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The form and content of the early Soviet book: a study through the country's publishing industry institutions of the 1920s and 1930s [*Working Title*]

The main aim of my thesis is to expose the contribution to the early Soviet book aesthetic by traditionalist, predominantly figurative artists, partially exemplified by members of the pre-revolutionary World of Art [Mir iskusstva] movement and their disciples. The starting point for my investigation is the fact that up to this day, Western scholarship has not properly assessed and written into its narrative the output of a large number of artists, who actively contributed to the field of book design during the first post-revolutionary years, and whose work does not neatly fit the definitions of neither pre- nor post-revolutionary avant-garde aesthetic. In particular, World of Art's legacy is often portrayed as belonging exclusively to the pre-revolutionary Russian domain.

My thesis consists of three chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of output produced by these traditionalist artists. These, in turn, relate to the multiple function of the early Soviet book within the broader socio-historical context of its creation, dissemination and consumption. Firstly, the book's crucial role as a tool of Bolshevik agitation and popular enlightenment is highlighted. Secondly, the active engagement by the Soviet state of books as instruments of cultural diplomacy is examined. Lastly, the role of book design as an important aspect of Soviet artistic education, in the context of creating art with a clear social purpose, is explored.

More specifically, the first chapter looks at the contribution by a number of rightist artists to the Bolsheviks' early publishing endeavours. The primary case study here is the People's Library [Narodnaia biblioteka] series. These were affordable illustrated editions of Russian classics, nationalised by the Bolshevik government in 1918, to which a number of former World of Art artists contributed.

Second chapter considers Soviet participation in a number of international book exhibitions during the 1920s. It looks at a number of lesser-known projects, including the 1922 Fiera Internazionale del Libro in Florence and the 1927 Internationale Buchkunst-Ausstellung (IBA) in Leipzig, which expose conscious engagement by Soviet authorities of rightist artists, including former World of Art members, as opinions on Soviet book art were formulated in the West. Another case study is the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris. Whilst it is primarily known

as a showcase of Soviet Constructivist art, the Soviet display also included a large-scale book section, in which works by numerous traditionalist artists were demonstrated. These cultural-diplomatic projects were viewed by Soviet authorities as a means to influence Soviet reputation and contribute to the country's acceptance into the circle of cultured Western nations. They assisted in the process of Soviet state carving out a position for itself in the international arena during the first years of its existence.

Finally, third chapter considers rightist artists who taught at the graphic art faculties of the Higher State Technical and Artistic Workshops, VKhUTEMAS (1922–1926) and VKhUTEIN (1926–1930), in Moscow, and VKhUTEIN (1922–1930) in Leningrad. In particular, it looks at the contribution to the development of the graphic faculty's program by a renowned wood engraver and book illustrator Vladimir Favorsky, who simultaneously was school's rector in 1923–1926. Equally important to this chapter's argument is the work of Dmitrii Mitrokhin, former World of Art artist, as head of VKhUTEIN's graphic faculty in Leningrad in 1924–1927.

As such, my research aims to resurface the presence, within the early Soviet artistic landscape, of rightist influences on book design. They often occurred alongside leftist ones, and associated artists occupied an equally important position, specifically on an institutional level. They were continuously supported by the Soviet authorities and were actively engaged in numerous state-sponsored projects. It also reveals a wider network of rightist art critics, graphic art and book collectors, museum officials and exhibition organisers, who held similar views and actively promoted traditionalist book artists. The thesis, as such, also aims to reconstruct this network's activity and its main players, vis-a-vis the leftist avant-garde.