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Cosmopolitanism as the Driving Force in the Artistic Development of Valentin Serov

It is not a coincidence that Valentin Serov's contemporaries considered him to be one of the major renovators of Russian art. He exhibited abroad at Munich Secession, Biennale in Venice and Salon d'Automne in Paris and became an acclaimed stage designer with Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*. As an associate professor at Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture he tutored Petrov-Vodkin, Saryan, Larionov, and Tatlin, thus, truly playing a key role in the development of Russian modernism. In fact, Serov's body of work is one of the most striking examples of artistic links between Russia and Western Europe before the Revolution.

Using contemporary sources and iconographic analysis I am trying to find out what works by European artists Serov could have known and to what extent he received them in his own art, which is an absolutely new approach to his oeuvre. One of the conclusions I could make so far is that Serov's cosmopolitanism was one of the essential factors in the evolution of his oeuvre and that it was one of the main reasons why his early masterpieces marked the beginning of modern painting in Russia. As someone who was allowed to ride Richard Wagner's dog at the age of four and by the age of fourteen had spent most of his life between Saint Petersburg, Munich, Paris, and Kiev, Serov was naturally inclined to neglect geographical borders between these places. Apparently, such early experiences as sketching *en plein air* with Max Liebermann's friend Karl Koepping and visits to Louvre with Ilya Repin made him consider the artistic dialogue with Europe not only self-evident but also necessary for an artistic development. However, during the Soviet era any analysis of Serov's cosmopolitan educational background was avoided and a profound discussion about possible artistic influences from abroad unwanted and virtually not pursued.

Serov's early works like *Amazon* (1884), *At the Window* (1886), *Riva degli Schiavoni* (1887), *Girl with Peaches* (1887) or *Young Woman in Sunlight* (1888) already show him thinking along the same lines as his European counterparts. In this context, his two early

visits to Europe – to Germany, Holland, and Belgium in 1885 and to Italy in 1887 – deserve particular attention. In the *Exposition Universelle* in Antwerp and *Esposizione nazionale artistica* in Venice Serov for example encountered works by Munch, Segantini, Favretto, and Sargent. The paintings he produced in the later years – like portraits of the patron Henriette Hirschman (1907) and the *Ballets Russes* dancer Ida Rubinstein (1910) – prove that he never lost his awareness of the modernistic developments in other countries or his courage to challenge those he appreciated most.