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## A BATTLE FOR THE “PEOPLE’S CAUSE” OR FOR THE MARKET CASE

### Kramskoi and the Itinerants

This article analyses the relationship of a prominent group of Russian artists, who were active from the 1860s to the 1890s, with the state institutions: first of all the Imperial Academy of Arts and with the Court. Rather than with aesthetic qualities of their art, I’ll be concerned with the cultural situation that surrounded these artists, with their socioeconomic standing, and with marketability of their professional production. It will involve the discussion of formal independence (or the lack thereof) of artists from the Academy, the peculiarities of their exhibitional politics, and communication with collectors and customers.

These artists are usually called the Wanderers (sometimes, Itinerants, fr. *Ambulants* — rus. *Peredvizhniki*), or else, in the Soviet historiography they were invariably called “democratic.” One of the most typical figures in the art world of that time was Ivan Kramskoi (1837-1887), and his advent to the professional scene began from the conflict with the Academy of Arts, when he organized what was later called the Revolt of the Fourteen. This “revolt” did not lead to the revolution, and it was not intended to. The radical ideas of the artistic and political Avant-garde of the following generations to make “du passé faisons table rase” were totally foreign for these artists. What they were looking for, was the professional (this, for a larger part, was understood as economic) success within the existing, not radically changed, society. To this end they alternatively distanced themselves from the Academy or collaborated with it — according to the situation. Their intention was to challenge the authority of the Academy of Arts as an art world monopolist. Populist in rhetoric, the *Peredvizhniki* (and to a certain extent the earlier group of Kramskoi) in fact heralded the new era when art began to be understood as commodity. Theirs was the first attempt in Russia to bypass the state as a sponsor and regulator in arts and to address the issues of art production and circulation on a private basis. In short, the activity of the *Peredvizhniki* (and the Kramskoi’s Art Cooperative — *Artel* that

preceded them) can be scrutinized as a market strategy. The deconstruction of the market subtext of the “people’s democratic” art of the 1860s-90s, usually hidden under the ideological veil, is the main goal of this article.

### **The Peredvizhniki in the eyes of Russian nationalists, Soviet ideologists and some Western specialists**

Upon the advent of the Peredvizhniki and during the entire time of the existence of the Soviet state, critics have employed such expressions in their discourse as “democratic cause,” “national motifs,” “folklore roots,” “social responsibility,” “exposé of officials,” “condemnation of the Czarist regime,” etc. more often than they discussed works of art aesthetically. The art of the populist intelligentsia was officially proclaimed as “progressive” and “outstanding” for the way it “fought” with pre-revolutionary society. There was very few discussion of the Peredvizhniki’s artistic merits, or their own motives, or their actions in a sociocultural perspective. The Soviet authors followed the way of the prominent critic Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906). It was Stasov who was largely responsible for the creation of the “Peredvizhniki myth,” reiterated since that time on. Before the revolution of 1917 this Stasovian point of view was not the only one; a broad array of voices highly critical of the Peredvizhniki’s role, goal and factual artistic output can be found in the contemporary periodicals. There is no wonder that soon after the revolution these voices were silenced.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the subject of the visual culture of the 1860-1890s was virtually abandoned, and no serious reevaluation was offered by the post-Soviet authors in the past twenty years. Astonishingly enough, old works are still popular, as, for instance, Frida Roginskaia’s *Peredvizhniki*, written during the late 1940s — mid-1950s and, although rich in sources, full of late Stalin epoch’s idiosyncrasies. It was published in 1989 and reprinted in 1993 and 1997.<sup>1</sup> In 2003 there was published a voluminous encyclopedia on the Peredvizhniki, 736 pages worth.<sup>2</sup> Again, some useful factual materials notwithstanding (like extensive lists of exhibitions), it totally lacks of any interpretive discourse. In 2004 another coffee table format book (464 p.) was published with a text by Semen Ekshtut, *Shaika Peredvizhnikov*.<sup>3</sup> Judging by the title, one may presume that the author offers a reconsideration of this art movement (Russian *shaika* means a ‘gang’ and usually bears negative connotations), but as it happened, the words *shaika peredvizhnikov* were borrowed from a saying of one of the later members of the group and had

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1. Frida S. Roginskaia, *Peredvizhniki [Itinerants]*, (M.: Iskusstvo, 1989 (1993, 1997)).

2. G.V. Romanov, *Tovarishchestvo peredvizhnykh khudozhestvennykh vystavok 1871-1923: entsiklopediia [The Association of the Itinerant Art Exhibitions, 1871-1923]* (SPb.: SPb. Orkestr, 2003).

3. Semen A. Ekshtut, *Shaika Peredvizhnikov [The Gang of the Peredvizhniki]* (M.: Drofa, 2004).

rather positive connotations closer to “rebels,” “our pack.” Ekshtut’s book gives some broader, than before, cultural context, but at the same time it reiterates old Soviet clichés and does not question the sacrosanct position of the Peredvizhniki in the Russian art history. (It is interesting to mention that this book was published under the aegis of the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Science.)

Meanwhile, in the West, the very few recent publications on this period of Russian art follow in the vein of the Soviet historiography — like the one published in 2006 by the University of Manchester Press, full of overly eulogistic pronouncements.<sup>4</sup> The author steps back from the serious well-balanced analysis of Elizabeth Valkenier made thirty years previously.<sup>5</sup> Valkenier’s book still has its importance as a pioneering Western study on Russian realist art of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but, being an introduction to the subject, it did not treat some facets with enough details. Her source base, as broad and thorough as it was, did not include certain materials which became available later — for example, the two-volume collection of key documents on Peredvizhniki published in Moscow in 1987.<sup>6</sup> And in this article I offer a more focused interpretation of the nature of the Russian realist art based not only on broader sources but seen through a prism of the new reality of the commodification of art and its circulation (through exhibitions) and distribution (to state and private collections). In doing so, the old and seemingly well-known documents will be revisited and interpreted in a new way. The very few general Western art books that mention Russian artistic groups tend to have misconceptions; as, for example, Richard Brettell’s otherwise interesting and insightful work *Modern Art 1851-1929: Capitalism and Representation* published in an authoritative series of Oxford History of Art shows. Brettell writes: “Europe’s first truly independent artists’ group was not French but Russian (first with Artel in 1863 and then with the Association of Travelling Art Exhibits, which transformed Russian artistic consciousness from 1870 until 1923.”<sup>7</sup> As I shall try to prove, these assertions are not quite correct: neither the Artel nor the Association (the Peredvizhniki) were truly independent (in terms of market sustainability, exhibitional space and even their unique artistic outlook), and, secondly, they were very far from really transforming Russian artistic consciousness.

In order to better focus on what was happening with the art and artists under the scrutiny, I’ll try by contextualizing the situation — putting it in a broader picture

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4. David Jackson, *The Wanderers and the Critical Realism in Nineteenth Century Russian Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

5. Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art. The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977).

6. *Tovarishchestvo peredvizhnykh khudozhestvennykh vystavok. Pis'ma, dokumenty* [The Association of the Itinerant Art Exhibitions. Letters and Documents] (M.: Iskusstvo, 1987). This edition is the first publication of the Peredvizhniki’s archives stored in the State Tretyakov gallery with a rather limited access to it.

7. Richard R. Brettell, *Modern Art 1851-1929: Capitalism and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40.

of the Russian society and emphasizing the institutional side of cultural life. The history of the relationship of the emerging artists with the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts plays a crucial role in this analysis. This relationship was never a straightforward battle between young, progressive and talented on one side and old, reactionary, and trend-insensitive on the other. It is also useful to trace similar West European trends, which began in the 1860s.

This was the generation of artists comparable to the Impressionists; most of its representatives were born in the late 1830s. The eldest — Nikolai Ge (or Gay, from Ге́, Ге), was born a year earlier than Édouard Manet, while the youngest of the protesters, Karl Lemokh, was born in the same year with Claude Monet. The most characteristic representative of the generation was Ivan Kramskoi whose life span fully coincides with that of Hans von Marées (1837-1887). This comparison helps to stress Kramskoi's unique role in the art process and in subsequent history of art. While both von Marées and Kramskoi are universally considered outstanding inspirational forces and catalysts of new movements, their impacts differ drastically. The German artist was one of the most prominent forerunners of modern art, with his innovative visual language; the Russian had an astonishingly modest outcome in terms of purely artistic production (half a dozen of thematic paintings and many dull portraits), but his role as an ideologue and public figure in the arts was unchallenged in Russia for several decades. In this respect Kramskoi could be likened to both Manet and Gustave Courbet — but without the painterly revolution of the former and without the grand-scale realist thematic compositions of the latter.

Ivan Kramskoi is well known as a leader of the young rebels, who challenged the authority of the Academy of Arts, and as a key figure in organizing of two subsequent associations of artists independent from the state authorities. He was an articulate speaker and a prolific writer who left a substantial body of letters and articles. Ilya Repin (1844-1930), who for some time was a member of the *Peredvizhniki*, remembered the following words of Kramskoi, to whom he was very close since early 1864:

The Russian [artist] should finally stand on his own feet in art. It's time to throw away those foreign nappies — thank God, we've grown a beard already but we are still walking in Italian leading strings. It's time to think about the creation of our own Russian school, about our own national art! [...] Our art dwells in slavery to the Academy [of Arts], which is itself a slave of Western art. Our task now — the task of Russian artists — to get free of this slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Kramskoi reiterated these ideas during the whole course of his life. As for Repin, at that time he was a student of the Academy, and his impressions were pretty dissimilar:

Next to each other, rubbing shoulders, were a disheveled lad in a peasant shirt and a gray-haired general in his uniform; next to them was a bearded man in a

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8. Ilya Repin, *Dalekoe Blizkoe [The Distant Nigh]* (L.: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1982), 169.

tail coat (a gorgeous artist with a goatee); farther there was a university student; a tall naval officer with a big beard; on the next step there was a whole pack of blonde fellows from the Vyatka region; a corpulent lady — a rare view in those days in the Academy; big-eyed Georgians and Armenians; a Cossack officer; stiff Germans in impeccable suits and hairdos a la Capoul.<sup>9</sup>

### **Academic patronage vs. artistic independence, Russia and the West**

"Getting free of the slavery of the Academy" began from the act of disobedience of the Academy's graduate students who, in November 1863, refused to take part in a contest for a foreign pensionship.<sup>10</sup> The reason they claimed was their aversion to create on any foreign historical subjects imposed on them by Academy's choice. Although this event, called later The Revolt of Fourteen, is usually considered as a first step to creation several years later of the Peredvizhniki Association, it was rather spontaneous and perpetrated by other artists than those who became the Peredvizhniki. On the other hand, the Revolt, whatever the constellation of reasons and personal interests (largely, Kramskoi's interests) provoked it, led to the creation of the important organization of Russian artists, the St. Petersburg Artel (working cooperative) of Artists.

As for the new forms and styles of expression, which were one of the main points of dissent of the emerging modern artists and the academic Salons in the West, those things were not quite relevant for Russian young artists or their antagonists in the Academy at that time.

A look at the Parisian Salon of those days offers further evidence to support the theory that the group of Russian rebels did not want to trouble themselves to compete with each other for a difficult task of getting the single prize (the rules were made stricter, and the number of contestants was unusually large: fourteen versus six or eight in previous years). In the same, 1863, year about 3,000 artists submitted 5,000 works to the jury of the Salon de Paris sponsored by the Académie des Beaux-Arts. And for this hard-to-imagine army of artists there were only 20 designated medals in three categories plus one special medal.<sup>11</sup> No wonder that the jury tried to winnow the competition by rejecting more than half of the initial contenders (only 2,217 paintings were accepted), but still, the proportion of medals to participants was much less favorable than it was with the Russian artists (1 to 14). However, with few chances for a medal or with none, French artists had to be exhibited and seen by the public and critics to get commissions and professional recognition. That is why those who were rejected produced such a massive uproar, along with their supporters,

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9. Ibid., 145-146.

10. It was called in Russian *pensiia* "pension," and the winners were called "pensioners." The prize was modelled on the Prix de Rome of the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, and the word "pension" was taken from there as well as "pensioner" (French *pensionnaire*).

11. See, Harrison C. and Cynthia A. White *Canvasses and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York - London: John Wiley, 1965), 52.

that Napoleon III had to establish a special venue for those barred by the jury — the Salon de Refusés of 1863. The merit system in “official” salons was also changed after that year: the number of medals was doubled to 40. Nevertheless, this incident marked the dismantling of the old institutional system in the sphere of French art, which led finally to the emergence of the art market free from the Academy and the State support. The Secession of the Fourteen launched a similar process in Russia.

The year of 1863 was a crucial watershed in cultural history of Russia and France alike. The simple comparison of key events is very spectacular.

In Russia a seminal book for reform-minded people was published in the spring: Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done*. (Its subtitle was “From the Stories About the New People”.) In France, Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* indicated the tremendous shift from religious spirituality to moralizing historicity. In Russia, the immediate parallel to the Renanian interpretation of Christianity was Nikolai Ge's strikingly uncanonical painting “The Last Supper” shown at the Academic exhibition in September. This painting became immediately famous, as did its creator who had just returned to Russia after several years in Europe as an academic pensioner. For this composition, Ge was conferred the title of Professor, bypassing the lower rank of academician. One more young artist was honoured with the title of Professor that time: Vasilii Pukirev (1832-90), for his painting “Unequal Marriage”, which showed at the same exhibition. These two events demonstrated the noteworthy shift of the Academic Council's criteria towards more openness.<sup>12</sup> (Still it was not enough for Kramskoi's group who made their Secession demonstration less than two months later.) Shortly before the Secession an inflammatory polemic under the title “Rassharkivaiushcheesia iskusstvo” (“Art That Bows and Scrapes”) was published in the satirical magazine *The Spark*<sup>13</sup> (*Iskra*, no. 38, 1863, October).

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12. Stasov was quite ecstatic because of this. In his review “The Academic Exhibition of 1863” he wrote: “What a comforting spectacle! [...] This exhibition also placed them [Academy's professors] in a brilliant light: true, they did not send any of their own work to the exhibition and did not exhibit anything of their own, but they demonstrated their activity in the fact that they were not indifferent to the efforts of the rising generations, and found much of what they created important or good.” Stasov, “Akademicheskaja vystavka 1863 goda,” *Izbrannye sochineniia v trekh tomakh* [*The Selected Works in Three Volumes*] (M.: Iskusstvo, 1952, vol. I), 115. Translated by Carol Adlam, <http://hri.shef.ac.uk/rva/texts/stasov/stas04/stas04.html> [Accessed on 7 April, 2008]. And: “Times have changed and views have been altered. [...] The former categories of “high,” “low” and “insignificant” exist no longer, and we cannot fail to admit that a particularly definitive transformation has taken place in our Academy if it makes a professor of someone who has painted a substantial picture - but substantial in what way? This is a picture in which there is no conflagration, no battle, no recent history, no Greeks, and no Pechenegs, but in which everything is limited to a parish church, with a priest obligingly marrying a pompous, living corpse of a general, and a tearstained young woman who is dressed up like a sacrificial victim, and who has sold her youth and her scrofulous little face for rank and money. And for such a painting the Academy nowadays awards a professorship? This is a decisive step, an important *profession de foi*, laden with consequences. (Ibid., 117). The consequences — the Revolt of the Fourteen — followed even before this article was published.

13. “Rassharkivayushcheesia iskusstvo,” *Iskra*, no. 37 (1863): 506-511; no. 38 (1863): 529-530. See English translation: Carol Adlam (2002), in *Russian Visual Arts: Art Criticism in Context, 1814-1909* [an online research archive]: <http://hri.shef.ac.uk/rva/texts/dmitriev/dmi01/dmi01.html> [Accessed on 29 September 2010].

The anonymous author (23-year-old Ivan Dmitriev) in this review of the yearly academic exhibition thundered against the lack of freedom of artists and the tyranny of the Academy. In France the Salon des Refusés opened in May; the seminal work of Eduard Manet "Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe" provoked a scandal; future Impressionists — Cezanne, Pissarro et al. — are also exhibited there. Later that year Manet painted another innovative work, "Olympia." His friend and champion Charles Baudelaire published a collection of critical essays, *The Painter of Modern Life*, a manifesto of modern art. Baudelaire's senior friend Eugene Delacroix died in August,<sup>14</sup> bringing the whole big epoch of Romanticism to the end.

Early in his life Kramskoi urged that "artists should be left alone to the mercy of society as shoemakers or craftsmen". In this he followed Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (Kramskoi once said that artists must learn Proudhon's articles by heart) who wrote that artists should be similar to acrobats and tight-rope dancers who do not rely on the State.

Dissatisfaction with the old Academy of Arts system of commissions led the young Secessionists to a new, private, form of organization. It was called the St. Petersburg Artel of Artists. The Russian *artel* could be translated as a "working cooperative," and it was fashioned not without the influence of working communes described in the Chernyshevskii's novel. A number of other communes and artels were organized around that time, for instance, in 1863 was founded the artel of young artists led by P. Krestonostsev.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Statute of Kramskoi's artel, the goals of their venture included the following: "1) by joint efforts to establish and secure one's material situation and to get a venue to sell our works to the public. [...] and 2) to accept commissions for art production of all kind."<sup>16</sup> In the advertisement in the *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* on 3 January 1864 (no. 2), they wrote that all commissions were welcome: icons, shop's signs, retouch of photographs, portraits done from photographs etc. It was not the single ad; Kramskoi was possibly the first Russian artist who understood the significance of marketing. Three months after the establishment of the Artel he wrote:

We should publicize not just in Petersburg or Moscow, where there are plenty of artists without us, but in all Russia. To advertise until it is ingrained in memory of every million of people that the Society exists, until everybody sees even in his dreams that we undertake all kinds of art works, no order is too small.<sup>17</sup>

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14. Earlier that year another iconic painter of a previous epoch, Horace Vernet, and later the Romantic poet, Alfred de Vigny died.

15. See memoirs of Vasilii Maksimov, a member of this artel: *Golos Minuvshogo*, no. 6 (1913): 161-176.

16. *Ustav S.-Peterburgskoi Arteli Khudozhnikov. S.Peterburg, 1866*, quoted by *Tovarishchestvo*, vol. I, 5.

17. Kramskoi, "A Letter to M. Tulinov of 21 April 1864," in Ivan Kramskoi, *Pis'ma, stat'i [Letters and Essays]* (M.: Iskusstvo, 1966, 2 vols.), vol. I, 20.



The artistic production of the Artel members throughout the whole years of the union was very modest, but economically — due to their all-inclusive willingness to do everything that could be done with brush and paints if they were paid for that — the Artel was a success. According to Stasov, the Artel business was in the “very blooming condition now. They are flooded with commissions for all kinds of “mundane needs” from the provinces. However, the members of the Artel (nowadays quite secure, they say) care less than before about really artistic creations”.<sup>18</sup> Thus, at least nominally, the rebels were able to prove that they could survive with their *métier* (if not creative art) without the help of the Academy of Arts. But the very fact that thematic compositions inspired by actual events, societal issues or plebeian faces were a rather minuscule part of their oeuvre demonstrates that the free market for contemporary subjects and the interest of collectors was not yet developed. Possibly the artists were able to create their “true art” in their spare time, but the lack of middlemen and promoters (dealers) left them limited chances for publicity.

An eloquent illustration of the condition of the art market of those days gives a painting “In Artist’s Studio” (1865, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) by Pukirev (Ill. 1). Famous and highly decorated for his “Unequal Marriage” (1862), he was still a struggling artist when it came to selling. His painting depicts a studio cramped with casts of classical statues and numerous paintings. The artist himself stands in the middle showing a new work to a patron. He is a fat merchant with an incredibly dull face betraying no emotions. A priest who with a sly smile points to something in the composition conveying some idea or explanation to the stupefied *kupets*. An elderly expert dressed as a gentleman on a civil service and evidently hired by the *kupets* looks closely at the painting while his gestures and facial expression suggest that he does not particularly like it. The artist looks at him meekly and rather dolefully lowering his head. And the painting is not really a painting but a huge icon. Two antique statues behind their backs scratch their heads in bewilderment. A frightened woman in a home dress, the wife of the artist, at the far right peeks in hope through a slightly opened door. And behind the icon stands a mysterious figure draped in picturesque classicist cloak; its veiled face is cast down. Is it the Christ in sorrow who has to witness these merchants in the temple (of art)? Is it the personification of High Art abandoned? This situation will be paradigmatic for the whole period under our discussion.

It is interesting to mention here that Kramskoi with his business acumen once organized a selling exhibition of the Artel’s artworks at one of the Russia’s big

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18. Stasov, “Vystavka v Akademii Khudozhestv” [“An Exhibition in the Academy of Arts”] in *Izbrannye Sochineniia v Dvukh Tomakh* [Selected Works in Two Volumes] (M. - L.: Iskusstvo, 1937, vol. I), 168 (first published in *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, no. 291, 299, 300 (1870)). In this light the assertion of Valkenier that “In terms of economics, the Artel members really had no other choice; they simply had to turn to the Academy for commissions, exhibitions and even studio space,” sounds not totally convincing (Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 36).



industrial fairs in Nizhnii Novgorod (in 1865) but the sales were very poor.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, there was not much to show. And on the other, there was no sizable demand for art from private buyers at that time, especially in the provinces.

Still, in this respect Kramskoi surprises by his sense of modernity: it seems that he is relevant to at least three out of four new phenomena of the new epoch as described by Walter Benjamin.<sup>20</sup> They are: 1) the culture of commodification — and Kramskoi demonstrated that he knew the relationship between the artistic production and its monetary value better than any other Russian artist of that time; 2) the entertainment industry based on exhibitions, amusement parks, newspapers, and advertising — we have already seen Kramskoi's understanding of the role of advertising, and as for the exhibitions — the story of the *Peredvizhniki* was basically about that; 3) visual imaging technologies such as panoramas and photography — Kramskoi began as a photographer's apprentice and was influenced by the "photographic aesthetics" till the end of his days; 4) a public architecture based on iron and glass — it is only in this that Kramskoi was not up to the avant-scene of modernity. But not only him; the glass-and-iron architecture of world exhibitions, which, by their constructions from the Crystal Palace to La Ruche, sent the ripple effect for artistic imagination for generations to come, was unheard of in Russia.<sup>21</sup>

One more aspect of the general issue of exhibitions vs. modernity should be briefly touched upon here. As Walter Adamson has shown in his recent book, the full advent of the Commodity culture occurs roughly thirty years after major international exhibitions: like The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations (Crystal Palace Exhibition) in London in 1851 or The Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1855 and others.<sup>22</sup> In Russia, although the first Russian Industrial Exhibition took place in Petersburg as early as in 1829, the sizable impact of them on public sphere could be traced only after the big shows of 1870 (in Saint Petersburg) and especially after the All-Russia Exhibition of Arts and Industry, which took place in Moscow in 1882. But, as we shall soon see, the Russian artists and critics (especially Stasov, who frequently mentioned numerous names of French and

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19. As there were very few pictures to show, the Artel offered to some non-member artists to participate (Khudiakov, Bogomolov, Krestonostsev, Schwabe and other) and even asked the Academy to lend them some paintings from its collection. It is unclear who paid the expenses. Most probably, the Academy, and the members of the Artel acted as mere *commis voyageurs*.

20. See Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in Walter Benjamin, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, *The Arcades Project* (transl., Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 7.

21. When in 1883 a critic V.V. Chuiko wrote that "these days stone gives way to iron and glass" (*Novosti*, no. 96, 1883), Stasov squarely dismissed Chuiko as totally unfit to talk about architecture and sarcastically wished him to live himself in an iron house, especially in winter." (Stasov, "Tormozy novogo russkogo iskusstva" ["The Shackles for the New Russian Art"], *Izbrannye sochineniia* [Selected Works] (1952), vol. II, 636).

22. See Walter Adamson, *Embattled Avant-gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 40.

German artists, most favourably — his beloved Courbet) were aware of the new Western exhibitional forms.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to providing a show space, the Academy kept awarding them with official ranks and titles. Within five years after the “riot” eight painters out of fourteen protestants were made Academicians. Four other artists were conferred the rank of Class Artist of the First Degree. (The percentage actually was even higher because one artist died very early.)

The artists well understood the material implications of these honourable ranks. In this respect their situation and aspirations were not much different from the position of West European artists of that time. We can recall here that the iconic “rebel” Eduard Manet and another Impressionist, Edgar Degas, competed (unsuccessfully) for the Prix de Rome. Or let us quote the words of Frederic Leighton, who, while having distinctive Pre-Raphaelite leanings, was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy (ARA) in 1864: “I can’t well...conceive it a *great* honour now — but it has material advantages as you see in the case of Gambart—I immediately inferred what you say from the fact of his buying my pictures so readily—he who never bought *anything* of mine before”.<sup>24</sup>

### **The travelling exhibitions: their declarations, subjects and venues**

The new step in an anti-academic activity began in 1869, which two years later brought the creation of the new independent art association, much more prominent than the Artel: the Peredvizhniki. Vasilii Perov, a well-known artist of “people’s scenes” and professor of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture wrote in 1877:

The first to bring the idea of establishing the association was G.G. Miasoedov on the grounds that the Academy was not totally fair by gaining big profits from

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23. Stasov wrote several articles about World exhibitions emphasizing their positive influence for the artistic development: “Nasha khudozhestvennaia proviziia dlia Londonskoi vystavki” [“Our Art Stock for the London Exhibition”], *Izbrannye sochineniia* [Selected Works] (1937), vol. I, 36-45 (first published in *Sovremennaia Letopis’*, 1862, no. 1); “Posle Vsemirnoi Vystavki 1862 goda,” [“After the 1862 World’s Fair”], *ibid.* 46-88. Eight years later he gave long rapturous descriptions to all kinds of arts, crafts and technical design represented at the Industrial Exhibition of 1870 in Saint Petersburg. The nationalistic pride was competing in his text with production fetishism — which makes him a real man of his time with a keen taste for capitalist modernity but without the aesthetical farsightedness of really modern critics. See: “Vystavka v Solianom gorodke” [“The Exhibition in the Salt Town”], *ibid.*, 127-161.

24. Undated letter from Frederic Leighton to Frederic George Stephens, Bodleian Library, MS don.e.69. Published in Jeremy Maas, *Gambart, Prince of the Victorian Art World* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975, 172-173. Quoted by Pamela M. Fletcher, “Creating the French Gallery: Ernest Gambart and the Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery in Mid-Victorian London,” *Nineteenth-century Art Worldwide* [e-journal], 6, 1 (Spring 2007): <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring07/143-creating-the-french-gallery-ernest-gambart-and-the-rise-of-the-commercial-art-gallery-in-mid-victorian-london> [accessed on 29 September 2010].

artists' works... Pointing to that fact, G.G. Miasoedov was absolutely right in saying, "Why do artists themselves not collect profit from their works?" — This is the foundation of the association. Many [artists] liked the idea, and the Company was created. As for any humanistic or patriotic sentiments, there were none.<sup>25</sup>

Miasoedov and other members of the initiative group like Ge or Perov (both former recipients of academic pensions as well as Miasoedov<sup>26</sup>) were established artists who felt that they could fare well without the mediation of the Academy. They thought that if exhibitions would travel beyond Petersburg and Moscow to Russian provincial cities, they will gain better exposure and more customers. In the same letter, Perov mentions the *raison d'être* of travelling: "We decided also to send paintings to the provinces if it would be nothing else but profitable."<sup>27</sup>

Upon writing the statute and registering with the authorities, the new organization was founded: The Company of Travelling Art Exhibitions (*Tovarishchestvo Peredvizhnykh Khudozhestvennykh Vystavok*). The members of the organization were eventually called *Peredvizhniki*. The analysis of this name is important, because it helps to eliminate a major misconception of the nature of this association, a misconception based on an incorrect translation, whether English or French.

Two established English terms for *Peredvizhniki* are Itinerants and Wanderers (French, *Les Ambulants*). They are somewhat misleading: the artists did not travel nor did they wander themselves. Nor they were *les marchands ambulants* — they did not travel to make their living. Their paintings did. Thus there were no romantic overtones of wandering in the beloved native countryside or being a *flâneur* in the city, in the manner of Courbet or some of the Impressionists, their French contemporaries.

Expectedly, the *Peredvizhniki* declared that they wanted freedom from the Academy not just for making a direct transaction with buyers and gather the admission fees from the attendees. Kramskoi insisted on the necessity of formation of a national school of art with democratic and 'national' subject matter. Stasov, as the main champion of the *Peredvizhniki*, portrayed such a ferocious contrast with the Academy that some artists were afraid that the government might consider them as revolutionaries upon reading his paean.<sup>28</sup> His claims were even more ridiculous

25. Vasilii Perov, "A Letter to Kramskoi of 13 April 1877," *Tovarishchestvo*, vol I, 142.

26. Miasoedov spent years 1863-1866 and 1867-1869 in West Europe as an Academic pensioner. It was there that he learned about the British system of traveling art exhibitions set in motion after the relative failure of the Great London Exposition of 1862. That idea gave Miasoedov the first insight to organize similar enterprise in Russia. See: G.G. Miasoedov, *Pis'ma, dokumenty, vospominaniia* (M.: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1972), 30-31; I.N. Punina, "Iz predystorii Tovarishchestva peredvizhnykh khudozhestvennykh vystavok" ["From the Antecedent History of the Association of the Itinerant Art Exhibitions"], in Viktor V. Vanslov, ed., *Khudozhniki-peredvizhniki [Itinerants Artists]* (M.: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1975), 39-40.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Cf., for instance, a forceful reply of Miasoedov to Stasov's article "Twentieth Anniversary of the *Peredvizhniki*": "You insinuate that not the moving [of the pictures — ES] was important

because the artists who participated in the Academic shows often exhibited very similar peasant subjects and scenes from everyday life, with a populist sympathy for a “little man.” And at the same time, the Peredvizhniki had not restricted themselves to the nationalistic, contemporary and “democratic” subjects. Kramskoi himself showed, at the First Travelling Exhibition (1871), a composition on a mythological motif from Gogol — “A May Night (Mermaids)” (Ill. 2)<sup>29</sup>; in the next show a year later he exhibited a religious composition, “Christ in the Desert” which was not exactly a “Russian subject” as well. Among the participants of the several exhibitions were the artists Bogolubov<sup>30</sup> and Gun,<sup>31</sup> who both lived largely abroad, were the members of the Academic Council and submitted French landscapes and scenes from French history to the exhibition. As for the formal and stylistic innovations, there was nothing in the works of the early Peredvizhniki (maybe with exceptions for Ge and Savrasov) that was seriously different from academic artists. In other words, the exhibitions of the Peredvizhniki from the beginning were never quite consistent in terms of their opposition to the Academy, formally or thematically.<sup>32</sup>

In this respect, the Peredvizhniki can be compared with a contemporaneous French group of artists: *Fédération des Artistes* (The Artists Federation of the Paris Commune), organized in 1871 — the same year as the Peredvizhniki. This not-so-well-known association had certain common features with their Russian counterparts: modest artistic results against the backdrop of a well-articulated desire for independence. We can agree with Gonzalo Sanchez, who in his book *Organizing Independence: The Artists Federation of the Paris Commune and Its*

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for the Association, but something else. What is it? [...] A protest against the academic routine? At this point you are wrong too. [...] We do not want [you] to create for us, against our will, this stupid reputation.” “Letter to Stasov of 15 June 1892,” Stasov archive in IRLI (Institut russkoi literaturnoi Akademii nauk SSSR — The Institute of Russian Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR). Quoted by Sophia Goldshtein in *Kommentarii k izbrannym sochineniiam V.V. Stasova* [Comments on Selected Works] (M. — L., 1938), 130.

29. See its analysis in the recent publication: Evgeny Steiner, “‘Rusalki’ Kramskogo i poetika smerti v russkom iskusstve vtoroi poloviny 19 veka” [“Kramskoi’s ‘Mermaids’ and the Poetics of Death in the Russian Art of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century”], in V.L. Rabinovich, M.S. Uvarov, eds. *Memento Vivere ili pomni o smerti* [Memento Vivere, or Remember of Death] (M.: Academia, 2006), 168-195.

30. The figure of Aleksei P. Bogolubov (1824-96) demonstrates how heterogeneous and far from “democratic” rebels the Company of Peredvizhniki was. Bogolubov belonged to an old gentry family, was a naval officer, and an official historian of the Russian Imperial navy and a teacher of drawing of several members of the Czar’s family. At that, he was an active member of the exhibitional activity of the Peredvizhniki and a champion of Russian artists in Paris where he lived for years.

31. Karl Gun (1830-1877) was not a low class disadvantaged rebel too. A pensioner of the Academy, he spent six years on a scholarship abroad, mostly in Paris, (1863-1868) and was bestowed the title of Professor of the Academy in 1870. He exhibited with the Peridvizhniki from the very beginning and became a full member a year later (1872).

32. “You are wrong: we are much closer to the Academy than to the Artel,” wrote Miasoedov to Stasov energetically arguing against Stasov’s claim that the “most important thing is the protest against academic routine,” “Letter to Stasov of 15 June 1892,” in Goldshtein (1938), 130.

*Legacy, 1871-1889* wrote that artists' goals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "had to do with the nature of the demands that they formulated, which were expressions of an organizational ideology, not a stylistic one".<sup>33</sup> In Russia this was true for both the Artel or the Peredvizhniki.

The location of their exhibitions is yet another important aspect that can further illuminate the level of the Peredvizhniki's independence and their lack of adherence to ideological principles. Before their Association was formed, its artists seldom complained about not being admitted to the academic exhibitions (unlike their colleagues in France). They still wanted to have their own events, however, and the place they chose for the first exhibition looks quite surprising. It was opened in the Academy's exhibitional space that "kindly offered" it to the Company, as the Peredvizhniki's Council wrote in its advertisement in the *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*.<sup>34</sup>

To put it simply, the Peredvizhniki believed that it was appropriate to use the Academy's space, but at the same time they insisted on the formal independence, and material included. The ticket office and printed catalogues had to be separate.

When the Academy decided to launch its own travelling exhibitions, Kramskoi was very worried about competing with it: he wrote that "the people would not get it — where the real art is". Again, he was not sure that the difference between the "good" and the "bad" art could be perceptible for the public.<sup>35</sup> Kramskoi was right: it is difficult to tell in many cases when the "national-democratic" art stops and the Salon one begins. His own thematic compositions without exceptions demonstrate this. Others Peredvizhniki (K. Makovskii, K. Gun, Bronnikov, A. Kharlamov and Iu. Leman are the brightest examples) were outright academic artists by their style and subjects.<sup>36</sup>

### **The battle for market Russian style: no dealers and few buyers**

In this respect the situation with Russian art was very different from the one with French art of the same period — nobody could mistake Impressionists for epigone academic artists. The Impressionists had to organize and exhibit on their own because they had been persistently rejected by the Salon jury. Still, there is

33. Gonzalo Sanchez, *Organizing Independence: The Artists Federation of the Paris Commune and Its Legacy, 1871-1889* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 178.

34. *Tovarishchestvo*, vol. I, 60.

35. See his letter to Stasov of 16 July 1886 in *Tovarishchestvo*, vol. I, 315.

36. The case of Konstantin Makovskii is very telling: one of the Fourteen, the member of the Artel and the founding member of the Peredvizhniki, he became one of the preeminent artists who worked for the high society supplying them with brilliant salon portraits. His participation in all dissenting events and groups can be explained by his amicable nature and sense of camaraderie rather than by his ideological conviction. The lack of that is demonstrated not only by the aesthetic style of his art, but by the fact that not once but twice he stopped his membership in the Peredvizhniki Association (in 1884 forever). It is interesting to mention here that out of fifteen fathers-founders nine left the organization.

an important point where the Peredvizhniki and the Impressionists meet: Neither group was made up of real avant-garde-style revolutionaries. In their seminal work *Canvasses and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* Harrison and Cynthia White demonstrated the emergence of the new institutional system in the sphere of the French art by tracing the success of the Impressionists, who were major contributors to a new conception of the artist as an independent individual, engrossed into an artist-dealer network. “Yet their ambitions,” asserted the Whites, “their attitudes, and their careers were as much the products of the Academic system as they were the results of innovation and rebellion.”<sup>37</sup>

There was one more major difference between the situation in the art market in Russia and in France and England in the 1870-1880s: in Russia the dealer with his commercial private gallery and periodical shows featuring works of living artists was virtually unknown. In France the contemporary art was actively supported at that time by such dealers as Adolphe Goupil (1806-1893) — it was in this firm young Vincent Van Gogh worked in the early 1870s; Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922), who organized the first big exhibition of the Impressionist artists in 1872 in London; Georges Petit (1856-1920), his rival in supporting and selling Impressionists;<sup>38</sup> Alexander Bernheim-Jeune (1839-1915), who exhibited Impressionists since 1874, and some other dealers, of lesser importance. In England the story of successful emancipation of contemporary artists (not necessarily very innovative aesthetically) from the Academy system of exhibitions-commissions-sales began even earlier: in the 1860s with the activity of Belgian-born Ernest Gambart and his French gallery on Pall Mall.<sup>39</sup> Thanks to him and his fellow gallerists who were quick to follow the lead, the London art market was possibly the most developed one in Europe. In Russia, this process did not begin until the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and “the eclipse of the Academy by the gallery system,” as Pamela Fletcher put it, did not happen. There were, however, some rudimentary forms of business establishments in Petersburg and Moscow that could have evolved into modern galleries — the shops of Giuseppe Daziario and D. Avanzo. They carried art supplies, art gifts and mostly water-colours and prints, which they commissioned from artists and printed in their Parisian facilities. As Fletcher asserted, “print selling was [...] at the root of

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37. The Whites, *Canvasses and Careers*.

38. It is interesting that Petit was willing to organize an exhibition of the Peredvizhniki in his gallery in 1882. The writer Ivan Turgenev, who lived mostly in Paris, tried to mediate and wrote Kramskoi a letter about Petit's offer and gave some suggestions about what could be attractive for the Parisian audience to see (and buy). Kramskoi decided that the famous writer was teaching him what to do, felt offended and declined the opportunity without much discussion. See excerpts of these in Sophia Goldshtein, *Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi: Zhizn' i Tvorchestvo* [*Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi: His Life and Art*] (M.: Iskusstvo, 1965), 345.

39. See the study of the role of his gallery: Pamela Fletcher, “Creating the French Gallery: Ernest Gambart and the Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery in Mid-Victorian London,” *Nineteenth-century Art Worldwide* [e-journal], 6, 1 (Spring 2007): <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring07/143-creating-the-french-gallery-ernest-gambart-and-the-rise-of-the-commercial-art-gallery-in-mid-victorian-london> [accessed on 29 September 2010].

the emerging gallery system”<sup>40</sup> — in England and in France (for instance, Goupil was dealing basically with prints until 1861). Why it did not happen in Russia?

One of the main reasons that prevented the full development of the “field of cultural production” (Bourdieu) — which should include not just artists and their institutions but dealers, critics, galleries, museums etc. — was the lack of demand for the artistic production in the period under discussion (1860-1880s). At this point even such mortal enemies as Stasov and the rector of the Academy Fedor Bruni, look alike when both lamented on this situation. Stasov wrote in 1865:

This year everybody — and the Academy was the first of them — complained that the exhibition was too small. But let me ask: why it should be bigger? Our artists have too few reasons to produce many paintings, sculptures and everything else. Quite the opposite: they have every reason to work as little as possible. Who, amongst us, need their production? The demand for creations of art in our country is just minuscule.<sup>41</sup>

Fedor Bruni, as the head of the Academy felt compelled to answer “to antagonists of the Academy of Arts”:

The reason that Mr. V.S. finds for the quantitative poverty of the exhibition is closer to the truth, and lies in the public’s indifference to art. To reiterate his words: “the demand for works of art in our country is utterly minimal”. [...] Now is just such a period, when artists have no choice but to sit around idly, receiving no commissions from anywhere - not even to paint icons.<sup>42</sup>

A sad, albeit satirical caricature by A. Volkov on this subject was published in a magazine *Znakomye* in 1858: a young artist with dashing goatce a la Van Dyck is lying idly on a couch. The caption reads: “An Occupation of an Artist who has completed the course.”<sup>43</sup> Twenty years later Stasov included this lamentation in his big essay “The Shackles for the New Russian Art” because the situation had changed very little. The market was in its nascent condition and a new private clientele had just began to emerge in the 1860s (more in the 1870s). For the next anniversary, the

40. Fletcher, “Creating the French Gallery...”

41. Stasov, “Eshche o nyneshnei vystavke” [“More About the Current Exhibition”], in Stasov, *Izbrannye sochinenia* (1952), vol. I, 574, (first published in *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, no. 290 (4 November 1865): 1-2.)

42. Fedor Bruni, “To antagonists of the Academy of arts,” *Birzhevye vedomosti* (*Smes*), no. 257 (25 November 1865): 2. Translated by Carol Adlam and Alexey Makhrov: <http://hri.shef.ac.uk/rva/texts/bruni/bruni01/bruni.html> [accessed 30 September 2010].

43. The caricature is reproduced in: Adlam, Carol, “The ‘Frisky Pencil’: Aesthetic Vision in Russian Graphic Satire of the Period of the Great Reforms,” fig. 5, *Nineteenth-century Art Worldwide* [e-journal], 3, 2 (Autumn 2004), [http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn\\_04/articles/adla.shtml](http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn_04/articles/adla.shtml). [accessed 20 May 2008]. Unfortunately Adlam’s commentary to this picture is not quite correct: the gist is not the criticism of the “lazy” artist. The criticism is aimed to the society, which does not need art.



25<sup>th</sup>, G. Miasoedov delivered a report with many interesting numbers. Nobody yet analyzed it, the voluminous literature on the Peredvizhniki notwithstanding. In 1897 there were 42 members in the Association. With about twenty at the beginning, and complicated changes with quitting, joining and rejoining (and later a rather high death toll) we can give only a very approximate median number of the members in each given year. It would be around thirty or slightly less. Over 25 years of work, they executed 3,504 artworks, which makes about 140 works per year. (This is much more than at a typical exhibition in the 1870s when the number of exhibits was sometimes below fifty.) 140 works divided between 30 artists makes less than five paintings (and drawings too!) per year per artist — a very low productivity. The total number of three and a half thousand works was estimated in Miasoedov's report at 2 million rubles. Or, the total body of sold works amounted for 1,135,635 rubles, and unsold works were priced for 754,180 rubles. It makes the total sales equal to 60 per cent of stock. This adds up to three items sold by each artist per year on average. (Of course, some did better and others sold pretty much nothing — and most had to do something on the side like teaching<sup>44</sup> or copying. Or they just sold their works directly to clients.<sup>45</sup>) And the total yearly sale in four or six cities would make about eighty four pieces (60 per cent of 140 exhibited). This is difficult to believe but it seems true.<sup>46</sup> If we add here that the sum of 839,000 rubles Tretyakov allegedly spent on art between 1871 and 1897,<sup>47</sup> it makes him a buyer of about 74 per cent, or three quarters of the Peredvizhniki joint marketable production over a quarter of a century. In this situation it is hardly possible to talk about a normally developed art market. Also, a secondary market for the Peredvizhniki works at that time was virtually unknown. Kramskoi wrote in this regard: "It means that our Russian life is still unable to pay for such an exotic plant as an artist. It (this life) does not need artists yet."<sup>48</sup>

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44. Some peredvizhniki were teaching in the Academy from the beginning: M.K. Klodt (in 1871-1896), who grew to the Head of the landscape studio; K. Gun (1871-1874). Others taught in its equivalent in Moscow (Perov, in 1871-1882) or in Petersburg's Drawing School (Kramskoi, since 1862) or the Law School (A. Morozov). Kramskoi and Lemokh gave private lessons to Czar's children. About the last, his younger comrade Yakov Minchenkov recollected: "When the court was looking for an [art] teacher, because of his German descent, thoroughness, delicacy, and *artistic style* [my italics — ES] he [Lemokh] was the best candidate of all the artists." Minchenkov, D. Yakov, *Vospominaniya o peredvizhnikakh* [*The Memoirs About the Peredvizhniki*] (L.: Khudozhnik RSFSR 1959).

45. For example, Lemokh "did not need to think about means of support because he was paid a pension [by the Ministry of Court for teaching Czar's children — ES] and selling his works mainly to the Czar's family and courtiers." Minchenkov, *Vospominaniya o peredvizhnikakh*, 66.

46. Grigori Miasoedov, "Vstupitel'naia Stat'sia k Al'bomu Dvadsatipiatiletia Tovarishchestva peredvizhnykh Khudozhestvennykh Vystavok" ["The Introduction to the Album Commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Association of the Itinerant Art Exhibitions"], *Tovarishchestvo*, vol. II, 534.

47. This number is given by Valkenier (*Russian Realist Art*, 65) without a reference to the source.

48. Kramskoi, "Letter to P.O. Kovalevskii of 18 December 1884," *Pis'ma*, vol. II, 160.

The statistics of attendance by cities in the same report yields another interesting fact: the population of provincial Russian cities and towns — as Tula, Tambov or Elisavetgrad — attended the Peredvizhniki exhibitions between 2.5 and 3 times more actively than the people in the capitals. According to Miasoedov's data (based on accounting ledgers), of every 1,000 people attending: in Petersburg — 18 and in Moscow — 19, whereas in small Tula — 30, Iaroslavl' — 55, Tambov — 50, Poltava — 40, etc. The lowest attendance was in the Western provinces: in Vilno — 13 and in Warsaw only — 9.<sup>49</sup> I think that this seemingly illogical fact — the proverbial provincial town in the deep beyond like Tula or Tambov attracted 2.5 times more people per thousand than the enlightened metropolises — is not so difficult to interpret. The educated people of Petersburg in Moscow, exposed to other exhibitions and museums, as well as to international travel, saw less allure in the Peredvizhniki's oeuvres, than curious provincials deprived of any visual amusements. Miasoedov himself reveals the nature of their interest:

The public liked these exhibitions (especially the free ones) and attended them as a cheap holiday, lightheartedly and with curiosity. For their pleasure, they could find on each picture a label informing them of the rank and merits of the artist. After strolling around and having a good time, they would go home and forget about art until the next year.<sup>50</sup>

The unfailing praise of Stasov describes the provincial public and their interest differently: "First of all, our attention is arrested by such sincere gratitude and heart feelings that inhabitants and the press of those places, visited by the travelling exhibitions, paid to this enterprise. In doing so they excelled by far almost everything that had been written in Petersburg and Moscow. It means that the goal of the magnanimous peredvizhniki had been achieved."<sup>51</sup> The prevailing negative or lukewarm reviews in central press Stasov violently dismissed.<sup>52</sup>

And the fact that in Europeanized Warsaw the interest was even twice lower than in Petersburg confirms this assertion and adds another glimpse of the problem of perception of the Peredvizhniki's art: their peasant scenes and historical compositions said very little to the non-Russian audience. (And the Peredvizhniki paid to it with plain hatred: one of the most talented Petersburg artists of academic style historicist compositions, Henryk Semiradskii, was casually referred to as "that Pole" and accused in non-Russianness.

A small group of merchant collectors came to the fore: Pavel Tretyakov who was buying virtually all new art and single-handedly supported "the Russian school." Other names worth mentioning include V.A. Kokorev, Soldatenkov,

49. Miasoedov, "Vstupitel'naia Stat'ia k Al'bomu..." 535.

50. *Ibid.*, 534.

51. Stasov, "Tormozy..." 631.

52. See an impressive selection of critical voices (and their very strong worded rebuttal) in the same Stasov's article, "The Shackles of the new Russian art": "Tormozy..." 613-631.

G.I. Khludov, D.P. Botkin and F.A. Tereshchenko. They would buy either from the studios or from the exhibitions, but it was way not enough. This fact and the absence of a figure of a dealer-promoter played its role in the eventual decline of the Peredvizhniki movement.<sup>53</sup>

The words of Christopher Green that “the dynamism of the dealers was the engine of modernism”<sup>54</sup> to a certain extent can be applied to this period too. In France, as Green attested, “it was the art market that provided the thrust behind eventual ascendancy of the moderns over the painters and sculptors of the *Artistes français* and the *Nationale*.”<sup>55</sup> In Russia the role, typologically similar to these two well-established traditional art associations, was played in this respect by the Academy and the Court itself. They were strong enough to compete with the Peredvizhniki, but when, in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new modernist groups emerged with their own exhibitions and dealers and galleries, both the Academy and the Peredvizhniki were eclipsed from modern Russian art.

Meanwhile, in the 1870s and especially in the 80s the Academy and the Court began to buy art more and more actively. Even Tretyakov with his extensive means of a thriving capitalist would complain that he could not compete with the Court. For example, Tretyakov wanted to buy “The Barge Haulers” from Repin, who nearly promised it to him but then sold it to the member of the Czar’s family.

The Academy-related artists received commissions from the Ministry of the Imperial Household and other official institutions. The “democratic” Peredvizhniki placed their bets on the private market. To a certain extent they were right: this was the time of the emergence of the first Russian private collectors from the merchant class.<sup>56</sup> But the total number of buyers was very small. As Minchenkov wrote about the 1880-early 1890s, “Court officials, even the very wealthy ones, almost did not buy paintings; only from time to time some ministers would spend a little sum. Substantial macceni or collectors were virtually non-existent in St.Petersburg.”<sup>57</sup> And without State commissions and purchases, often through the Academy, it was impossible to survive. (Or possible, but less attractive —) Kramskoi made his living

53. Of course, there were also hugely important issues of aesthetic and ideological nature, neither of each helped to their art production to be strikingly distinct from the Academic works and aesthetically alluring — but I leave this side without scrutiny as more evident and better researched.

54. Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2000), 52.

55. Green, *ibid.* “*Artistes français*” - *Société des Artistes Français* was founded in 1881 to organize yearly Salon exhibitions and united all French artists, mostly traditional. “*Nationale*” — *Société nationale des Beaux-Arts*, was founded in 1899 for organization of its own Salons for well-established artists.

56. These merchant patrons sometimes were difficult to deal with (they routinely asked to change this or that in a picture they were going to buy). Kramskoi in a letter to Repin confided that he was dreaming that a day would come when artists would be really free of the whims of merchants. (Rus. *kupets* often — and definitely in this context — has negative connotations). He shared with Repin the sentiments about the “morass [...] of merchant monsters.” “Letter of 26 December, 1877,” in *Pis'ma*, vol. I, 435-36.

57. Minchenkov, *Vospominaniya o peredvizhnikakh*, 287.

by commercial portraiture, often of the nobility, and frequently of the members of the Czar's family. In his letter to Tretyakov he wrote, "the Czar's portrait always represents a banknote of greater or lesser denomination, which depends on the execution, but is always a money matter."<sup>58</sup> In the 1880s, with the new Czar, Alexander III, the course for protection and encouragement "national" art intensified, and purchases for the Court soared.<sup>59</sup> It was a unique situation: the Peredvizhniki were "for the people" and were known as "champions of democracy," but were in fact reaping the benefits of official patronage — be it direct commissions and sales, or exhibition space, or official ranks. This is how Yakov Minchenkov, a minor Peredvizhnik himself, described the Czar's involvement: "On the first week of the Great Lent the Czar (Alexander III — ES) would fast and received communion. After breakfast he would go with his family to the Peredvizhniki exhibition, a day before it was opened for the public. There he conversed with the artists and bought their works."<sup>60</sup> This royal tradition was continued by his successor, Nicholas II, but at that time the difference was so indistinct that once he mixed up exhibitions, and arriving at a Spring academic exhibition, he thought that he was at the Travelling one.<sup>61</sup>

In such an atmosphere, it was only logical that the Court suggested merging the Academy and the Peredvizhniki. In 1890 a *Committee for Discussions of Changes Needed in the Emperor's Academy of Arts* was founded. The Peredvizhniki were invited to sit on this Committee — and join the Academy as professors or members of the Academic Council — Repin, Kuindzhi, Shishkin, Miasoedov, V. Makovskii et al. — virtually all but two or three less important figures. Vladimir Makovskii, a member since 1872, became Rector of the Academy in 1895.

It was seemingly a happy end for those rebellious young artists. They had reached prominence and material success; many adopted the lifestyles of the gentry or bourgeoisie. Although a private art market had been somehow created, official state commissions still grossly outnumbered the individual collectors.

In other respects, the rebels lost: They had failed to create a school of followers. Their art from the 1890s onward looked as pathetically outdated as the worst kind of an academic salon — a salon filled by pseudorealist peasant types and petit bourgeois genre scenes. The Peredvizhniki's generation created nothing compatible to the work of their peers in France i.e. the Impressionists<sup>62</sup> or England i.e.

58. Kramskoi, "Letter to P.M. Tretyakov of 10 November 1876," in *Pis'ma*, vol. II, 72. Kramskoi executed more than thirty portraits of the members of the Czar's family and twice as many — of the nobility: princes, counts, barons etc.

59. For example, the Czar bought Repin's "The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan of Turkey" for an enormous sum of forty thousand rubles. For this money Repin bought a country estate.

60. Minchenkov, *Vospominaniya o peredvizhnikakh*, 287.

61. *Ibid.*

62. It is remarkable that Russian artists in their trips to Paris (as Kramskoi and others) or during their long sojourns there (as Repin) hardly ever noticed the Impressionists (although Repin once mentioned that there was "something" to them). Kramskoi confessed in his letter of 21

Pre-Raphaelites, who were about just ten years older; or *Arts & Crafts Movement* of William Morris (1834-1886); or *Aesthetic Movement* of Walter Pater (1839-1894), who were all close contemporaries of Kramskoi. Stylistically, the artistic outcome of the Peredvizhniki was much closer to the historical French Salon artists of the previous generation, or to mid-century realists — again seriously outdated in the 1880-1890s. On the other hand, a group of traditional but talented and technically virtuosic artists of an academic style became very popular in Russia in the 1880-1890s (G. Semiradskii, S. Bakalovich, brothers P. and A. Svedomskii and others). And the public often openly preferred the latter. Even Pavel Tretyakov himself started acquisitions of the new academic Salon artists around that time. All in all, in the 1860s, the young rebel artists tried to find their niche by freeing themselves from the official institutions, but they were not strong enough artistically or radical enough socially to be consistent and daring. The road of compromises they took ended in a cul de sack. Next generation of artists turned away from the Peredvizhniki in the mid-1890s. Side by side with these new artists at the turn of the century emerged sympathetic critics, daring dealers and generous collectors.

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July, 1876, from France: “I had no idea that these Impressionists are such a burning issue here” (Kramskoi, *Pis'ma*, vol. I, 357). As for Stasov, he referred to them very negatively: Manet and Impressionists “were concerned only with their ‘impressions’.” (Stasov, *Sobranie Sochinenii* [Collected Works] (SPb.: Tipografiia M.M. Stasiulevicha, 1906. vol. IV), 88).