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Exhibition Strategies of Russian Modernism in the 1900s – 1910s

The impact of exhibitions on spreading modernist art movements is now considered pivotal, although it is usually examined through a sequence of case-studies which underline the global and progressive character of the art in Europe at the time. Other studies in this area often focus on single exhibition societies and do not recognise the impact this phenomenon could have on a specific artistic culture and the shifts it could undergo.

Since the 1890s, Secessionism and international art exhibitions have created a new mode of interaction between artists, collectors, and the public in European art centres. Their new forum-like institutional system shaped artists' career pathways while exalting the role of the art show.

Meanwhile, Russian art also underwent a radical change due to the disruption of the hegemony of academic supervision in the exchange process with the European art world. An increase in Russian art's presence in European exhibitions coincided with the growth of private initiatives at the turn of the century. Many studies address this period of Russian art history in terms of cultural influence, which might limit it to a matrix of appropriation. In this regard, Russia's relation to Western art cannot be reduced to the idea of direct transfer but seems to be a complex fluctuation of interpretation of its own artistic and cultural identity in response to changes in European art centres.

The presence of Russian artists in international art exhibitions in the 1900s–1910s showed a growing polarisation of opinion on the definition of national heritage and its place in creative processes. The internal aesthetic dilemma was fed both by modernist dynamics in Europe, in terms of style and changes in institutional layout, and by a need to (re)formulate their position regarding the international community and their own background and history.

This research views the role of Russian artists in fin-de-siècle international art exhibitions and secession movements in the early 20th century as a stimulus for the debate on modern aesthetics in Russia. It aims to rethink the evolution of expressive language in Russian art and the creation of cross-cultural networks, in connection with the rise of new exhibition strategies and biographic patterns among artists.

It will combine methodological approaches that emphasise the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the art process and take into account the agendas of the institutions involved.

It will first discuss the growth of new cultures of display across Europe at the turn of the century, emphasising the role of secessionist organisations and artist-driven societies to delineate the context in which Russian exhibitors positioned themselves. Second, it will provide an interpretative overview of the problems inherent to the artistic debate in Russia between the late 1890s and the 1910s by focusing on Russian modernist artists exhibiting abroad. Drawing on press reviews, catalogues, and epistolary exchanges between artists and exhibition organisers, it seeks to locate events such as the *Exposition de l'art russe* at the Salon d'automne of 1906 or Russian art sections at the Munich and Vienna Secessions throughout 1896-1913, and delineate the contribution at the Salon des Indépendants (1901-1912), the Sonderbund in Cologne (1912) and the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London. It will try to define the criteria for artist and work selection, see how they were received and understand reactions in the Russian art community. In doing so it seeks to decode the import of this participation for both the reception of Russian modernist artists in a European cultural context and their own evaluation of their path.

The main concern of the research is to situate these exhibitions not as timeline of narrative-building events that punctuate the history of Russian art, but rather as the elements of a swift process where market and personal interest are as important as the quest for renewed collective identity.
