Society for Co-operation in SCRSS Russian and Soviet Studies

Digest

No 1, Spring 2021, £2.00

Contents

Feature

Karelia, Art-Contact and Denise Wyllie

By Diana Turner

Denise Wyllie is a visual artist and filmmaker. As a painter-printmaker, her works focus on nature, but she also explores other media and ideas, and has delivered monumental art projects. Her work is held in many UK and international collections.

Denise's latest international solo exhibition of prints took place in September 2020 at the Vyhod Media-Centre in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Karelia, Russia. *Denise Wyllie: Printmaker, London – Gardens of Paradise* (translated into Russian as *Сады Дениз Уайли*) included recent Japanese-inspired floral prints, juxtaposed with earlier meditative and sombre English ponds and forests. She explains that these exquisitely coloured artworks are "a transition from dark interiors and dark landscapes, painted in the autumn and the winter, to a reawakening of spring and summer." The exhibition run has been extended several times, a measure of its success with local audiences.

Poster for Denise Wyllie's 2020 exhibition *Gardens of Paradise* in Petrozavodsk

It followed another solo exhibition, *Karelia Dreaming*, held in the library of Petrozavodsk State University in autumn 2019. That exhibition was based on a small folio of twelve prints inspired by the Russian landscape. They included a number of pastel drawings of the Sacred Lakes in Karelia, made by Denise in the 1990s, reworked as photographs with additional elements.

Both exhibitions saw her connect with local students – *Gardens of Paradise* inspired a group of young journalism students to stage

an event at the gallery with music, poetry and their responses to the artwork, while *Karelia Dreaming* in the heart of the university "made me feel part of the new Karelian young blood coming forward". In March 2020, she was also "really honoured" to be a judge for a competition among local schools to design an emblem for Karelia, organised by Petrozavodsk State University.

Tree Spirits by Denise Wyllie

Denise's recent art projects in Karelia are the latest in a twenty-eight-year history of collaboration with artists and cultural institutions in Petrozavodsk. In the early 1990s she met a young Russian from Petrozavodsk who was working as an exchange teacher in London. Invited to her house for dinner with friends, he was transfixed by an icon painting of the Madonna, called *Gentleness*, painted by a Greek friend of Denise's. "That's the icon of my city, Petrozavodsk," he finally said. The moment seemed to presage her future connection with the city. When he returned to Karelia, she gave him some of her prints which came into the hands of a group of artists in Petrozavodsk called Art-Contact.

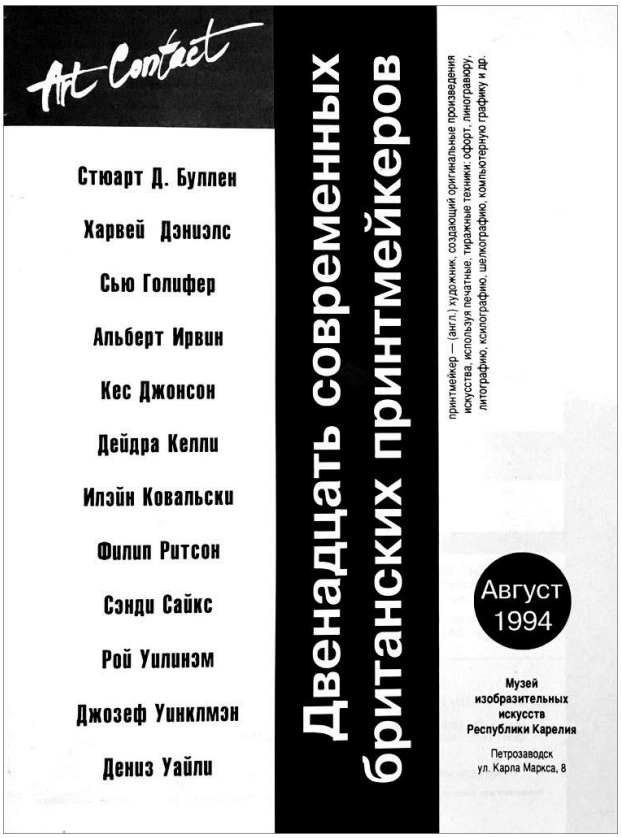
The late 1980s, during *perestroika*, had seen the emergence of radical contemporary artists in Petrozavodsk who organised unofficial happenings, performances and installations. By 1991, a small group of these artists had formed an innovative collective called Art-Contact. Sergei Terentjev explains: "It all happened in 1991… Everything was in flux and falling apart. The USSR no longer existed, and… we had to restructure, and adapt to new political and economic conditions…" Aware that a basic art market was developing in Russia, stimulated by interest from Europe, Karelia's Ministry of Culture took a revolutionary step by opening a commercial venue, the Taide Gallery, run by Maria Yufa and Sergei Terentjev. "We had developed a somewhat naïve, but very ambitious, plan to promote a new Karelian art, which included presentations in Petrozavodsk of artists from different corners of the world and of Petrozavodsk artists in other towns and countries." These plans included two exhibitions from London with works by Denise Wyllie and Peter Jackson. However, the gallery ran into financial difficulties, so Maria and Sergei decided to go it alone, found sponsors, hired another exhibition space and named their new group initiative Art-Contact. Gradually, they were joined by like-minded artists.

Art-Contact's offer to Denise of a solo exhibition had come out of the blue. She recalls receiving a letter in the post, covered in Russian stamps and Cyrillic script, with Maria Yufa's invitation inside. She leapt at the chance and travelled to Petrozavodsk in 1992 for the opening of her exhibition *Wild Garden*, held at the Artists Union Gallery. "I was embraced by a group of young creative people, who… decided to organise my exhibition independently from the usual political channels. It was at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union… when Western artists were not exhibiting in Russia, and I was one of the first artists, and the first female artist, from outside the Soviet Union to have exhibited at the Artists Union Gallery in Petrozavodsk since the Russian Revolution seventy years before."

Opening of *Outside Russia: The Death of Socialist Realism* at the Hardware Gallery, London, 1994. Left to right: TV journalist Andrey Tsunsky, Masha Yufa, Sergei Terentjev and Denise Wyllie

Denise stayed for three weeks and experienced a bewildering round of television and radio interviews, as well as meetings with artists and curators. Many of these contacts, including Maria Yufa and Sergei Terentjev, became lifelong friends. Her collaboration with Art-Contact also became a catalyst for something new. While she was there, her friends screened an art documentary on local television, re-interpreting the Socialist Realist collection at the Museum of Fine Arts. “I became intoxicated by the… integrity and depth of the film and their achievements in making this.” She was so inspired by their work that she joined Art-Contact in 1993 and returned to London ready to take on and achieve “Herculean tasks”. She was to be the only non-Russian member of Art-Contact, helping put her colleagues into the international arena.

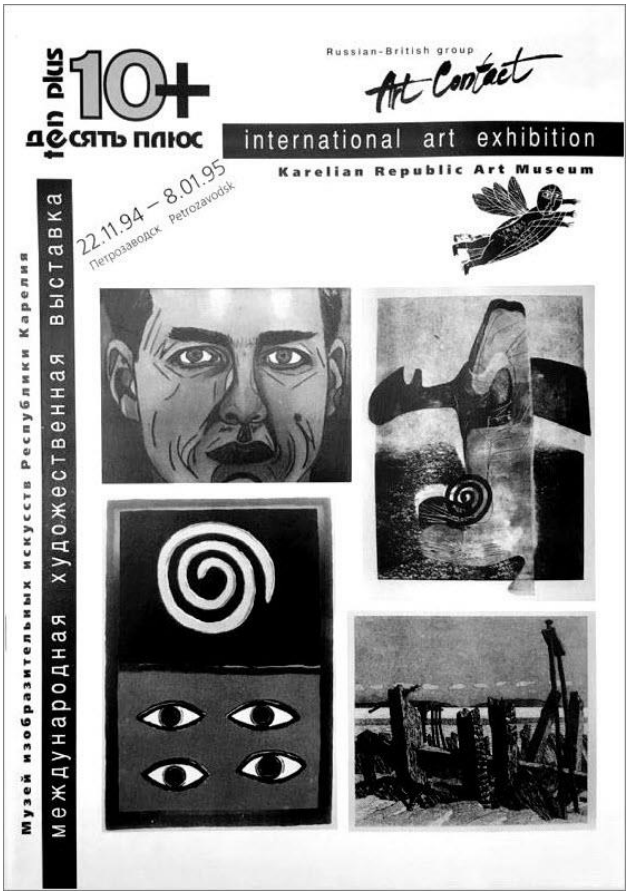
This led to a trio of collaborative ventures in 1994. Firstly, together with Art-Contact, Denise curated and organised an exhibition of eight contemporary Karelian artists, *Outside Russia: The Death of Socialist Realism*, in May 1994 at the Hardware Gallery in Highgate, London. Then, in the summer, she curated an exhibition in Petrozavodsk, *12 Contemporary British Printmakers*, organised by Art-Contact and the Museum of Fine Arts. This pushed the boundaries of current artistic conventions, and included British artists of different cultures, approach, disciplines and career stages. Alongside abstract urban and atmospheric country landscapes, she included “bold contemporary themes such as ‘coming out’, a progressive gay identity and the battleground between the sexes”. Sergei Terentjev adds: “This remains the only such big, serious and high-quality British exhibition in Petrozavodsk in the cultural history of Karelia… It became clear that Art-Contact’s public-art activity was bringing tangible results and was a serious contribution to contemporary culture in Karelia.”



Cover of the exhibition catalogue for *12 Contemporary British Printmakers* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Petrozavodsk, 1994

Finally, in late 1994 Denise acted as Art-Contact’s European co-curator and organiser for their international exhibition *10+* (*Ten Karelian Artists Plus the Whole World*) at the Museum of Fine Arts – a huge task in a world before the Internet and mobile phones. The final exhibition was a major contemporary art event for Petrozavodsk, with 200 artworks from thirty countries. Sergei Terentjev adds: “In substance, this project was not only a very

big exhibition, but it became the prototype for our future international triennial *Otpechatki* (Imprints)."



Cover of the exhibition catalogue for *10+* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Petrozavodsk, 1994

Art-Contact continued for eight years under the leadership of Maria Yufa and Sergei Terentjev, so revolutionising the attitude to contemporary art in the city that by 2000 it had become ubiquitous for the state-run Museum of Fine Arts and the City Exhibition Hall to curate conceptual exhibitions. In the same year Art-Contact's programme transferred to the Vyhod Media-Centre (the old Artists Union Gallery), under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture of Karelia, where it is now a hub for the creative industries and arts. One could say that, in just under thirty years, Art-Contact has become the new contemporary art 'establishment'. Today Maria Yufa is Head of the Petrozavodsk City Exhibition Hall, while Sergei Terentjev is Curator at the Vyhod Media-Centre.

After 2000, collaboration between Art-Contact and Denise continued, but each adopted new technologies, professions and roles. In parallel with her painting and printmaking, Denise embarked on new projects – public art, land-art, science art and video art. Some of these showcased in Karelia. A particularly ambitious project was a collaborative work by Denise and fellow artist Clare O Hagan (who work together as 'Wyllie O Hagan') for *Otpechatki (*Imprints), the IV International Triennial of Visual Arts in Petrozavodsk in November 2009 – a festival initiated by Art-Contact. That year's theme was 'The White Sea: Art and Science'. Inspired by fossils in the Paleontological Institute in Moscow, Wyllie O Hagan submitted a moving-image artwork with a Michael Nyman soundtrack, boldly overlaid with drum and bass. Denise describes *A Deep White Sea, Karelia* as "quite an extraordinary and experimental film… [that] showed ancient creatures going back in time to the beginning of time". In the same year, the film was also entered for – and won – the Michael Nyman / Shooting People Award for Creative Video.

Wyllie O Hagan returned in 2010 for Petrozavodsk's *Aquabiennale*, the International Biennial of Watercolour Painting (yet another Art-Contact initiative). For their submission *Letters from London*, Denise decided against a conventional landscape watercolour, opting instead for drawings of a group of gay men in bondage, based on photographs taken at London's Gay Pride march. She does not censor her work for a Russian audience: "Apparently, when he opened the package, Sergei said, 'Denise never lets us down!'" In 2014, Denise participated independently in the *Aquabiennale*, this time choosing a feminist theme, a self-portrait as a strong female artist with her muse – the artist in the foreground, her male lover reclining behind her.

Returning to nature in art, what does Denise know of contemporary Karelian landscape art? She is less familiar than with other genres, but cites Oleg Yuntunen and Olga Yuntunen as exceptional landscape painters and printmakers – both appeared in her *Outside Russia: The Death of Socialist Realism* exhibition in London in 1994.

Karelia's fabulous landscape of forests and lakes also inspires Vladimir Zorin's land-art projects and his 'drawings' in marquetry made of silver birch bark, while the annual Karelian Art Residency initiative, which invites international artists to live and work in Karelia, offers one residency in the remote Kostomuksha Nature Reserve "to observe and study the processes of wild nature".

Poster for Sergei Terentjev's 2021 theatre project *Diary of a Killer-Cat*, which features animations based on Denise Wyllie's drawings

So, what next for Denise? Together with cameraman Andrei Kurochkin from Petrozavodsk, she is putting the finishing touches to "a video with extracts from all the events to do with the [*Gardens of Paradise*] exhibition and showing, as well, how the paintings develop into the prints. I'm so excited because it looks wonderful… I might even put it in for an art film festival!". She is also working with the Vyhod Media-Centre to transfer *Gardens of Paradise* to one of their partner galleries in Finland. Finally, she is producing a number of drawings that Sergei Terentjev will transform into an animation for *Diary of a Killer-Cat*, a theatre project he is staging in early 2021.

Denise Wyllie is an SCRSS member. This article is based on online material kindly provided by Denise Wyllie, an interview given by Denise Wyllie to Diana Turner in November 2020, and additional research by Diana Turner. Many thanks to Denise Wyllie for permission to reproduce the images included in the article.

Sources

Karelian Art Residence website, URL: https://resartis.org/listings/karelian-art-residence-air-karelia/

Terentjev S, '28 let s Denis Uayli', Vyhod Media-Centre website:
(1) 24.8.20, URL: https://m.vk.com/@wyllisgarden-sergei-terentev-28-let-s-deniz-uaili
(2) 25.8.20, URL: https://vk.com/@wyllisgarden-sergei-terentev-28-let-s-deniz-uaili-chast-ii
(3) 1.9.20, URL: https://m.vk.com/@wyllisgarden-sergei-terentev-28-let-s-deniz-uaili-chast-iii
(4) 16.9.20, URL: https://vk.com/@wyllisgarden-sergei-terenev-28-let-s-deniz-uaili-chast-iv

Wyllie D, 'Gardens of Paradise: Denise Wyllie's Solo Art Exhibition opens in Russia', 31.8.20, YouTube, URL: https://youtu.be/U4028AiAg0Y

Wyllie O Hagan, 'Films' (includes *A Deep White Sea, Karelia*), Wyllie O Hagan website, URL: https://www.wyllieohagan.com/work/films/

Yufa M, 'Obkhodya okrestnosti Onezhskogo ozera', *Moscow Art Magazine*, No. 33, 2000, URL: http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/83/article/1821

SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

Annual General Meeting 2021

Notice is hereby given that the SCRSS AGM will take place online at 11.00 on Saturday 15 May 2021. The meeting is open to SCRSS members only. Members will need to register in advance by email and will receive details for joining the AGM online via the Zoom app. If you are not already on the SCRSS email list, please email

ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk with your name in the subject line as soon as possible. The AGM is an opportunity to review the activities of the Society and its Trustees, as well as consider ideas for future development. The deadline for motions and nominations of members for election to the next Council is Friday 23 April 2021. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member. The Agenda will be available from early May.

Library Catalogue

I am delighted to report that, at their meeting this January, the SCRSS Trustees (i.e. SCRSS Council members) approved the purchase of a library management system (LMS). It has been a long-term ambition of the Society to be able to catalogue online the books (over 40,000) and thousands of other assets (posters, periodicals, theatre programmes, etc) contained within its collections on professional library software. The Soutron LMS will absorb all the data catalogued to date (see the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/library.htm to view the existing records). Once it has been set up, and volunteers trained, it will help to speed up considerably the process of cataloguing, as well as making the library catalogue available online. The purchase of the LMS has been made possible by a very generous donation from a member to cover initial costs and the first two years' subscription. After two years, the Society itself will take responsibility for the annual costs.

Membership and Finance

Thanks to the tremendous ongoing support of members, including the Centenary Club, the Society continues to strengthen its finances and is now building a reserve fund for longer-term financial stability. To ensure that the SCRSS continues to promote knowledge of the culture, language and history of Russia and the former USSR, through its activities and unique library and archive, it is vital that we maintain and increase the membership of the Society. If you have received a membership renewal notice (on coloured A5 paper), please respond promptly and consider adding a donation to the standard fee. If you want to make a longer-term commitment, please consider joining the SCRSS Centenary Club, which aims to support the day-to-day running costs of the Society up to 2024 and beyond. Twenty-two members have already done so, each committing to donate £1,000 over five years – as a single payment, or £200 per year, or £17 per month. For more information, contact the Hon Secretary.

PhD Studentship

SCRSS Trustee and Council member Professor Jeremy Hicks, of Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), has successfully applied for funding for a PhD student to research the following topic: *Red Cross or Red Star? The Tension between Humanitarian and Socialist Internationalism in World War II Aid to Russia*, using the SCRSS Archive and contributing to the Society's centenary activities in 2024. The funding includes fees and a three-and-a-half-year grant for living expenses. The student will be supervised jointly by Professor Jeremy Hicks, Professor Matthew Hilton of QMUL's School of History, and SCRSS Trustee Jane Rosen. At the time of writing the deadline for applications was imminent. The Society looks forward to welcoming the successful candidate in the autumn.

Help Us Open Up

The Society is seeking volunteer 'guardians' to allow the centre to open at least one day each week from September 2021 (Covid-19 permitting). See details on the separate sheet enclosed with this mailing.

@SCRSSLibrary

The Society's Twitter account @SCRSSLibrary was launched in November 2020 and has quickly gained a following. It features news about events, selected items from the Society's archives and links to articles from

the *SCRSS Digest*. The Twitter account joins the Society's existing Facebook presence and website.

Next Events

Tuesday 23 February 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture and Book Launch: Professor Jeremy Hicks on *The Victory Banner Over the Reichstag – Film, Document and Ritual in Russia's Contested Memory of World War II*

Saturday 15 May 2021, 11.00
Zoom Online Event: SCRSS AGM 2021

Other events were being finalised at time of press. Follow the SCRSS on Twitter or Facebook, see the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm, or contact the SCRSS on ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk to make sure that you are on our e-newsletter distribution list.

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

Remembrance Sunday 2020

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, Remembrance Sunday in November 2020 was marked at the Soviet War Memorial by a brief wreath-laying ceremony, attended by representatives of several embassies of the countries of the former USSR.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2021

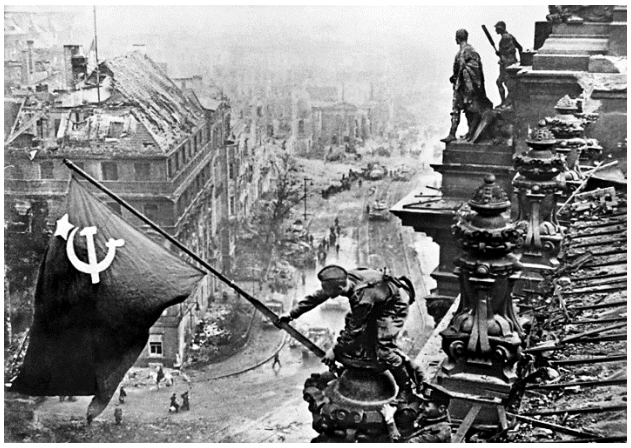
The Trustees of the SWMT, in consultation with Southwark Council, decided against hosting a ceremony on Holocaust Memorial Day this year. Instead, the SWMT supported virtual events hosted by Southwark Council and the Russian Culture House in London.

The Soviet War Memorial is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). The Memorial was unveiled in 1999 on the initiative of the SCRSS and the Society has been supporting the work of the SWMT since its foundation. See www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com for more information.

Feature

The Victory Banner Over the Reichstag

By Professor Jeremy Hicks



Evgeny Khaldei's famous photograph of the Victory Banner over the Reichstag, Berlin, 1945 (reproduced courtesy of Sputnik)

There are some symbols, be they images or artefacts, that are instantly recognisable and evoke not just a historical moment but also an attitude to history. They may be said to be 'iconic'. Joe Rosenthal's famous photograph from Iwo Jima is one, Alberto Korda's portrait of Che Guevara another, but Evgeny Khaldei's photograph of a Soviet flag over the Reichstag at the culmination of the Battle of Berlin in 1945, termed the 'Victory Banner' (*Znamya Pobedy*), is a particularly arresting image and potent symbol, and one that first piqued my curiosity about the Soviet Union and Russia as a teenager.

But this symbol is not only a photograph: an exact copy of the Victory Banner raised over the Reichstag in 1945, bearing the name of the unit that raised it (the 150th Order of Kutuzov Second Class, Idritsa Rifle Division, 79th Rifle Corps, 3rd Strike Army, 1st Belorussian Front), is paraded at the start of the annual 9 May Victory Parade on Red Square. Indeed, the parade, including the participation of the Victory Banner, was deemed so important that, despite the dangers of Covid, it was held to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Victory over Fascism in 2020, albeit moved to 24 June, the date on which the original 1945 parade was held.

Khaldei's image and the paraded copy of the Victory Banner are the two most prominent representations of this symbol. Yet it is also a museum artefact, and there are depictions and accounts of it being raised across many media: newsreel and documentary film, other photographs by other photographers, newspaper reports, memoir accounts, works of history, paintings and historical films, documentaries and features with actors. It was this proliferation of images that drew me to the Victory Banner in an attempt to understand the origins and evolution of the memory of the Great Patriotic War: what has been termed the 'cult' of the war. Its hold over the Russian self-image is undeniable and, I felt, could not be explained solely by the immense scale of loss and historical significance of Victory. Rather, its power lies in part in the symbols by which this memory is mediated.

The story starts with Stalin's speech of 6 November 1944, in which he celebrated the liberation of Soviet territory from Nazi occupation, and called for a red flag (literally banner – *znamya*) to be raised over Berlin as a symbol of Soviet victory. As the centre of Nazi power, Berlin's value was symbolic as much as military, and the raising of the red flag of the Soviet Union was intended from the outset to cement and declare the victory as Soviet, but also Stalin's (since he ordered it). But if this was all about symbols, what building could be taken to stand for Berlin? The centre of Nazi power was Hitler's Reich Chancellery, and Berlin's most famous landmark was the Brandenburg Gates, but the Reichstag, seat of Germany's Parliament, seems to have been chosen for its echoes of Hitler's 1933 seizure of power following the Reichstag fire, blamed on the Communists, and the subject of a notorious show trial later that year.

The Victory Banner artefact, showing the full name of the 150th Rifle Division that raised the flag over the Reichstag (reproduced courtesy of the author)

Although it had been closed since the fire, the Reichstag was one of the tallest buildings in central Berlin and also served as a military objective for the Red Army: the units storming the centre of Berlin competed to see which could capture the building and raise a red flag on it first, in time for 1 May, a key date in the Soviet calendar. The result was that various units raised often home-made red flags on different parts of the building on the evening of 30 April 1945, before the official banner of the 150th Rifle Division was raised over an equestrian statue at 22.50, and moved to the cupola the following day. Famously, Meliton Kantaria and Mikhail Egorov (a Russian and a Georgian, like Stalin himself) were credited with raising it. However, they had not been in the first wave who raised the first flags, and Khaldei's famous photograph did not actually record the moment the flag was raised in the evening, nor the raising of the official banner of the 150th Rifle Division: the photographer Khaldei reconstructed the moment after the event, probably on 2 May. (The iconic photograph does not include the name of the 150th Rifle Division, but this was in any case added to the official flag when it was taken down from the cupola.) Similarly,

as studio correspondence shows, in filming the Battle of Berlin the documentary filmmakers had produced footage that was insufficiently expressive, and they shot the storming of the building again in early June. The Victory Banner then travelled to Moscow for the 24 June parade, but was consigned to the Red Army Museum (now the Central Museum of the Armed Forces) after the soldiers who had raised it were unable to march smartly enough. During the Stalin years it tended to be associated with Stalin, as did war memory more broadly, and never more so than in Mikheil Chiaureli's famous film *The Fall of Berlin* (1950), where Stalin flies into Berlin triumphantly, immediately after the Victory Banner is raised.

Yet it was the post-Stalin period, when history and memoirs became popular, and war veterans began to play a more important role in Soviet life, that the Victory Banner took on the status it enjoys today. Veterans began to gather informally in Moscow, and especially by the Victory Banner in its museum setting, on 9 May, which was not a public holiday from 1948–64. There were also more formal ceremonies to mark Victory Day and Soviet Army Day: meetings in the Kremlin that involved the parading of the Victory Banner. But it was Leonid Brezhnev's ascent to First Secretary of the Communist Party, from 1964, that transformed memory of the war, and established the Victory Banner as central to Soviet commemoration practices in a way that remains influential to this day.

Following the dismantling of the Stalin cult under Khrushchev, it was Brezhnev who, in a bid to create a new unifying national story that did not depend on the charisma of a single leader, elevated memory of the war to a hallowed status close to that of the Revolution. Key to this was the establishing in 1965 of 9 May as a public holiday, and the first 9 May Red Square military parade was inaugurated by the parading of the Victory Banner. This was broadcast live on TV as part of a holiday programming schedule devoted to commemorating the war, including the televised 'Minute of Silence', a key element of Victory Day rituals to this day. The Victory Banner was part of the creation of a ritualistic and sacred atmosphere around memory of Victory, faintly redolent of the Stalin era.

While there were no 9 May parades again until 1985 and then 1990, the last years of the Soviet Union saw a huge number of newspaper articles and memoirs exposing myths surrounding the Victory Banner: the fact that Egorov and Kantaria had not raised the first flag, that Khaldei had belatedly staged his famous photograph and that the Victory Banner had not taken part in the 1945 parade. The inference was that, in showing how the symbol of the Victory Banner, and by implication the cult of Victory more broadly, were constructed ('invented traditions' in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase), the symbols and rituals would cease to inspire uncritical belief in the Soviet system, unnuanced pride in its achievement of Victory, but a more discriminating historical consciousness. Instead, the Soviet system collapsed in 1991 and Boris Yeltsin attempted to deflate the Victory cult by ending the practice of Red Square military parades and restricting circulation of Communist symbols such as the Victory Banner (which bears a hammer and sickle in the hoist). The danger of this policy, was that it permitted the Communist opposition (KPRF) to lay exclusive claim to the moral authority of Victory and its associated symbolism, including the Victory Banner, which by the late 1990s had started to appear in facsimile form at demonstrations.

Vladimir Putin immediately understood this risk and responded to it, within days of his swearing in to the post of president in May 2000, by reinstating yearly Red Square Victory Parades with the Victory Banner, restoring the Soviet national anthem in 2001, and, from 2005, conducting full military parades with the latest ballistic missiles. The Victory Banner is now paraded not only on Red Square on 9 May but in many regional ceremonies and re-enactments, as well as widely displayed on demonstrations, such as by pro-Russian groups in Crimea in 2014, and then in East Ukraine. It remains a powerful and resonant symbol, whose history is that of the

emergence, evolution and persistence of memory of the Great Patriotic War as a force in Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian society.

Jeremy Hicks is Professor of Russian Culture and Film at Queen Mary University of London where he teaches Russian film history and literature. He is the author of three books and many articles on Russian and Soviet history, film, literature and journalism. He is also a member of ASEEES, the British Association for Slavonic and European Studies, the Modern Humanities Research Association (UK), and a Trustee of the SCRSS. 'The Victory Banner Over the Reichstag: Film, Document and Ritual in Russia's Contested Memory of World War II' is published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020, and is launched at the SCRSS's Zoom event on 23 February 2021 (see page 7).

Feature

The SCR 1937–1952

By Judith Todd

This is an abridged reprint of an article from the 'Anglo-Soviet Journal' (ASJ), 50th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution special issue, 1967, pages 28–32. Judith Todd was Secretary of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR), the original name of today's Society for Co-operation in Russian & Soviet Studies, from 1937 to 1952. The ASJ was published by the Society between 1940–92.

In 1937, the Society occupied three rooms in what was then 98, Gower Street, and carried on the usual activities of a small voluntary Society, arranging lectures and other functions on a small scale, and creating contacts through a very restricted range of British visitors to the USSR and Soviet visitors to Britain. The summer months were largely taken up with the organisation of travel groups on the specialised basis which was later to become the distinguishing characteristic of the Society's work – groups of, for example, architects, doctors and lawyers were formed for what was then still the slightly daring purpose of visiting a mysterious country – from the basic price of £23 for three weeks.

Mrs Tomalin (right) and Judith Todd (left) of the SCR, organisers of an exhibition for Aid to Russia, after VE Day, 1945 (SCRSS Archive)

The outbreak of war in 1939 presented new difficulties in what had even previously been no easy task: in the condition of frigid state relations between Britain and the USSR, the Society had been for many years almost the sole channel of unofficial contact, and had had to carry on its work with the limited support of a small number of far-seeing members who were willing to risk unofficial disapproval of its unfashionable objects. The declaration of war in September 1939 caused nearly all public activity by voluntary organisations to be suspended because it was thought that the congregation of large numbers of persons provided a target for heavy bombing, which fortunately did not materialise at that time. The Society, however, gained some temporary fame as one of the first organisations to break this metaphorical blackout, by arranging at the Queen's Hall (shortly, alas, to become an actual victim of bombing) in November 1939 an orchestral concert of Soviet music.

In addition to the normal difficulties of war-time organisation, the SCR had naturally to contend with the special problems of the political climate of the years 1939 to 1941, and the emotions aroused by the Soviet-

German Non-Aggression Treaty, the recovery of the Western territories, and the Finnish war. Nevertheless, activity was maintained at a high level, and the Annual Report for 1940 records twenty-five major events, including two Queen's Hall concerts and the launching of the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*. The staff at the time consisted of the Secretary, an Assistant Secretary, and an office girl (a species which became extinct after the war), who in addition had to concern themselves with the safeguarding of archives and records both against a possible German invasion in the summer of 1940, and the Blitz of the winter of 1940–1941. Fortunately, nothing was lost, though the most important records spent some time on the pavement in tea chests while the adjoining building was gutted by incendiary bombs, and it was discovered after the war that the President, Chairman, Committee members, Vice-Presidents and Secretary appeared on a Gestapo list for immediate arrest had the invasion taken place.

The Anglo-Soviet fighting alliance of 1941, formed after the German invasion of the USSR on 22nd June, had naturally an enormous effect on the scope of the Society's work. Its library and archives were almost the only source in Britain of information about the USSR apart from the files of the intelligence services, and were made immediate use of by individuals, organisations and Government departments. Although the Ministry of Information in London and the Soviet information services soon developed an exchange of war photographs, pictorial information about the pre-war development of the USSR, which formed the basis of its successful stand against Nazi aggression, came for several years exclusively from the Society's archives. Exhibitions, mostly pictorial but becoming increasingly elaborate, were a popular form of publicity during the war; the SCR's first effort, based on an exhibition of Soviet photography which appeared to have arrived in 1939, was an enormous success as queues formed to learn something of the powerful new ally whose pre-war achievements had so largely been ignored by the British press and radio. Twelve thousand visitors came to this hastily assembled collection and its success led to the opening of a special exhibition department which organised further exhibitions in London, and travelling collections for the many Anglo-Soviet weeks held outside London in connection with the Aid to Russia funds organised by the Joint Committee for Soviet Aid and the then Mrs Churchill's Fund.

As well as exhibitions, the Society's war-time activities covered a wide range of different functions, from a symposium on 'Some Contributions to War Surgery from the USSR' to the arrangement of gifts to their Soviet counterparts from schoolchildren, and a series of Shakespeare recordings made by leading actors and actresses as a New Year gift to their Soviet colleagues in 1945.

Musical events continued to be well supported: the 50th anniversary of Tchaikovsky's death was commemorated in 1943 by a provincial tour of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, arranged by the Society, with nine concerts and a total audience of 17,000, while in 1944 we had the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Rimsky-Korsakov, and a presentation to Sir Henry Wood, on his 75th birthday, of scores presented to him by Soviet musicians. Large numbers of lecturers were also provided for the Forces, for schools, and for every kind of the discussion groups which flourished during the period, when the future of society was not left to television commentators.

A feature of the Society's work during the war was the increasingly specialised nature of the information and other services demanded of it, and this led soon afterwards to the formation of the specialised sections, through which a large part of its activities were carried on. These Sections worked through leading members in their own field in either country to develop a two-way traffic in ideas and material, through which each was better able to understand the problems of the other, and the solutions which they were attempting to find. As well as exchanging information, exhibitions and visits, the Sections made history by

arranging a number of unique events. For example, the first occasion on which a Soviet chess team played a British team was arranged by the Chess Section, in a radio match for which the moves were transmitted through the co-operation of the two national post offices in 1946. This was followed in 1948 by the visit of the first Soviet chess team to come to Britain for an over-the-board match.

The 20th anniversary of the Society's foundation had been celebrated in 1944 amid wartime conditions. In 1949, its 25th anniversary was marked by the visit of an important delegation from the USSR, whose members made many public appearances and private contacts, and were pioneers in the sphere of personal exchanges and friendships which has proved so important a part of the Society's work up to the present day. It is difficult, at this point in time, to convey the deep impression which they made on the many hundreds of British people whom they met, just as it is difficult to convey the effect of the first British delegation to visit the USSR after the war. Both our countries had been confined by the war to written contact, and we had both felt that, with the successful conclusion of the war as allies-in-arms, a great expansion of our work would be possible. To meet these possibilities the Society had itself expanded by finding a new home at Kensington Square, to house its growing library and to give a fitting home for the activities of the Sections.

The hopes of the post-war period were not immediately fulfilled, for, as it is hardly necessary to remind members, this coincided with the icy blast of the cold war. Several distinguished persons found it no longer polite to be associated with the Society, and, although during the war-time alliance we had often remarked that the public could never again be misled by the misrepresentations of Soviet policy and conditions previously inflicted on them by the organs of mass communications, there was a marked tendency to return to the old atmosphere of prejudice and misinformation. But by now the Society's work was firmly established on a level which enabled it to continue the development of specialised contacts in spite of the vagaries of political fashion. The Science Section, for example, was particularly active during this period, when the Society's holdings of learned journals, and its translations of scientific and medical papers, provided a service in conditions where the present wide exchanges were not available. All the Sections, in fact, devoted much attention to the preparation of information for their English members in the form of Section bulletins, based on translation of Soviet material, and for their Soviet colleagues in the form of periodical reports based on material collected in Britain by experts on the subject.

I have tried to give a necessarily telescoped account of the Society's work during the fifteen years in which I was Secretary, and for reasons of space have confined myself to recalling events rather than people. The work could of course never have been carried on without people, and without the devoted assistance of members and staff often in periods of great social pressure […] To have worked with them, and […] with many Soviet colleagues, added the warmth of comradeship to the sense of historic involvement in a task whose ultimate aim, the creation of better and deeper understanding between Britain and the USSR, is so closely bound up with the peaceful development of humanity.

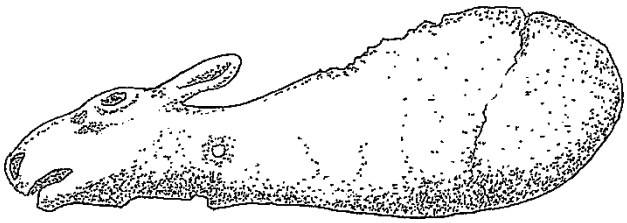
Reviews

Arctic: Culture and Climate Exhibition British Museum, 22 October 2020 – 21 February 2021

This exhibition looks at the lives and experiences of indigenous peoples in the Arctic – their past, present and future.

The Arctic, or Circumpolar North, is centred on the North Pole in a landscape of tundra (treeless frozen plains) and taiga (coniferous forests). Today there are eight Arctic nations (Russia, USA, Canada,

Greenland / Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland) with four million inhabitants living in the region. Some 400,000 of these are indigenous peoples with ancestral ties to the Arctic, comprising forty ethnic groups with distinct languages and histories. However, looking down on the North Pole from above highlights the connections between these indigenous peoples: they have common cultures, and have traded and communicated for millennia.

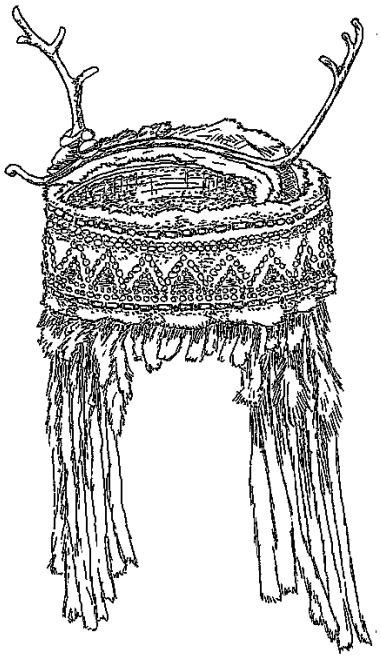


Antler-bone spoon depicting a moose head (Ust' Polui site, Russia, 1st century BC – 1st century AD)

All have adapted to living with harsh weather and ice (from buildings to clothes to travel to food); all have relied traditionally on reindeer herding, hunting and fishing; lives and cultural celebrations are structured around the seasons – the dark, lean winter months and the light, abundant summer months; and all have experienced European exploration and colonisation. Today they are also connected by the devastating impact of climate change: the Arctic is warming at twice the rate elsewhere and is predicted to be ice free within eighty years. Ironically, climate change is simultaneously revealing new information about prehistoric life in the Arctic as objects melt out of the permafrost.

The exhibition examines these themes through artefacts, testimony and digital media, and represents many of the forty Arctic ethnic groups. This review focuses on the eight ethnic groups living in the Far North of Russia – the Chukchi, Sakha, Evenki, Dolgan, Nganasan, Nenets, Khanty and Sami peoples (looking at the map from northeast to northwest).

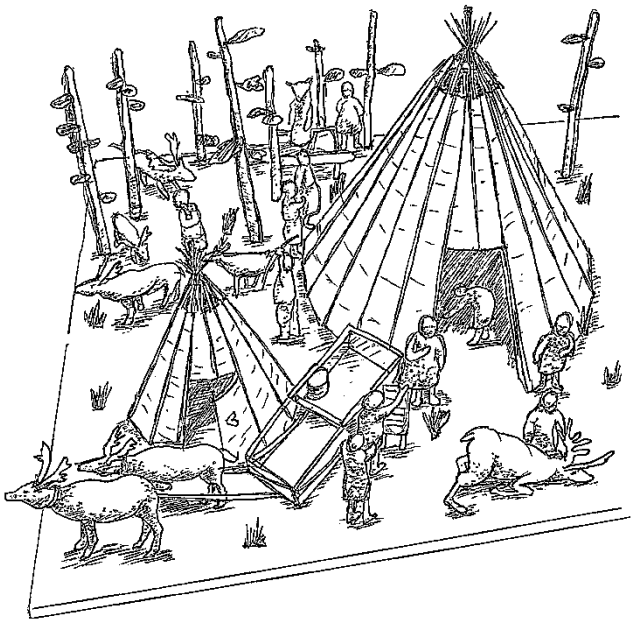
The first Arctic peoples settled in Siberia 30,000 years ago on what was then grassy steppe. The Yana excavation site in eastern Siberia has revealed a sophisticated hunting culture that was able to survive the extreme cold through technical innovation, notably the invention of eyed needles, made of mammoth tusk, allowing the creation of tailored clothing and shoes. Between 9,000 to 15,000 years ago, after the end of the last Ice Age, steppe gave way to taiga, some Arctic peoples moved across to North America for the first time, while in Siberia dog sleds were invented. Around 2,000 years ago populations grew and adopted more settled lifestyles. In northwest Russia, excavations at the Ust' Polui site show that several communities settled near the River Ob to trade, conduct ceremonies and produce crafts. A delightful exhibit from here is an antler-bone spoon depicting a moose head.



Evenki shaman headdress (leather tassels, cloth and beadwork trim, iron-alloy antlers, Russia, late 19th – early 20th century)

From the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries Siberia was subject to exploration and colonisation by the Russian state.[1] Novgorod and Muscovy sent expeditions beyond the Urals to procure pelts in the fifteenth century, but complete colonisation only began from 1586 when Muscovy founded Tyumen, the oldest fortified town (‘*ostrog*’) in Siberia. The aim was mass settlement by Russian peasants and tradespeople, living in *ostrogs*, and

accompanied by the spread of the Russian Orthodox religion. By the eighteenth century there was a well-developed governance system, with Russian officials overseeing the collection of the lucrative '*yasak'* fur tribute from the indigenous people. The exhibition includes four large watercolour paintings on linen panels by Nikolai Shakhov (1770–1840), a Russian administrator in the Obdorsk region. They depict in beautiful detail scenes of everyday life among the settler and indigenous population, including Russian Orthodox missionaries, and Khanty people fishing and procuring pelts.



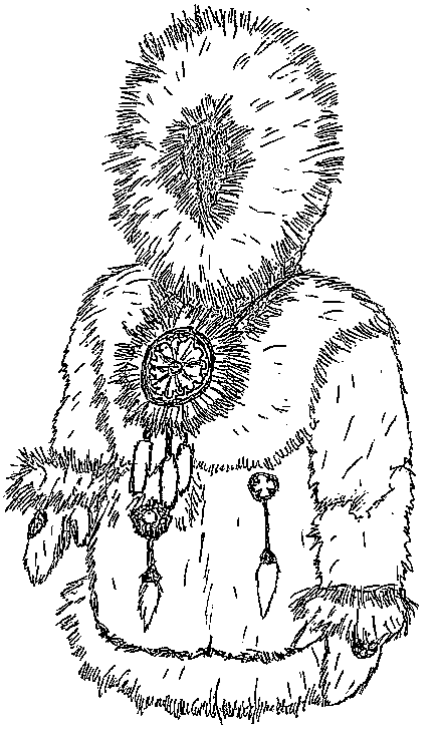
Model of a Nenets winter reindeer camp, *detail*
(mammoth ivory, Russia, pre-1860s)

In the nineteenth century Russian explorers spent time in the Far North researching the indigenous peoples, collecting ethnographic objects and displaying them in museums out of their everyday context; ethnographic accounts presented these peoples as primitive 'children of nature'.[2] In the early Soviet era this was superseded by a paternalistic state policy to educate indigenous groups, but boarding schools hit local communities hard as children became separated from their parents for long periods. Collectivisation also impacted traditional livelihoods as reindeer herders were required to hand their animals over to collective farms. However, Soviet ethnographers sought to present a positive view of indigenous Arctic peoples, carefully selecting artefacts to demonstrate their creativity in designing items that enabled survival in harsh environments. Despite the campaign against traditional beliefs such as Shamanism in the 1920s–30s, this was a popular research area for Soviet ethnographers. Evenki and Nganasan shamans negotiated with the spirit world to ensure good weather for hunting and herding (the word 'shaman' is derived from an Evenki word for 'one who knows'). This exhibition includes, among other shaman 'kit', two extraordinary birch-wood Nganasan guardian spirit masks and an Evenki leather tasselled headdress with red cloth / beadwork trim and iron-alloy antlers.

Although today many Arctic peoples work in other industries, most maintain a connection with their traditional economies of herding, hunting and fishing. Reindeer have always been vital for meat, milk, hides and as a means of travel. With the exception of the Sakha, who are pastoralists, the Russian Arctic ethnic groups are all reindeer herders. The Nenets travel hundreds of kilometres with large migrating herds between winter and summer rangelands, as shown in a short video clip from 2018 of herder Anisi Okotetto driving his reindeer through a snowbound landscape. Their conical reindeer-hide tents are depicted in a delightful nineteenth-century mammoth-ivory model of a busy Nenets winter reindeer camp. The Evenki have small herds of less than fifty animals and ride their reindeer when hunting wild reindeer or sable, using saddlebags to transport equipment and food; the Dolgan train some reindeer to be ridden or pull sleds. Historic exhibits include Evenki reindeer-hide and birchbark saddlebags with black/red decorative trim, and Dolgan snow goggles made of reindeer skin decorated with beads. There is also a late twentieth-century Chukchi reindeer-hide girl's parka coat.

Since the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Russian Arctic peoples have begun to reconstruct lost elements of their culture (and develop new practices), with some receiving state support to create local cultural centres and organise festivals

celebrating the seasons. A good example of this, covered in the exhibition, is the Sakha people's annual festival of the *yhyakh*, which takes place around the summer solstice, marks the return of the summer, and gives thanks for good weather and pasture for hay, cattle and horse breeding. The festival was banned during the Soviet period, but restored after 1991, and is now a large, well-attended event that involves feasting, horse riding, wrestling, dancing and parades in traditional costume, as shown in video clips from the 2012 festival. Related exhibits include two small-scale mammoth-ivory models of the *yhyakh* festival – one pre-1867, one by contemporary Sakha artist Fedor Markov.



Chukchi girl's parka and mittens (reindeer hide, Russia, 1996)

Two thirds of the exhibition's 280 objects are from the British Museum collections. The Russian exhibits include many archaeological and ethnographic artefacts from the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, reflecting the continuing fruitful relationship between the British Museum and its Russian counterparts (last seen in the magnificent *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia* exhibition in 2017).

Arctic: Culture and Climate provides a rich cultural history of all indigenous peoples of the Circumpolar North, including Russia. On the twin theme of global climate change and how Arctic indigenous organisations today are leading the way in advocacy and initiatives, testimony is predominantly from Alaska and Canada. Whether Russian Arctic peoples are less active in this arena, or this simply reflects the curators' backgrounds (all are based in the British Museum's Americas collections), is not clear. Whatever the case, this is a wonderful exhibition. Unfortunately, like many other museums during the pandemic, it has been dogged by lockdown stop-starts. If you cannot visit, view the curator lecture at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFlSyhNeqGc&feature=youtu.be or buy the excellent catalogue (price £35.00).

Footnotes

1 Teriukov AI, 'Russian Colonialism' in Lincoln A, Cooper J & Loovers JPL (Eds), *Arctic: Culture and Climate*, Thames & Hudson in collaboration with the British Museum, 2020, pp. 224–230

2 Davydov V, 'Changing State and Exploration of the Russian Arctic: Expanding Horizons of Ethnographic Knowledge' in Ibid., pp. 255–265

Note: The illustrations in this review are by Helen Turner, and are based on photographs taken at the *Arctic: Culture and Climate* exhibition.

Diana Turner

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk: Selected Stories
By Nikolai Leskov (translated by Robert Chandler, Donald Rayfield & William Edgerton, introduction by Donald Rayfield, New York Review Books, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-68137-490-1, Pbk, 448pp, £14.99)

This is a collection of new translations of six short works by Nikolai Leskov. Leskov was born in Gorokhovo, near Oriel, in 1831, the son of a magistrate and grandson of a priest. His early life was disrupted by family disintegration and he was sent away from home to various uncles for his education. After two years of school education, aged

16 years, he became a court clerk. On the death of his father a year later, he and his brother moved to Kiev where another uncle finished his education. Here he formed an interest in Poland and the Polish language, Old Believers (Orthodox dissenters) and Jews.

While working as a civil servant, yet another uncle – this time an Englishman named Scott – set up a firm in Russia called Scott & Wilkins. It transported serfs, livestock and dead stock across Russia to lands on the Volga and in the south. Leskov joined them for three years, travelling rough with the deported serfs, as no other writer had before. He mixed with the Russian peasantry and ethnic minorities, learning their customs, religions and languages. Scott encouraged Leskov to publish his colourful business reports in the press. When his uncle's business went broke after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, he turned to journalism and settled in St Petersburg. He was a controversial author and wrote under a Polish pseudonym, Stebnitsky. It is from all these experiences that Leskov's extraordinary tales of mystery, magic, cruelty and religious intolerance spring.

The aim of these new translations is to capture the true voice of the people of the tsarist empire, their ardent beliefs and their pride in their skills, however badly treated. The first tale, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, is well known, having been turned into an opera by Shostakovich. As translated by Robert Chandler (one of our SCRSS vice-presidents), this is a brutal example of how a rich merchant family with a neglected young wife is destroyed by passion and greed. A realistic picture is given of the horrors of the murders committed by the wife and her lover, and of their subsequent transportation to Siberia for the crime.

Of the other five stories, four are translated by Donald Rayfield, who introduces the collection in this book. These are: *The Sealed Angel*, based on the struggle to persuade a travelling group of Old Believers to convert to the Orthodox religion and give up their precious icon; *The Enchanted Wanderer*, a story of incredible savagery based on the practices of various ethnic groups, including the Tatars at the time of the Mongol Empire; *The Unmercenary Engineers*, concerning the consequences for three engineers, studying to become military officers in nineteenth-century St Petersburg, who choose a life of piety and absolute honesty, shunning the killing of others; and the *Innocent Prudentius*, a Greek Byzantine legend converted by Leskov into a moral tale favouring the virtues of love. The remaining story in the collection, *The Steel Flea*, is a tale of rivalry between English and Russian master microscopic craftsmen in tsarist days, and translated by William Edgerton.

Not being a Russian reader, I cannot comment on the quality of the translations except to say that all the stories read with great simplicity and fluency. My main impression from these elaborate tales is of Leskov's ability to convey the power and influence of beautiful women for good or bad. I am intrigued by his favouring of those who hold strong dissident views, but shocked by his dislike of the Jews. Leskov's work also records many Russian beliefs and legends that are still alive in Russia today.

Jean Turner

I Want a Baby and Other Plays
By Sergei Tretyakov (Glagoslav Publications, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-912894-30-7, Pbk, 436pp, £20.99)

Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov was born in 1892 in Latvia. He was a distinguished student in Riga. He studied law at Moscow University, graduating in 1916.

In 1922 Tretyakov settled in Moscow. He was immediately in the forefront of artistic development, sitting on the Central Committee for the promotion of proletarian culture and collaborating in theatre and film with Mayakovsky, Meyerhold and Eisenstein. Meyerhold and Eisenstein produced all his plays.

Tretyakov was singularly innovative in theatrical technique and staging, and was

noted as a prime practitioner of art that celebrated the Soviet experiment (later called Socialist Realism). By 1923 he was producing what he called 'industrial art', meaning matter-of-fact portrayal that sharply impacted his audiences.

The immense appeal of Tretyakov's plays derives from electric pace, imaginative staging, humour and topicality.

Pace is key. His plays were divided into self-contained units (and sometimes brief scenes within units) resonating with each other, instead of successive acts that unfolded the plot. No time was spent on character description. Character instead emerged from the actions and staging that brought scenery into the heart of the play. For example, *Gas Masks*, about a factory director who spent the money intended for factory safety on drink, was performed in a gas factory.

The two striking plays in this collection are *Roar, China!* and Tretyakov's major work *I Want a Baby*.

Roar, China! relates objectively an instance of repugnant imperialism. In a Chinese port during British colonial rule, Holey, an American businessman, swings an angry punch at Chi, a local boatman, when arguing over the fee for a boat trip. The boat lurches, Holey falls out and drowns. The incident is witnessed by the crew of a British gunboat anchored nearby. The Captain, responsible for discipline in the port, demands retribution for the white man's death. But Chi has disappeared. The Mayor of the town is required to provide two scapegoats to be executed. The arrogant and pretentious British contrast with the resigned and resentful Chinese. Impermanence and China's forthcoming roar are signalled: "My little boy is sleeping in my boat… The Captain probably has a little boy too… in 20 years my son will have his boot on the neck of the English boy."

I Want a Baby was ready for production in 1927 but banned for undermining Soviet family values. Meyerhold argued that the play was intended as a futuristic contribution to the contemporaneous Leninist-inspired debate on how to harness sexual activity to the service of the Soviet state. Milda, a party official, wishes to produce the perfect proletarian baby but without a love match. At many levels and through many actors the play unfolds the complexity of the aims and perversities of Soviet society. In a baby contest Milda's child shares first place with a child she considers unworthy, while the next prize is won by the child of a drug addict. The three babies are hailed as "heroes of the revolution". The inconclusive ending perhaps reflects the challenge in creating the perfect Soviet society.

Tretyakov was arrested in 1937, another innocent victim of the Terror. He killed himself in prison. Thereafter, his work disappeared. Reappearance and recognition have been recent and slow. This collection, expertly translated by Robert Leach and Stephen Holland, and brilliantly introduced by Leach, is a worthy tribute to a significant artist and will accelerate awareness.

James Heyworth-Dunne

Wait For Me: Selected Poems of Konstantin Simonov
(edited and translated by Mike Munford, Smokestack Books, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-9161392-3-7, Pbk, 116pp, £8.99, introduction, bilingual text Russian and English)

What you get: a well-produced slimmish volume with a portrait of the author on the cover, containing twenty-four well-spaced poems of varying lengths, and a nine-page introduction on Simonov's surprising origins and his speech defect, the love affair that sparked *Wait for Me*, and his life as a correspondent in the Great Patriotic War. His famous poem achieved an iconic status akin to Vera Lynn's *We'll Meet Again* in Britain.

Both these subjects, love and war, deal with the most passionate experiences a human being can have, and, distilled here, is some of the most tender and passionate poetry to emerge from that war. Detailed attention

should be paid to the Russian and the English texts, because Munford catches the *tone* of the Russian well (something Auden said was the most important thing when translating poetry). He works hard to retain the rhyme scheme, and – the most interesting thing for me – he re-writes the Russian into genuine modern English, but at the cost of re-phrasing and re-stating the original in such a radical way that one is constantly saying to oneself, has he got that in? and that? and then searching the Russian again to find it. Sometimes he *does* change the original in this process, but not so far that one would criticise. So not only do we have a collection of the most moving poems, but an exercise in reading Russian and a linguistic puzzle as well.

When studying Russian literature myself, I was unaware of the motivation for *Wait for Me*, and I am touched by that story. But that is not the whole of Simonov's story by a long chalk. Born in 1915, he graduated from the Gorky Literary Institute in 1939, began working as a journalist and then as a war correspondent for *Krasnaya Zvezda* (the Red Army newspaper). His first job was to report on the Battle of Khalkin-Gol against the Japanese in 1939.

Simonov was a prolific and versatile writer, and his work extended far beyond pieces for *Krasnaya Zvezda* and *Pravda*. Just as writers in the past had been urged to produce Five Year Plan novels, now writers were tasked to inspire patriotism in Russian hearts. Simonov led the way with a play about the war, *Russian People* (*Russkiye lyudi*, 1942). He had the misfortune to start as a writer during the most oppressive time of all in the USSR for creative writers (1945–53), although his account of the Battle of Stalingrad is vivid and accurate in his novel *Days and Nights (Dni i nochi*, 1944). Ironically, his propagandistic style earned him a number of state prizes in this period.

What we have to thank Simonov for is not his artistic achievement, which was modest (with some exceptions). Rather it was his part, as an official in the Writers Union, in supporting and achieving, stage by stage, during the later 1950s and early '60s, the longed-for Thaw in Russian cultural life. As a student, I well remember our first-year lecturer, Ronald Hingley, arriving late one day for his morning lecture on Russian poetry. He apologised, and offered as an excuse that the evening before he had called in at the library in St Anthony's College and looked at the November issue of *Novy Mir*. The year was 1962, *Novy Mir* contained the first publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and he had sat up all night reading it.

Andrew Jameson

A Brown Man in Russia: Lessons Learned on the Trans-Siberian
By Vijay Menon (Glagoslav Publications, 2018, ISBN: 978-1911414-75-9, Pbk, £18.15)

In the summer of 2013 three highly qualified graduates of Duke University, USA, who were regular worldwide backpackers, decided to spend Christmas in Mongolia, travelling there by the Trans-Siberian railway. Their names were Avi, Jeremy and Vijay, the latter the author of this book. Both Avi and Vijay are brown-skinned of Indian origin and Jeremy is white-skinned.

Like most brown-skinned people who have contributed much to so-called Western civilisation and have lived in the US or Britain for several generations, with high social status, he has experienced racism during his many travels. He has decided to take no offence at this and to put it down to the ignorance of the perpetrators.

So, what would be his experience in Russia, a country neither he nor his companions had ever visited before, whose language they could not speak or read, on the route they had booked from Moscow to St Petersburg and then on the Trans-Siberian to Irkutsk? He decided to record his experiences every day, together with the philosophical lessons learned therefrom.

His first impressions were of shockingly icy temperatures that drove them into every

museum, art gallery, shop and café on their rapid tours of Moscow and St Petersburg, before embarking on the Trans-Siberian. They were awe-inspired at the treasures on view in both cities.

Travelling third-class on a budget, they were surprised at the provision of sleeping compartments with real beds for their journeys. Those who have travelled such trains will recognise the joys and setbacks of this provision. Unable to communicate with others except by music and sign language, they benefited from the innate kindness and generosity of the Russian people. When hard rations ran out and they were unable to afford the dining room prices, their rush to buy bread and cheese at a train stop in Tyumen was rewarded by the kindly shop lady refusing to accept their money. Told to leave the dining room, where they were playing chess, unless they bought food, a silent Russian traveller sent them a plate of blinis. Innocent Avi was soundly beaten at chess every time by a Russian fellow traveller, proving to him that chess is a Russian national game.

Of course, there were setbacks, like the noisy and drunken space travel trainees in the next compartment, insisting that the trio join them; or the sudden display of racism from another drunken group who were soundly told off by a kindly Siberian babushka sharing their compartment at the time.

This was compensated for by a group of young ice-hockey players, who sat listening to music from the Americans' iPods for part of their journey and cried when Vijay and his friends got off at Irkutsk.

Then on to Mongolia, to achieve their objective. Here they found a more Western way of life, nationalistic, revering the achievements of Genghis Khan, with hi-tech and smart young people. They spent Christmas Eve in a Buddhist temple at the top of a mountain in the magnificent Terelj National Park and Christmas Day in a 'ger' (tent house) with traditional nomads. Then they flew home from Chinggis Khaan International Airport, taking back a glowing picture of Russian people and culture – Vijay's inspiration for this delightful book.

Jean Turner

The 12 Apostles of Russian Law: Lawyers Who Changed Law, State and Society
By Pavel Krasheninnikov (translated by Christopher Culver, Glagoslav Publications, with the support of the Institute for Literary Translation, Russia, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-911414-93-3, Pbk, 164pp, £16.50)

This book is a bizarre contribution to literature, published with the support of the Russian Government. When a friend of mine, a leading Russian defence lawyer, saw the book in a photograph on Facebook of my dining table, he asked: "And who will write about Pavel himself, the Apostle of amendments?" I replied: "That's my punishment, tomorrow – a review. Only 500 words. Luckily I have a sense of humour." His response: "Three is quite enough."

The front cover of the book shows an oil portrait (not identified on or in the book) of Count Mikhail Mikhailovich Speransky (1772–1839), with two of his state medals. Indeed, Speransky was a high state official, publishing in 1826 the Corpus of Laws of the Russian Empire, and was one of the judges who tried and sentenced the Decembrists of 1825, the aristocrats who rose up against autocracy in favour of a constitutional monarchy. He ended up with six high state medals, having been Governor of Penza and of Siberia.

Pavel Krasheninnikov, who was born in 1964, has done one better. He has no less than seven medals, at only 57 years of age. The Russian original of this book, published in 2016, was illustrated with portraits of the '12 Apostles', with their medals.

Indeed, being adorned with high state medals seems to have been a criterion for inclusion in the ranks of 'Apostles'.

In his Epilogue Pavel writes that the 1993 Constitution "fully meets the demands of a

legal governed state". Oops. In the last year Mr Putin has decided otherwise. However, Pavel was Minister of Justice under Yeltsin, 1998–9, and has for many years been a Deputy in the State Duma for Mr Putin's United Russia party, and for eighteen years Chair of the Legislative Committee. Hence 'Apostle of amendments'.

All of the twelve were faithful servants of the tsarist, or in the case of Vladimir Terebilov, the Soviet, regime. Terebilov, whom Pavel names for some reason 'The Patriarch of Law', was born in 1916, was a Soviet prosecutor from 1939 to 1962, then Deputy Chairman of the USSR Supreme Court from 1962 to 1970, and then USSR Minister of Justice from 1970 to 1984, when he became chairman of the Supreme Court until his retirement in 1986. He died in 2004. His moment of fame was the 'Brodsky Affair', when the Nobel Prize-winning poet was given five years forced labour for 'parasitism', on the grounds that he was not formally registered as working anywhere.

Pavel's book is littered with unnecessary vignettes and anecdotes, and here is a particularly egregious example. He tells us that "according to a long-standing tradition", he and Sergei Stepashin (who became prime minister) would visit Terebilov on the eve of Victory Day (9 May), and bring some food and drink, spending several hours chatting to him, listening to his stories and asking for his advice on various matters. This is clearly of the greatest importance to Pavel.

Pavel leaves out, among others, Semeon Desnitsky, PhD from Glasgow, who was the first academic to teach law in the Russian language and contributed to Catherine the Great's reforms in the eighteenth century; the great judge and reformer Anatoly Koni who presided over the jury acquittal of Vera Zasulich in 1878; and Tamara Georgievna Morshchakova, reforming Constitutional Court judge, who is still with us.

Maybe they did not have enough medals.

Professor Bill Bowring

Printed and published by:
SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB
Tel: 020 7274 2282
Email: ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk
Website: www.scrss.org.uk
Registered Charity No 1104012
Editor: Diana Turner
Publication date: February 2021