

ПОД ОТКРЫТЫМ НЕБОМ

Journeys in Space and Memory: Urban Scenes and Landscapes by Russian Artists

Landscape painting has a strong tradition in Russia beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. A group of artists—the so-called Wanderers (Peredvizhniki)—split off from the classical academic canon, with its emphasis on rendering scenes from the Bible and mythology, and started to depict their environment. Through their reflections of nature and society these artists addressed various ideas and institutions of Russian culture, including class structure, the tsarist regime, censorship of the arts, and Russian identity itself. Their works frequently criticized the status quo, contrasting poor peasants with the wealthy nobility, for example, and showing the endless unpaved roads covered with slush in early spring. Yet serene Moscow courtyards, as well as beautiful rivers and forests, are represented as well.

This exhibition shows how the Russian tradition of landscape painting continued into the twentieth century. It offers a journey to places in Russia, Western Europe, and the United States that were cherished by the artists who depicted them while living and working there, or while longing for them in emigration. Amid the search for new forms of artistic expression that dominated the early twentieth century, the dispute about Russian culture remained active. Behind the works, therefore, lie questions similar to those of the previous century—questions of identity and belonging, nostalgia and survival—but modified by the course of history, the world wars, and the revolution.

An homage to St. Petersburg opens the exhibition. Many artists in this exhibition were born and studied in St. Petersburg, which changed its name in 1914 to Petrograd and in 1924 to Leningrad. (In 1991, with the fall of the USSR, the name St. Petersburg was reinstated.) The city's Baroque and Neoclassical architecture also inspired several artists. For Alexandre Benois, St. Petersburg, the city in which he was born, was the epitome of Russian culture. Later in life, from his home in France, he created many views of Russia's northern capital from memory or with the help of postcards. A panoramic view of St. Petersburg by Mstislav Dobuzhinskii was among Thomas P. Whitney's favorites and decorated a wall in his office, as seen in the photograph nearby.

Organized by Bettina Jungen, senior curator and Thomas P. Whitney, Class of 1937, Curator of Russian Art, Mead Art Museum

Alexandre Benois
St. Petersburg 1870–1960 Paris

Summer Garden in St. Petersburg, 1957 (1959?)
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on medium weight laid paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.407



Alexandre Benois
St. Petersburg 1870–1960 Paris

Fountain at Peterhof, ca. 1920–1924
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.411



Alexandre Benois
St. Petersburg 1870–1960 Paris

View of the River Okhta in St. Petersburg, 1959
Watercolor and graphite on paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.418



In Benois' worldview, the palace of Louis XIV in Versailles embodied Western civilization's highest cultural achievement. Yet he also loved his native St. Petersburg and frequently depicted its palaces and parks, many of which date to the Baroque period.

The gates of the Summer Garden were planned in 1770 and finished in 1784. They became a landmark, and poets from Aleksandr Pushkin to Anna Akhmatova wrote about them. Benois, however, does not place the gates in the center, but includes the Swan Canal (Iebiazh'ia kanavka), created in the second decade of the eighteenth century, with its arched bridge, and a horse carriage, which alludes to a past era.

Tsar Peter I modeled Peterhof, the palace and park outside St. Petersburg, after Versailles with the intention of surpassing the model. The Benois family had close ties with Peterhof, since Alexandre's father, Nikolai, had designed several buildings on the estate. The fountains in the park of Peterhof are a recurring theme in Alexandre Benois' work before and after his emigration in 1926. In his watercolors he shows the harmony of manmade and natural beauty.

Benois' view of the river Okhta features the Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit and the Protection of Our Most Holy Lady Virgin Mary and a wharf where ships for the army were produced. The wharf was closed in 1913 and the church was demolished in 1929, after the artist had left Russia. For this late watercolor Benois relied on a nineteenth-century photograph by Alfred Lorens of the same view.

David Burliuk
Semirotivka farmstead, Kharkov Governorate, Russian Empire (now
Ukraine) 1882–1967 Southampton, NY

Nocturnal Landscape, ca. 1940–1950
Oil on masonite

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.505

In the early twentieth century Burliuk was a proponent of the Russian avant-garde in art and poetry. Although he frequently showed his own works, he was most active promoting emerging Russian artists at events and exhibitions. In 1912 he coauthored the Futurist manifesto **A Slap in the Face of Public Taste**. In 1918 he left Russia, settling a few years later in New York, where he continued to paint and write. Today his works are rarely missing at auction and still enjoy great popularity.

Early on David Burliuk experimented in his paintings with the texture of the surface, using mud, sand, paint, and other materials to enhance the surface's expressive quality. In emigration he adopted a Post-Impressionist manner. Yet impasto and materiality remained characteristic of his works throughout his career.

Nocturnal Landscape is a typical work in Burliuk's oeuvre. He painted it on masonite leaving the texture of the board purposefully visible. The thickly applied paint adds a gestural element to the small painting. The bright yellow of the moon is accompanied by sprinkles of other colors—green, red, blue—which bring the dark composition to life.



Mstislav Dobuzhinskii
Novgorod 1875–1957 New York

The Queen of Spades, 1931
Watercolor and gouache on illustration board

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.299

Dobuzhinskii created this set design for the performance of Tchaikovsky's opera **The Queen of Spades** at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels. He did the scenography for this opera four times between 1925 and 1939 for the operas in Kaunas (in Lithuania), Brussels, and the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London.

The artist first began theater work in St. Petersburg in 1907 when he was a member of the World of Art group. In 1924 he left Russia for Lithuania, his family's homeland. Throughout the rest of his life he worked for theaters in Europe and the United States.

Especially later in his career Dobuzhinskii often repeated his original designs for various theaters. Life in emigration was exhausting, and it seems only natural that the artist tried to build on the success of his earlier work. Additionally, European and American audiences liked the "Russianness" and decorativeness of his work.



Robert Fal'k
Moscow 1886–1958

Paris Street Scene, ca. 1928–1938
Oil on canvas

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.129

Robert Fal'k, who had studied under Neo-Impressionists such as Abram Arkhipov, Valentin Serov, and Konstantin Korovin, became in the early twentieth century one of the leading Cezannists. He participated in major exhibitions, including the Golden Fleece—where visitors could see Fauve art for the first time in Moscow—and the World of Art. He was also a founding member of the Jack of Diamonds, featuring Neo-Primitivism and Cezannism.

From 1928 to 1938 he lived in Paris, where he painted this work. A dynamic brushstroke and harmonious colors distinguish his paintings. Stylistically he remained a Cezannist for most of his career. Just before the Second World War broke out he returned to the Soviet Union. In the 1950s he was a major influence on young nonconformist artists, who looked up to him as a reminder of a past and inaccessible art world.



Pavel Filonov
Moscow 1883–1941 Leningrad (now St. Petersburg)

The Flight into Egypt (The Refugees), ca. 1913–1918
Oil on canvas

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.21

This painting depicts the biblical story in which Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus flee from King Herod's impending massacre of Jerusalem's infant boys in an attempt to kill the prophesied king of the Jews (Matthew 2:13–23).

In Orthodox iconography a fourth young person, interpreted as Jacob, another son of Joseph, often accompanies the group. Filonov rendered this figure as a shirtless dark-skinned man with a club and harpoon—weapons typical of the northern peoples of Alaska and Siberia—as well as a stylized feather headdress. Nina Gurianova suggests that this figure is inspired by poet Velimir Klebnikov's figure Ka, an "energetic, attractive, darkskinned" pathfinder.

The artist painted a fantastic landscape around the figures, consisting of numerous facet-like shapes filled with shimmering color. This structure reflects not only his idea of the "madness" of art, which requires the artist's tireless labor, but also the idea that art is similar to a living organism, always growing and changing.

Filonov used the same composition as the title illustration for his poem **Chant of Universal Flowering** (*Propeven' o prorosli mirovoi*, 1915), displayed in the case nearby. With this work he responded to the First World War, to which the ancient tale of religious persecution and political emigration must have seemed particularly relevant.



Natal'ia Goncharova
Negaevo, Tula Province, Russia 1881–1962 Paris

Red Houses in Moscow, 1905

Oil on canvas

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

2001.13

This painting from an early stage in Goncharova's career may be among the first works she created in oil. Before 1905 she devoted herself to pastel drawing, her favorite subjects being landscapes and still lifes. The broken daylight and the colors of the rainy day in this work evoke the characteristics of pastel, a medium that is also reflected in the artist's light brushstroke, her use of white, and the uncovered areas of the canvas.

Like her partner Larionov, in 1904 the artist worked in the studio of Konstantin Korovin, a proponent of Russian Impressionism, whose work is represented nearby in this exhibition. Around 1905–1906, Goncharova moved on in her search for expressive forms and began to incorporate elements of Post-Impressionism, in particular van Gogh's vigorous brushstroke and contrasting contours.

Goncharova likely painted **Red Houses** in Moscow's Trekhprudnii district, where she shared a studio with Larionov on Trekhprudnii lane 2A.



Serge Hollerbach
Born Pushkin (near St. Petersburg), 1923

Street Repairs, 1996
Acrylic on paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2002.387

Hollerbach began his art education in Leningrad in 1941, but had to leave after five months when German troops invaded the city. He was subsequently sent to Germany to do forced labor. After the war he continued his art studies at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. In 1949 he moved to New York, where he became associated with Russian artists from the early twentieth-century wave of emigration, including Dobuzhinskii and Rozhankovskii.

The artist sees himself as someone who bears witness to his time. He paints and draws what he sees in his environment—mostly people in urban settings or at the beach. To this day Hollerbach practices a contemporary form of realism. He mentioned once that, despite his progressive loss of sight since 1994, he is unable to work in an abstract style.



Vladislav Izmailovich
St. Petersburg 1872–1959 Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg)

The Neva with the Peter and Paul Cathedral, 20th century
Pastel over pencil on board

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.461



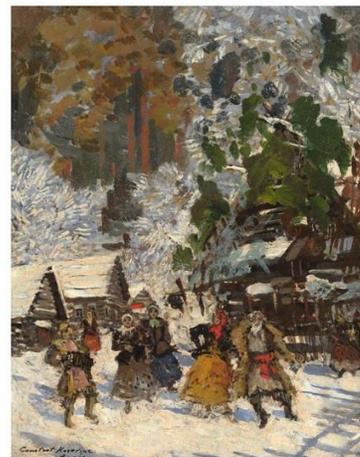
Konstantin Korovin
Moscow 1861–1939 Paris

Dancing in the Snow, Russia, ca. 1923–1939
Oil on board

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.338

Korovin's mature art is rooted in Impressionism. After his trip to Paris in 1887 he wrote of the Impressionists: "In their work I found everything I was scolded for back home in Moscow." He praised color and light as the highest values in art and noted that one has to "find a subject for the tone." He also created well-received set designs throughout his career.

By the early 1920s, however, he had little money, could not find a studio to work in, and felt under attack by revolutionary artists on the left. In November 1922 he therefore emigrated from Russia to Paris, a city he had visited and depicted many times before. Yet his works did not sell well in the French capital, fetching only low prices. Forced to take commissions, he produced countless views of Paris by night and Russian winter scenes. This painting is likely one of the latter. It testifies not so much to the artist's great talent as to the circumstances in which he spent the last sixteen years of his life.



Mikhail Larionov
Tiraspol, Moldova 1881–1964 Fontenay-aux-Roses, near Paris

Landscape with Wagon, ca. 1909–1910
Oil on canvas laid on fiberboard

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.20

Larionov created this painting in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire, where he spent most summers in his native town of Tiraspol. In 1910 the Burluk family invited him to their house in the Crimea, where he produced works very similar in style to **Landscape with Wagon**. In the familiar provincial environment he was at his most prolific, while in Moscow he devoted his energies to the organizing of exhibitions and events.

Provincial motifs enjoyed great popularity among early twentieth-century European artists. Gauguin worked in Brittany, Normandy, and Tahiti, for example, and Picasso discovered the African mask. These artists sought liberation from the artistic and social restrictions of the environment in which they lived. Larionov's province, however, was his home, and therefore it represented comfort more than liberation.

The energetic brushstrokes and intensive colors call to mind the modernist art movements Expressionism and Fauvism. Larionov was impressed by the works of his French contemporaries when he accompanied Diaghilev to Paris in 1906 and quickly absorbed the newest trends. Just a few years later he presented his own innovation called Rayism (Luchism).



Isaak Levitan
Kibarta, Lithuania 1860–1900 Moscow

A Forest Glade, late 19th century
Oil on canvas board

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.282



Lev Mezhberg
Odessa, Ukraine 1933–2007

Street in Slobodka, Odessa, 1971

Oil on canvas

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

2001.432

Mezhberg was a master of tonality. Soft colors—predominantly blues and yellows—and diffuse light characterize many of his paintings. **Street in Slobodka** features these characteristics despite its pronounced contrasts.

The painter's professional career started in 1958 when he graduated from art school amid the years of Khrushchev's political "Thaw." The modest liberalization in Soviet cultural politics may have allowed Mezhberg to participate early on in exhibitions throughout the Soviet Union and abroad.

Odessa, the artist's hometown—and where he spent his entire life until his emigration—was among his favorite subjects. While he no doubt had a very personal relationship with the city, it was also an unobjectionable subject—one that could be portrayed without causing too much trouble. In an autobiographical essay he mentioned that he became an artist at a time when Jewish themes were subject to repression. He created this painting two years before he left the Soviet Union to settle—like so many other Jewish artists—in the United States.



Oskar Rabin
Born Moscow, 1928

Spring in Priluki, 1967

Oil on canvas, label from a can of condensed milk

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.346

The painting's dark colors and coarse texture seem to belie its title, despite the pussy willows on the window sill. While the depiction of Russian spring, with its muddy roads and fields, had a century-long tradition dating back to the Wanderers (Peredvizhniki), Rabin does not refer to their realism. His painting is a symbolic account of the drabness of life and culture in Soviet Russia. The label from an actual can of condensed milk connects the work with real life at the time, when condensed milk was considered a special treat.

Priluki is a village on the Oka River south of Moscow, where Rabin and his wife regularly spent time starting in the late 1950s. There they met with their artist friends Vladimir Nemukhin and Lidia Masterkova (both represented in the Mead's collection), and Rabin even considered buying a house. It is clear, therefore, that the somber atmosphere of the painting does not reflect the artist's fond perception of the place itself.

Rabin was a leader of Nonconformist art in Moscow. By the time he painted **Spring in Priluki** he was suffering increasing harassment and pressure from art critics and censors, yet he continued to exhibit his work and organize exhibitions. In 1978 the government deprived him of Soviet citizenship.



Sergei Sharshun
Buguruslan, Samara region, Russia 1888–1975 Villeneuve-Saint Georges,
France

Glance at a Village (Clin d’oeil sur un village), 1951

Oil on wood

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

2001.438

After quitting the school of economics in his native province, where his parents had sent him, Sergei Sharshun started to take art classes at the studios of Ilia Mashkov and Konstantin Iuon in Moscow at the age of twenty-two. Two years later he went to Paris where he attended, among others, the art school La Palette run by the Cubists Jean Metzinger and Henri Le Fauconnier. Early on the artist developed his own ornamental style. He counts as a French abstractionist along with fellow Russian artists such as Serge Poliakoff, André Lansky, and Nicolas de Staël.

Until the 1940s Sharshun devoted most of his creative energy to writing poetry and prose. His encounter with Dadaism around 1920 had a lasting influence on him. In **Glance at a Village** Sharshun presents a surrealist composition that the viewer is left to decipher. Hills, clouds, and perhaps a village in the center? The palette, limited to variations of purple, points to his oeuvre of the 1950s, when he preferred monochrome tones for his paintings.



Marianne von Werefkin
Tula, near Moscow 1860–1938 Ascona, Switzerland

Early Spring (Vorfrühling), ca. 1907–1909
Tempera on paper mounted on board

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.84

Early Spring is set in Lithuania, where the Werefkin family owned an estate—a generous gift from the tsar to Marianne’s father. The family called it Blagodat, which means “paradise” or “abundance,” and spent summers there. Marianne loved the place dearly and worked a lot in her studio house until 1896, when she moved to Munich.

In December of 1909 the artist spent a few months in Kaunas, Lithuania, during which she visited Blagodat for the first time since she had left Russia. According to Werefkin scholar Laima Lauckaite, the landscape in **Early Spring** reflects the region around Blagodat. Werefkin was deeply impressed by this visit and particularly noted the poverty and ubiquitous hardship.

The intense colors of the painting reflect the artist’s emotions during her stay in Blagodat. The man sitting beneath a wayside chapel is a beggar, wearing warming rags around his head and reading the Bible. The motif reflects Werefkin’s Catholic spirituality, in which she found comfort in difficult times.



Mstislav Dobuzhinskii
Novgorod 1875–1957 New York

View of St. Petersburg, 1912
Colored lithograph

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
2001.126

Dobuzhinskii was known as the “poet of St. Petersburg” and therefore publisher Iosif Knebel’ commissioned him to make a print of the city for his educational series **Russian History in Images** (Kartiny po russkoi istorii). Dobuzhinskii contributed three images to the series, but this work was not included.

In this print the artist created an accurate account of life in Russia’s capital in 1912. From his temporary workspace in the church of the Senate and Synod building he captured a detailed view of the city’s most important square, St. Peter’s Square (today Senate Square), with the Admiralty, Neva River, and Peter and Paul Fortress in the background. In front of the majestic neoclassical architecture of the Admiralty he showed numerous entertaining scenes of people’s everyday activities.

The clear lines and deep perspective—created by means of the diagonal road and the contrast between the bustling narrative foreground and the looming sky and buildings in the distance—are characteristic of Dobuzhinskii’s style, as is the decorative quality of the composition.
