhibit in Berlin (1922)," trans. John Bátki, in *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy Benson and Éva Forgács (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 409.

civilization and aesthetics, to dig all the way back down to the essentials". Whereas European schools of Futurism, Cubism, and Expressionism which were also displayed at the exhibition, did not add anything new to the French school[106].

A somewhat similar opinion was expressed by Serbian modernist artist and poet Branko Ve Poljanski. He argued that among all styles that were represented at the exhibition, suprematism and constructivism were the strongest and "the most Russian". And the key characteristic of these artworks was the fact that they were not touched by European influences[107]. Overall, both Ve Poljanski and Kassák attributed abstract art to specifically Russian art, because it was not invented in Western countries. The alleged Eastern, not European influence on it, is also actively emphasized.

In many reviews on "The First Russian exhibition" the national character of particular participants of the show was also discussed. And Malevich appeared to be the most popular of them, which resulted in the fact that his Russianness was actively emphasized. For instance, Westheim suggests that Malevich is the most illustrative example of the Russian tendency to take any idea to the extreme:

> Malevich, the Russian, takes the word dead literally; with the result that he ends up as a believer in zero. For, quite simply, to paint in "white on white" is to give up painting. The logical conclusion would be to disown art altogether and give up the whole thing.[108]

Ve Poljanski claimed that Malevich was the strongest representative of "independent, non-European Russianism"[109]. The Russianness of El Lissitzky was explained by the fact that he depicted lots of means of transportation and mechanisms, and that, according to Ve Poljanski,

[106] Ibid.
[107] Branko Ve Poljanski, "Through the Russian Exhibition" (1923)," trans. Maja Starčević, in *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy Benson and Éva Forgács (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 416.
[108] Westheim, "The Exhibition of Russian Artists (1922)," 406.
[109] Ve Poljanski, "Through the Russian Exhibition" (1923)," 414.

was related to the fact that Russia needs trains and other transportation means above everything else[110]. Ve Poljanski also proclaimed Rodchenko "the Russian Archimedes"[111] without specifying what made him particularly Russian.

At the same time Chagall and Archipenko appeared somewhat distant from other Russian artists for critics. Ve Poljanski called Chagall one the strongest representatives of German and world Expressionism and did not mention anything about his Russianness[112]. Kassák wrote that the greatest master of Expressionism, the Russian-born Chagall, has matured his art in Berlin and Paris and did not influence art in Russia significantly[113]. Ve Poljanski also highlighted that Archipenko has lived outside of Russia for quite a while, and "has lately been prone to the weakness of stressing that he is not a Russian but a — Ukrainian"[114].

Special attention should be paid to the article of Lunacharsky, which he published after the exhibition in the Soviet newspaper "Izvestiya", where he shared his opinion about represented artworks as well as suggested an overview of art reviews published abroad. First of all, Lunacharsky noted that "The First Russian Exhibition" put into question the monopoly of emigrant artists on Russian art. He referred to a review by George Voldemar, who argued that this art was mostly "[...] ethnographic, nationalistic, decorative, strangely combining peasant masculinity with academic mannerism". Lunacharsky associated emigrant art with, as he claimed, the vastly irrelevant group "The World of Art", characterized by depiction of "vulgar pseudo-Russian bazaar, so beloved by European hearts". Lunacharsky wrote:

> …azure, antimony and gilding, fancy carvings — in a word, Russian pseudo-national baroque, of course, passed through the refined and twisted soul of the master[115].

[110] Ve Poljanski, "Through the Russian Exhibition" (1923)," 415.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ve Poljanski, "Through the Russian Exhibition" (1923)," 415 – 416.
[113] Kassák, "The Russian Exhibit in Berlin (1922)," 409.
[114] Ve Poljanski, "Through the Russian Exhibition" (1923)," 416.
[115] Lunacharsky, "Russkaya vystavka v Berline," 2.

At the same time he did not seem to be the biggest admirer of non-representational painting either. He wrote about suprematists and constructivists:

> I believe that the new generation now being educated in our schools will be able to reflect the revolution more richly and directly than the leftist inventors - wonderful people, often sincere friends of the revolution, but nevertheless scions of the left-bourgeois art of Parisian bohemia[116].

Overall, the analysis of catalog, art reviews and secondary literature revealed several important insights that are crucial for the understanding of the Russian avant-garde canon formation. First of all, in the catalog all artworks that were displayed at "The First Russian Exhibition" were attributed as Russian without any additional clarification about the national identification of artists and their current places of residence. For example, artists, who emigrated from the Soviet Union, were not differentiated from those who continued to live in the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that the catalog, apart from Redslob's contribution, did not demonstrate an explicitly nationalist manner of talking about the displayed art, it still framed all art movements, artists and artwork as representatives of Russian art only. At the same time, the role of Moscow and Petrograd-based art groups and attentiveness to the Russian interpretation of broader European art styles in the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon is already observable.

Considering the complicated history of the organization of the exhibition, it is hard to claim that this national framing was explicitly purposeful on the behalf of Soviet authorities, who clearly did not favor the latest examples of Soviet art, but rather displayed it because "leftist" artworks were significantly cheaper to obtain than more conservative ones. The hectic classification of different art movements and the lack of representation of artworks of "the highest quality" also signaled the fact that NARKOMPROS was not actively invested in the

[116] Ibid.

construction of "the golden standard" of the Russian avant-garde canon. The presence of many artists, who later would not become well-known figures of the Russian avant-garde, also witnessed the fact that the quality of artworks were not the highest priority of Soviet authorities. Also, Willi Münzenberg played a decisive role in introducing emigrant artists into the canon of the Russian avant-garde, not Soviet authorities. Moreover, the catalog did not define the Russian avant-garde as a particular movement or period within the broader framework of the Russian art.

Apart from the agency of German organizers of the exhibition, the role of art critics in the discursive establishment of Russianness of the latest Soviet-Russian art should also be taken into account. They were ones who extensively wrote about national peculiarities of displayed artworks, in some cases in a not very convincing manner of essentialization of national character. In other cases, they attributed peculiarities of this art to Eastern influence or direct effects of the Revolution. However, even in the latter case the latest Russian non-representational art was perceived as a continuation of the tradition of high Russian culture that previously was mostly famous for its literature.

It was highly interesting that such art movements as Suprematism and Constructivism, which did not imply any nationalist aspirations, were proclaimed "the most Russian", because they developed relatively independently from Western influences. At the same time artworks by participants of the group "The Jack of Diamonds", which was explicitly dedicated to the creation of national art, were not always perceived as Russian. The same is relevant for Russian versions of Cubism, Impressionism, Expressionism and so forth. Undoubtedly, not all existing art reviews were analyzed in this research, nevertheless, the discursive nationalization of art movements without any nationalist aspirations nevertheless stood out. Following the nationalization of particular art movements, the most active participants were

also proclaimed illustratively Russian. For example, Malevich, Rodchenko and Lissitzky. It is notable that the Russianness of expressionist painter Marc Chagall was questioned, because of his belonging to broader European artistic tendencies and foreign residence. The Ukrainian identity of Archipenko was highlighted, but not discussed any further.

The Rediscovery of the Russian avant-garde in the West

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Soviet authority's attitude towards avant-garde art was complicated even in the beginning of the 1920s, whereas in the 1930s formalist experiments were prohibited on the official level after the long ideological contestation between modernist and realist art groups. In 1932 all Soviet artists became members of the single artistic union, created by the state, whereas other art groups were abolished. As a result, all artistic activities in the country were put under governmental control, and the government became the only commissioner in the Soviet Union. In addition to structural changes, the public attack on formalist experiments continued for several years, and the new universal art canon was introduced. Socialist realism became the hegemonic approach to art in the whole country. As a result of the continuous effect of these changes, modernist artworks were not displayed in museums and galleries or even openly discussed in the Soviet public sphere for a long time[117].

Predictably, the rediscovery of the pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde heritage happened in the West in the middle of the 20th century. As Forgacs argued, interest in Russian avant-garde grew at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s among new leftist movements in Western countries. Disappointed in the Soviet project, especially after the military invasion of Hungary in 1956, leftist intellectuals envisioned an alternative modeled either on the pre-Stalinist Soviet Union or Trotsky's unrealized concept of permanent revolution[118]. In this alternative vision the Soviet avant-garde was perceived as the visible example of the possibility of radically new culture[119].

[117] Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2013), 55 – 58.
[118] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism*, 223.
[119] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism*, 225.

"Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" (1962)

In 1961 Camilla Gray, former ballet student in the Soviet Union and wife of Oleg Prokofiev, son of the famous Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev, published a ground-breaking book about Russian and Soviet avant-garde *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*. A year later the first systematic exhibition of Russian avant-garde "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" was organized in 1962 at London's Grosvenor Gallery. This exhibition was accompanied by a short catalog, comprising two pages of texts, which included a small introduction and basic information about every artist represented at the exhibition. According to the catalog, a new era of art was born in Russia long before the October Revolution, but after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, "artistic revolutionaries" allegedly started to control artistic life and thought in the country until 1921. These two decades were called "one of the most revolutionary in the history of art". The most salient feature of this introduction was the fact that the Soviet Union or any particular Soviet republic were never mentioned as geographical categories. The catalog referred to Russia exclusively[120].

"Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" displayed artworks of only eight artists. Among them were Marc Chagall, Kazimir Malevich, Wassiliy Kandinsky, Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova, El Lissitzky, Alexander Archipenko and Vladimir Tatlin. Short descriptions dedicated to each of these artists attempt to describe their relations with each other. For example, authors argued that Kandinsky after his return to Russia in 1914 came under Suprematist influence, obviously associated with Malevich. Larionov and Goncharova were attributed to the Rayonist movement, which constituted part of the Russian

[120] *Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art (1902-1922),* (London: Grosvenor Gallery, 1962), 6.

avant-garde, but, according to the catalog, could not be considered as influential as Suprematism. Also, both Larionov and Goncharova were associated with Sergey Dyagilev, for whose "Russian seasons" they did set stage design. Tatlin was mentioned as representative of "Russian Constructivism", whereas Lissitzky was the one who worked with both Chagall and Malevich, and was more influenced by the latter's Suprematism. Chagall was described as an artist who reinterpreted cubism in a more sensual and emotional way. It was also mentioned that Chagall was born in Vitebsk (the territory of modern Belarus), worked in Paris and Moscow. Archipenko was mentioned as a pioneer Cubist sculptor. More detailed information about his connections with other artists or geographical spaces did not appear in the catalog[121].

Overall, there are three main features of the "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" exhibition catalog. First of all, the Soviet Union is unequivocally equated with Russia, and subsequently Soviet avant-garde is considered to be a direct continuation of Russian modernist art, that began to flourish in the Russian empire. Secondly, almost no information that could potentially undermine the homogenous image of the Russian avant-garde was mentioned. For example, Chagall and Lissitzky's contributions to the project of Jewish art, or Chagall's or Archipenko's long experience of emigration. Thirdly, according to the framework of the exhibition, the Russian avant-garde started to develop at the very beginning of the 20th century and came to an end around 1922. The earliest work, represented at the exhibition, was created by Kandinsky in 1902. The latest examples were displayed by Lissitzky (1923) and Malevich (1920). Finally, the belonging of all these artists to the same canon was based on personal artistic influences, their relation to the young Soviet state, and in the case of Larionov and Goncharova to Dyagilev's "Russian seasons".

[121] *Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art (1902-1922),* (London: Grosvenor Gallery, 1962), 7.

The exhibition "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" was certainly rather small in scope, because at that time Western curators had limited access to artworks of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde. Most of them were kept in the Soviet Union. Despite this limitation, exhibitions dedicated to modernist art of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, also took place in Milan, Berlin, Cologne, Copenhagen and other cities during the 1960s [122].

"Moscow-Paris, 1900-1930" (1979 – 1981)

"Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design since 1917" in the Hayward Gallery in London in 1971 was the first exhibition that was organized in cooperation with Soviet authorities. Curated by Camilla Gray, it was dedicated solely to the constructivist branch of Soviet avant-garde[123]. Another truly diverse display of Russian and Soviet avant-garde, jointly organized with Soviet authorities, took place in Paris in 1979, eight years later. "Moscow-Paris, 1900-1930" was held at the National Museum of Modern Art located in the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1979, and two years later at The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. These two exhibitions aimed at showing cross-influences characterizing French and Russian modernisms.

Since "Moscow-Paris, 1900-1930" was the first extensive display of Russian and Soviet avant-garde from Soviet museum storage, details about its organization are well-known. First of all, the Centre Pompidou, where the first exhibition took place, was a rather unique cultural institution. As Poupée noted, between 1977 and 1981 it freely defined its policy, explicitly oriented towards international projects. This policy was inspired and organized by the director

[122] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism*, 223 – 231.
[123] Forgács, *Malevich and Interwar Modernism*, 232.

of the museum Pontus Hulten, who during these years initiated four international projects: "Paris – New York", "Paris – Berlin", "Paris – Paris" and "Paris – Moscow"[124]. In 1976 Hulten traveled to the Soviet Union and received positive feedback from the Ministry of Culture, as curator of the painting and sculpture section of "Moscow-Paris, 1900-1930" Jean-Hubert Martin recalled in his interview in 2020. According to Martin, curators, including Hulten himself, were the most important actors that made this exhibition happen despite all limitations on the Soviet side[125].

In the beginning, Hulten personally managed communication with the Soviet Ministry of Culture. This communication happened mainly with Alexander Khalturin, the chief commissioner for the exhibition on the Soviet side and the Director of Foreign Affairs in the Ministry of Culture. As Martin mentioned, Khalturin was an official, definitely not an art historian. Martin recalled:

> No one was against the avant-garde, as they had received approval "from the top." It was important to achieve a mutually acceptable balance between the avant-garde and figurative art in the wider sense, not just Socialist Realism. Khalturin was very active and slippery. He was always pushing for artists who seemed too academic to us. All of a sudden he might say: "The painting section has too much Malevich and Tatlin in it, they should be moved to design and architecture. Tatlin designed sets, so let's show him in the theater section." He was always playing with the exhibition layout, shuffling works between different sections."[126]

Overall, despite the fact that Soviet authorities clearly gave a "green light" to display the Russian and Soviet avant-garde, officials, who were engaged in the organization of the exhibition still tried to shift the focus from modernism to more conservative socialist realism.

[124] Mathilde Poupée, "Exhibition Paris-Moscow, 1900-1930," *Looking at Images: A Researcher's Guide*, 2014, http://blog.soton.ac.uk/wsapgr/files/2014/10/Looking_at_images_POUPEE.pdf.
[125] Jean-Hubert Martin, "Interview with Jean-Hubert Martin, one of the curators of the exhibitions Paris — Moscow and Moscow — Paris," interview by Andrei Erofeev and Sasha Obukhova, *Russian Art Archive Network*, November 18, 2020, https://russianartarchive.net/en/research/interview-with-jean-hubert-martin-one-of-the-curators-of-the-exhibitions-paris-moscow-and-moscow-paris.
[126] Ibid.

Martin recalled art historian Vadim Polevoy, who was allegedly overseeing whether the organization went correctly in the political sense. Martin said:

> Within the exhibition we wanted to reflect on the image of the Revolution and everything that happened after. However, he was always present on site and at some point he made an entire speech about the Revolution, saying that the people behind it were young and romantic and for this reason we should not pay much attention to this period.[127]

At the same time Martin mentioned representatives of the Soviet Union who helped French curators to find the necessary information and choose artworks with better precision and expertise. Among them were Dimitri Sarabianov, one of the major experts on the avant-garde in the Soviet Union and then in Russia, Svetlana Dzhafarova, who, as Martin noted, revealed artworks by Malevich kept in regional museums, Anatoly Strigalev and Vigdaria Khazanova, who was responsible for the architecture section[128].

The difference between exhibitions that took place in Paris and later in Moscow also represented a significant interest. As Isaak argued in her review of the exhibition in 1981, in the Moscow exhibition some artworks by Malevich, Chagall, Rodchenko were not represented, and David Burluik was not displayed at all[129]. However, Martin claimed that exhibitions in Moscow and Paris were almost identical and composed of the same sections, despite the fact that the Soviet Union decided to have the exhibition two years later than planned. Martin recalled:

> There were a couple of cases where we couldn't obtain certain loans again, but without serious consequences for the exhibition[130].

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[127] Jean-Hubert Martin, "Interview with Jean-Hubert Martin, one of the curators of the exhibitions Paris — Moscow and Moscow — Paris," interview by Andrei Erofeev and Sasha Obukhova, *Russian Art Archive Network*, November 18, 2020, https://russianartarchive.net/en/research/interview-with-jean-hubert-martin-one-of-the-curators-of-the-exhibitions-paris-moscow-and-moscow-paris.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Jo Anna Isaak, "Moscow - Paris 1900 - 1930," *Art Monthly*, July 1, 1981, 9.
[130] Ibid.

The real controversy in the Moscow exhibition was caused by the figure of Leon Trotsky. In the Paris exhibition there was a vitrine dedicated to Trotsky, and Soviet organizers refused to install it in Moscow. Martin claimed that because of that some French curators refused to come to the opening of the exhibition in Moscow.[131]

Shifting to the "Moscow-Paris 1900-1930" exhibition catalog, it is important to clarify that my analysis includes limited sections of the text such as: "Plastic arts", "Applied arts", "Agitprop", "Posters", "Theater and Ballet". The latter was included because in the previous analysis set stage design appeared to be important in the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon. The following sections were omitted: "Literature", "Music", "Cinema", "Photography". The analysis will also include both French and Soviet versions of catalogs. Despite the lack of crucial differences between them in relation to my topic of analysis, the usage of both catalogs revealed a more detailed representation of the Russian avant-garde in the framework of the "Moscow-Paris 1900-1930" exhibition.

Overall, the analysis of the catalog revealed that there were five main strategies of the construction of the Russian avant-garde canon. First of all, Moscow-centered geography played an important role in the construction of the canon. Most art groups, exhibitions, educational institutions and professional activities of artists were associated with Moscow. Secondly, the lack of differentiation of the national identity of artists who worked in Paris, apart from Armenian and Georgian ones, also contributed to the homogenous image of artists from the Russian Empire. Thirdly, the emphasis on the role of both ancient and quite recent

[131] Jean-Hubert Martin, "Interview with Jean-Hubert Martin, one of the curators of the exhibitions Paris — Moscow and Moscow — Paris," interview by Andrei Erofeev and Sasha Obukhova, *Russian Art Archive Network*, November 18, 2020, https://russianartarchive.net/en/research/interview-with-jean-hubert-martin-one-of-the-curators-of-the-exhibitions-paris-moscow-and-moscow-paris.

Russian traditions, such as Russian literature of the 19th century, also contributed to the construction of specifically Russian avant-garde canon. Fourthly, essentializing descriptions of Russian artists, such as the urge to push everything to the extreme, was another widely used strategy in the formulation of the canon. Lastly, the common experience of the October revolution was mentioned as an important factor that determined the development of post-revolutionary avant-garde in a certain way, which accompanied the lack of clear differentiation between Soviet and Russian artists after the October revolution. Below I will provide detailed examples for each of these strategies.

According to the "Moscow-Paris, 1900-1930" exhibition catalogs, the beginning of the Russian avant-garde dated back to activities of "The World of Art", which was established in 1898, and symbolist art group "Blue Rose", which emerged after a homonymous exhibition in 1907 in Moscow[132]. The end of the avant-garde was attributed to the 1920s in the Russian version of the catalog. It was mentioned that "leftist artists" lost the fight for artistic hegemony to proponents of figurative art, that were represented by AHRR (Associatsiya hudozhnikov revolutsionnoy Rossii [Association of artists of revolutionary Russia]), OST (Obshestvo stankovistov [Society of easel painters]), OMH (Obshestvo moskovskih hudozhnikov [Society of Moscow artists]) and others[133]. It is important to notice that in both catalogs there are two the most prominent definitions of modernist artists: "avant-garde artists" and "leftists artists". However, the latter is used more frequently.

Starting from the introduction of both catalogs, the explicitly national framing of represented art becomes obvious, since one of the main aims of the exhibition is to demonstrate and even

[132] Centre Georges Pompidou and Soviet Union, eds., *Paris-Moscou, 1900-1930* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979), 17.
[133] Centre Georges Pompidou and Soviet Union, eds., *Moskva — Parizh, 1900 – 1930*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Sovetskiy Khudozhnik, 1981), 29.

compare specific features of two national schools and subsequently their national characters. Despite the fact that in the Soviet case revolution was believed to transcend the divisions between national schools and different styles, the definition of "national school" was still central for the catalog and the project of exhibition overall[134]. In the Soviet case the definition of national schools, especially in the beginning of the catalog, appeared to be quite bewildering, because Russia and the Soviet Union in many cases were mentioned simultaneously[135]. However, the analysis of the whole catalog revealed that representatives of non-Russian Soviet republics were always mentioned in accompaniment with their national affiliations. For example, among Ukrainian Soviet artists there were Mikhail Boychuk, Anatoly Petritskiy and Zinovy Tolkachev[136]. Considering the pre-revolutionary period, Armenian and Georgian heritage as sources of inspiration for Martiros Sarayan and Georgy Yakulov, Lado Gudiashvili and Niko Pirosmani respectively were noted. In addition, Sarayan was called the leading Armenian artist[137]. One of the most outstanding details about the Russian catalog is the claim that, unlike in France, most people who are considered to be representatives of Russian art were Russian, and despite that, they "had the talent to express universal feeling of art"[138].

Another important leitmotif of the catalog corresponds to the name of the exhibition. Moscow and Paris were repeatedly defined as two cities without which avant-garde as we know it would not develop[139]. Unsurprisingly, the narrative about the Russian avant-garde in this catalog is extremely Moscow-centered. Other places in the Soviet Union were mentioned significantly less frequently. For example, Kyiv appeared in relation to the activities of

[134] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 8 – 11.
[135] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 6 – 8.
[136] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 114.
[137] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 43.
[138] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 15.
[139] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 8.

Alexandra Exter[140], Smolensk was related to the activities of El Lissitzky[141], Vitebsk was mentioned along with UNOVIS (Utverditeli novogo iskusstva [Affirmers of the New Art]) and Marc Chagall[142]. However, neither Kyiv nor Vitebsk were put in Ukrainian or Belarusian contexts. Predictably, Petrograd also played an important role in the narrative about the emergence of the Russian avant-garde as well as Paris, since interconnections between Moscow and Paris's artistic life were one of the main focus of the exhibition. There was an illustrative quote by the unknown Soviet organizer of the applied art exhibition in Paris in 1925:

> In Europe there are only two interesting cities: Moscow and Paris. The first represents revolutionary dissatisfaction. The second represents well-fed joy[143].

With regard to the role of particular cities in the development of the Russian avant-garde, there were several common types of institutional settings that appeared in the catalog: private collections of Moscow-based merchants such as Morozov and Schukin[144], who introduced French modernism to various artists of the Russian Empire, art groups, exhibitions, theaters, official Soviet art institutions, production sites, and even one cafe. Art groups that were mentioned in the catalog were mostly based in Moscow and Petrograd. The latter was represented by "The World of Art" and "The Union of Youth"[145], and the former by "Blue Rose", "Jack of diamonds", "Golden Fleece", "Donkey's tail"[146] and "LEF" (Leftist Front of Art)[147]. Vitebsk was mentioned in relation to UNOVIS. Exhibitions that were organized by these groups also appeared in the catalog along with its main participants.

[140] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 43.
[141] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 115.
[142] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 113.
[143] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 76.
[144] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 26.
[145] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 43.
[146] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 14.
[147] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 246.

Also, there were exhibitions of various artists from the Russian empire that took place in Paris in 1906 (Kandinsky, Petrov-Vodkin, Kuznetsov, Vrubel, Somov, Roerich)[148], 1914 (78 artists from the Russian empire, including Burliuk brothers, Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Puni, Alexandra Exter, Mikhail Matushin, Alexander Archipenko, Baranov-Rossine, Marc Chagall, Natan Altman etc). The exhibition of Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov in 1914 was also mentioned[149]. In addition, the constructivist exhibition "5x5=25" organized in Moscow in 1921 appeared in the catalog, along with its five participants Alexandra Exter, Lyubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Vesnin[150].

Shifting to the theater section, it is important to notice that "Russian seasons" curated by Diaghilev were mentioned in relation to stage set designs by Alexander Benois, Leon Bakst, Nikolay Roerich, Alexander Golovin, Natalia Goncharova, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky[151]. The Kamerny Theater in Moscow, established in 1914, also frequently appeared along with such artists as Alexandra Exter, Georgy Yakulov, Alexander Vesnin, Konstantin Medunistky[152]. Meyerhold State Theater and Theater of the Revolution, led by Meyerhold from 1922 to 1924, were also mentioned in relation to "leftist artists" such as Malevich, Golovin, Vladimir Dmitriev (who was under influence of Tatlin's counter-reliefs), Pavel Filonov, Iosif Shkolnik, Lyubov Popova, El Lissitzky, Natan Altman and Alexander Rodchenko[153]. It was also mentioned that Dobuzhinsky, Altman, Vesnin and Popova were involved in stage set design for so-called mass spectacles, organized in public places in Petrograd, Moscow, Kazan,

[148] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 52.
[149] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 60 – 62.
[150] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 28.
[151] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 54.
[152] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 140 – 142.
[153] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 138 – 142.

Orenburg and different Siberian cities. Mass spectacles that were set up in Ukraine and Azerbaijan were mentioned separately[154].

Official Soviet art institutions also played a significant role in the narrative presented in the "Moscou-Paris 1900-1930" exhibition. In particular, VKHUTEMAS (Vysshiye Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiye Masterskiye [Higher Art and Technical Studios]), GAHN (Gosudarstvennaya Akademiya Khudozhestvennyh Nauk [State Academy of Art Sciences]) and INKHUK (Institut Khudozhestvennoy Kultury [Institute of Artistic Culture], all based in Moscow, were mentioned, as well as Petrograd-based GINKHUK (Gosudarstvennyj Institut Khudozhestvennoy Kultury [State Institute of Artistic Culture]. These institutions were associated with the objective analysis of art and such figures as Malevich and his followers, Lissitzky, Nikolay Suetin, Ilya Chashnik and Matushin. The influence of the founder of constructivism Vladimir Tatlin on the educational programs of VKHUTEMAS was also emphasized[155].

The involvement of "leftist" artists in the production of different goods and association with particular production sites was also outlined. For example, Sergei Chekhonin, the former member of "The World of Art" was mentioned in relation to the design of agit-porcelain in Petrograd at the former imperial porcelain factory. Another artist that was heavily involved in the design of agit-porcelain was Alexandra Schekatihina–Pototskaya. Overall, the chapter dedicated to agit-porcelain was predominantly centered around activities in Petrograd[156]. In the French version of the catalog VKHUTEMAS was compared to German Bauhaus, and the involvement of avant-garde artists in the design of different objects was observed[157]. For

[154] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 113.
[155] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 74 – 76.
[156] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 120 – 121.
[157] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 246.

example, furniture and interior design were associated with Tatlin and Rodchenko, clothes design with Tatlin, Polova, Stepanova and Rodchenko, crockery design with Tatlin, small architectural forms with Gustav Clucis, Alexey Gun, Anton Lavinsky and Alexandra Exter[158].

The distinct section of the catalog was dedicated to so-called agitprop and included descriptions of different activities aimed at the establishment of new Soviet hegemony. For instance, the decoration of cities was attributed to Alexander Vesnin, Alexander Kuprin, Lyubov Popova and Alexander Osmerkin in Moscow, UNOVIS and Chagall in Vitebsk, Altman, Vladimir Lebedev, Petrov-Vodkin, and Kandinsky in Petrograd. Artists who were involved in this activity in Ukraine were mentioned separately and were represented by Boychuk, Petritskiy and Tolkachev[159]. The production of propagandist posters was also thoroughly covered in the catalog. The project "OKNA ROSTA", which mostly functioned in Moscow and was famous for the usage of the stencil for the distribution of propagandist posters, was associated with poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and artists Mikhail Cheremnykh, Ivan Malutin[160]. Other creators of posters that worked in Petrograd included Lebedev, Vladimir Kozlinsky, Leo Brodaty. Lissitzky was associated with the production of posters in Smolensk[161]. Alexander Rodchenko was mentioned as one of the leaders of the agitprop movement, who created posters for films directed by Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov[162]. Also, there was a section dedicated to pre-revolutionary posters, represented by Evgeniy Lansere, Leo Bakst, Ivan Bilibin, Mikhail Vrubel etc. However, the production of posters in the imperial period was proclaimed underdeveloped in comparison to the Soviet period[163]. Lastly, one of the peculiar and comparatively unique site that was mentioned in relation to

[158] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 74.
[159] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 113 – 114.
[160] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 115.
[161] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 115.
[162] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 127.
[163] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 126.

avant-garde activities in Moscow was “Pittoresk Cafe”, which was decorated by Yakulov, Tatlin, Rodchenko, Leo Bruni, Udaltsova and Sophia Dimshits-Tolstaya[164].

Considering that the exhibition was dedicated to the exploration of artistic interconnections between Moscow and Paris, Paris as a site of development of the Russian avant-garde was also mentioned. Apart from various exhibitions that were already mentioned above, the role of the so-called “Russian colony” of artists, that lived in Paris in the 1910s, was emphasized in relation to Alexander Archipenko, Sergei Bulakowski, Marc Chagall, David Shterenberg, Leopold Survazh, Natan Altman, Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, Osip Zadkin, Alexander Exter and Sonya Delone[165]. It was very notable that despite the fact that Survazh and Delone were born in the Russian empire, later they were not included in the traditional canon of the Russian avant-garde. In this particular exhibition their artworks were displayed because of the accessibility of French loans. And the same is somewhat relevant for Archipenko and Baranov-Rossine, whose works are mainly kept in Western collections[166].

The Russian academy, established by Marie Vasiliev in Paris, was also highlighted as an important site for the development of the Russian avant-garde[167]. The role of particular Western artists in the development of the Russian avant-garde was also reflected. For instance, the emergence of Suprematism was described by the following scheme: Van Gogh — Matiss — Kandinsky — Malevich. In the case of Constructivism the genealogy was the following: Cezanne — Piscasso — Tatlin — Rodchenko[168].

[164] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 70.
[165] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 58 – 59.
[166] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 307 – 310.
[167] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 56.
[168] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 76.

The role of Paris in the formation of a specifically national dimension of art, produced by artists from the Russian Empire, was also observed, and especially with regard to the exhibition of 1909, after which French critics noted that artists from the Russian Empire lacked their own unique approach to art, and were rather imitators of universal European tendencies, particularly of Cezanne and fauvism[169]. In response, as was written in the catalog, Malevich, David Burliuk and Yakulov claimed the necessity to reject Western influence and turn to the East, because "Russians are more Eurasians than Europeans". Goncharova said that cubism was equally a Russian phenomenon as well as a French phenomenon. She also claimed that Russian art was always renewed due to Eastern heritage, and in spite of "vulgarizing Western influence"[170].

Overall, the influence of Russian traditions such as lubok, Orthodox icons and church architecture was thoroughly covered in the catalog. For example, such representatives of "The World of Art" as Roerich, Kustodiev, Benois, Bakst, Dobuzhinsky were proclaimed inventors of the "new Russian style". Pavel Kuznetsov and Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin were mentioned as artists who drew their inspiration from old Russian frescos and Orthodox icons, Nikolay Sapunov and Sergei Sudeikin turned to Russian folk art, Aristarkh Lentulov was inspired by old Moscow architecture. The art group "Jack of Diamonds" was associated with lubok tradition, on the basis of which they worked in neoprimitivism style, which was presented in the catalog as "Russian analogue of expressionism". Larionov was described as the artist who looked at the world through the lense of Russian folk art. It was also mentioned that Chagall, Malevich and Tatlin were influenced by these artistic experiments with national emphasis, and that in his early years Tatlin was actively engaged in the study of ancient Russian art[171].

[169] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 26.
[170] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 55.
[171] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 43 – 45.

One of the most intriguing details of the catalog is the description of the Monument to the Third International (or Tatlin's Tower) because it was related to the Russian tradition of constructing buildings in order to commemorate the important event, instead of erecting monuments[172]. Filonov and Kandinsky were not associated with any particular Russian tradition, however, were proclaimed as unique artists, who had no analogs in Europe[173].

The embeddedness of leftist artists in Russian tradition was also attributed to the fact that they followed the aspirations of Russian artists and writers, who were active in the 19th century. In the beginning of the section dedicated to agitprop it was stated that the tradition of perceiving art as "the teacher of life and the bearer of ideology and moral norms"[174] emerged already in the 19th century, and was continued after the October revolution. Also, critical ideas of Leo Tolstoy, Nikolay Chernyshevsky and Maxim Gorky about "art for art's sake" were outlined in relation to early art-nouveau experiments of "The World of Art". On the contrary, suprematists were framed as followers of the ideas of famous Russian writers[175].

As in the case of critical reviews on "The First Russian Exhibition" (1922) catalog, there were lots of generalizing statements about the national character of the Russian avant-garde. For instance, the Russian tendency to push everything to the extreme, which was already mentioned in the previous chapter, appeared with regard to non-objective art. It was proclaimed that the Russian interpretation of synthetic cubism was inspired by a spiritual approach, which implied the attempt to transform human consciousness in order to reinvent the whole world. One of the illustrative quotes was the following:

[172] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 334.
[173] *Paris – Moscou, 1900 – 1930,* 45.
[174] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 108.
[175] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 13.

> [Russian artists] looked out for various ways to express ideas of spiritual development [...] Russian culture was too obsessed with seeking truth and goodness[176].

In comparison to "The First Russian Exhibition" and "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922", "Paris-Moscou, 1900-1930" elaborated on already mentioned strategies of incorporating artists into the Russian avant-garde. If "The First Russian Exhibition" catalog mentioned only a few Moscow or Petrograd-based art groups, the publication dedicated to "Paris-Moscou, 1900-1930" exhibition broadened the range of different institutional sites and activities associated with these cities. In addition, "Paris-Moscou, 1900-1930" continued the pattern of putting emphasis on the role of Russian traditions, even quite modern such as Russian literature of the 19th century, in the formation of specifically the Russian dimension of the avant-garde. Appeals to the Eastern character of the Russian avant-garde and essentializing statements about national character are also present in the catalog, reminding of critical reviews on "The First Russian Exhibition", as well as the role of the October revolution in the development of the Russian avant-garde in a unique way. This catalog also demonstrates how the focus of the particular exhibition might modify the canon. The representation of artists, who spent most of their active lives outside of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, was determined by the fact that "Paris-Moscou, 1900-1930" used lots of loans from French collections. As a result, artists such Survazh and Delone, who are in most cases not included in the Russian avant-garde canon, appeared within one.

"Art of Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection" (1981)

In 1981, the Guggenheim Museum organized the exhibition "Art of Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection", which became possible because the main collector of Russian and Soviet avant-garde George Costakis left the Soviet Union with a

[176] *Moskva – Parizh, 1900 – 1930,* 26 – 28.

small, but still insightful part of his collection to the West. As Rowell noted in the catalog of "Art of Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection", exhibitions and publications dedicated to pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde proliferated during the 1970s, however the lack of materials about theories, art groups and particular artists complicated the understanding of the movement. The arrival of the part of George Costakis's collection to the West shed significant light on pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde, especially since Costakis, as Rowell wrote, relied only on primary or confirmed secondary sources[177].

It is notable that the catalog relies on Costakis' ideas about the classification and periodization of pre-Soviet and Soviet avant-garde. According to Costaki, the Russian avant-garde began to emerge in 1910 with the establishment of "Union of Youth" and its first exhibition in Petrograd, where artworks by David and Vladimir Burliuk, Natalia Goncharova, Pavel Filonov, Mikhail Larionov and Alexandra Exter were represented. Another important event was the establishment of "Jack of Diamonds", who held its first exhibition in Moscow in 1910 with the same artists and also displayed works by Wasiliy Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Aristarkh Lentulov, Alexei Morgunov. Costakis, as mentioned in the catalog, supposed that the Russian avant-garde flourished for two decades, from 1910 to 1930. In accordance with his periodization, Zander Rudenstine dated the end of the movement back to the 1930s. First of all, she mentioned that significant organized opposition against avant-garde rose within the artistic community already in the 1920s. She wrote:

[177] Margit Rowell and Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection.* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1981), 15.

> Many artists felt that the avant-garde's formal, abstract approach was far too limited in its appeal, that its work was essentially unintelligible and that the complete break with the past advocated by the Section of Fine Arts[178] was destructive rather than regenerative.[179]

Then Lenin, who was in power until 1924, insisted on the reduction of the power of the avant-garde group. The early 1930s was marked by ideological attacks on individual artists such as Pavel Filonov, Alexander Rochenko, Alexander Drevin and the resignation of the cultural minister Anatolii Lunacharsky, who, to say the least, was tolerant of the avant-garde movement. In 1931 the Russian Association of Proletarian Artists formulated the conception of art as "a revolutionary weapon in the class struggle". In 1934 Socialist Realism was adopted as the exclusive style for all forms of Soviet art. At that point, as Zander Rudenstine argued, the era of the avant-garde ended, and this periodization corresponded to the widespread idea about the fate of the Russian avant-garde[180].

We could claim that periodization, based on Costakis' observations and represented in the catalog of "Art of Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection", is somewhat typical, whereas the list of participants of the movement, according to Costakis, is certainly more diverse. Zander Rudenstine cited his words:

> As he has often repeated: "The army [of the avant-garde] was huge. Most art historians whom I met as I began to learn about the avant-garde told me of a dozen artists, or at most fifteen: Tatlin was mentioned, Malevich, Larionov, Goncharova, Exter, Kandinsky, Chagall, Lissitzky, and a few others. But these art historians had too narrow a view. There were Generals, Majors, Colonels, Captains, Sergeants, and — not to be forgotten — many foot soldiers. If you forget these, you do not understand the avant-garde. I collected the work of about fifty-eight artists; I'm sure that there were many more; probably three hundred.[181]

[178] In the early years of the Soviet Union Wasiliy Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, Nikolai Punin and other modernists were placed at the top of the new artistic hierarchy — the Government's Section of Fine Arts — and were asked to "construct and organize all art schools and the entire art life of the country."
[179] Zander Rudenstine, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 9 – 10.
[180] Zander Rudenstine, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 9 – 10.
[181] Zander Rudenstine, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 12.

According to the catalog, 38 different artists were represented at the exhibition in the Guggenheim museum, and this selection was quite diverse in comparison, for example, to the "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922", organized in 1962 at London's Grosvenor Gallery. The latter displayed only the most famous artists such as Malevich, Tatlin, Chagal etc. On the contrary, at Costakis' exhibition some already canonized representatives of the Russian avant-garde such as Chagal, Goncharova or Larionov were not shown, whereas other less famous painters were embedded in the canon. And there were several strategies, according to which, they were integrated into the Russian avant-garde movement.

As opposed to other analyzed catalogs, there was a total lack of emphasis on the Russianness of the avant-garde. Nothing was written about the national character of this art. At the same time no other kind of avant-garde apart from Russian or Russian-Soviet was mentioned in the catalog, therefore all art groups, artists, artworks, that appeared in the publication, were framed as Russian by default without special descriptions of their Russianness. Rather, institutional sites in Moscow and Petrograd appeared to be the main unifying factor among these figures.

First and the least prominently mentioned unifying factor is the experience of visiting Moscow art collectors such as Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morosov, who kept lots of artworks of French painters such as Matisse, Gauguin, Cezanne. In this context Ivan Kliun, Kazimir Malevich[182] and Varvara Stepanova[183] were mentioned. The role of pre-revolutionary collectors was also emphasized in the catalogs analyzed above.

[182] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 37.
[183] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 16.

The next unifying factor was exhibitions either those that influenced artists or those in which they participated. For example, it was stated that "Golden Fleece" exhibitions of 1908 and 1909 were important for Malevich and Kluin as a source of inspiration[184]. However, the main role of exhibitions in the establishment of the Russian avant-garde canon within the catalog of "Art of Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection" was related to the participation of certain artists in particular exhibitions that mostly took place in Moscow and Petrograd.

For example, exhibitions of "Jack of Diamonds", which took place mostly in Moscow, were mentioned in relation to Kandinsky, Malevich, Lentulov, Alexei Morgunov, Ivan Kluin, Olga Rozanova, Nadezhda Udaltsova. "Donkey's Tail" exhibition, which was organized in Moscow in 1912, was related to Malevich, Tatlin, Filonov, Morgunov. Other exhibitions that were prominently mentioned in the catalog were ones organized by "Union of Youth", Petrograd-based art group, mostly active between 1909 and 1914. Among its participants, David and Vladimir Burliuk, Goncharova, Filonov, Larionov, Exter, Morgunov, Elena Guro, Kluin, Malevich, Ivan Puni and Tatlin were mentioned. And not all of them necessarily belonged to the group itself. Another exhibition that unites artists, mentioned in the catalog, in a single canon is "0.10 exhibition", organized in Petrograd in 1915, that is Malevich's farewell to Cubo-futurism and the introduction of the Suprematist period. Popova, Rozanova, Kluin, Tatlin and obviously Malevich were mentioned as participants of this exhibition. Also, Morgunov, Tatlin, Popova, Puni, Kluin, Exter were represented as participants of the futurist exhibition "Tramway V", organized in Petrograd in 1915. "The Store Exhibition", taken place in Moscow in 1916, was mentioned along with such artists as Popova, Exter, Kluin, Malevich, Morgunov, Popova and Rodchenko[185].

[184] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 37.
[185] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 314 – 318.

Post-revolutionary exhibitions appeared no less frequently in this catalog. For example, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Sixteenth and Nineteenth State Exhibitions, all of which took place in 1919 in Moscow. Among its participants Kluin, Varvara Bubnova, Morgunov, Rodchenko, Popova, Varvara Stepanova were mentioned. "5x5=25" exhibition, organized in Moscow in 1921, and conceptualized as "farewell to pure painting" in the process of transition to productivist art, also was noted in the catalog. "The First Russian Exhibition" in Berlin (1922), which was already analyzed in this research, appeared to be the most prominently mentioned in the catalog and evidently crucial for the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon. In total, 20 out of 38 artists, whose artworks were represented at the exhibition, were mentioned as participants of the First Russian Exhibition. Among them were Varvara Bubnova, Vasiliy Chekrygin, Alexander Drevin, Pavel Filonov, Gustav Klucis, Ivan Kliun, Ivan Kudriashov, El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevich, Konstantin Medunetsky, Petr Miturich, Solomon Nikritin, Lubov Popova, Ivan Puni, Alexander Rodchenko, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, Vladimir Tatlin, Nadezhda Udaltsova and others[186].

As was mentioned above, many of the exhibitions were associated with particular rather informal art groups, such as "Jack of diamonds", "Donkey's Tail", "Union of Youth" or "Supremus" ("0.10 exhibition"). However, after the Bolshevik revolution many art groups were institutionalized on the governmental level, such as UNOVIS (Utverditeli novogo iskusstva [Affirmers of the New Art]) at the Vitebsk Art School or Obmokhu (Obshchestvo molodykh hudozhnikov [Society of Young Artists]) at SVOMAS (Svobodnye gosudarstvennye hudozhestvennye masterskie [Free State Art Studios]). Both UNOVIS and

[186] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 314 – 318.

Obmokhu organized exhibitions. The former displayed artworks by Ilia Chasnik and Gustav Klucis. In the latter Rodchenko, Vladimir Stenberg and Medunetsky participated[187].

Overall, belonging to particular institutions, most of which were established on the governmental level, was also an important factor in the formation of the canon. And most of these institutions were located in Moscow or Saint-Petersburg. Among them were SVOMAS, PETROMAS (Petrograd branch of SVOMAS), VKHUTEMAS, INKHUK, GINKHUK and IZO NARKOMPROS.

SVOMAS was established in 1918 in Moscow, replacing the Stroganov Art School and the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. PETROSVOMAS in Petrograd was opened a year later. With regard to the main Moscow branch of SVOMAS Klucis, Kluin, Ivan Kudriashov, Malevich[188], Naum Gabo, Antonie Pevsner[189], Konstantin Vialov[190], Lentulov, Morgunov, Alexei Babichev, Popova, Rozanova, Sergei Senkin, Vladimir Stenberg, Tatlin, Udaltsova were mentioned. PETROSVOMAS was represented by its leading figure Matiushin and accompanied by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Boris, Ksenia and Maria Ender[191].

In 1919 SVOMAS was replaced by VKHUTEMAS[192]. In the catalog the latter was traditionally compared to Bauhaus. Among its associates, as mentioned in the catalog, were Klucis, Tatlin, Nikolay Ladovsky, Vialov, Babichev, Chashnik, Alexander Drevin, Exter, Kluin, Lissitzky, Nikritin, Popova, Mikhail Plaksin, Rodchenko, Senkin, Stepanova, Udaltsova. Another prominently mentioned institution was INKHUK, founded in 1920

[187] Rowell, Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia, 314 – 318.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 160.
[190] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 213.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 23.

originally under the direction of Kandinsky. Its main aim was to formulate an ideological and theoretical approach to the arts based on scientific research and analysis. However, in less than a year Kandinsky left INKHUK because his approach turned out to be too psychological and subjective for other members of the institute who were more inclined towards objective analysis of form, constructivism and, later, the art of production[193]. Among them were, for example, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Babichev, Popova, Exter, Kluin, Osip Brik, Boris Arvatov, Nikolay Tarabukin, Vesnin, Lissitzky, Ioganson, Boris Korolev, Ladovsky, Medunetsky, Stenberg, Drevin, Nikolai Grinberg, Klucis, Malevich, Boris, Ksenia and Maria Ender. The Petrograd branch of INKHUK that was called GINKHUK was represented by Ender, Grinberg, Matiushin, Chashnik and Tatlin[194].

Finally, IZO NARKOMPROS, the art branch of People's Commissariat for Enlightenment which functioned as the Soviet Ministry of Culture, was related to various artists represented at the exhibition in Guggenheim. Malevich, Bubnova, Morgunov and Udaltsova were mentioned as ones who participated in its work without specific details, but there were more detailed accounts about Tatlin, who was the head of IZO NARKOMPROS, Kluin, director of the Central Exhibition Bureau of the Narkompros, Rozanova, who was in charge of Subsection of Applied Art of IZO NARKOMPROS[195].

Another way of positioning artists in the Russian context was referring to their activities that took place in Moscow or Petrograd, or in cooperation with representatives of Russian culture such as writers. For example, it was mentioned that Stepanova and Popova were working at the First State Textile Factory in Moscow, designing patterns for printed fabric[196], and

[193] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 25.
[194] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 314 – 318.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 32.

Malevich designed the pamphlet for the Committees for Peasant Poverty in 1918[197]. Klucis designed a group of "Radio Orators" for the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922, also organized in Moscow[198]. Rozanova, Malevich and Filonov's cooperation with Russian avant-garde poets such as Velimir Khlebnikov on book illustrations was mentioned, as well as Popova, Vesnin, Exter, Medunetsky, Stenberg and Vialov's experiences of creating decorations for the Kamerny Theater and the Theater of the Revolution in Moscow[199].

In addition, rather informal communication between different artists was reflected in the catalog, which served as a justification of their belonging to the same canon. For example, the informal "Electroorganism" art group, moved from Suprematism towards a cosmic form of abstraction. "Electroorganism" was established in 1922 and included Ivan Kudriashev, Klement Redko, Mikhail Plaksin and Solomon Nikritin[200]. The friendship between Kluin and Malevich[201], Kluin and Rozanova[202] was also accentuated. In the context of artistic activities in Vitebsk cooperation between Malevich, Klucis and Lissitzky were highlighted[203]. The figure of Chagall also appeared in the catalog in relation to the Vitebsk Art School, however, none of his works were included in the catalog, as well as his short biography[204]. The same is relevant for modernist sculptor Alexander Archipenko, whose influence on various avant-garde artists was outlined, however, he was mentioned as a specifically Ukrainian artist and was not represented by any of his works[205].

[197] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 166.
[198] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 259.
[199] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 314 – 318.
[200] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 305.
[201] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 115.
[202] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 124.
[203] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 175.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Rowell, *Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia,* 20.

Overall, the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon in the exhibition catalog "Art of Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection" was not relied on the essentialization of the national character of these artworks, but rather on the belonging to particular institutions, art groups and even informal social circles, as well as participation in certain exhibitions, propagandist and productive activities. It is important that most of these institutional sites, events and activities were associated with either Moscow or Petrograd, two capitals of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Vitebsk appeared to be the salient exception in the narrative, centered on Moscow and Petrograd. In comparison to previously analyzed catalogs, the role of Soviet art institutions in the Russian avant-garde was represented in more detail. Another observable feature is the fact that most artists, represented at this exhibition, participated in "The First Russian Exhibition" and it was intentionally highlighted in the catalog, which proves the importance of "The First Russian Exhibition" in the canon formation. Lastly, it is important to notice that Costaki brought his collection from the Soviet Union, therefore the selection of represented works and artists was heavily determined by that factor. It is a striking contrast with the "Paris-Moscow, 1900 – 1930" exhibition, which displayed many artworks, created by emigrants born in the Russian empire, because of the accessibility of French loans.

"The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" (2016)

The last chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the analysis of "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog, which is supposed to represent post-Soviet perspective on the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon. In order to capture a more established narrative about the Russian avant-garde, promoted by Russian cultural institutions, this particular exhibition was chosen. First of all, it took place in 2016 in Vienna, which was quite recently. Secondly, the main lender of artworks for this exhibition was the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg. As the director of the State Russian Museum Vladimir Gusev noted, the richness of the collection of the Russian avant-garde was determined by the fact many items from GINKHUK back to the 1920s were kept in the State Russian Museum[206]. However, loans from European museums, such as Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Kunstmuseum Bern, Centre Pompidou in Paris etc, were used as well. Thirdly, at least half of contributors of the catalog came from Russia, as well as one of the two main curators of the exhibition. Lastly, "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" aimed at covering the phenomena of the Russian avant-garde as a whole, unlike many other exhibitions, especially in Russia, that were usually dedicated to specific artists, periods or branches of the movement such as Suprematism or Constructivism. According to the catalog, "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" covered the period from 1905 to 1935, until modernist experiments in the Soviet Union were prohibited.

"The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog comprises descriptions of biographies of artists, a short analysis of particular artworks, and information about the

[206] Andrey Zolotov, "V Venu privezli 130 glavnyh proizvedenij russkih avangardistov," Rossiyskaya Gazeta, February 26, 2016, https://rg.ru/2016/02/26/v-albertinu-privezli-130-glavnyh-proizvedenij-russkih-avangardistov.html.

main stylistic branches of the Russian avant-garde. In addition, it includes five essays by well-known scholars of the Russian avant-garde John E. Bowlt and Boris Groys, a specialist in Russian history Helmut Altrichter, and two main curators of the exhibition, associate director of the State Russian Museum Evgenia Petrova and the head of Albertina museum Klaus Albrecht Schroder. The contributions of John E. Bowlt and Boris Groys represent additional interest, because of their unconventional and even poetic approaches to the movement, whereas other sections follow more traditional ways of writing about the Russian avant-garde.

Looking back at the previous analysis, it became obvious that the narrative about the Russian avant-garde, represented in "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog, was very similar to earlier publications. For example, the list of the most influential representatives of the movement corresponds to "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922" organized in 1962 at London's Grosvenor Gallery. In the case of the latest exhibition Chagall, Goncharova, Kandinsky, Larionov, Lissitzky, Malevich, Rodchenko were mentioned[207]. The only difference, in comparison to "Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art 1902–1922", was that Archipenko was replaced by Rodchenko. The former was mentioned only in relation to "Parisians Russians" along with Baranov-Rossine, Survazh, Delone, however, none of their artworks were displayed[208].

Among strategies of inclusion of artists in the Russian avant-garde canon, evident in "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog, were already observed affiliations with art groups, exhibitions and institutions, mostly based in Moscow, Petrograd and Vitebsk, activities often associated with the Soviet authorities, personal connections

[207] Elena Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes* (Saint Petersburg, Munich: Palace Editions in cooperation with Hirmer Verlag, 2016), 7.
[208] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 124.

among each other, cooperation with modernist Russian poets such Alexei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov, theater directors such as Meyerhold and Sergei Dyagilev. Most biographical details of such kind were already covered in previous chapters, however, the latest catalog introduced new figures in the same fashion and revealed some new information about the institutional affiliations of the most famous figures of the Russian avant-garde canon. For instance, it was mentioned that after the beginning of the attack on formalist experiments Malevich taught at the Kyiv Art Institute, the only place where he allegedly was allowed to work[209]. Among new figures of the Russian avant-garde were Wasiliy Kuptsov, student of Pavel Filonov[210], alumni of VKHUTEMAS Vladimir Malagis, who was influenced by Petrov-Vodkin[211], creators of propagandist posters and street decorations in Petrograd Mikhail Vexter and Arthur Klettenberg[212], Tatlin's follower Sophia Dymshits-Tolstaya[213], creator of agit-porcelain Nataliia Danko[214]. Wladyslaw Strezminski, Yuri Vasnetsov[215] and Vera Ermolaeva[216] appeared in relation to UNOVIS and Malevich's influence, and Vasnetsov was also associated with GINKHUK. Alexey Jawlensky, who spent most of his life in Germany, also appeared in the exhibition. According to the catalog, he was influenced by Kandinsky, and was the student of one of the most known "Wanderers" Ilya Repin[217]. Also, it is important to notice that all artworks by Jawlensky, represented at the exhibition came from the Albertina collection, which explains its appearance in the Russian avant-garde canon, despite the fact that the artist spent most of his life outside of the country[218].

[209] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 272.
[210] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 292.
[211] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 260.
[212] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 256.
[213] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 254.
[214] John E. Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass" in *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes, ed.* Petrova (Saint Petersburg, Munich: Palace Editions in cooperation with Hirmer Verlag, 2016), 41.
[215] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 240.
[216] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 262.
[217] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 194.
[218] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 305.

Another prominent strategy, that was already observed in the earlier analysis, corresponded to the implementation of popular national traditions into the artistic style. With regard to this strategy, the connection of Malevich's suprematist artworks and Kandinsky's abstraction to Orthodox icons was traced[219]. Chagall's art as a symbolic interplay between Western modernism, Jewish and Russian folk traditions, Judaism and Christianity was also outlined[220]. Specific national qualities of whole artistic styles such as Futurism and Cubo-Futurism were also attributed to the influence of Russian folk art. For instance, it was mentioned that avant-gardists quickly turned away from Futurism and its emphasis on the supremacy of movement and urban life, because folk art and icon painting were closer to them[221]. Whereas Russian Cubo-Futurism was called "idiosyncratic and contradictory" because of the synthesis of the national and international[222].

A rather new approach towards positioning artists in the Russian avant-garde canon, introduced in "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog, corresponds to the depiction of Russian realities. For example, Boris Grigoriev, who spent most of his life outside of Russia, was mentioned along with his two series of paintings "Rasseya", dedicated to Russian peasantry, and "Faces of Russia"[223]. Malevich's depiction of allegedly Russian peasantry also appeared in the catalog[224], as well as Petrov-Vodkin's artworks that displayed landscapes in Russia, Volga river etc[225]. Yuri Vasnetsov was

[219] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 47.
[220] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 136 – 142.
[221] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 112.
[222] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 47.
[223] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 168.
[224] Elena Petrova, "The Richness and Variety of Russian Art in the First Third of the Twentieth Century" in *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes, ed.* Petrova (Saint Petersburg, Munich: Palace Editions in cooperation with Hirmer Verlag, 2016), 20.
[225] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 176.

mentioned as the one who managed to incorporate Russian subjects even in Constructivism[226]. In the special section of the catalog, dedicated to portraiture as a genre of the Russian avant-garde, it was stated that the history of the movement could be read, based on portraits of its famous representatives of other genres[227]. With regard to that, Altman's portrait of poet Anna Akhmatova depicted as "Chekhov's woman" was described[228], as well as Grigoriev's portrait of Meyerhold[229].

One of the most extraordinary ways of positioning artists in the same canon, represented in "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog, was demonstrated in Bowlt's essay. He united artists within the Russian avant-garde on the basis of their attitude to mirrors, electricity, light and X-rays. However, despite the seemingly unusual conceptualization of the movement, Bowlt suggested quite coherent frameworks for uniting these artists within the same canon. First of all, he positioned them within the broader tradition of Russian culture. Firstly, he claimed that Altman's and Tatlin's self-portraits continued the tradition of autobiography, "a favorite genre of the Russian Silver Age"[230]. Secondly, Bowlt argued that despite all modernist experiments Vladimir Malagis, Zinaida Serebriakova, Natalia Goncharova, Konstantin Yuon, Boris Grigoriev, Nikolay Dormidontov and Kazimir Malevich paradoxically maintained the tradition of "Wanderers" of depicting reality[231]. Thirdly, he pointed out that Kandinsky was heavily influenced by the symbolist tradition of "The World of Art" group[232].

[226] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 240.
[227] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 132.
[228] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 72.
[229] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 132.
[230] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 42.
[231] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 43.
[232] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 44.

Bowlt also considered that Malevich's radical experiments were associated with "traditional "ideological" impetus in Russian culture"[233]. In the case of the avant-garde, in his opinion, it was revealed in the desire to destroy the old world in order to create a new one. He also mentioned the expansive nature of the Russian spirit and "all or nothing" attitude that colors Russian history[234]. In earlier analysis very similar essentializing observations about the maximalist and radical character of Russian culture frequently appeared. The eastern influence on the Russian avant-garde, which frequently appeared in earlier catalogs, also was pointed out by Boris Groys. For instance, he claimed that Russian futurism in comparison to Italian futurism was more cooled down and less passionate, because the Russian version of the movement was impacted by Buddhist and Taoist thought[235].

Logically, Bowlt attributed the ambitious aspirations of avant-garde artists to the experience of revolution. Throughout the catalog the idea that common experience of revolution influenced the direction of development of oftenly very different artists appeared. It was stated that despite radically different views on artistic matters Malevich, Tatlin, Chagall, Kandinsky, Popova, Rozanova, Altman, Lissitzky and Rodchenko[236] unanimously welcomed the revolution, joined various newly established art institutions and participated in different Soviet agitprop projects. Apart from institutional affiliations, Groys made an argument that the Russian avant-garde is more "Bolshevist" than the Bolsheviks, since the former is more radical in aspirations to eliminate the usual order of things in order to release "immaterial

[233] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 47.
[234] Bowlt, "Through the Looking Glass", 51.
[235] Boris Groys, "The Russian Avant-Garde: A History of Illness", in *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes, ed.* Petrova (Saint Petersburg, Munich: Palace Editions in cooperation with Hirmer Verlag, 2016), 58.
[236] Klaus A. Schroder, "The Russian Avant-Gardes: An Introduction to the Exhibition," in *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes,* ed. Petrova (Saint Petersburg, Munich: Palace Editions in cooperation with Hirmer Verlag, 2016), 13.

energies". In this regard, Groys mainly focused his observations on non-objective art of Malevich and Kandinsky[237].

In some aspects "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog represents more nuanced picture of the Russian avant-garde, because it put more emphasis, for example, on Alexandra Exter's connections to Kyiv[238], or El Lissitzky's links to White Russian and Jewish cultures[239]. However, generally it still represents the picture heavily based on narrative, centered around institutions and exhibitions in Moscow, Petrograd and Vitebsk, and not deprived of essentializing statements about the national character of Russian culture and its maximalism. The Eastern influence which supposedly differentiates the Russian avant-garde from the Western one was also outlined, as well as the impact of Russian folk culture and Orthodox icons. Also, as in "Paris — Moscow, 1900 – 1930" exhibition catalog, the Russian avant-garde was embedded in the broader tradition of Russian culture, mostly dated back to the 19th century. With regard to the latter proposition, the depiction of famous representatives of Russian culture in portraits was also mentioned. The relatively new strategy of including artists in the Russian avant-garde was related to the depiction of Russian topics, not necessarily in Russian style. Finally, foreign loans, in this particular case from the Albertina collection, also influenced how the Russian avant-garde canon was represented at the exhibition.

[237] Boris Groys, "The Russian Avant-Garde: A History of Illness", 59.
[238] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 122.
[239] Petrova, eds., *Chagall to Malevich: The Russian Avant-Gardes*, 234.

Conclusion

The analysis of exhibition catalogs, dedicated to the Russian avant-garde, from three different historical periods revealed that the canon of the Russian avant-garde since "The First Russian Exhibition" in Berlin in 1922 stayed relatively consistent. Most of the artists, who were called the most important figures of the Russian avant-garde in Vienna in 2016[240], exhibited their artworks in Berlin in 1922. The only exception was Larionov and Goncharova, however, already in 1962 they were included in the Russian avant-garde canon. The most salient fluctuation of the canon is associated with artists, who emigrated from the Russian empire and left most of their artworks in foreign collections. Depending on the institutional context of the particular exhibition, artists such as Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, Leopold Survazh or Sonya Delone might be included or omitted in the canon. The figure of Alexander Archipenko, whose artworks are also predominantly located in the West, is more complex because of his explicit Ukrainian identity. For instance, in the "Paris-Moscow, 1900 – 1930" exhibition Archipenko was situated in the Russian canon, in Costaki's exhibition he was called a Ukrainian artist.

Exhibitions catalogs from different historical periods demonstrated quite similar strategies for positioning artists within the same canon. Despite the fact that "The First Russian Exhibition" catalog mainly relied on the pure nomination of artists as Russian, even those who worked during the Soviet period, it nevertheless contained preliminary manifestations of more advanced strategies of the formation of the Russian avant-garde canon, namely institutional and more informal affiliations with Moscow and Petrograd and emphasis on special interpretation of broader European art styles in a Russian fashion.

[240] Chagall, Goncharova, Kandinsky, Larionov, Lissitzky, Malevich, Rodchenko

At the same time, as was evident from Costaki's exhibition catalog, the accentuation of Russianness of particular styles or artists is not an inevitable requirement for the construction of the national canon. Spatial setting and its relation to activities of particular art groups and artists have proven to be one of the most salient strategies of canon formation in other catalogs as well. The analysis revealed that most exhibitions, art groups, theaters, production sites, and official art institutions, that were mentioned in the catalog, were located either in Moscow or Petrograd. The salient exception is Vitebsk, which was never put into the Belarusian context. Kyiv, which played a certain role in the careers of, for instance, Exter and Malevich, was never observed as an important site for the development of the avant-garde. Apart from institutions of different degrees of formality, personal relationships between artists also contributed to the establishment of the unified canon. Friendship, artistic collaborations and mentorship were frequently noted in analyzed catalogs.

The October Revolution as the decisive factor for the development of the Russian avant-garde in a particular way was mentioned almost in all catalogs, and in most cases, it was associated with specific activities and opportunities suggested for "leftists artists". Agitprop, design for mass production and even leadership in newly established official institutions were discussed in relation to the effects of the October revolution on avant-garde artists. Notably, most of these activities were also related to Moscow, Petrograd or Vitebsk. Also, despite presumable expectations, the fact that the Soviet Union was established and significantly influenced art production, artworks that were produced in the new state were mostly framed as the continuation of the previous Russian tradition. Overall, Russian and Soviet art was equated.

Another prominent strategy of the justification of specifically Russian character of the avant-garde was associated with accentuation of national characteristics of artists and their works.

The influence of folk culture, Orthodox icons and local architecture on the Russian avant-garde were repeatedly emphasized. In some cases, it corresponded to the aspirations of artists such as Goncharova, Larionov, Burliuk and others to pursue the development of particularly Russian art. In the case of Malevich, for example, this argument appeared more ambiguous. Another pattern was related to positioning avant-garde artists within the tradition of the high Russian culture of the 19th century. In "Paris-Moscow, 1900 – 1930" exhibition catalog it was repeatedly noted that avant-garde artists shared the critical attitude towards "art for art's sake", expressed by such well-known writers as Tolstoy and Chernyshevsky. The connections between modernist Russian poets of the 20th century and avant-garde art was also highlighted. In "The Russian Avant-Gardes: Chagall to Malevich" exhibition catalog the depiction of important cultural figures in portraits was also noted. At the same time, it was the only catalog that justified the Russianness of certain artists on the basis of the fact that they depicted Russian landscapes, Russian people and so forth.

The importance of rather essentializing statements about the Russian character with its maximalism and radicalism in the development of the specific type of avant-garde became evident already in 1922 in critical reviews on "The First Russian Exhibition". In the following publications, this topic continued to thrive mostly in relation to styles such as Suprematism and Kandinsky's abstraction which could be easily defined as Russian based on visual analysis. The appeals to Eastern influences on the character of the Russian avant-garde also stood out, in some cases with relatively detailed justifications, in others in the vague essentializing fashion.

Obviously, this analysis represents a rather short-sided perspective, because it relies on the limited number of catalogs and does not include other potentially highly insightful sources such as publications in media, academic literature from different periods, auction catalogs

etc. Further research on this topic is certainly needed. However, it nevertheless demonstrated the main strategies of the construction of the national canon and the influence of the broader, primarily institutional context on this process. As was mentioned above, the formation of the national canon is usually based on the attribution of a specific national style, depiction of national topics and geography, related to the biography of a particular artist. In the case of the Russian avant-garde canon, all these categories are highly relevant. However, the factor of the October revolution appeared to be context-specific, as well as the strategy of positioning avant-garde artists within the same tradition to which Russian writers from the 19th century belonged.

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