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# What's the Matter with Moscow?
## Developing a Field of Art in a Postsocialist, Globalized World

By

Elise Meghan Herrala

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

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Abstract

What's the Matter with Moscow? Developing a Field of Art in a Postsocialist, Globalized World

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How has the field of art developed, evolved, and been sustained in Russia after socialism? This dissertation examines the challenges Russian art-world actors face in building a field of art in a society undergoing rapid and significant economic, political, and social transformation. As a result of this upheaval, Russian art since the end of the Soviet Union has had to develop and negotiate an identity with the simultaneous yet contradictory forces of a socialist history and a neoliberal present. Further, actors in the Russian art world are judged against a teleological notion of artistic progress that stems from a Western-dominated cultural hierarchy.

Russia's art world grapples with both its Soviet past and its post-Soviet present in a world of fully developed fields of art. These conditions differ greatly from Bourdieu's account of the genesis of an autonomous field of art in nineteenth-century France, in which he takes for granted the conditions that made the development of an autonomous tradition of art possible, namely a cultural and political legacy particular to France. Russian art, therefore, offers a unique contemporary example of how a field of cultural production must struggle to create itself as autonomous while outside the bounds of Bourdieu's ideal field that bore Euro-American modernism in the West. I demonstrate the impact these differences have had on the development of a Russian field of art, by showing (1) how Russia's tumultuous transition from socialism to capitalism has differently shaped two generations of post-Soviet artists; (2) the difficulty of establishing a strong market and the resultant limited community of collectors; (3) the impact of a powerfully constraining state on the lives and work of artists; and (4) the significance of entering into a world in which there already exists powerful field(s) of arts centered in the West.

While the development of the Russian art world has made significant and arguably rapid changes over the past two decades—such as the increase of arts education and institutions—it still faces numerous challenges, from the escalating censorship by the state to the falling number of collectors. Further, when situated within a global context of inequality, it becomes apparent that the Russian field of art remains on the periphery of the international art world, struggling for legitimacy in the eyes of foreign experts and collectors. By attending to the historical trajectory of Russian art throughout the twentieth century—taking seriously the contributions of Soviet culture and the impact of globalization on cultural production and practices on its own terms as opposed to just as "other"—I construct a genealogy of the contemporary field of postsocialist art that

illuminates how Russians have come to understand the categories of "art" and "artist." Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the combination of the cultural and economic isolation experienced during the Soviet period, the current government's controlling presence, and Western capitalist economic and cultural hegemony has had detrimental effects on its understanding of itself and thus, the creation of its field of art.

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# PREFACE

Why do rich Russians buy art? "I don't think there is any great mystery… of course they're trying to show off their wealth," answered James Butterwick, a respected Russian art dealer, as we stood in his London gallery in 2012.[1] His response disappointed me. I had just begun my dissertation fieldwork on Russian art collectors, and expected a more complicated explanation for why Russians are increasingly buying art. Instead, Butterwick repeated what I had been reading in mainstream Western media: rich Russian collectors seek status. Later, during further interviews in London, I heard the same assessment repeatedly. In my field notes, I summed up my London trip by concluding that "Overall, it seems Veblen's conspicuous consumption is alive and well among Russian collectors."

While the majority of Russians experienced a financially precarious transition after the fall of the Soviet Union, a minority came away with unprecedented affluence. These newly rich Russians inspired many journalistic accounts about their presumed spending habits, while academic scholarship focused on the consumption patterns of the lower and middle classes (see Patico 2008; Shevchenko 2002, 2009; Zavisca 2004). Although there is now a considerable literature on post-Soviet Russian elites, it largely asserts that economic and political achievement bind the class together (among many, see Bonnell 2001; Gerber 2000; Hanley, Yershova, and Anderson 1995; Kryshtankovskaia 1995; Kryshtankovskaia and White 1996, 2005).

Yet membership in the dominant class is not just earned, but learned.[2] The newly rich and powerful must acquire the cultural tools to display their wealth and status in the "right" way: with taste, refinement, perhaps creativity, and even magnanimity. In the case of post-Soviet Russia, this poses a unique problem: how does one learn to project dominant-class membership in what was, for 70 years, officially a classless society? There is little in-depth scholarly research on dominant class culture in Russia and the ways in which consumption works to display class membership.[3] I wanted to learn how both the nascent class and its corresponding lifestyle were being constructed and maintained simultaneously in postsocialist Russia—without the benefit of previous generations who could pass down the cultural capital associated with elite status.

Thus, my dissertation began from an interest in the cultural basis of class formation for the new Russian elite. I wanted to explore how Russia's rich and powerful use consumption and culture to establish a cohesive lifestyle that differentiates them from lower classes. To do this, I decided to focus on art, as it is one of the ultimate markers of rarified consumption.

Russian art collectors in particular were increasingly in the news. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, accounts in the Western media dismissed wealthy Russians as boorish *nouveaux riches* who spent opulently and excessively on high-end fashion, cars, and real estate. From the vantage point of the global elite, these new rich Russian lacked the taste or restraint of "old money," more interested in Porsches than Pollocks. But by the mid-2000s, both spending habits and media accounts of Russian art collectors began to shift. Suddenly they were prominent on the international art scene. In 2004, billionaire Viktor Vekselberg purchased the entire Forbes Fabergé Collection for more than $100 million. And in 2008, billionaire Roman Abramovich made history by purchasing Francis Bacon's *Triptych* for $86.3 million, at that time the most expensive work of post-war art, in addition to Lucian Freud's *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* for $33.6 million, which

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[1] Interview with author on May 28, 2012

[2] Whether many of the post-Soviet super rich can be said to have "earned" their wealth is another matter.

[3] For notable exceptions see Oushakine 2000; Humphrey 2002.

was the highest ever paid for a work by a living artist. These historic purchases were just a few examples of the Russian collectors' renaissance, which led former Moscow-based art journalist John Varoli to suggest in 2009 that "the recent rebirth of private art collections in Russia has been one of the most significant cultural and social movements in the country over the past 20 years."[4]

To make sense of the shift among the Russian economic elites, I turned to Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu, two of the most important theorists for understanding how cultural consumption operates as an expression and basis of the dominant class. While Veblen focuses on conspicuous consumption as the primary illustration of pecuniary position, Bourdieu maintains the quest for class distinction ultimately appears through refined tastes and consumption—a difference that reflects the separate stages that occur in the evolution and maturation of a dominant class. This type of class evolution—from insecure parvenus, asserting class status through conspicuous consumption and emulation, to an established, self-assured elite with refined consumption and tastes—appeared to reflect trends within Russia's dominant class spending in the past two decades, as I suggest above. Thus, I hypothesized that the dominant class had moved from Veblen's conspicuous consumption to the cultivated tastes explained by Bourdieu's *Distinction*.

Although Moscow was ultimately where I planned to conduct the majority of my fieldwork, I began my research in London during the spring of 2012.[5] Not only is London one of the most important centers of the international art world, but it has also become home to an estimated 150,000 Russians (Groskop 2014).[6] The influx of Russians into the city has inspired an increase in Russian-focused arts institutions to cater to this clientele, such as foundations, galleries, and dealers. Even Moscow-based galleries opened branches in London.[7] London was also home to the only auction house in the world that was focused entirely on Russian art, MacDougall's Fine Art Auction.[8] The major international auction houses such as Sotheby's, Christie's, and Bonhams held biannual Russian art auctions in London as well.[9] Given London's importance for Russian art sales, it seemed the ideal place to begin. I spoke with Russian art specialists at auction houses, Russian art dealers, and a formerly Moscow-based art journalist. I also attended the opening receptions for the May 2012 Russian art auctions at Sotheby's and Christie's. As I explain above, in many ways these interviews and conversations reinforced what I had read prior to arriving, particularly that Russians were collecting primarily for status.

But as often the case with fieldwork, once I finally arrived in Moscow, I realized that the story *was* more complicated—and interesting—than what my interlocutors in London suggested. My primary goal was to interview collectors, a notoriously elusive and private group who were difficult to reach without introductions. Given that I had no contacts within this group (or outside of it, for that matter), I was forced to cast a wider net of informants who I hoped would eventually

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[4] As reported in *The Washington Post*.

[5] I also conducted interviews in New York City (with an international art attorney, auction house specialists, and dealers) which like London is home to many wealthy Russian expatriates. Beginning in the mid-2000s, Sotheby's and Christie's catered to this clientele by holding Russian art auctions in New York (as well as London). Demand has since waned, however, forcing Sotheby's to close its standalone Russian art auctions in New York in 2013. Christie's followed suit in 2015 (Kazakina 2015).

[6] Compare this to 2001, when there were roughly 10,000 Russian-born people living in London according to the British census (as reported by *BBC News* in 2005).

[7] An example was the Regina Gallery, one of the oldest and most respected art galleries in Moscow, which opened a London branch in 2010. By May 2013, however, Regina closed its London location. Their Moscow gallery remains active.

[8] In May 2013 the auction house Vladey opened in Moscow, becoming the first and only contemporary art auction in Russia.

[9] While Sotheby's and Christie's have offices in Moscow, they hold their Russian art auctions in London.

lead me to the collectors. Although I was happy to speak with anyone who was connected to the art world, I figured a logical starting place was those who work with the collectors in any capacity (particularly on the market side), such as galleries or auction houses. I also sought out journalists and critics who I assumed would not only have a sense for the landscape of the Russian art world, but would also have contacts within it.

Starting with market actors and journalists turned out to be a fortuitous decision, as it led to opportunities to interview collectors and spend time in their homes among their impressive collections. But in addition to collectors, my world opened up to actors from all corners of the Russian art world, each with their own stake and agenda. I spoke with people at galleries, including the owners, directors, and various members of the support staff (from assistants to heads of sale); auction-house founders, directors, and art specialists; independent and museum curators; a director and employees of private arts institutions; members of the media, such as journalists (freelance, newspaper, and magazine), art critics, and publishers; art consultants (both to private collectors and corporations); academics and art historians; and, finally, the artists.

In addition to interviewing, I tried to spend as much time as possible around the art. I attended exhibition openings at museums and galleries and preview openings at auction houses. I spent countless hours in Triumph Gallery, one of Moscow's leading contemporary-art galleries, during its normal day-to-day operations. Although hardly as glamourous as an exhibition opening, days at the gallery were never dull, as a steady stream of people came in and out: workers, artists, curators, collectors, friends. I also traveled to Ukraine with Triumph to observe its team in action as they put on a large-scale exhibition at Art Kyiv Contemporary, Ukraine's largest contemporary art project. I went to public art offerings as well, such as lectures and discussions, art fairs (such as the Cosmoscow international contemporary art fair), and workshops. I discovered that Moscow's museums were a great place to conduct interviews—particularly with art historians!—and wait out snowstorms. I spent time in artists' studios and in the homes of collectors, from the bohemian Moscow intelligentsia in the city center to the oligarchs in the moneyed northwest suburbs. I even participated in the art itself: a young video artist cast me in an experimental film because he needed a woman with an American accent like mine—one that sounded "bored, or maybe intellectual." I took it as a compliment, but needless to say, I did not win any Oscars.

From these varied viewpoints, it quickly became clear that there was no way to talk about the *consumption* of art—and what it meant—without talking about the *production* of art. This meant interviewing artists, of course. But it is not only artists who are responsible for creating a piece of art. Equally important are the various agents located throughout the art world, whose social relationships—consisting of struggles, alliances, cooperation, and competition—made up the *field of art.* In order to understand this more complicated story, then, I shifted from Bourdieu's theoretical framing of elite status differentiation in *Distinction* (1984) to his theory of field analysis in *The Rules of Art* (1996). Field theory allowed me to develop a more expansive and comprehensive picture of how and why art in postsocialist Russia looks the way it does, which I discovered was about much more than just the burgeoning tastes of the rich. Accounts from across the field revealed how profoundly the Russian art world is shaped by the history of state socialism and Russia's often fraught relationship with the international art world (and the West in particular). By attending to the historical trajectory of Russian art throughout the twentieth century—taking seriously the contributions of Soviet culture and the impact of globalization on cultural production—I attempt to construct a genealogy of the contemporary field of postsocialist art that illuminates how Russians have come to understand the categories of "art" and "artist."

Positioned at the intersection of sociology, art history, and cultural studies, it is my hope that this dissertation offers a detailed and convincing account of the social production of Russian art. Conversely, I also hope my analysis of the Russian case brings field theory to life in novel and generative ways. Ultimately, I hope that my research adds to an emergent literature on fields of cultural production outside of the West by challenging Eurocentric understandings of artistic progress that stem from a global symbolic and economic hierarchy over which the West has remained dominant.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I arrived in Moscow in August 2012, I had zero contacts in the art world and little hope my cold e-mailing strategy would change that. Yet not an hour after I hit *send* I received a reply from Dmitrii Khankin, owner of Triumph Gallery, where I would eventually spend endless hours attending openings, interviewing artists, and watching the day-to-day operations. Dima was incomprehensibly busy yet always made time to speak with me. His erudition was unmatched, and I learned something new from every conversation. He was also generous with his introductions, giving me access to a wide-range of people in the art world. Without Dima, I daresay this dissertation would have never happened.

But it wasn't just Dima who surprised me with generosity. I was continually astounded by the time and energy my interviewees gave me, and I extend to all of them my deepest gratitude. A few conversations were particularly fundamental for helping me see the field of art emerge. Sergei Popov showed me the importance of attending to the unique historical and social trajectory of Russian art, and his nuanced insights inspired the central focus for this dissertation. Marat Gelman was invaluable for tracing the postsocialist art world from the very beginning, while Ksenia Podoinitsina and Stas Uiba helped me understand challenges facing the younger generation. From Mikhail Kamenskii I learned much about the early days of the post-Soviet art market, and I am grateful for his probing questions about my project, which pushed me to expand my knowledge of Russian art history. I must also thank art historian Sasha Balashov, who dedicated hours to showing me around the Tretiakov, enthusiastically sharing his expertise of Russian art.

Engaging with art primarily through writing can sometimes make one forget the ineffable joy and wonder that accompanies seeing art in person. I am grateful for the collectors who graciously invited me into their homes to remind me of this fact, particularly Viktor Bondarenko, Pierre Brochet, Aleksandr Kronik, and Aleksandr Volochinskii. And while this perhaps goes against the argument of my dissertation, it was the artists who truly made this project come alive. Their passion, dedication, and thoughtfulness was endlessly inspiring and I never tired of seeing their work and hearing their stories. I hope they receive the recognition they deserve—both within Russia and internationally.

Living in Moscow can be an exhilarating, if sometimes frustrating endeavor, and I'm happy I did it with Daria Khramtsova, who became a close friend. I want to thank Alyona Akhiridinova for her ability to make Moscow welcoming and Ben Priddy for helping me navigate Russian bureaucracy too many times to count, after which he was always willing to share the woes of expat life over a bottle of vodka. Ben Lind at the Higher School of Economics gave valuable comments during the beginning stages of research. I was also fortunate to have two extraordinarily bright research assistants, Nataliia Kostenko and Sofia Simakova, who assisted me with everything from introductions to translations to scheduling. I look forward to seeing their contributions to the field of Russian art, which will no doubt be impressive. I also want to thank Dasha Rozensheyn for introducing me to some incredible artists and sharing her insights on Russian political art.

Much like a work of art, a dissertation is not solely created by one person. There has been an entire field of brilliant, generous, and caring people in my life who made this dissertation a reality. My journey to a Ph.D. started as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, where I realized I wanted to be a sociologist after watching Claire Decoteau, Cedric DeLeon, Andy Clarno, and Bashar Tarabieh conduct inspiring research while still finding time to be dedicated teachers

and activists—and most importantly, friends. My friendship with Anna Zogas also began at Michigan, and fifteen years later her brilliance and intellectual rigor continue to inspire me.

At Berkeley, I want to thank the staff of the sociology department, who always went the extra mile to smooth out bureaucratic bumps, especially Carolyn Clark and Anne Meyers. The Berkeley Program in Eurasian and East European Studies (BPS) introduced me to scholars of the region across disciplines, who were important for expanding how I approach area studies in sociology. In particular, I want to thank Ned Walker, the director of BPS, for his support over the years. The beginning stages of this dissertation benefitted from the sharp feedback of Michael Burawoy's dissertation group including Julia Chuang, Fidan Elcioglu, Zach Levenson, Gabe Hetland, and Siri Colom. I was also fortunate to have various chapters workshopped by the Berkeley Connect in Sociology Fellows dissertation group, including Kate Maich, Cyrus Dioun, Graham Hill, Ana Villareal, Ben Shestakovsky, and Professors Kim Voss, Cristina Mora, and Cybelle Fox. Several professors were especially important during my time at Berkeley. Alexei Yurchak was fundamental for helping me think through the concepts of socialism and postsocialism. Kristen Luker's seminar on interviewing gave me the skills (and confidence) I needed before going into the field. Barrie Thorne was an important example of how to be a tough yet caring academic. And Victoria Bonnell helped me locate and develop my intellectual interests and pushed me to be a more precise writer.

My dissertation committee consists of three scholars for whom I have the deepest respect. I am grateful for Yuri Slezkine's incisive comments on my dissertation, which challenged me to consider my own Western-based assumption. Throughout the years I have benefitted enormously from the mentorship of Raka Ray, whose generous and unfailing encouragement and support has given me the confidence to believe in myself as a scholar. She is a model academic who I now have the privilege of considering a friend. And finally I want to thank Michael Burawoy—certainly the hardest part of my entire dissertation to write. Michael's commitment to his students is astonishing (he has read every word of this dissertation more times than I have), his enthusiasm for sociology and teaching contagious, and his intellect inspiring. His feedback over the years turned a half-formed idea into a dissertation, and his belief in me turned an uncertain graduate student into a sociologist. It was a great pleasure and honor to work with Michael, and the lessons I learned from him will no doubt stay with me for the rest of my career.

I would be horribly remiss not to thank my exceptional group of friends, whose intelligence and loyalty never ceases to amaze me. Anastasia Kayiatos, a true intellectual, introduced me to the Russian language. Jennifer Hudson's early excitement for my project was vital for its development; Eric Garcia kept me energized from beginning to end; Elizabeth Travis and Martha Linsley helped keep me relaxed; and Tre Wallace, Tai Power Seeff, Rhea Meyerscough, and Patricia Kubala provided a (brainy) respite from long days of writing. It's inconceivable to imagine having done this without the bottomless support and enthusiasm of Kate Maich and the extraordinary intellect and humor of Zach Levenson, and I can only hope I have done as much for them as they have for me. I started a conversation with Nina Aron our first month at Berkeley and nine years later we still haven't run out of things to say to each other. Her intellectual and emotional contributions to this dissertation are profound, and this manuscript feels as much hers as it is mine. Also my deepest love and gratitude go to her children, Emmett and Iona, who have been a constant source of happiness and levity, helping me out of the self-possessed fog that frequently envelops the dissertating. And to Ryan Calder, a partner who is as brilliant as he is supportive, whose remarkable mind animated many of the ideas found in this dissertation (not to mention carefully

edited them) and whose love led me to the finish line. Completing this dissertation wouldn't have meant nearly as much without him by my side.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Debra and Richard Herrala. They never questioned any of my endeavors, even when they didn't quite understand why or what I was doing. Ultimately it was their unwavering belief in me that allowed me to think it was possible to take on a project like this. I can't imagine that being the parent of a graduate student is an easy thing—e.g., having to deal with their constant money problems, Peter Pan syndrome, and self-doubt—but my parents did it with extraordinary patience and love. If only we could all be so lucky.

# NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I use the Library of Congress (LC) transliteration system, omitting soft and hard signs and other diacritics. Names and places that are well known outside the art world are given in their most common English form (e.g., "Yeltsin" instead of "Eltsin," "Moscow" instead of "Moskva"). Nearly all other names are transliterated, including the names of prominent Russian artists (e.g., "Dubosarskii" instead of "Dubossarsky").

For the sake of consistency, I transliterate the names of all other people and institutions using the LC system, even when those people and institutions transliterate their own names differently on websites and social media. The only exception is people who also appear as authors or editors in English in the bibliography. In that case, to avoid having two names for the same person in the same manuscript, I use the more widely published name throughout (e.g., "Backstein" instead of "Bakshtain" because Backstein's writing is cited in this manuscript.)

# INTRODUCTION
## *The Sociology of Russian Art*

The Moscow contemporary art scene I discovered during my first round of fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 often appeared to be a lively and enthusiastic one, full of openings, exhibitions, lecture series, museums, and festivals. Yet during my time there, the attitudes about the contemporary art market I encountered were frequently negative. Collectors, gallerists, journalists, and art historians (among others) bemoaned the dismal state of the Russian contemporary art world. The people I spoke with were on the front lines of this community, intimately familiar with the barriers to building a thriving contemporary art world, so it made sense that they viewed the progress as protracted and difficult.

When I returned to Moscow a year later in August 2014, it only took a day or two to sense that things had not gotten better since I left in the summer of 2013, starting with the inflated prices of everything from metro tickets to food to rent. The mood was darker and more fearful, no doubt given "the situation," as people in Russia tended to refer to the events in Ukraine and Crimea. I was anxious to hear how this was being felt in the art world—and it did not take long to find out. During my second interview of the trip, the brooding and intellectual artist Sergei Ogurtsov (b. 1982) wasted no time giving me his assessment: "Right now the situation [of the Russian art world] is of downfall and devastation—it's gotten much worse in the past two years. The Russian art world is on its way down, like all systems in Russia." He dramatically stubbed out the first of many cigarettes and continued. "The artistic community was optimistic five years ago, cautious two years ago, and now it's just *devastation*."[10] This was a sentiment I heard often over the next month, from struggling young artists to the most well-known and established. At the end of 2012, I had written in my field notes, "The art market in Russia is bleak." Two years, one invaded country, and several sanctions later, things had gotten noticeably worse: what was once considered "bleak" would now pass for "robust." It was not a good time to be part of a world to which the Russian government was openly hostile, and collectors—fearful of the economic precarity that Putin's political decisions inspired—had stopped buying altogether.

Since the fall of socialism, the contemporary field of art has developed and evolved in distinct and unexpected ways in Russia. Amid massive economic, political, and social transformations transpiring at a rapid pace, the Russian art world and its actors have faced varied and specific challenges in developing a field of art at once internal to its own borders and the international arena. The end of socialism has enabled the Russian art world to come into its own by actively consolidating an autonomous identity (apart from the state) even as it must negotiate the contradictory forces of the nation's not-so-distant socialist past and its globally oriented capitalist present. As a function of their integration into the global economic and cultural networks, Russian artists and their institutions find themselves measured—and measure themselves—against a teleological notion of artistic progress dominated by a Western ideal.

Extant theories of cultural value cannot account for the local and global situation in which postsocialist Russia finds itself. Most notably, Bourdieu's idea of art as an autonomous field, derived from his examination of nineteenth-century France, takes for granted the surrounding socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions that allowed artistic autonomy to develop in the first place—namely, a cultural and political legacy particular to the French and a global order it

[10] Interview with author on August 31, 2014

dominated. Russian art was experiencing a similar trajectory until Soviet rule completely changed the course of its art history. In contrast to the French case, then, Russia has had to grapple with an interrupted field of art with a complicated past on the one side, and a world of fully developed fields of art on the other. In this, Russian art today uniquely exemplifies the diachronic and synchronic challenges agents in a local field of cultural production face to establish their field's autonomy. These challenges differ radically from those faced by agents in Bourdieu's ideal-typical field of art, set in the early years of Euro-American modernism. While Bourdieu assumes that an autonomous field of art is maintained in a society that is capitalist and democratic, using the case of postsocialist Russia I argue that historicizing the concept of the field *outside* of a Western context broadens this understanding.

While the Russian art world has made significant and arguably rapid advances over the past two decades—such as the increase of arts education and institutions—it still faces numerous challenges, from escalating censorship by the state to the falling number of collectors. Further, when we situate the Russian field of art within a global context, it becomes apparent that Russia remains on the periphery of the international art world, struggling for legitimacy in the eyes of foreign experts and collectors. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the combination of the cultural and economic isolation experienced during the Soviet period, the current government's controlling presence, and Western economic and cultural hegemony have led many figures in the Russian art world to consider the Russian contemporary art scene stagnant and embattled. Despite the field's creative ferment and passionate individuals, Russians interested in contemporary art speak pessimistically about it, seeing themselves as excluded from—and structurally inferior to—acknowledged Western hubs in the international field of art.

## TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF RUSSIAN ART

The literature on postsocialist Russian contemporary art is small and limited in scope, with few comprehensive accounts of the postsocialist period.[11] Further, there has been no comprehensive sociological study of Russian art.[12] Given that sociologists of art are generally more interested in *how* art and its value are produced—as opposed to focusing on the aesthetic quality of individual work—this is somewhat surprising (Tanner 2003). Because the production and consumption of Russian art in the past century diverged markedly from the dominant narrative of Western art, it provides an unprecedented and fascinating case to examine alternative contexts from which art can emerge.

Before the Soviet period, Russian art followed a trajectory much like that of the West. By the end of the eighteenth century, ties between the church and court were loosening, granting previously unknown autonomy to artists (Degot 2012). As in Bourdieu's (1996) France, the rise of autonomous bourgeois art in Russia necessitated an institutional organization that led to museums, commercial galleries, critics, and a viewing public (Bowlt 1991). At the end of the

[11] Nonconformist art of the Soviet period, up through the 1980s, has been a much more popular topic in Russian art (see Baigell and Baigell 1995; Bown 1989; Bulanova 2006; Diehl et al. 2010; Rosenfeld 2006; Rosenfeld and Dodge 1995a, 1995b; Tupitsyn 1989). Regarding postsocialist art, however, there are much fewer resources. Amirsadeghi (2011) compiled one of the first comprehensive surveys of postsocialist contemporary Russian art in English. More accounts exist in Russian, and particularly helpful are the monographs of collectors, such as Brochet (2007) and especially Bondarenko (Popov 2010). Degot has also written extensively on the topic (cf. 2012).

[12] A key exception is Jonson (2015), who focuses on protest art in the Putin and gives a thorough account of the history of contemporary art in the post-Soviet period.

eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the first "autonomous" Russian art appropriated Western-style impressionism, which was dominant in Europe at the time.

But by 1909, Russian art had found its own voice with the avant-garde, an "original and astonishingly radical phenomenon" that was considered some of the most cutting-edge art in the world at the time (Degot 2012). Concerned with utopian ideals of collectivity, the Russian avant-garde was critical of modernism in the West, which was based on feelings of alienation and defined by the image of the lonely artist as sole creator.[13] The Russian avant-garde continued until the beginning of the 1930s, producing what is arguably the most recognizable art to come out of Russia. It encompassed movements such as Futurism (e.g., Nataliia Goncharova, Lyubov Popova) Suprematism (e.g., Kazimir Malevich, Vasilii Kandinsky) and Constructivism (e.g., Aleksandr Rodchenko, El Lissitsky). The avant-garde played an important role for political and social agitation both prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and during the establishment of the socialist state in the post-civil war years. Their art, which focused on experimentation and a "profound reformulation of life," reflected the political culture of Russia at the time. Indeed, many of those involved with the avant-garde movement originally sided with the Bolsheviks and not only welcomed the socialist re-imagination of society, but also helped conceive of it aesthetically.[14]

But similarities to Western art history end there, after the autonomy of the Russian field of art was severely curtailed at the beginning of the 1930s, when Stalin irrevocably changed the course of art and literature by making Socialist Realism an official state policy. In a move consistent with his obsessive paranoia, much of the avant-garde art that had *championed* the cause of socialism was suddenly considered decadent and bourgeois. Thus, art was seen as a potential threat, and by decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party ("On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations") in 1932, artists had to work within the confines of the state-mandated style of Socialist Realism—a style of realistic art with the purpose of furthering the goals of socialism and communism.[15] This style was diametrically opposed to the avant-garde's art, which rejected the traditional realistic representations in order to reconstruct a new vision of reality. By contrary, the straightforward depiction of "reality" in the art of Socialist Realism was thought to be more easily understood by the proletariat and therefore more effective propaganda. Yet as the art critic Alexander Kamensky (1993) explains, Soviet artists were forced to make art that was actually divorced from reality, in which they had to follow "a world of myth according to a fixed plan [that] was invented by the Party" (155). The "mythical world" was portrayed by "optimistic works," that were "rich in enthusiasm and heroics" and "singing the praises of

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[13] It should be noted that this is an oversimplification of the Russian avant-garde.

[14] As Groys puts it, "As they understood it, the artists of the Russian avant-garde were producing not objects of aesthetic consumption but projects or models for a total restructuring of the world on new principles, to be implemented by collective actions and social practice in which the difference between consumer and producer, artist and spectator, work of art and object of utility, and so on, disappeared. The fact that these avant-garde projects are hung in present-day museums as traditional works of art, where they are viewed in the traditional light, signals the ultimate defeat of the avant-garde, not its success" (2012:252).

[15] Completely eradicating private art forms was, of course, impossible. Not only did artists continue to make "unofficial" work, but there was also a network of support for art that persisted underground. Although limited in number, this art network included private studios; collectors' salons posing as "home galleries," such as the famous collection of George Costakis, which included works of the Russian avant-garde (for a detailed account of the Costakis collection, see Roberts 1994); and a few "amateur" studios—tolerated by the state so that they could use them as "proof" to the outside world that they did not engage in censorship—where art could be exhibited without having to part of the Artists' Union (Degot 2012; Rosenfeld and Dodge 1995b; Tupitsyn 1989).

blossoming socialist construction."[16] Never mind that the post-war reality in the Soviet Union was marked with starvation and anguish—artists were to render the country as nothing short of paradise.

However, even the artists' *interpretation* of what "socialist paradise" might look like was severely regulated, as artistic novelty and innovation were considered bourgeois and thus discouraged. Instead, artists were pressured to turn to styles of classicism and imitation of "memorable Russian masters of the nineteenth century and of pseudo-academic genres" (ibid.). Art was heavily regulated and policed during this time, in which there was "no room for independent thought. The artists' own opinions might as well have been extinct, for he became the blind executor of tasks sent down on high" (ibid.:157). By the post-war period, artistic autonomy was almost completely extinguished in the Soviet Union. The groundbreaking, daring, and experimental art of the avant-garde was replaced with the aesthetically homogenized vision of Socialist Realism.

The state's control of art not only strangled the creativity of artists but also effectively removed Russia from the international art world conversation. Indeed, much of the historical work done on Russian art in the twentieth century, particularly from the West, focuses on the avant-garde up until the early 1930s. Art during the Stalinist period—which is nearly always conflated with Socialist Realism—is ignored or not taken seriously (Bown and Taylor 1993). In part, this is because the art was seen as going "backward" in history: Socialist Realism marked a return to ideologically-driven figurative painting, which at that time the West "could not accommodate within paradigms of modernism, internationalism and the avant-gardism" that were the cornerstones of their notions of free artistic expression (ibid.:6). In this way, the loss of autonomy for Soviet art was also seemingly considered by some art historians as the country's loss of "legitimate" art altogether. In this way, Soviet art deviated from the "progress" of the traditional art-history narrative, the cornerstone of which is the autonomous producer.

Yet this excision of Soviet art from the dominant record of art history is problematic, and an important reason for a more robust sociology of Russian art. Are we to believe that Socialist Realism made Russian art completely static and irrelevant? When those who guard the canon of art history are in the West, the answer is yes. The problem is not just that Socialist Realism is seen as irrelevant—postsocialist Russian art is also situated within that historical tradition and seen through a Western understanding of what art should be. As Yakimovich (1993) points out, the intellectual tools and theoretical framework through which Russian art is assessed do not "fit" the post-Soviet situation. Importantly, instead of explaining this through the *lack* in the art education of Russians, he tells us *why* the "Western intellectual arsenal" is not sufficient for Russian art:

> Postmodernism is after all devoted to problems of man and society under the aegis of limitless consumption, abundance, free choice, openness, permissiveness, virtually instantaneous communication and a range of factors totally absent in the former Soviet Union. That is why postmodernist analogies are ultimately misleading; the philosophy, sociology, and psychology of Western Europe and America cannot serve us directly. The independent mind [...] cannot be against freedom; but it can and must be against illusions connected with attaining freedom. We have to find our own way (215).

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[16] These decrees were issued in the mid-1940s from Andrei Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Party and a close confidant of Stalin on "ideological questions" (Kamensky 1993:154).

Understanding Russian art within an art historical narrative generated in the West—a society organized economically and politically nearly the opposite of the Soviet Union—indeed seems unlikely to offer much explanatory power. Degot (2012) argues that given its stylistic opposition to the West's modernist abstraction, in addition to the growing ideological divide between the East and West, Soviet art was "super-historical, synthetic, and unique"—and that this very claim of absolute novelty reveals Soviet art to be part of the worldwide modernist project. This type of reframing of Soviet and Russian art is a departure from most historical narratives, and gestures toward the need to reconcile Western and other art histories.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian art has had the opportunity to return to the autonomy it experienced before the constraints of Socialist Realism. But "successfully" returning to that autonomous tradition of art and establishing postsocialist Russian art as relevant on the international art scene has proven to be nearly impossible.[17] Why is this the case? And why has sociology ignored Russian art? Russian art critics and historians have long understood the importance of the divergent histories of Western and Russian art, and it is precisely because of Russia's unique experience that they have in many ways provided the closest approximation to a sociological analysis. I would argue that given the importance of the systems that have shaped postsocialist art—such as the state, the lack of market, repression, socialism—historians of Russian art have face a challenge that often *forces* them to reckon with the larger social context. The art historian Matthew Jesse Jackson described the paradox of studying Russian art:

> …on the positive side, […] I was able to publish a book that aspired to present a broad portrait of the Soviet system AND the place of visual art within that system. My friends who study American art could never write this kind of all-encompassing book—a book on Andy Warhol will be on Warhol, not on postwar America. […] On the negative side, one cannot simply discuss [Russian] art. For example, the writer on Warhol does not need to explain American life to her reader, but the person writing on Ilia Kabakov must deal with an incredibly dense number of "extraneous" facts simply to begin discussing the concrete achievement of individual artworks (2012:2).

In other words, it is difficult to disentangle Russian art from its historical, economic, and political context. Therefore, Russia's most prominent art critics and historians—notably Ekaterina Degot, Boris Groys, Viktor and Margarita Tupitsyn, and Viktor Misiano—have become invaluable for understanding not only postsocialist art, but the world in which it was created.[18]

Despite these art historians' vital contributions, however, art historians in the end are not sociologists. But why does that matter? A sociological critique of art history is that it fails to socially contextualize art and at the same time places too much importance on the individual output of the artist. Sociologists take issue with art history's prevailing image of the artist as the

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[17] Groys (2008) argues that this is the result of the hegemonic reign of capitalism: "Under the conditions of modernity an artwork can be produced and brought to the public in two ways: as a commodity or as a tool of political propaganda. The amounts of art produced under these two regimes can be seen as roughly equal. But under the conditions of the contemporary art scene, much more attention is devoted to the history of art as commodity and much less to art as political propaganda. The official as well as unofficial art of the Soviet Union and of other former Socialist states remains almost completely out of focus for the contemporary art history and museum system" (4–5).

[18] In recent years, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art started the important project of assembling the archives of postsocialist Russian art, and has begun a more academic examination of the field as a whole by mapping out the "family tree of Russian art" (see http://garagemca.org/en/research/the-family-tree-of-russian-contemporary-art).

autonomous, isolated creator, whose work is a unique expression of his or her own artistic genius. For many art historians, ultimately the value of the work comes from how the individual artistic vision is then received. The sociologist, however, sees the artist as only one component necessary for the production of culture. To understand how art is created (and received by others), sociologists use a more encompassing unit of analysis than just the artist, such as the "art world" (Becker 1982) or "field of art" (Bourdieu 1996).[19] This allows sociologists to situate artists within a larger context to show how the other actors in the art world contribute to the production of art and its meaning.

As I suggest above, current accounts and analyses of contemporary Russian art by historians often do address multiple elements of the field beyond the artist, especially relating to the market or the influence of the West. Thus far, however, none have done a comprehensive examination of the field *as a whole*. The aim of this dissertation, then, is to provide a more exhaustive account of the social production of postsocialist Russian art by using Bourdieu's concept of the field of art. I argue that using field theory not only provides a larger and more nuanced understanding of Russian art, but also helps to unsettle and challenge Western art history's traditional assumptions and beliefs of non-Western art. In the following sections, I explore the explanatory power and limits of Bourdieu's concept of the field of art within Russia.

## SOCIOLOGY, ART, AND BOURDIEU

"Sociology and art do not make good bedfellows." So said Pierre Bourdieu (1993b:139), perhaps the most influential sociologist of art. Although his theories of art were developed from his critiques of both sociology and art history, he was most fiercely critical of the art world itself. The reason sociology and art make an uneven pairing, he charged, was "the fault of art and artists, who are allergic to everything that offends the idea they have of themselves: the universe of art is a universe of belief, belief in gifts, in the uniqueness of the uncreated creator" (Bourdieu 1993b:139).[20] In other words, he found it problematic that art is understood through a lens of modernism, seen as the expression of an individual artist who is presumed to be free and autonomous to express his or her own "truth" through art.[21] In this conception, art is seen to have a "pure aesthetic," unfettered by exogenous limitations to the artistic process.[22]

But Bourdieu was not satisfied with the treatment of art in sociology, either, finding it lacked explanatory power for why and how art was created. From these criticisms emerged his approach to art: instead of focusing on ontological questions, such as "what makes something a work of art," he believes we should be looking to sociological questions, such as "what are the *social and historical conditions* that produce a work of art."[23] His account is a compelling

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[19] Unsurprisingly, some art historians have mounted a critical response to Bourdieu's seeming dismissal of their field. For example, Hooker, Paterson, and Stirton (2000) argue that Bourdieu has set himself up as "an intellectual predator with art history as his prey" by unfairly claiming art history to be a practice of "bourgeois exclusion" from his own privileged position inside the field of cultural production (214).

[20] Bourdieu goes on to suggest that art historians see sociologists as an "intrusion" and "source of scandal" because their attempt to understand and explain art results in the "disenchantment, reductionism, […] vulgarity or sacrilege [of art]" and a desire to "expel artists from the history of art" (1993b:139).

[21] Many sociologists of art share this critique (cf. Becker 1982; Zolberg 1990).

[22] In spite of this animosity, Bourdieu did not dismiss art history whole cloth; in fact, he engaged with the work of art historians to develop his theories, most notably Erwin Panofsky (cf. Bourdieu 1967).

[23] Art historian Michael Baxadall's study *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (1972) was one of Bourdieu's key inspirations. Bourdieu called Baxandall's study an "exemplary realization of what a sociology of

compromise between these two sides because it avoids privileging the primacy of the single artist for making meaning of art while also not relying on an entirely structural explanation either (Tanner 2003). For Bourdieu, one cannot understand an artist as an individual entity; rather, one must first situate him or her within the artistic field from which they have emerged. In this way, as he put it, he seeks to know, "*who created the creators?*" The subject of artistic production for Bourdieu is not the artist or the product, then, but rather

> the whole set of agents who are involved in art, are interested in art, have an interest in art and the existence of art, who live on and for art, the producers of works regarded as artistic (great and small, famous—i.e., 'celebrated'—or unknown), critics, collectors, go-betweens, curators, art historians, and so on" (1993b:148; see also Bourdieu 1996).

In other words, artists are embedded in systems of social relationships. Taken together, these social relationships make up the *field* of art, which I shall discuss in greater depth in the next section.

*Field Theory*

Bourdieu's concept of *field* refers to the system of social relations that govern a particular social formation, which is made up of agents and their positions within that field. Although fields are arranged hierarchically, they are relatively autonomous because they function on the basis of their own rules, laws, and logic. An agent's position in the field is the result of how their *habitus* and capital (economic, social, or cultural) interfaces with these rules. In any given field—such as political, economic, or cultural—agents compete for control, resources, or power that is specific to that field. Varying degrees and types of capital determine an agent's position within the field, and thus there is competition among the "players" of the "game" to acquire, demonstrate, or protect one's capital. Indeed, this struggle among agents is necessary for the game to continue—in other words, for a field to function at all (Bourdieu 1993a).[24] The very structure of the field, then, is defined by the power relations between agents through factors such as the amount or mastery of certain types of capital, their trajectories within the field, or their ability to either adjust or transform the rules.

*Habitus* and field are relational concepts, as a field can only function when agents possess the "correct" *habitus*, meaning they know the "rules" and are committed to following them to play the "game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:19). Bourdieu characterizes *habitus* as a system of dispositions that have been developed as a result of, and as a response to, outside conditions of the world that shape actions, tastes, thought, and class membership. One's *habitus* begins to form at childhood, and over time these dispositions solidify such that they become second nature, predisposing individuals "to realize the potentialities inscribed in a certain position" (1993a:170), which is achieved through possessing various types of capital. Cultural capital, for example, is a form of knowledge that has been internalized, allowing the individual to appreciate and decipher

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artistic perception ought to be" by showing how art in the early Italian Renaissance was created and consumed within a specific historical logic that greatly diverged from the modern understanding of the "disinterested" aesthetic (derived from Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*).

[24] However, Bourdieu cautions elsewhere that comparing a field to a game is not entirely accurate: "unlike [a game], a field is not the product of a deliberate act of creation, and it follows rules or, better, regularities, that are no explicit or codified. Thus we have *stakes* (*enjeux*) which are for the most part the product of the competition between players" (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992:98).

cultural relations or artifacts. The acquisition and/or inculcation of cultural capital occurs through the education one receives, both from within their family and through formal institutions such as schools.

Having the right cultural capital is especially important in a field such as art, because "the work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (1993a:35). Worth comes not only from the material production of the object, but also from the *production of the value* that is assigned to a work. In other words, while the artists create the work itself, numerous other actors are involved in assigning it value, including dealers, art critics, collectors, museums, academics, and galleries. The cultural capital required to identify a valuable piece of art is rarified knowledge that is essential for success within the field of art. Thus, one's experience with art—their interpretation, knowledge, enjoyment, and relationship—is shaped by multiple social conditions, such as history, education, class, and status. As Bourdieu puts it, "although it appears to itself like a gift of nature, the eye of the nineteenth-century art-lover is the product of history" (1996:288). And so just as he believes a work of art is not merely the product of an individual artist's aesthetic vision, Bourdieu argues that one's experience of art, and thus the development of one's taste, is not the product of their own "pure gaze," free from outside influence but rather the result of *habitus*.

Although Bourdieu sketches out some general laws of fields, they are in no way universal as each field has properties unique to it. Still, every field is marked by an internal struggle that shapes, defines, and changes it. These struggles are often concerned with (1) how to gain and/or retain power, (2) definitions of legitimacy and value, and (3) the delineation of a field's boundaries. To analyze a field—specifically a field of cultural production—he suggests that there are three main operations (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1996). First, the field of art must be analyzed within the field of power,[25] paying attention to how it has evolved over time. As Bourdieu argues, this is particularly important given cultural producers are in a dominated position in the dominant class, a position he argues is "structurally contradictory," which is "absolutely crucial for understanding the positions taken by writers and artists, notably in struggles in the social world" (1993a:164). Second, the internal working of the field—its specific laws and rules—must be examined, including "the structure of objective relations between positions occupied by individuals and groups placed in a situation of competition for legitimacy" (1996:214). And last, one must analyze the *habitus* of the agents who are part of the field, which shows the different "systems of dispositions" that are internalized and can prove useful or advantageous within a particular field.

Yet how does one know when a field has been created? There is no precise formula, but Bourdieu gives some indicators that demonstrate a field of art exists. For example, one can look for signs of autonomy—one of the most important features of a field—such as the creation of institutions which are specific to, and necessary for, the field to function. In the case of cultural production, this includes: exhibition spaces (galleries, museums, art clusters); institutions that legitimate or consecrate art (academies, art critics, salons); the reproduction of producers and consumers (art schools); and "specialized agents" such as dealers, critics, art historians, and collectors. Other indicators are the appearance of biographers and art historians who have an

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[25] Bourdieu defines a field of power as "the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural). It is the site of struggles between holders of different powers (or kinds of capital) […] have at stake the transformation or conservation of the relative value of different kinds of capital, which itself determines, at any moment, the forces liable to be engaged in these struggles" (1996:215).

interest in preserving what is produced in the field—and as such, preserving the importance of their capital (Bourdieu 1993a). Yet another indicator is the existence of a "field effect," which occurs when a work of art becomes impossible to understand without knowing the specific historical and social positioning of the field from which it was produced. And last, Bourdieu says the economic world of art is "reversed" because,

> the fundamental law of this specific universe, that of disinterestedness, which establishes a negative correlation between temporal (notably financial) success and properly artistic value, is the inverse of the law of economic exchange. The artistic field is a *universe of belief*. Cultural production distinguishes itself from the production of the most common objects in that it must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object, that is, the recognition of artistic legitimacy (1993a:164).

Bourdieu gives his most comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of cultural fields in *The Rules of Art* (1996), in which he describes the rise of the autonomous fields of art and literature in nineteenth-century France. He illustrates how the struggles of artists and writers such as Manet, Flaubert, and Baudelaire to achieve creative freedom from controlling forces such as the church and courts contributed to the creation of their own autonomous fields of cultural production. Achieving autonomy resulted in a separation of the form of art from its function, resulting in the new belief of *art for art's sake*. Through this account, he demonstrates that art is not created in a vacuum, free from external factors and influences. Rather, art is the product of a particular historical and social location in addition to the variously positioned players within the field of art—including artists, dealers, collectors, curators—who all have a stake in the definition of what can be considered "legitimate art." The struggle over this definition, then, gives rise to the meaning and value of a work of art. Put another way, although an individual creates a work of art, the *meaning* of that work comes from dynamics of the cultural field as a whole. It is only within this historically and socially determined space that a work of art can become consecrated. As Bourdieu emphasizes, "the more established the field becomes, the less can the production of the work of art, of its value but also of its meaning, be reduced to the sole labor of an artist" (1996:295).

## THE UTILITY OF FIELD THEORY IN RUSSIA

All fields are dynamic. Even after a field's emergence, the meanings, importance, values, and rules are constantly changing. From where does this change come? And why does it happen? Applying field theory to cultural production provides not only an understanding of the conditions under which art is being created, but also helps us track societal transformation. This no doubt provides a useful and important framework for understanding the art world from a more comprehensive perspective. Yet the way in which Bourdieu has constructed the parameters for what a field is, and can achieve, does not always work outside of the Western context. There has been some scholarship of non-Western art that has used field theory, such as Winegar's (2006) account of the Egyptian contemporary art world and Buchholz's examination of Chinese art (2015). But much more scholarship is needed in order to fully articulate what field theory can look like for postsocialist, postcolonial, or other art worlds on the periphery. The emergence and evolution of the Russian field of art provides an opportunity to examine the impact of cultural and economic upheaval. Russia has had to transition from socialized state control of cultural production to a

globalized world in which there is already an established field of art. In what ways has the field of art been altered in a country wedged between a socialist past and a globalized present? What follows is an attempt to engage Bourdieu based on my research in order to build these concepts further.

*Issues of Autonomy: Artists and the State*

The field of art, like all fields of cultural production, is in a dominated position within the larger field of power. Ultimately, however, to occupy the dominant position in the larger field of power requires high degrees of economic and/or political capital. This hierarchy of capital creates a tension in the field of art: while it needs to be autonomous to create art, it cannot exist without support or interaction from the dominant forms of power, whether political (e.g., government support) or economic (e.g., market forces). As Bourdieu (1996) points out, "As liberated as [the fields of cultural production] may be from external constraints and demands, they are traversed by the necessity of the fields which encompass them: the need for profit, whether economic or political" (216). This tension is manifested in the type of art that is created: "bourgeois art," which represents the politically and economically dominant; and "art-for-art's sake," or that which identifies itself as independent from the economy and is given value entirely on its own terms. Bourdieu categorizes these separate poles as the two principles of hierarchization in the artistic field, bourgeois art representing the *heteronomous principle*, and art-for-art's sake representing the *autonomous principle*.

Even the most autonomous art, however, is being created within in a field that is necessarily embedded within a larger field of power and thus submits to the laws that organize the field of power or serves the interests of the field of power in some way.[26] Thus, situating the field of art into the larger field of power shows to what degree it influences artists and also the way in which artistic expression is organized in culture.[27] So what, then, counts as autonomous in the larger field of power? For Bourdieu this is narrowly defined, fixed on the ability artists have in the struggle to legitimate themselves and remain free from the more dominant parts of society (namely, the economic and political).[28]

But as Winegar (2006) argues in the case of Egypt, autonomous art can be understood and put into practice differently outside of the Western context. She observed that Egyptian artists *did* struggle for autonomy—but not necessarily as Bourdieu might define it. These artists did not want to be controlled by economic and political elites, yet they also saw that there were *positive* aspects to their relationship with those in the dominant fields. She found that autonomy for contemporary Egyptian artists varied generationally—based on different experiences of the post-independence political and economic circumstances—resulting in what she suggests is a "context-specific

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[26] As Bourdieu suggests, "the relationship of homology established between the field of cultural production and the field of power (or the social field in its entirety) means that works which are produced with reference to purely 'internal' ends are always predisposed to fulfill external functions as an added bonus—and all the more efficaciously because their adjustment to demand is not the product of a conscious search but the result of a structural correspondence" (1996:166).

[27] He notes that "the notion of the field of power has been introduced in order to account for the *effects* which may be observed at the very heart of the literary or artists field and which are exercised, with different strengths, on the ensemble of writers or artists" (1996:380).

[28] The opposite could be true, van Maanen (2009) suggests, "if the political field set great store by a vivid cultural and artistic life in society, the cultural field could operate more autonomously, even less dominated by economic laws, without losing its societal significance" (78). As I discuss at the end of this dissertation, this is precisely what has accounted for the success of the Chinese art market in the past ten years.

struggle" for autonomy. Reimaging "culturally-specific autonomy" in Egypt allows Winegar to challenge the idea that there is "an independent engine of autonomy operative in all art worlds" (188).[29] Similarly, Hockx (2003) points out that the Chinese literary field is not easily schematized into the autonomous and heteronomous principles of the French literary field, in part because of the "presence [in China] of a third principle, partly but not fully heteronomous, which motivates modern Chinese writers to consider, *as part of their practice*, the well-being of their country and their people" (225, emphasis in original). Like Winegar, Hockx emphasizes the necessity of developing culturally-specific understandings of autonomy.

Like Winegar and Hockx, I find that the meaning of autonomy for Russian artists has also shifted over time and varies between generations, and more importantly, developed from a different political and economic context than Western art. In particular, the case of Soviet Nonconformist art poses an interesting challenge to what constitutes autonomous art. Given the overreach and repressive measures of the Soviet state, not to mention the complete absence of an art market, Bourdieu might suggest that even "unofficial" art like that of the Soviet Nonconformists lacks autonomy. Yet some scholars have shown that even when the field of cultural production is controlled by an authoritarian regime, the production of "free" art and literature *can* persist. For example, Sapiro (2003, 2014) shows how dissident writers in Vichy France developed strategies of resistance against the government, eventually helping to then shape how the field was organized in the decades after the war.[30]

And in the case of the Soviet Union, Komaromi (2007), maintains that despite being officially controlled by the party, an autonomous field of "unofficial culture" did develop within the Soviet Union after Stalin, in which artists and writers were able to develop a field *outside* the confines of ideological control.[31] Although this art was produced *within Soviet society*—in other words, it was only the existence of Soviet society that this particular field of cultural production could exist—she nonetheless argues, "late Soviet unofficial culture suggests that 'autonomy' can manifest in many ways and that the forms of resistance to power are more varied than a dominant Western critical discourse has tended to allow" (2007:629).[32] Similarly, Jackson (2012) argues that

[29] Winegar continues, "Furthermore, assumptions about the drive to autonomy run the risk of confirming certain teleological notions of progress regarding the art of non-Western people (e.g., that their art world has not evolved enough yet to become completely autonomous)" (2006:188).

[30] Speaking specifically of authoritarian regimes, Sapiro (2003) notes, "cultural producers develop strategies in order to escape the political constraints. These strategies of resistance, which prevent the unification of the corporation (*corps professionnel*), can be described in Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1985) as 'field effects.' Contrary to the attempts to unify the corporation and to increase professional homogeneity, the logic of the field opposes the dominant agents, who hold the monopoly of the means of formal consecration, and the dominated, who resist this system. However, the autonomy of this field is slight, since the political struggle determines the antagonism between the 'heretical' dissidents and the 'orthodox' dominant agents (i.e., those who submit to the dominant ideology)" (446).

[31] Interestingly, Adams (2008) argues that the Soviet cultural field was actually *similar* to the Bourdieu's understanding of the French field as both were structured around autonomous and heteronomous principles: "artists […] competed either for the symbolic rewards (prestige among cultural elites) accorded by the autonomous principle, or for the mass appeal of the heteronomous principle, which resulted in both political influence and economic rewards. [T]he Soviet field of culture production had multiple levels that corresponded to republic, national, and international boundaries, and that the prestige structures of each field were increasingly influenced by the structures on the next higher level. The result was a growing homology among local fields as well as an expanding potential for the transposability of schemas across locals" (618–619; see also Adams 2010).

[32] And yet, Bourdieu seems to account for this: "As we see, autonomy does not comes down to the independence tolerated by those in power: a high degree of freedom may be left to the world of art without being automatically marked by assertions of autonomy […]; conversely, a high degree of constraint and control—through strict censorship, for example—does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of any assertion of autonomy so long as the collective

the art of the Soviet Nonconformists echoed the autonomy of the pre-Socialist Realism art of the Russian avant-garde, and was,

> about as close to a 100% non-market driven art movement as one can find in the later twentieth century. These artists really did make their art in order to understand the existential complexities of their surroundings, not for display in a booth at an art fair in Basel (2).

Although not necessarily "autonomous" given the draconian laws regarding unofficial art, Soviet Nonconformists managed to make their art in secret and remain away from the power of the economic field—something that is unimaginable in today's art world. Indeed, Bourdieu laments in his postscript to *The Rules of Art* that threats to autonomy "result from the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money" (1996:344). In this way, freedom from the pressures of the market, even under the repression of the Soviet Union, grants an unforeseen—and unconsidered—type of autonomy.

After the Soviet period, we see a further shift of the meaning of autonomy for artists in postsocialist Russia. I show the differences between two generations of artists, which demonstrates how the role of the artist in society can change over time (such as how their role is defined, enacted, and legitimated) depending on the political and economic climate at that time.

*Issues of Autonomy: The Market*

As I discuss in the previous section, in Bourdieu's conception of the field of cultural production, an ideal field is one that is autonomous, which involves a "systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies: that of business […], that of power […], and even that of institutionalized cultural authority […]" (1993:39). Yet the field of art is subsumed under the forces of the economic and political fields. For Bourdieu, autonomy can be achieved when these two forces are balancing each other out—in other words, when neither one can monopolize the field of art. This is a typical struggle in the field, a push-and-pull of the market and the state.

When these forces do not balance, however, autonomy of the field decreases. While it is certainly true that the market can come to oppress autonomy as well,[33] in the postsocialist Russian case, the market has come to play an essential role in maintaining the continuation of its existence. The lack of balance between the market and state in Russia has not worked in the market's favor, as it is certainly not able to monopolize the field of art as it, too, is subject to the domination of the political field. However, without the work of galleries to establish space, education, outreach, conversation, and political push-back to the state, Russian art may not have even existed this long. Contrary to what Bourdieu may have believed, the market has been a critical component for the field of art to continue.

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capital of specific traditions, original institutions (clubs, journals, etc.) and their own models is sufficiently great" (1996:381, fn 9).

[33] Critiques abound about whether or not any artists in a capitalist market can be autonomous since they are making art "for the market." Groys (2008) considers it curious that "even the most severe judgment on the moral dimensions of the free market never leads anybody to conclude that art that was and is produced under those market conditions should be excluded from critical and historical consideration. […] One cannot, that is, avoid the suspicious that the exclusion of art that was not produced under the standard art market conditions has only one ground: the dominating art discourse identifies art with the art market and remains blind to any that is produced and distributed by any mechanism other than the market" (5–6; see also Groys 1992b).

*Collectors and Distinction*. Bourdieu has a somewhat functionalist approach that ties art collecting to class distinction and identity, suggesting that knowledge and love of art is an expression of one's class, cultural capital, and *habitus*: "access to 'high' art is not a question of virtue or individual gift but of (class) learning and cultural inheritance" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:88). Further, he argues that art is used as a way to display status. The newly wealthy Russian have been frequently, and often unflatteringly, portrayed as collecting art only to achieve status and indicate their new social class. While there is some truth to this—there are plenty of Russians who collect to display wealth—in fact there are much more complicated and nuanced reasons for collecting in Russia (and the Soviet Union, for that matter). Their reasons for collecting also go beyond an expression of their educational and class backgrounds—the assumption from Bourdieu here would be that they had considerable cultural capital and education such that they could appreciate art.

Putting aside the status-seeking newly rich collectors leaves an eclectic group of collectors whose reasons for passionately acquiring art are varied—and diverge from what Bourdieu might suggest. To begin with, many collectors began collecting during the Soviet period, when art meant (and cost) little and society was ostensibly classless. Art collection conveyed very little class status. Having unofficial (and thus illegal) art may have given collectors certain cachet among the intelligentsia, but this was hardly something that could be flaunted. They were also not exercising their educational capital, as they had all received a Soviet education that barely acknowledged that art in the West existed. In this case, then, each had to develop cultural capital and artistic *habitus* on their own and outside of the traditional places. And the collectors who began buying art in the disorganized 1990s went largely overlooked as the market scarcely existed—Russia art had fallen out of any interest it may have enjoyed at the end of the Soviet period. Those collecting Russian contemporary art in the 1990s were typically buying unknown artists who did not mean anything to Russians let alone outside of the country.

So if not for status as expression of their *habitus*, how and why did these collectors begin? How can Bourdieu explain this? It turns out there is something of a national-cultural preservation element: they feel it is a responsibility to collect Russian art because, as one collector put it, "if I don't buy it, who will?" In other words, they are in large part motivated to collect art in order to preserve their national culture. And, much like the market actors I discuss in preceding section, these collectors see it as their duty to help provide the support (and infrastructure) for contemporary art that the state does not.

*Issues of Autonomy: Global Hierarchies*

Given the rate and scale of globalization in the past several decades, examining a field of art based only on nationality leaves out a large part of analysis. Although nationality remains important for understanding the field of art in a particular country, it is just one component of that which impacts the ways in which art is experienced. Because of this increasing interconnectedness—not to mention intertwined histories of colonialism, imbalanced power relations, regional hegemonies, dependence between nations, cross-cultural exchange and hybridity—scholars in recent years have argued for expanding field theory to think about it transnationally and globally (Casanova 2004; Fourcade 2006; Buchholz 2016; Sapiro forthcoming).[34]

But the globalization of art and culture is experienced in divergent and uneven ways around the world, based on the position of the national field within the larger international context. For

[34] For an analysis of the colonial state as a transnational field, see Go 2008; Steinmetz 2005, 2008.

example, Sapiro (2010) finds that "asymmetrical cultural flows" within the global book market account for the reigning hegemony of English, despite an increase in the number of translations around the world. In other words, most translation moves from the core to the periphery. Much like the hierarchical structure and struggles among and within the fields of power, then, international fields of art and culture are similarly organized along an unequal gradation. Countries in the core—primarily those in the West—occupy the dominant position, while countries in the periphery are in the dominated position. Thus, an aesthetic hierarchy exists in the international art world, where success comes by adopting the values based on those at the top in the core countries; in other words, the legacy of Euro-American modernist concepts of autonomous art.

Often the Eurocentric values of art become internalized and aspirational for those outside the West. Sapiro (forthcoming), for example, finds that elites from nations occupying a dominated position in the international field will be more likely to look internationally for models to import to their country because they appear to have higher prestige, although the opposite is true of a national field in the dominant position internationally. The result is that this concentration keeps peripheral countries relegated to their regional identities while the core possess not only power, but the power of universalization.

Duval (2015) muses that perhaps the global hierarchy of autonomy can evolve and shift through phases, and that, "the history of a field that is increasing its degree of autonomy necessarily moves through a phase of primitive accumulation implying relations with fields of more longstanding autonomy" (177). While this may be true, it assumes that the end goal (or success) of a field of art necessarily must be the adoption (or, as some may see it, achievement) of Eurocentric autonomy. This type of thinking is shortsighted, Paulson (1997) argues, because it "presupposes that autonomy is a heroic, quasi-irreversible conquest, whose existence defines a 'before and after' in history and which constitutes a modern legacy to be treasured and defended" (401–402). Imagining autonomy as something that is universal and can be achieved—and, importantly, as something that is fundamentally *modern*—reinforces hierarchy among societies in which those that do not share that construction of autonomy are somehow not part of modernity.

One can see the danger in universalizing autonomy, particularly when examining colonial and postcolonial societies. Hilgers and Mangez (2015) point out that because of the complexities of societal organization and hierarchization, "colonization should not necessarily be conceived as the collision and coexistence of two societies" but also as "the recomposition of a social assemblage, or of a society marked by radical levels of autonomy and internal differentiation, extreme forms of exclusion and strong logics of ambivalence, heteronomy and encounter" (264). The uneven relationship of power and autonomy as a result of globalization varies not only among nations but within them as well, as the Russian case illustrates. When Russian art is assessed against a Western standard of autonomous art, it "fails" to get attention (or the right kind of attention, in any case). Thus because it cannot match this ideal of autonomous art, it suffers on the international art market (cf. Winegar 2006).

## DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

In this dissertation I aim to demonstrate the importance of taking seriously cultural production that deviates from the Eurocentric tradition, showing the ways in which socialism, political crisis, and economic and societal transformation have altered, shaped, and built the current field of art in Russia. I base this analysis on archival research; 65 in-depth interviews with influential figures in the Russian art world, including artists, collectors, gallerists, curators, art historians, auction

houses, and critics; and thirteen months of participant observation at art events, artists' studios, galleries, and in the homes of collectors in Moscow from 2012–2014 (including two months in London).

In Chapter One I set the stage for the rest of the dissertation by examining the lives of Russian contemporary artists. Russia's recent history of socialism, turbulent transition to capitalism, and continuing difficulties to maintain a democratic society has shaped the political, economic, and cultural structures from which a Russian art *habitus* was cultivated. To understand this *habitus*, I interviewed contemporary artists who are active today, born between 1950–1990. Although they are now operating within the same field of artistic production, the rapidly changing nature of Russian society over the past 25 years has meant that artists have had greatly divergent experiences of socialism, education, and the market. Thus, it is not useful to lump all contemporary Russian artists into the category of "postsocialist." Rather, by separating Russian contemporary artists into two generations, those born between 1950–1970 and 1970–1990, I am able to trace significant differences between them to show how art is understood and produced in a culturally specific way as the result of historical factors. By examining the artists' relationship to Russia's socialist past (including the Soviet Nonconformists), the experience of their formative years (in particular art education), and their experience of the present, I demonstrate not only the importance of historical context for understanding a field of art, but also how the European understanding of what it means to be "autonomous" is not necessarily applicable to the Russian case.

Chapter Two focuses on the buyers and sellers of the Russian art market and its difficulty establishing a strong market with the attendant limitations placed on the local community of collectors. By examining the historical and present-day relationship of artists, galleries, and collectors, I show how simply replicating a developed, Western-modeled art market (as many hopeful gallerists set out to do in the 2000s) without attending to historical and cultural differences is not enough for building a class of collectors. That is not to say that collecting is not taken seriously in Russia. Many collectors understand it as a responsibility, seeing their role as crucial for picking up the slack of the state's disinterest in contemporary art by financially supporting artists and helping to conserve Russian art history. And their role goes beyond that of financial patron. Through their support, promotion, and purchasing power, collectors (and galleries) become important players for consecrating art—their engagement is what helps to infuse it with a distinctive *value* that extends beyond its materiality (Bourdieu 1996). Yet despite these motivated and committed collectors, Russia has yet to return to its rich tradition of collecting art in pre-Revolutionary Russia (see Bowlt 1991). The criminalization of collecting during the Soviet period altered Russians' relationship to the practice, an impact that has extended to the present. And while it has increased in popularity since the end of the Soviet Union, particularly in the 2000s, there are still not enough collectors to sustain a robust market. This has led to poor consequences for both galleries and artists: without enough people buying art, galleries cannot afford to stay open while artists must find alternate ways to support themselves financially. However, I find that the market has nonetheless played a critical role for building and preserving the postsocialist field of art—and, I would argue, remains a cornerstone for the continuation of autonomous Russian art into the foreseeable future.

One of the reasons galleries and collectors have remained so important in post-Soviet Russia is because of the strained relationship of art to the state, which I explore in Chapter Three. As in the Soviet period, the state continues to have a powerful impact on art at various positions in the field, through direct, indirect, and ideological ways. The state targets contemporary art through direct political interventions, such as censorship, in the service of building a postsocialist

national identity that is increasingly tied to the Russian Orthodox Church. By refusing to provide governmental support, the state indirectly impacts the field, by setting national agenda for what is considered culturally important to Russia. And last, the state's ideological direction and political decisions has created a culture of fear among artists and art world actors, and has had damaging consequences in both domestic and international contexts.

In Chapter Four, I look beyond Russia to the international field of art. I situate the Russian field of art within the Western-led international art world and argue that artists from countries in the periphery face contradictory constraints that limit and shape their art. Despite the increased globalization of the art world, it is still the Western art capitals—such as New York, London, and Paris—that largely structure the field. The West has long been an important arbiter for cultural production and evaluation throughout Russian history, beginning with Peter the Great's European-influenced cultural revolution at the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century. Looking westward continues today, and art-world interlocutors in Russia—such as artists, critics, gallerists, and art historians—have also adopted these Euro-American understandings of what counts as authentic and original art. Evaluating their national art against the "universal" Western art historical canon helps to perpetuate notions of Western art superiority. As a result, Russian artists are faced with the complicated and often perplexing task of asserting their own individual and cultural artistic vision that is at once on par with the West yet distinct from it. To understand the Russian field of art one must examine not only its internal dynamics, but also its relationship to the Western-dominated international field of art.

I conclude by considering the generalizability of the Russian case for understanding fields of art in other postsocialist countries. In particular, I ask why it is that China has been far more successful than Russia at building a field of art.

# CHAPTER ONE
## *Contemporary Artists in Russia*

In September 2014 I attended the opening of Aleksandr Vinogradov and Vladimir Dubosarskii's exhibition "Moscow: Vanishing Reality,"[35] an ambitious and thoughtful meditation on the city by two of its best-known contemporary artists. Located in the Museum of Moscow's cavernous Proviantskii Warehouse, both the scale of the show and its paintings matched the size of the space: there were 83 in total, some as large as 195cm x 435cm. In spite of the high vaulted ceilings and concrete floors, the personal nature of their work, aided by soft light, made the space feel surprisingly intimate. The artists' *cinéma-vérité* depictions of Moscow—past and present, iconic and banal—revealed their personal visions of the city, creating a timeline of meaningful markers and memories. Their representations of the city charted its changing landscape, offering the viewer (particularly those of their generation) a familiar and relatable collection of shared memories. One could not help but be seduced by the exhibition's intimacy.

I was particularly excited to be there: several years earlier, seeing a painting by Vinogradov and Dubosarskii had sparked my interest in Russian contemporary art. Born in 1963 and 1964 respectively, they are, according to curator and critic Viktor Misiano (2009), "the artists of a generation." At the opening's after-party I ran into Yasha Vetkin (b. 1987), a photographer and video artist. Tightly clutching books and old exhibition catalogues of Vinogradov and Dubosarskii, Vetkin clearly shared my enthusiasm for the duo. He proudly showed me their autographs and discussed at length how they—and others of their generation—were trailblazers in post-Soviet Russian contemporary art. The artists of Vinogradov and Dubosarskii's generation were in the unique position of producing art under both socialism and postsocialism: they had received a classical Soviet art education, yet had built their careers as professional artists in the chaos of the postsocialist 1990s. By the 2000s, their reputations and careers had solidified in the new climate of relative economic and political stability.

By contrast, Vetkin's generation was born at the end of the Soviet period. This generation's experiences of socialism are a palimpsest, living in the once-removed forms of others' memories and the muted vestiges of Soviet societal and bureaucratic organization. Vetkin and his cohort were free to explore contemporary Western art and access artistic training outside of the traditional figurative style that characterized Soviet art education. Further, their formative years had not been defined by transition; they did not have to create an artistic identity during the disorientation of *perestroika*, when the competing ideologies of capitalism and socialism experienced uncomfortable contemporaneity. Nor did they have to establish their careers during the confusion, uncertainty, and economic precariousness of the 1990s, when there was an almost complete lack of institutional or market structure for the arts. As children or young teenagers, this generation knew chaos and instability, but transition and crisis did not define it.

While Vinogradov and Dubosarskii's depiction of Moscow resonated with the childhood of Vetkin's generation in certain ways, its evocative representations of the city reveal important differences between the generations. Whereas Vinogradov and Dubosarskii focus on memory and transition, emphasizing the replacement of socialist forms with postsocialist ones, the artists of Vetkin's generation are more interested in exploring the present. Earlier that day, I had interviewed Vetkin and his collaborator Evgenii Granilshchikov (b. 1985) about their current project, a film in

[35] "Moskva: Uskolzayushchaya Realnost'"

which they were attempting to capture the condition and atmosphere of Moscow today. They were adamant about not portraying the city through clichés, such as the bleak remains of Soviet architecture or the orgy of opulence accompanying post-Soviet oligarchic wealth. For them, art was not about reconciling with their socialist past or even reckoning with the "new" capitalist present. It was about dealing with reality as they experienced it.

Russia's recent history of socialism, turbulent transition to capitalism, and continuing difficulties with democracy have shaped the political, economic, and cultural structures from which a Russian postsocialist art *habitus* was cultivated. Further, the world in which the postsocialist field of art was developed changed rapidly in a manner of a few decades. The end of the Soviet Union coincided with the beginning of the information age, allowing for unforeseen access to technology and communication and connections to the outside world. So although younger artists such as Granilshchikov and Vetkin are presently operating within the same field of artistic production as older artists such as Dubosarskii and Vinogradov, the rapidly changing nature of Russian society and the world in general over the past 25 years has meant that they have had divergent experiences of becoming and being artists.

However, accounts of Russian contemporary artists tend to group them together. For example, in her study of Russian art and protest under Putin, Jonson (2015) considers artists born between the 1950s and 1980s as part of the same generation, arguing that "artists relate and respond to crucial events and issues in the society of their own time. This is what makes up a 'generation' and distinguishes it from other generations that were influenced by other sets of events and issues" (50). While it is true that the artists in this time period were all born in the Soviet period, I found that the age in which these artists experienced the important events to which Jonson refers—such as *perestroika*, the end of the Soviet Union, and the political and market reforms of the 1990s—shaped their development as artists. Given the profound societal shift after 1991, it is necessary to pay closer attention to differences in generation, even if only by 20 years.

However, these younger artists are now making their mark and increasingly becoming part of the Russian art world. Instead of lumping them together with the older generation of contemporary Russian artists into the broad category of "postsocialist," I separate them into two generations: (1) the *Last Soviet Generation*, born between 1950–1970, and (2) the *First Postsocialist Generation*, born between 1970–1990. While there is certainly overlap between these two generations, distinct characteristics of both have become visible. Thus, this categorization of them produces a more nuanced account of how art is understood and produced in a culturally specific way as the result of historical factors—both at the time of the field's emergence and throughout its evolution.

Perhaps the most traditional or obvious way to compare the two generations would be on the basis on the *type* or *subject* of art each creates. While form is indeed important, and something which I will also examine, it is not the central focus for establishing the trajectories of these artists. Further, the actual product itself—art—is what *results* from my object of analysis, which is the field as a whole. Because my research is focused on *how* a field of art emerges, develops, and persists in a specific historical and global context, it is essential to establish the experiences that make up both the emergence and evolution. I contend that this is captured by the coexistence of two generations of artists, one that straddles the transition and one that was born either during or after it.

Originally I did not set out to do a generational comparison. Because I was concerned with the entirety of the field of Russian contemporary art, I wanted to understand it from a variety of angles, and thus talked to artists who ranged in age from 25–75. The artists with whom I spoke

also had a range of "success" in the Russian art world, from some of the most recognizable to those who have had only been in a show or two in small galleries. However, for this analysis, all of the artists have had some measure of success and consecration; in other words, they have been recognized by others in the field as "artists." Moreover, although I am comparing these two groups on the basis of shared generation, I am by no means suggesting an internal homogeneity or ideological homogeneity *within* each generation, whether in terms of belief or style. On the contrary, I contend that the significant continuities that do exist *within* each generation reveal the very evolution of the field of contemporary Russian art.

In this way, I move beyond an analysis based on different aesthetics, and rather toward a systematic examination of differences and similarities within *the field of production itself,* ultimately showing how Russian contemporary artists have come to understand and experience the categories of "art" and "artist." To do this, I use three categories to examine the artists of both generations: (1) their relationship to Russia's socialist past and its transition to capitalism; (2) the process by which they developed their identities as artists, including education and career development; and (3) their orientation to the international field of art. Before examining the two generations, however, I give a brief overview of the Soviet Nonconformist art that directly preceded them in order to historically situate contemporary art today.

## BACKGROUND: SOVIET NONCONFORMIST ART, 1956–1986

To understand the development of postsocialist art, one must know what preceded it. By this I do not mean to give a lengthy exposition of the entirety of Russian art history, as space is limited. But it is necessary to explain the "unofficial" art in the Soviet Union from 1956–86, which influenced, inspired, and made possible postsocialist art.

By the time the Last Soviet Generation was coming of age, the Soviet art world was firmly split between "official" and "unofficial" art. Beginning in 1932, Socialist Realism became the only officially approved art, a style of realistic art with the purpose of furthering the goals of socialism and communism. All other types of art were forced underground, and the art community has come to refer to it "unofficial", "nonconformist," or (mostly in the West), "dissident" art.[36] However, in 1953, the Khrushchev thaw cracked open the door for Russian unofficial artists after two decades of total closeting. Although making art outside the strictures of Socialist Realism was still illegal, it no longer carried the severe punishment—often long stretches in the gulag or even death—as it did during Stalinist times. Rather, usually it meant that unofficial artists could not get work as professional artists. Instead, they often earned a living through applied arts, such as illustrating children's books, and made independent art in their off-hours.[37] The situation further loosened after the "Bulldozer Exhibition" in 1974, an unofficial art exhibition that was set up in the woods outside of Moscow. Using bulldozers and water cannons, the police forcefully and violently broke up the exhibition—while members of the foreign press watched. After receiving considerable negative coverage by the Western media, state officials began to make concessions to unofficial artists.

[36] While this type of art is usually used in reference to Soviet art that did not adhere to the dogma of Socialist Realism, it did not necessarily imply an anti-socialist vision. Many artists who made "unofficial" works did not consider themselves dissidents (see Baigell and Baigell 1995; Heartney 2011), a topic I discuss in greater details in Chapters Three and Four.

[37] That is not to say, however, that they were completely safeguarded from repression, violence, or imprisonment. Unofficial artists were still targets for the state even if the degree to which they were punished lessened.

Their art was acknowledged by the state and they were given the opportunity to form their own organization and exhibit in public with impunity.

In the historiography of Russian art, Nonconformism therefore spans from 1953 to 1986. This era was not homogenous, however, with distinct periods that reflected the prevailing political climate. Backstein (1995) considers the unofficial art of the 1950s and 1960s as the "modernist" period in part because its aesthetic was "rooted in the notion of self-expression" that "defend[ed] the independence of art from the political system, and promot[ed] a view of art as the fixed embodiment of the artist's inner reality" (334). The unofficial art during this period borrowed styles and genres from Western art, with emphasis on abstraction (such as Lidiia Masterkova, Figure 1) and figurative expressionism (such as Oskar Rabin, Figure 2) that rejected the traditional representation of Socialist Realism. American Abstract Expressionism was especially attractive to Soviet artists during this period because of its "myth of heroic individualism, an image of the artist-creator as capable of immediate, raw self-expression," which was completely absent within Socialist Realism (Bobrinskaya 2011:15).

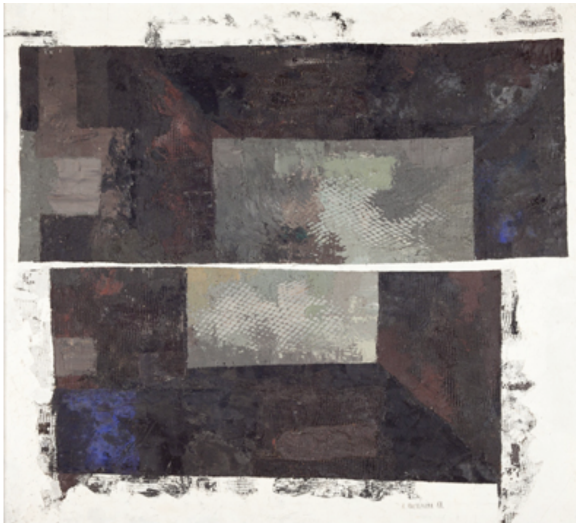

Figure 1: Lidiia Masterkova, *Untitled* (1968). Photo: Zimmerli Art Museum

Figure 2: Oskar Rabin, *At the Grave of Sidor Polikarpovich* (1963). Photo: The Tsukanov Art Collection

Unofficial art changed in the 1970s and 1980s, moving away from the ahistorical metaphysics of the modernist 1950s and 1960s to focus on issues of everyday Soviet life. This included Moscow Conceptualism and Sots Art (short for Socialist Art, also known as Soviet Pop Art). These movements' textual aesthetic was legible to the international art scene, as the rise of conceptual art was not unique to Russia at this time. Yet their art made a distinctive contribution to the international artistic conversation: their own thematic reference of day-to-day life under socialism, such as in the form of Soviet mass-media clichés or the experience of communal life. In part because of this aesthetic specific to Russia, Conceptualism and Sots Art were responsible

for reintroducing Russian art to the international art world (Backstein 1995). To this day, art from this period is still the most recognizable contemporary Russian art internationally.[38]

What characterized Conceptualism and Sots Art was a "sudden intrusion of speech into visual art" (Tupitsyn 1995:303). Using visual markers of everyday Sovietness—which often included texts that relayed ideology and propaganda, executed in the official style of Socialist Realism—artists such as Ilia Kabakov, Viktor Pivovarov, and Erik Bulatov deconstructed the rhetoric and semantics of official Soviet narratives, creating a unique sociocultural framework of Russian art. These artists mostly had a traditional art education, meaning they were skilled figurative painters. Yet they found it difficult to accept the "stultifying hypocrisy of socialist realism's language," and refused to recreate the figurative works exalting the glories of a future socialist utopia. And unlike the artists of the 1950s and 1960s who tried to mimic the abstraction of the West to distance themselves from official artistic rhetoric, the conceptualist generation "accepted the representational character of art as the principal tradition which they were given to work with and paradoxically, to justify by their critical relation to it" (Degot 2012:19).

Bulatov's 1972 painting *Danger* (see Figure 3) is a prime example of art from this period, using the unmistakable textual and figurative style of Socialist Realism to criticize the Soviet Union. The painting depicts an unremarkable bucolic Russian setting: a field divided by a seemingly stagnant ditch of water and bounded by a wooded area in the background. Two cows graze in the far distance, while a couple picnics near the water. Yet the idle calmness of the scene is interrupted by the word "DANGER" in red letters on each side of the canvas. The inward slanting of the text leads the viewer to the center of the painting, but no obvious danger can be seen; there is a confusing mismatch between message and delivery. Bulatov was inspired by the handmade signs found throughout the Soviet Union that warned passersby of imminent threat with an unsettling equanimity, and sought to underscore the tension between the two.[39] By reproducing the everyday visual landscape of socialism, Bulatov's *Danger* scriticizes the Soviet regime by highlighting the ambiguity of its official ideology.

Figure 3: Erik Bulatov, *Danger* (1972). Photo: Zimmerli Art Museum

Sots Art from the 1970s was a form of Pop Art with a socialist twist, and therefore particularly "exportable" internationally.[40] The use of Pop Art in a socialist context may not make immediate sense in that Pop artists were responding to the rampant consumerism and ubiquity of

[38] Some scholars have argued that part of the Soviet Nonconformist artists' success in the West stems from Cold War logic: the West was interested in Russian art insofar as it was opposed to their ideological enemy of communism, a theory to which I will return in later chapters.

[39] The canvas's square shape can be seen both as a reference to Malevich and to the German military's Iron Cross; Bulatov's father died fighting the Germans in WWII (Jackson 2010).

[40] The movement's name was coined by Vitalii Komar and Aleksandr Melamid and expanded to include such artists as Aleksandr Kosolapov and Leonid Sokov.

mass-produced consumer goods in the capitalist West—something unknown to Soviet citizens. Yet these Russian artists underscored that in the Soviet Union they were "flooded with the overproduction of socialist ideology and could identify with it just as ironically as Andy Warhol identified with a can of Campbell's soup" (Degot 2012:21). In other words, socialist iconography was a ubiquitous commodity that provided a rich field of images to be used to critique and deconstruct official Soviet rhetoric. For example, Sots artists signed their names on anonymous slogans on red banners such as *Onward to Communist Victory* (see Figure 4), which as Degot explains, rendered meaningless "not only a Soviet slogan (since personal authorship devalues it) but also the concept of personal expression (which is devalued by banality and ideological 'lies')" (2012:22). Another example of Sots Art is the radical juxtaposition of Western and Soviet imagery, as in Kosolapov's 1982 *Lenin-Coca-Cola* poster (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Komar and Melamid, *Onward to the Victory of Communism!* (1972). Photo: Saatchi Gallery

Figure 4: Aleksandr Kosolapov, *Lenin-Coca-Cola* (1982). Source: Tretiakov Gallery

In the next section, we will see how the Last Soviet Generation was inspired by the artists and spirit of the Nonconformists—but how they ultimately sought to differentiate themselves by embracing an artistic identity more congruous with, and representative of, postsocialist issues.

THE LAST SOVIET GENERATION (artists born 1950–1970)

The artists born roughly between 1950 and 1970 occupy a liminal space in Russian art history. They came of age during the Soviet period and received classical Soviet art training, which focused on the figurative style of Socialist Realism and was dismissive of Western art. Although they began their careers in the chaos of the 1990s, they achieved success during the relative economic and political stability of the 2000s. What did it mean for these artists to come of age during the Soviet period, only to have their adulthood split between socialism and capitalism? And because of their unique position of producing art under both socialism and postsocialism, do we consider them the last generation of Soviet artists or the first generation of postsocialist artists? Following Yurchak (2006; see also Boym 1994), I refer to this cohort as the Last Soviet Generation. Unlike the generations before and after them, Yurchak argues, this generation had no defining historical event to bind it together as a cohort. The October Revolution, World War II, and Stalinism marked the older generations, while the succeeding generation was shaped during the collapse of the Soviet Union. By contrast, the Last Soviet Generation came of age facing the "normalized, ubiquitous, and immutable authoritative discourse of the Brezhnev years" (32). As Boym remarks, they were the "children of stagnation."

The artists of the Last Soviet Generation used art to both critique and make intelligible the societal, political, and economic changes happening around them. But it was not just the subject matter of their work that reflected the transition; style and form did so as well. The Last Soviet Generation was caught in a temporal triad: looking ahead to a more promising postsocialist future, reckoning with the uncertainty of the present in the 1990s, and retaining the training, memories, and nostalgia of the socialist past. In this section I explore the ways in which that triangle affected the development of the Last Soviet Generation. I first examine how, under postsocialism, its artists differentiated themselves from the Nonconformists. However, I also explore how they used practices and styles of art rooted in the Soviet period. I then turn to how the Last Soviet Generation coped with the absence of institutional structure in the Russian art world, particularly in the 1990s. Its artists adapted to the lack of support, finding ways to continue making art and eventually helping to build up the Russian art world over the postsocialist period. Last, I reflect on their conflicted feelings about the state of the Russian art world, the market, and their nostalgia for the past.

*Identity in Transition*

Although members of the Last Soviet Generation began their careers during the heyday of Nonconformist art, they were too young to be part of the unofficial scene that by *perestroika* had become, as artist Tatiana Arzamasova (b. 1955) explained to me, "the same closed system [as official art, Socialist Realism]—it just didn't have the same stamp of approval."[41] The Nonconformist art community was notorious for its exclusivity: an "almost sectarian elitism" that was "refined by intellectualism" (Misiano 2008:51). The most famous Nonconformists—such as

[41] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

Kabakov, Bulatov, Kosolapov, and Komar and Melamid—left the Soviet Union starting in the late 1970s. By the end of the 1980s, this exodus of artists, coupled with the end of socialism and thus the end of the *raison d'être* of Nonconformist art,[42] left the art scene depleted and formless. Art was no longer unofficial or official; it was just *art*. This put the Last Soviet Generation in the unusual position of creating an identity while also trying to define a style and language of art. Those who stayed in Russia were left to grapple with what it meant to be not only a "postsocialist artist" but also a "postsocialist person" in general.[43]

Members of the Last Soviet Generation had long felt alienated from the Nonconformist circle, and with socialism gone, the artistic language of Nonconformism became obsolete and inadequate. As artist Dmitrii Gutov (b. 1960) explained,

> DG: We didn't start underground, and that absolutely made a difference between our generation and those just a few years older than us. We had a completely different attitude to art, to life, to everything. [...] I wasn't fond of this underground circle. I went from time to time to these exhibitions. The first time, I was 14 and I went to the famous underground exhibition in 1974 [Bulldozer exhibition], so I knew quite well what was going on there. But I had no desire to take part in it.
> *EH: Why was that?*
> DG: I felt some... repulsion. Their ideas were not interesting for me. I was interested in Marx and leftist theory and the anti-communism in this [underground] circle was very flat. It was too simplistic, not interesting at all.[44]

The Last Soviet Generation sought to develop a new artistic language that reckoned with the changing economic and social landscape of Russia, and thus made a deliberate break with the Nonconformist tradition. They excavated memory from Soviet life and attempted to make sense of the clumsily developing post-Soviet society. Vinogradov and Dubosarskii, whom I discuss in greater detail below, used Socialist Realism to create playful yet critical commentaries of Russian capitalism and its excess and luxury. Although they did not use the style of Socialist Realism, artists such as Olga Chernysheva (b. 1962), the art collective *Chto Delat?* ("What is to be done?"), and Dmitrii Gutov also addressed the changes in society through their art. But unlike Vinogradov and Dubosarskii, their starting point was much less glitzy. As Chukhrov (2008) describes, they were concerned with "the remaining margins and fragments of social space, arenas rejected by elite culture, new money, and the state as the miserable and unprofitable remains of the former Soviet Union," resulting in art that shows "the barrenness and dissolution of post-Soviet spaces and the people in them" (214).

For example, throughout her career, Chernysheva's work has centered on careful and quiet observations of seemingly mundane, everyday details of life in postsocialist Russia that can be at once critical and compassionate. Her work illustrates the ironies and idiosyncrasies that emerged with the end of the Soviet Union—often simultaneously addressing the disappointments and hopes

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[42] "After the Soviet system had opened itself to the outside world in the 1980s, they learned that if an artwork does not appear innovative or original in the international art context, it cannot be regarded as having developed out of an authentic inner impulse. This discovery was a painful realization for many of the unofficial artists, who had tended to appropriate and rather naively invest in the radically individualist rhetoric of modernism, above all in its radically oppositional posture, its contempt for all manifestations of contemporary mass culture" (Groys 2003:56).
[43] For more on creating a neoliberal subject in postsocialist Russia, see Yurchak (2003).
[44] Interview with author on September 3, 2014

of capitalism. Her series *Waiting for the Miracle* (2000; see Figure 6), which consists of women in Russia wearing hats during the winter, is a good illustration of what she tries to do in her work. The repetition of hats gestures toward the conformity and repetition found in Soviet propaganda while at the same time "incorporating subtle visual clues that hint at the transition to consumer-driven individuality" (Chukhrov 2008). Chernysheva's subtle details and execution were also a definitive break from the Nonconformists, who were obsessed with destabilizing the textual codes as ideology—as Misiano (2010) put it, "the world according to Chernysheva emerges not from language but from an intimate, tactile experience" (228).

Figure 6: Olga Chernysheva, *Waiting for the Miracle* (2000). Photo: Pace Gallery © Olga Chernysheva

Some postsocialist art of this generation, however, was much less subtle in addressing the collision of the Soviet past with the fledgling capitalist present and future, making a radical break with the Nonconformists' styles of expression. A prime example from the 1990s was what Degot (2012) calls the "brutally exhibitionist" performance art of the Moscow Actionists, such as Anatolii Osmolovskii (b. 1969), Aleksandr Brener (b. 1957), and Oleg Kulik (b. 1961).[45] These performances were extreme public acts, frequently including violence and nudity. For example, one of Oleg Kulik's most famous performances was his impersonation of a rabid dog, in which he would bark, growl, and attack the crowd while chained, naked, and on all fours (see Figure 7). He performed this worldwide, from Red Square to an exhibition in Sweden (where he actually bit an art critic) to a cage in a New York gallery. Of his 1997 show at Deitch Projects in SoHo, *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith remarked that "to watch a human impersonate a dog as thoroughly as Mr. Kulik is extremely disconcerting. One's inclination to respond to his sheer dogginess […] grates against the rational knowledge that he is actually human."

[45] See Bredikhina et al. 2007; Degot and Riff 2008; and Kovalev 2007a, 2007b

Figure 7: Oleg Kulik, *Mad Dog Performance* (1994) © Oleg Kulik

The popularity of performance art in the 1990s is often understood as a reflection of the chaos of the Soviet Union's collapse, a critical reaction against the inundation of Western culture, and a way of expressing the frustration of the decade in a way that the text-centric paintings and large-scale installations of the previous decade could not.[46] But performance art was also popular for practical reasons: money was scarce and art materials were prohibitively expensive.

*A Return to Painting: Vinogradov and Dubosarskii*

While many artists in the 1990s—particularly the first half of the decade—sought to differentiate themselves from the underground artists before them, they did not completely abandon the socialist past or even the tradition of the Nonconformists; rather, their art grew out of it. The art of Vinogradov and Dubosarskii is a particularly good example of this. Much like the celebrated Nonconformist Bulatov, and Sots Art in general, Vinogradov and Dubosarskii parodied the visual language of Socialist Realism—but in a novel way that addressed the issues relevant to their time.

During the height of performance art's popularity in the mid-1990s, Vinogradov and Dubosarskii were the first to return to oil on canvas, using their classical easel-technique art training to "create bright, beautiful paintings in reaction to Moscow's oppressive atmosphere of confrontational installations and street performances" (FitzGerald 2008:104). While many of their peers were attempting to make art that was similar to that in the West, Vinogradov and Dubosarskii chose to work within the style of Socialist Realism so that they could create art using the same language that Russians already knew, given that most people—both in and outside of the art world—had not been exposed to contemporary art as it has developed internationally. As

[46] Actionist art forms also took place within Noncomformist art in the 1980s, most notably by groups like Champions of the World and Andrei Monastyrskii's Collective Action. But these actions during the Soviet period tended to be in non-public spheres and were much more secretive. During the 1990s, however, actions and performances became very public and were often intended to shock and provoke.

Vinogradov told me, "it didn't make sense to make Western-looking art because no one [in Russia] would understand it!"[47] In this way they were very much like Bulatov: their aesthetic style was accessible and familiar, but there were layers of meaning that people who *did* get art would see. This let the duo reflect the new Russian identity and society in its artistic language.

In Socialist Realism, the Soviet Union was depicted as nothing short of paradise and utopia. Socialist Realist paintings glorified farms, factories, youth, strength, and Soviet leaders. Vinogradov and Dubosarskii did the same, but showed the glorification of mass consumerism—for in postsocialist Russia, capitalism now represented the shimmering future. With their grand-scale paintings, they depicted idols created by a society of mass consumerism—such as Michael Jackson, Andy Warhol, Mickey Mouse, and Barbie—intermixed with hyperbolized stereotypes of Russianness, cultivated both within the country and abroad. As they explained to me,

> VD: Everything was changing and falling apart [in the 1990s] and we had to figure out how to show this in our art. A completely new style wouldn't be accessible to people, but we didn't want to look back [into the past] either. So we used the symbols that were "in power" at the time—advertisements, celebrities, movie stars, pop culture stuff of the West—to say something about the culture. We had fun with it and made it in "Soviet" painting style, with stuff like collective farms, army, etc. But ultimately we were not being serious.
> AV: Irony was important for us.
> VD: We threw away the old ideology but kept using its language to create something new.[48]

An ideal example of their postsocialist take on the stylization of Socialist Realism and power is *Just Do It* (2000; see Figure 8). In this work, a grinning, shirtless Arnold Schwarzenegger sits in the middle of a field, flexing his biceps for a group of adoring children. In the background, a serious Sylvester Stallone stands at an easel, capturing the scene.[49] Compare this with the Socialist Realist painter Boris Vladimirskii's 1949 *Roses for Stalin* (Figure 9), in which a flock of children gaze reverently at the enigmatic and stately Stalin. Both paintings are vehicles for displaying the embodiment of power (in the case of Schwarzenegger's chiseled and meaty biceps, this is quite literal), but tempered with a suggestion of benevolence (including adoring children).

Figure 8: Vladimir Dubosarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov, *Just Do It* (2000) © Dubosarskii and Vinogradov

[47] Interview with author on September 1, 2014
[48] Interview with author on September 1, 2014
[49] Ironically, Stallone held a 40-year retrospective of his own paintings in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2013.

Figure 9: Boris Vladimirskii, *Roses for Stalin* (1949)

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, their bright, aesthetically accessible art focused on issues of "glamour," which garnered negative reaction from some critics, particularly in Russia, who accused them of "spawning Socialist Realist porn, or 'Capitalist Realism'—art intended to capture the fancy of the new rich" (FitzGerald 2008:104). The response from the West was often curious yet cautious. In March 2003, the duo showed a painting installation, *Our Best World*, at the Deitch Gallery in New York. The installation included 38 canvases that were installed in a continuous line around the gallery. In a review in the *New York Times*, Ken Johnson said of the exhibition.

> If this painting is anything, it's a goofy, distinctively Russian satire of consumerist euphoria. There are reasons to think it's not much of anything—it's not admirable as painting nor is its iconography surprising. Still, its effect is exhilarating. It may not be something, but it's not nothing (2003).

His restrained praise suggests an uncertainty around how to critique or approach this painting, which makes sense given that Vinogradov and Dubosarskii were not only influenced by Socialist Realism—a style of art from which Western art has not descended—but also made figurative paintings after several decades that were dominated by Conceptualism. Despite not being overly impressed with the exhibit's skill or representations, Johnson's careful assessment leaves room for appreciating the sociocultural context, which gives their work gravitas and importance.

Vinogradov and Dubosarskii's art has changed over the course of two decades (they started painting together in 1994). By the end of the 2000s, they moved from addressing the glamour of the 1990s and early 2000s to focusing on everyday life and the lingering memories of the Soviet era. Their medium has remained the same—large oil on canvas—but their use of color is more restrained and their compositions and subjects less grandiose. Consider their series *Total Painting*, which started in 2001 and now consists of more than 150 parts around the world, 195x145cm each (see Figure 10). The panels fit together to reveal a scene in a Russian field and woods, with all manners of absurdity and excess that one would most likely *not* find there: gratuitous nudity, rainbows, wolves, orgies, celebrities. In this painting they parody the ideas of utopia and paradise that are offered both in advertising and Socialist Realism. As Degot (2010) put it, "this world of

immediately fulfilled desires … inflicts universal boredom. The more exuberant these images of fulfilled life are, the more skeptical and even sarcastic [the] artists appear to be." The absurdist hedonism of their work in the late to mid-2000s reflected the unrestrained and unrefined consumption of Russia's new wealthy, in addition to providing commentary on the glut of Western media and influence.

Figure 10: Vladimir Dubosarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov, *Picnic* (Fragment of *Total Painting*) (2002) © Dubosarskii and Vinogradov

Their series *Total Painting* stands in contrast to their 2011 panorama *For Valour*, which also consists of multiple parts sized 195x145cm each (see Figure 11). Like *Total Painting, For Valour* takes place in a pastoral Russian landscape flanked by birch trees and littered with wildflowers, the azure sky Technicolor bright and dotted with innocuous wisps of grey cloud. The subjects of the paintings are a far cry from the comic drama of *Total Painting*, however: they are World War II veterans, both men and women. These paintings depict Victory Day—May 9—still a serious and important holiday in Russia. The veterans wear happy smiles and uniforms heavy with medals. Many hold flowers; some dance or wave flags. This may seem like a sentimental or nostalgic nod to a time that Russians consider a triumph in their history. Yet the project is "not so much an attempt to impress the descendants of the last 'righteous of the Russian land' (in the words of Vinogradov and Dubosarskii) as a commentary on the modern history of Russia, where those in power speculate with history rather than honoring it" (Kravtsova 2012:11).

Figure 11: Vladimir Dubosarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov, *For Valour* (Fragment) (2011). Photo: Elise Herrala

The duo's exhibition at the Museum of Moscow in September 2014, which I described at the beginning of this chapter, is centered on this careful examination of Russia's recent history. By showing World War II veterans, in addition to depictions of a former era (such as stills from Soviet movies), Vinogradov and Dubosarskii address the past by situating it in the present, examining how these markers and relics of their history have persisted within the culture or continue to resonate. Their depictions of everyday life in present-day Moscow, many including unmemorable people crossing unremarkable streets, also shows a cultural shift. Many are done in watercolor and whitewash on paper, creating a muted effect that contrasts with their usual bold and saturated color of oil on canvas. The quietness of these paintings (see Figure 12) captures the zeitgeist of the Putin era, in which the country's developing infrastructure and increased standards of living ushered in relative economic stability and calm—and which allowed for access to consumption that placates and distracts people from decreased freedom. The prevailing attitude in the country was no longer characterized by the excess and chaos shown in their earlier work.

Figure 12: Vladimir Dubosarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov, *From the Series Khimki Life* (2010). Photo: Triumph Gallery

*Finding Artists in the Institutional Desert*

The Last Soviet Generation had to develop its own artistic language in addition to fashioning a postsocialist identity in the ruins of the Soviet system. The decimation of the Soviet infrastructure meant that the generation's artists faced the challenge of creating the field of art from the ground up. They were infused with not only an uncomfortable uncertainty as to their future and potential as artists, but also the unprecedented freedom of a veritable *tabula rasa* of the art world.

It was not an easy or smooth project. Artists were suddenly and forcefully ushered into a free market, which brought considerable economic precarity. This was exacerbated by several factors. A robust, legally sanctioned art market had not existed since the Russian Revolution. There were just three galleries in Moscow during the early to mid-1990s,[50] yet there was not even enough business to sustain them. More often than not, these galleries became de facto exhibition spaces for artists to show their work, generally only to other artists (a very small community). The international art market was similarly fruitless for generating income: while during the Soviet period the underground artists could sell to foreign collectors, Western interest in Russian art had largely dried up with the fall of communism.

Although the dismantling of socialism brought an end to artistic censorship, it also took down the scaffolding—however shaky—of the Russian field of art, leaving what artist Lev Evzovich (b. 1958) called an "institutional desert." While state cultural policies in the Soviet Union were repressive and criminalized unofficial art, they still provided support: many underground artists had jobs as illustrators or designers or were part of the Artists Union (if only to get benefits, such as access to state-supported studios). Without steady work or access to government-subsidized studio space, many artists worked (and in some cases lived) as squatters.[51] Acquiring materials to make art was often too expensive, so performance art became one of the more popular forms of artistic production during the 1990s, as mentioned earlier.

Not having official institutions—including museums, art publications, and more than a handful of galleries—also meant that artists had no way of (1) getting their art to a public larger than art-world insiders or (2) having their art validated and consecrated by others. Misiano (2009) argues that legitimizing art in a time when "the old system of art had actually died out and the new system only existed as a future prospect" took on a dramatic urgency (50–51). How were the artists able to be recognized as such without a defined field to demarcate the boundaries of art? And further, how was the general public—those not involved in the art community—able to access art without institutions to mediate that experience? How did the members of the Last Socialist Generation deal with, and adapt to, this period? How were they able to build their careers as artists while also helping to build the field of art? And in what way did this influence their art?

To reach the public and attempt to build the art community, the artists of the Last Soviet Generation dealt with the lack of institutional support and structure of a field in a variety of ways. As I discuss in the previous section, Vinogradov and Dubosarskii used the style of Socialist Realism (in addition to being media savvy) to appeal to the broader public. The Moscow Actionists—including Osmolovskii, Brener, and Kulik—used performance art to communicate directly with people. I discuss in the previous section some of the reasons for the rise of performance art during this time, including as a response to the collapse of the Soviet Union and to the high cost of art supplies. While these reasons are important, shocking performances were also for artists to compensate for the severe lack of official and unofficial institutional support for

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[50] Regina Gallery, Gelman Gallery, XL Gallery

[51] Around Chistye Prudy and Kitai Gorod were popular areas for artists in which to squat and/or hang out during this time.

art (Maydanchik 2014). The post-Soviet artists of the 1990s found themselves in a culture in which their art had no outlet or framework for understanding it, and in which they had no professional identity. Lacking a postsocialist field of art, which would have fostered the creation, circulation, and consecration of their work, these artists felt marginalized. By staging very public and outrageous performances, they were able to bypass conventional outlets to garner an audience for their work, "engineering their own cultural legitimization as professional artists" (ibid.).

*Witnesses of the Future: AES+F*

The group AES+F demonstrate how Russian artists of the Last Soviet Generation navigated the "institutional desert" of the post-Soviet era and managed to build successful careers, both in Russia and abroad. It was formed in 1987 as just "AES" by Tatiana Arzamasova (b. 1955), a conceptual architect; Lev Evzovich (b. 1958), a conceptual architect and filmmaker; and Evgenii Sviatskii (b. 1957), a graphic artist. In 1995 the group added Vladimir Fridkes (b. 1957), a fashion photographer, after which it became AES+F. Like Vinogradov and Dubosarskii, the members of AES+F had a Soviet art education, had come of age during *perestroika,* and were too young to be part of the underground Nonconformist art scene. As Evzovich put it, "We didn't feel [the underground scene] represented our experience and problematics. And so we started really to work in so-called contemporary art when the system became open."[52]

Their "experience and problematics"—in contrast to the previous generation—centered on issues of globalization, capitalism, and consumerism. These were new issues for Russian society, and Russian art and artists had not yet addressed them. Sviatskii refers to this time as a "frenzied search for identity in a Russia dominated by *perestroika* art."[53] Part of the early development of their art and ideas came from a trip in 1989 to New York City, which they described as an inspiring cultural shock, in part because, as Evzovich explained, "We learned that Russia is not so important in the cultural scene. And of course that was a different experience than to live [in Moscow] and to think that Russian culture is one of the most important in the world."[54] Situating themselves as artists for the first time in an international context had a profound impact: it was eye-opening and exciting to see art and culture as it existed within a capitalist society. Yet in part *because* of this, they realized how important it was to return to Russia and make art in their rapidly changing country. The importance of staying in Russia remains central to their self-conceptions as artists:

> LE: …we had the possibility to stay in America, in New York, and to start our career there. But we understood that… that it would be a very unique and interesting experience here in Russia, during the time of these radical changes. And really we saw this radical situation with capitalism, globalism, and saw these trends as they developed in the 1990s, that was very… well, it was happening all over the world, but in Russia it was happening in a very grotesque way. Capitalism but also the clash of globalism and nationalism… and so we decided to return to Russia and started our activities here.
> ES: So it was a very important decision to not immigrate, not to stay in the States.[55]

[52] Interview with author on September 3, 2014
[53] Qtd. in Harris (2012:37)
[54] Interview with author on September 3, 2014
[55] Interestingly they mention in a 2014 interview that they are now considering relocating to Berlin because of what Evzovich calls a "disgusting atmosphere" for artists in Russia. While they have not been directly censored or persecuted, inquiries have been made about their work (interview with Amar Toor in *The Verge*, July 11, 2014).

With their return to Russia, they were faced with the issue of how to develop their own style while simultaneously appealing to and reaching an audience that was largely unfamiliar with contemporary art. Much like the performance art of the Moscow Actionists, AES+F focused on making the *form* accessible to as many people as possible, often bypassing institutions and using the rapidly expanding Russian mass media for coverage and distribution. The group's most important example of this was their first large-scale work, the *Islamic Project* (1996–2003). While it eventually expanded to full gallery and museum shows, the project started as a collection of postcards and posters that were intentionally made to be highly reproducible, particularly by the media (one cannot help but draw a connection to the similar rationale of art in the Soviet Union, which was made so that everyone could enjoy it). They chose this strategy not only to bring more attention to their art, but also to fill a hole in the Russian art world: namely, the lack of institutions that would normally distribute and promote their work. Because institutions such as museums and galleries, and influential players such as critics and collectors, were in short supply (if they existed at all), artists like AES+F had to be proactive in order to start the conversation that is normally mediated by an entire field of different actors. As they recalled,

> LE: …I think our main ideas and concepts were articulated in the 1990s and one of the most important influences was that we started to work in an institutional desert. There was no art market, no institutions, no museums… the museums were part of the old Soviet system, half-destroyed… the galleries existed not as commercial institutions but as a place for exhibitions.
> TA: Because there were no collectors, the gallerists were just curators. They were just for shows, no one was buying.
> LE: And, you know, the meaning of that situation was that the artists had to communicate with people, with spectators, the public—not through the institutions, but immediate and direct. I think this was a unique experience, not only for Russia but for this period, for the whole world. Maybe it somehow resembles the experience of China—
> TA: —but later.
> LE: Right, but later. We had to build [the art world] from the ground up with this direct communication.
> ES: We provoked the media to publish our images and we worked hard on the quality and the strength of our images so they could be reproduced… that let media… it helped spread it over a much bigger audience, much more than a regular institution can do. That was the strategy in fact.
> LE: But also this language can work for very different kinds of audience, from intellectuals to very democratic publics.[56]

Their strategic decision to produce art that was accessible to a wider audience was successful not only for reaching the Russian public, but also internationally. Unlike many of their peers, the members of AES+F were not primarily concerned with the Soviet past or the Russian state. They recognized that with the end of the Cold War, Russia had not only joined a world besotted with capitalism but had also ceased to serve as the West's enemy. The Soviet Union was

[56] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

replaced by a new threat for the West: Islam. AES+F's *Islamic Project* was a commentary on Western Islamophobia,[57] in which the group attempted to reveal the problematic nature of arguments hinging on perceived differences between the West (modernity, innovation, freedom) and Islam (tradition, aggression, backwardness). Described as a "visualization of fears of Western society about Islam," the series is composed of digitally altered images in which Islamic symbolism is seamlessly incorporated into iconic Western cities, landscapes, and landmarks. One of the most striking examples is *New Liberty* (1996; see Figure 13), in which the Statue of Liberty is covered by a burqa. AES+F sought to disrupt the ideas of *myth* (the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of the mythical "freedom" of the West) and *stereotype* (in recent years, the burqa has become a cultural stand-in for a Western critique of Islam) that inform Western discourse on Islam. They avoid making direct proclamations with their art, instead seeking to construct intentional ambivalence, thus forcing the viewer to make her own conclusions about the piece. To provoke conversation, they deliberately adopt a tone both amusing and disturbing, leaving space open for dialogue:

Figure 13: AES+F, *New Liberty, Islamic Project* (1996) © AES+F

> LE: Our main task in *Islamic Project* was to invite people for intercommunication, to override the political correctness concerning the problem.
> TA: Just to provoke them.
> LE: Because our idea is that art should be free territory for discussions. And for expressions, and so on. And if society has no choice in how to express something which is really what people are worrying about, then there is no way to do this. […] So our Islamic Project was a kind of provocation, like in psychoanalysis, to bring everything to the light—but in a social way. We wanted to invite our audience… in United States, in Europe, everywhere… to discuss the issue amongst themselves.
> ES: It starts a conversation.

By using highly reproducible forms, such as posters and postcards, in addition to tackling controversial topics of an international concern, AES+F found a way to successfully make and circulate art during a time in which the field of art in Russia was not available to offer much support. Further, by taking advantage of resources outside the Russian field of art—such as foreign grants and fellowships, foreign collectors, and media coverage—they were able to survive as artists without having to emigrate. Remaining in Russia was crucial for further helping to develop the field of art there, not only for themselves but for future generations.

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[57] In particular, they were critiquing Samuel Huntington's 1993 "Clash of Civilizations" paradigm. Huntington argued that future struggles would be determined across cultural and religious lines instead of nation-states, especially between the West and Islamic nations.

*Looking Back, Looking Ahead*

Life during the chaos of the 1990s and 2000s was stressful and uncertain, so the development of infrastructure to make life as an artist possible was considered an advancement in the Russian art world. Yet while this was a time of chaos, many artists found it exhilarating to have the freedom and responsibility for helping to develop the art world. Despite the lack of money or a developed art market, they had energy, desire, passion and hope for a better future. And by the 2000s, they helped to make up the post-Soviet Russian art establishment, with some even enjoying commercial success outside of Russia. However, many members of the Last Soviet Generation now reflect nostalgically on that time, citing the lack of a defined field as *positive* because it left space for a kind of freedom that had not been experienced before or since—in particular with regards to the market. Dmitrii Gutov explains how institutions, including money, changed Russian art:[58]

> DG: When the nineties began, the occupation [of artist] was really awful. It's impossible to express how awful it was. No one was interested in art at all, of course. They were interested in survival. There was no chance to sell anything. These 10 years—they were awful but interesting. But we had a lot of energy and ideas. Around 2000, the situation began to change and some guys with money decided to begin to buy art. All the galleries at this time—they were ornamental. They were organized around 1990 and for 10 years they didn't sell. But the situation really began to change in 2003, when the first art institution was established—Stella.[59] After this, everything changed.
> *EH: Was it a good change?*
> DG: It was kind of a good change. Of course it's good to make an exhibition and have space and from time to time they give money for projects. But to create something *really* interesting, it doesn't help. For example, in the nineties I created a lot of installations. And several times Stella asked me to do something for her gallery. And she has a lot of money. Millions? Billions? I don't know. She asked me to do something like sculptural painting. And I said, "no no, I prefer to do installation." But she insisted: "no, I need something I can buy for my collection." See, this is the difference. In the nineties you had a chance to do something original. For example, when Vladimir Ovcharenko[60] asked me to do something, I said "Volodia, I have an idea for an installation—25 tons of black mud on the floor of [your] gallery." He had to think about it for half a year, but then he decided to do it. But after the nineties, this kind of installation was absolutely impossible. *No one wanted to spend money for pure art*. People only wanted money for their collections, paintings to put on the wall above their sofa. Fucking nightmare. The interest in art and the money—this absolutely changed the kind of art that was produced.[61]

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[58] Groys and Vidokle also reflect on the impact of the market, particularly on the younger generation of artists: "There was almost no competition among the unofficial artists—they built a really utopian community. And an individual artist worked for this community. The contemporary situation is, of course, quite different. Young artists try to get in touch with galleries, with media, with potential collectors as soon as possible. A contemporary artist does not see in the other artists the spectators that have to appreciate his or her work. Rather, other artists are regarded as competitors for the attention, for the gaze of a possible spectator" (2006:403).

[59] Stella Kesaeva, who in 2003 founded the Stella Art Foundation, a non-commercial art organization.

[60] Vladimir Ovcharenko is the founder and owner of Regina Gallery, established in 1990.

[61] Interview with author on September 3, 2014

Indeed, many Russian artists are now deeply dismayed about the Russian art world and concerned about its future. This is true despite the stability of the 2000s and 2010s relative to the 1990s, and even despite individual success: the artists I interviewed were among the most critically acclaimed, celebrated, and recognized contemporary artists in Russia. They are particularly pessimistic about the political situation, which creates an atmosphere of fear and caution and thus tempers the creative output of artists—and the degree to which they feel they will be respected internationally. As Vinogradov explained, "Russian art and artists will not be taken seriously or be part of the international art scene until the political situation changes."[62]

On the whole, however, the Last Soviet Generation regards favorably the development of art institutions and of opportunities for making and displaying contemporary art in Russia. While many artists recount the challenges of the present-day art world in Russia, none deny that tremendous changes have occurred since the fall of the Soviet Union, particularly in regard to the development of art institutions and contemporary art education. For AES+F, the experience of institutions marked the difference between artists of their generation and those of the First Postsocialist Generation, born between 1970–1990:

> TA: Well the next generation—it has been about 20–25 years—has just appeared. Of course in some ways it is another generation because from the *beginning* they work with institutions. Also with galleries. And they are already oriented toward an international career, and they take part in all these biennales for young artists and so on.
> LE: Also, what is important is that we were the last generation of Russian or international artists who had no contemporary [art] education. So because we had a different kind of education—Evgenii's a graphic designer, illustrator, [Tatiana and I] graduated from Moscow Architectural Institute… but the new generation, they have a school for *contemporary art*—such as Rodchenko School, etc.
> *EH: Still not many, though.*
> LE: Not that many, but this is another situation when… I just spoke with some younger artists and [they have] another mentality because from a very young age they are already in the structure of the art world, in its institutions.

THE FIRST POSTSOCIALIST GENERATION (artists born 1970–1990)

Members of the newest generation of Russian artists were born between 1970–1990. Their experiences of the Soviet Union are limited to childhood memories or the lingering imprint of socialism, so I call them the "First Postsocialist Generation." Unlike members of the Last Soviet Generation, they had the opportunity to receive a contemporary arts education in which they were exposed to work outside of Russian art or Soviet Realism. They also lack a classical Soviet art education. How did greater access to contemporary art education and the international art world, in addition to growing up during a time of transition, shape their development as artists? And what distinguishes them from the artists of the Last Soviet Generation? Because they are young, it remains to be seen what their trajectory as artists will be. However, I begin here to develop a sketch of this generation by examining how education and arts institutions have affected their maturation

[62] Interview with author on September 1, 2014

as artists, including their professional development both in Russia and internationally. I also show how they grapple with identity, trying to negotiate what it means to be a "Russian" or "postsocialist" artist. I end with a discussion of the tension that exists in their relationship with the international art world, and especially of how globalization and professionalization have shaped their desires and outcomes.

*Educated Differences*

One of the most significant differences between the two generations is access to contemporary art resources, in particular art education that includes exposure to and training in contemporary art (both Russian and worldwide). In addition to education, Russia has several institutes, programs, and universities (some degree-granting, others just offering courses) in which to study contemporary art—a departure from the experience of the Last Soviet Generation. And further, the support for the contemporary art world is better institutionalized than ever before. Beyond education, institutional support comes in the form of organizations granting fellowships, residencies, special programs for developing young art, and awards.

These institutionalized programs not only help artists materially, but are an important part of developing established measures of artistic legitimacy and consecration for Russian art. As Erofeyev (2012) explains, the Kandinsky Prize was created in 2007 to establish "who and what are preeminent in Russian art" by generating an "inventory of concepts and personalities" which are then used to define the hierarchy into which they should be sorted (17). The institutionalization of evaluation operates not only as a guidepost for what type of work is celebrated but also has proven important for knowing how to establish a career. In other words, it provides known milestones artists can work toward that will undoubtedly help their careers. This signals to the Russian art world that they have, in some senses, made it. As Arzamasova and Evzovich discuss in the previous section, because the new generation of artists came into a formed art world—beginning their careers with institutions already in place—they have a different mentality of the art world, including a better sense of what they can expect and what is possible.

The access to education, resources, and institutions has provided a considerable difference in opportunity for these younger Russian artists. In fact, all of the artists with whom I spoke in the First Postsocialist Generation had post-high school arts education that included access to, and training in, contemporary art. These possibilities have continually increased, with the institutional presence growing and strengthening dramatically over just two decades—a trend that can be observed by examining the differences in educational paths *within* this generation, gesturing toward the continual growth of a field of art.

For instance, those born before the early 1980s pursued contemporary art training in their later twenties and early thirties, after they already had a bachelor's degree (often in a field that is arts or technology related). These artists experienced the last days of socialism and came of age during the turbulent and uncertain 1990s, when the field of contemporary art was just being established, thus limiting their exposure to it when they were younger. Further, contemporary art education was not as widespread yet, making it a less obvious path to becoming an artist. So although the artists born before the early 1980s were the first to be exposed to a post-Soviet art education, this did not necessarily translate into immediate acceptance of, and fluency, in contemporary art. Artist Sergei Lotsmanov (b. 1983) recalled how after five years of classical art training in high school, he was completely unprepared when he started university:

> I received a fellowship to study at the Tallinn Art Academy [in Estonia]—I was very excited. But… I didn't know anything about [art] in the second half of the twentieth century. I had absolutely no idea what modern art was! I immediately immersed myself in it, but it was a culture shock for me that lasted several years.[63]

Similarly, artist and curator Vladimir Potapov (b. 1980) describes how he had an "aggressive" reaction to seeing contemporary art in Volgagrad, where he grew up: "I hated it. I saw Oleg Kulik on TV and I thought he should die or be in hospital because he was crazy."[64] To be fair, Oleg Kulik is a provocative artist, walking around on all fours wearing nothing but a dog collar and a chain and sticking his head inside of a cow's vagina. Nonetheless, it was true that Potapov's aesthetic imagination was parochial when he was young. After moving to Moscow in the late 2000s, he realized his conception of art ended in the nineteenth century. Even though he already had a university degree and had trained as traditional painter for eight years, he decided he needed to educate himself about contemporary art, so he enrolled in the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Moscow. Potapov's path was not unusual for someone his age: of the nine artists I interviewed who were born before the early 1980s, eight had attended ICA.

The Institute of Contemporary Art is the most influential and long-standing institution for contemporary art in Russia. Joseph Backstein[65] and several Moscow artists and critics founded ICA in 1991 as an independent, non-profit organization aimed at "reintegrating contemporary Russian art into the structures of the international art world."[66] Their educational program began in 1998 in conjunction with the George Soros Centre for Contemporary Art.[67] While still a very relevant institution, the ICA was particularly important for the first half of the First Postsocialist Generation. The artist Haim Sokol (b. 1973), a graduate of ICA, explains:

> When I moved [to Moscow], I didn't really know anyone. The one person I knew, she told about [ICA], about who Backstein was. This was really important for me… I still feel really lucky. I learned important things about art [at ICA], but really—it was just as important for networking and meeting people. The people I met there are still my closest friends and colleagues. I still work with them. You exhibit with them… so it's helping to form a network of people, to make the Russian art community. And Backstein… after I met him, he invited me to exhibitions and created a lot of opportunities for me. This institution is single-handedly building a contemporary art world here.[68]

Others speak just as enthusiastically and reverently about ICA as Sokol does above. It was where they not only learned about contemporary art, but was also where they learned *how* to be professional artists. Further, it was the best place to get linked into the community of Russian contemporary artists. The ICA provided an institutional landing site in which young artists

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[63] Interview with author on September 10, 2014
[64] Interview with author on September 10, 2014
[65] Backstein remains a very important figure—perhaps the most influential, if these things can be quantified—in the Russian art world today.
[66] Institute of Contemporary Art website (see http://www.icamoscow.ru)
[67] The American philanthropist George Soros open similar contemporary art centers throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The Soros Centre for Contemporary Art in Moscow, initially headed by Irina Alpatova, existed from 1991–2000, and was one of the first institutions to support contemporary art in Russia.
[68] Interview with author on September 22, 2014

assembled artistic networks, and many credit for giving them their start in the Russian contemporary art world.

Artists born after the early 1980s, however, have had a slightly different trajectory: they received art education from a young age. Eight of the nine artists I interviewed who were born after 1981 received contemporary arts training either during their bachelor's studies or directly afterward. Because their education started earlier, none had experiences like that of Vladimir Potapov or Sergei Lotsmanov in which there was a revelatory moment of contemporary art as something new and exciting. Rather, studying at a contemporary-art school was an obvious step on the path to becoming an artist in Russia. The artist Ustina Iakovleva (b. 1987) explains how she became an artist:

> I knew first I needed to go to the Institute [ICA] in order to be known in the Moscow art world. All of my artist friends had gone there, so I saw that was how to be part of that community, how to build networks. And these networks are so important. Then I wanted to do START[69] to help me get my work out there. But even with that… really, having a big network helps with everything.[70]

Today, there is an established and expected formula—or habitus—in Russia for how to "become an artist," which assumes a certain level and type of professionalization and internationalization of artists that did not exist previously. The artists born in 1984 or after also attend the ICA, as Iakovleva did, which is now considered part of the establishment. But they have also been increasingly enrolling in the Rodchenko Art School, which was established in 2006 by the Department of Culture and Education of the City of Moscow and part of the Multimedia Center of Actual Arts and incorporated with the Moscow House of Photography and the Multimedia Art Museum.

Another trend in art education for the First Postsocialist Generation is spending time in the West. ICA, for example, is affiliated with several programs in Western Europe that do exchanges. Although artists from the First Postsocialist Generation are eager to study in the West, unlike artists of Soviet generations before them, they do not emigrate. Rather, they want to return to Russia and stay. When I asked why they would want to stay in Russia as opposed to staying, Sergei Ogurtsov (b. 1982) said it was because of "knowledgeable fear." This is an interesting concept, and one I had not considered before. The West is attractive, of course, because materials are cheaper and the access to networks of knowledge and the "art world" is much easier (or more accessible). However, there is an overproduction of art and artists in major Western cities, which in fact makes it more difficult to "break into" the art market. In Russia, by contrast, young artists have an intimate knowledge of how things work.

*Finding an Identity*

The issue of the artistic identity of this generation is a complicated one, formed by opposing forces. On one hand, in addition to having a more comprehensive arts education, its members have grown up with access to an increasingly globalized world outside of Russia via the Internet. Yet on the

[69] The Vinzavod Art Foundation began the START program in 2008. It gives unknown young talent the opportunity to have their first solo exhibition by providing gallery space, a curator, and a budget. START also invites professionals from the art community (such as gallerists and critics) to see the show. This gives the young artists exposure they otherwise would not receive.

[70] Interview with author on September 3, 2014

other hand, despite virtual access, Russia has in many ways been sealed off from international presence in the art world. Russian artists' isolation stems from (1) the sluggish pace at which the field of art has developed (which stems, in part, from the unwillingness of the Russian government to support contemporary art, an issue to which I will return in Chapter Three), and (2) Russia's political precariousness over the past two decades. When Russia is not seen in a favorable light internationally, interest in its art decreases.

This has created a tension for the artists of the First Postsocialist Generation. Though they live and work in Russia, many consider themselves (or at least aspire) to be *international* artists. They are very aware that to be part of the larger conversation of art and art history requires fluency in a specific international or "universal" language of art. As the artist Piotr Goloshchapov (b. 1982) put it, "The art world is a different space—its own universe and not tied to nationalism."[71] Although many are proud to be Russian, when it comes to describing themselves as artists, they choose not to identify with nationality but rather think of themselves as global or international. For example, although artist Pavel Kiselev (b. 1984) feels deeply connected to Russia, he states, "I am a global international artist with a Russian background; it's important for me to think of it that way."[72]

The "international identity" that members of the First Postsocialist Generation seek appears in their art. They are adamant that their subject matter is not specific to Russia,[73] describing themes such as poverty, politics, or socialism and the Soviet past. The socialist past, in particular, provoked the most ire.[74] There is a self-consciousness to this generation's disavowal of socialism and the Soviet past. This ranges from wanting to show Russia *in the present* as Granilshchikov and Vetkin did to a more negative dismissal of Russia and its past. I was most often told, "I don't remember the Soviet Union at all. So why should I be addressing it in my work?" Instead, members of the First Postsocialist Generation want to focus on "universal" themes that "people anywhere in the world have to deal with," such as emotion, media, or technology.

The works of artist Ivan Egelskii (b. 1982) illustrate the preoccupation with the "universal" issue of technology, which he considers "one of the main contemporary issues of civilization today."[75] Egelskii explores the role of technology in daily life, questioning how various forms of technology may or may not be preserved in the future by juxtaposing traditional forms of art with modern issues. For example, in the piece *Broken Abstraction* (2014, see Figure 14), a working computer monitor is suspended in a round glass case filled water. It brings to mind an extinct animal in a natural-history museum, suggesting that after this technology is obsolete it must be preserved for future generations. Egelskii is also interested in the idea that our lives are dictated by these machines—yet we do not really know how they are made or what happens inside them. By not knowing *how* something works, we have to *believe* in it. To explore this idea, he made a digitized bible that appears to be an ordinary traditional looking copy of the bible (a leather bound

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[71] Interview with author on September 3, 2014
[72] Interview with author on September 8, 2014
[73] An important exception here are the political artists, who I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three on art and the Russian state.
[74] Chukhrov (2013) suggests a more nuanced and political understanding of their disavowal, arguing that, "the question of whether or not contemporary Russian social space happens to be beyond post-Soviet experience is dependent on whether or not the Soviet experience is regarded as an obsolete authoritarian past, or as an alternative modernity which, notwithstanding all its failings, contained valuable elements for building non-capitalist means of production and a post-class, if not classless, society" (253). This is an interesting point (which I return to in Chapter Three) and one I would argue could be applicable to a small number of artists from the First Postsocialist Generation.
[75] Interview with author on August 29, 2014

book with gold lettering)—but rather than words, it is written entirely in binary code (rows of zeroes and ones). Ultimately, Egelskii argues that science is a new kind of religion.

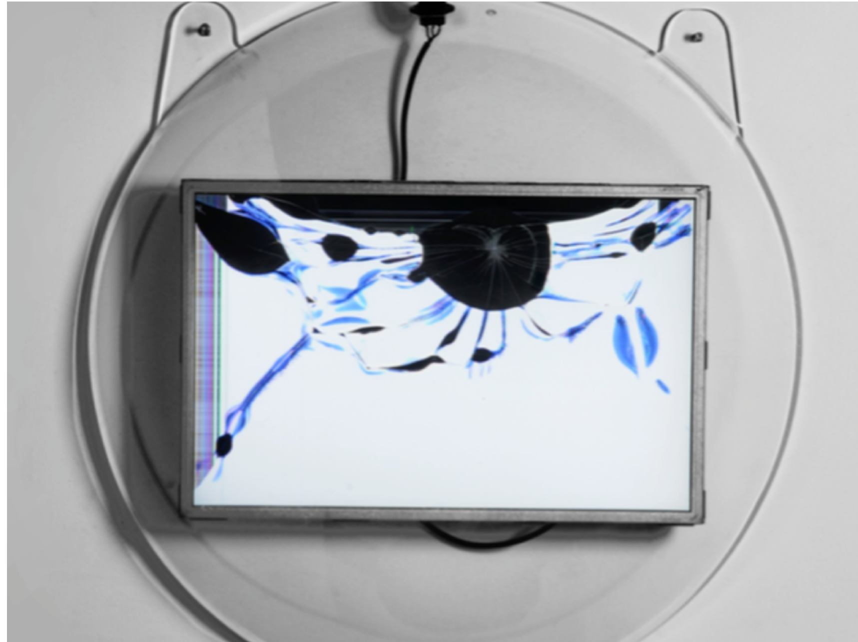

Figure 14: Ivan Egelskii, *Broken Abstraction* (2014). Photo: Courtesy of artist

*“We are not Russian—we are people of the world”: Recycle Art Group*

Georgy Kuznetsov (b. 1985) and Andrey Blokhin (b. 1987), who form the Recycle Art Group, are examples of artists of the First Postsocialist Generation who are attempting to supersede their Russian identity in the international art world by avoiding addressing specifically Russian issues. Despite their young age, they have enjoyed considerable success, and are internationally some of the most well-known (or, at least, commercially successful) Russian artists of this age. They have been showing in Europe since 2009 and in April 2015 they had their first solo show in the United States.[76]

The name “Recycle” references their use of recycled materials (including Styrofoam, plastic, plastic mesh, stained glass, steel). The ethos of reusing materials was commonplace in Soviet culture, although that sensibility was apparently not a motivating factor for Kuznetsov and Blokhin. (Nor, for that matter, do they “recycle” the iconography, ideas, or memories of the Soviet past.) Instead, the reuse of materials is significant in several ways. As Blokhin explained,

> Literally we are doing the reincarnation of idea and reincarnation of material. So we usually use classic themes, classic subjects—we are recycling themes in art history. And same idea with the material—because we use recyclable material for all our artworks, we are reincarnating it. And we also use the idea that all *our* works can also be recycled.[77]

[76] Their show, “Heaven Carrier,” was held at the Richard Taittinger Gallery in New York City.
[77] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

Reuse, then, becomes integrated into all aspects of their work—from concept to execution—and highlights their interest in oppositions, in particular classical versus contemporary art, permanence versus ephemerality, and spirituality versus materiality. They achieve this by addressing contemporary culture using quasi-archeology and classical Western traditions, such as Christian iconography, narrative relief carving, and sculpture. Their interest centers on how the iconography being created by today's (global, they would argue) consumer culture will be immortalized later in history, if it can be at all. In particular, they explore ideas of the material visualization of the virtual reality of our culture (e.g., the Internet and social networks), such as in an installation that presents Facebook as a real religion, complete with ten "commandments" based on the social network's terms and conditions. By presenting social media this way through this type of imagery, they explore the ways in which our interactions with technology mediate how we see the world.

> We wanted to make a fake archeology, a fake religion, fake god… for example, in our last show we had the head of Bender from *Futurama* as the head of a Buddha sitting on a pedestal. We also mix the idea of religion and Internet sources, like social networks. We used the Facebook logo "f" and made it giant, and now it's like the cross, like a crucifix. In our show *Paradise Network* we used the idea that everyone who uses social networks—their profiles will live forever after they die. They are immortal. But they are not material, so you cannot touch them—they don't *physically* exist. So that's why there are a lot of connections with religion. In modern times, a lot of people don't think about religion … they care about information. And information started to be like a new religion. Now people only want to trust the facts. And the Internet provides people with the possibility to get facts.[78]

Thus the Recycle Art Group attempts to provide the material iconography for these "new religions."[79] In their archeological pieces, for example, they have created fossilized logos from tech companies (see Figure 15), evoking the remains of an ancient civilization that has been excavated after centuries underground.

Figure 15: Recycle Art Group, *Letter F* (2012). Photo: Courtesy of artists

The recycling of familiar religious imagery crossed with contemporary cultural iconography is another example of how Kuznetsov and Blokhin use dualism. They employ stained glass—evoking religious contexts—to depict what they call "modern saints," which range from superheroes to characters from popular American cartoons such as *The Simpsons*. In *They Killed Kenny!* (2012; see Figure 16), they constructed stained glass church windows with *South Park* characters. They focus on Kenny in particular because in each episode of the cartoon he dies, but then rises again, Christ-like, in the next.

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[78] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

[79] This is not unlike Egelskii's work, who suggests that technology and science form a new religion.

The Recycle duo has always been fascinated by large existential questions that they consider "universal" and not necessarily unique to Russian culture. Growing up in the era often characterized by increasing globalization, they are comfortable working with, and communicating through, the mélange of cultural references and influences once confined by national borders. Their cultural dexterity and relative fluency in global symbolic vocabularies allows Blokhin and Kuznetsov to translate more easily outside of Russia. For example, although the characters in their stained glass pieces, such as *They Killed Kenny!*, are products of the United States, Blokhin maintains that they are useful for representing larger issues within culture, such as the "new religion" of social media. Further, he asserts that even referring to the cartoons as "American" is not useful or relevant.

Figure 16: Recycle Art Group, *They Killed Kenny!* (2012). Photo: Elise Herrala

> *EH: I'm interested in why you chose these particular American cultural icons such as Homer Simpson or Kenny. What do they represent for you? The satire of these shows, particularly in South Park, is very much rooted in an American form of irony.*
> AB: It's international, really—cartoons, movies. And of course there are a lot of connections with America, but you know, actually, we really don't think that we are Russian. We don't think it's necessary to say that. So if I'm from this country it's necessary to make an art piece that will be connected to something "Russian," like Socialist Realism? I was born in '87 but I really was a child when it was the end of the Soviet Union and I really don't care about this time. I didn't feel it. That's why we look at the themes we do, things that are international: the Internet, cartoons, movies, all these things are global. And for our generation it's not necessary to say "I'm Russian", "I'm from the UK", "I'm American"… I think that the world is really international… it's strange now, at this time, to use nationality. I don't feel there are any borders between countries in the art world. That's why, actually, we are not working on the ideas communism and so forth. We don't really care about them. For us it's necessary to show the language of art that can be understood by anybody from different countries, such as the life of Homer Simpson. And it's really cool because if you make some shows in London or New York, everybody understands what you are talking about. It's great if a lot of people get what you do.[80]

Although their success in the West can perhaps be in part the result of the universal appeal of the themes in work, both Blokhin and Kuznetsov developed familiarity with the art world outside of Russia at an early age. Their parents were artists and friends, and as children they were able to

[80] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

accompany them when they were artists in residence, allowing for frequent travel outside of Russia, particularly in the West. They credit this in part for their development as artists, which Blokhin said helped to give them context for the history of art. But in addition to the themes of their work and their early exposure to the international art world, Recycle's success also comes in part from knowing early on how to professionalize, both in Russia and abroad. Blokhin's approach to the work it takes to gain such success is instantly recognizable as "millennial": success comes through a mixture of a neoliberal attitude (individuals are responsible for their own fates) and networking, both through social media and in person.

> AB: There are not so many artists [in Russia] who have much success. But if you want to do something you don't really need to wait to have someone support you. If you want something you need to just do it yourself. Send your proposals for residencies—there are a lot of places worldwide where you can make any art if you want. You don't need to wait for someone. This is the main problem of many Russian artists, and actually I think this about artists anywhere. Because always people are waiting for somebody to help them. They wait for a sponsor, for a partner, they wait for a gallery, they think that a gallery will always support you everywhere. But if you want to make art, *you* will do it.
> *EH: So basically you have to be really proactive. You have to put yourself out there and put your art out there.*
> AB: Yes of course. When we first started to work we spoke with the galleries, with the residencies, with the curators, with a lot of people. And if you want to do something you need to speak with these kinds of people, you need to go there, you need to make these connections. And if you sit on the sofa and don't try, nothing will happen. This is the main problem with 70% of Russian artists.
> *EH: So how does social media link back into putting yourself out there? Because I feel like with the Internet it helps.*
> AB: So yes, with the Internet—okay. But it doesn't always work. Because the art world is the kind of thing that you cannot do all that you want through the Internet. It's the ideal technology, but we are not programmers. If you want to do something, you actually need to go and speak to people, you need to see the exhibitions. And if you're sitting at home and just looking at reviews after shows, you cannot really feel it. Because art is emotion. You need to feel it. And if you don't do it, nothing will work. It's impossible to do everything through the Internet. For sure! [Laughs] It's like the instrument to help you, but it's not the only tool.[81]

Knowing how to professionalize differentiates the Last Socialist Generation and the First Postsocialist Generation, as Tatiana Arzamasova of AES+F pointed out. Certainly this knowledge is much more readily available for the First Postsocialist Generation, although despite Blokhin's assertion that anyone can make it if they put themselves out there, not all Russian artists have come into success quite as quickly, a theme to which I return in Chapter Four.

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[81] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

## CONCLUSION

The artists of these two generations are working in the same field of art, so there is undoubtedly overlap between them. However, the tensions each tried to reconcile during their development as artists differ. I argue that these key differences help to define the identity of each. The identity of the Last Soviet Generation was born out of the transition—both a differentiation from the Soviet Nonconformist tradition and an attempt to figure out their new postsocialist reality in the ruins (and memories) of socialism. Further, they did this while also dealing with the lack of art institutions in the immediate postsocialist period, making life as an artist extremely difficult. The First Postsocialist Generation, however, benefitted from the infrastructure that was already developed by the time they began their art careers. Memories of socialism were much more distant for them. Instead, the globalization of the art world shaped them. They conceive of themselves as "international" artists who happen to be from Russia.

Degot (2010) points to the shift in the way artists of the First Postsocialist Generation see their position and importance in the Russian art world: they are "starting to see themselves as 'artist workers' who actively seek audiences outside the art world" (2). What has caused this shift? As I argue in this chapter, Degot suggests that this is the result of the social and political circumstances in which they grew up, which we are now beginning to see. The First Postsocialist Generation has enjoyed opportunities and access that were not available to the artists of the Last Soviet Generation, born a few decades before. However, there are also some drawbacks to having come of age after socialism. As Degot notes, this is the first generation—many from outside of Moscow, which is a new trend—who were "too young to have their apartments privatized for free in the 1990s and so are forced to struggle with enormous rents and the price of life in the capital [Moscow]" (2010:2). Of course not all artists of the Last Soviet Generation enjoyed such perks as free apartments. But Degot's point is important: the two generations have different relationships to socialism and capitalism, and experienced them differently. The day-to-day struggles of economic precarity have shifted. The main similarity between the generations is, of course, that they both continue to exist in a specific *local* Russian context—a locality that has not yet become part of the global one.

Yet the artists are only one component in the field of art. In the following chapters, I examine the other players who make up and influence the Russian field of art. In the next chapter, I show how the Russian market and collectors have become a backbone of the art world, providing support and infrastructure.

## CHAPTER TWO
## *Buyers and Sellers*

> *"We started this gallery on an illusion: if we had a nicely located space, white walls, black floors, graduates of European universities who speak many languages, show Damien Hirst, then we would launch the contemporary art market in Moscow. It failed! It failed because there was no demand, no developed taste, no developed tradition."*
>
> —Dmitrii Khankin, Triumph Gallery[82]

Upon my first visit to Dmitrii Khankin's Triumph Gallery in 2012, located just off Red Square, it seemed to me that he had, in fact, gotten part of the illusion right: the gallery was open and bright, with the requisite black floors and white walls. Given the time Khankin spent in the West, and indeed around the world, it came as little surprise that he would know the "right" steps required to establish a gallery. Further, he was committed to expanding the gallery's exposure beyond Moscow and frequently organized large-scale exhibitions in other European cities, which was unusual for a Russian gallery. Triumph also has the good fortune of being free of the financial problems that plague many galleries in Russia, prompting the art critic Valentin Diakonov to call it the "spare no expense gallery" in 2013. The gallery was often gossiped about for its seemingly unending supply of funds[83] and elaborate and controversial exhibitions.[84] And eight years after it opened in 2005, Triumph remained an important, controversial, and talked-about gallery in Moscow. It represents internationally known Russian contemporary artists such as Vladimir Dubosarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov and AES+F, while also bringing to Russia the work of important Western contemporary artists such as Damien Hirst.[85] The gallery has worked hard to bring exhibitions of Russian art abroad and invests money into both established and upcoming artists. Perhaps most importantly, it has had the capital to keep going, even when other top galleries have had to change to non-commercial formats after the market collapsed in the 2008 economic crisis.[86] Why, then, does Khankin say it failed?

Khankin's negative outlook on the Russian art market, and its impact on the Russian art world in general, is not unusual. The negativity circling nearly all aspects of the Russian art world—including the market, curators, collectors, artists, critics—ranges from pessimistic to dismissive. A popular opinion among the international and Russian art communities is that Russian art collectors, often thought of as *nouveaux riches*, have no taste. Contemporary Russian art is also poorly received by both, and frequently dismissed as derivative of Western art. And Russian art world insiders often complain that because of a lack of education and exposure, the Russian public

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[82] Interview with author on October 17, 2012

[83] They had a somewhat unclear relationship with the late oligarch, Boris Berezovsky. One journalist suggested that they received all their funding from Berezovsky, something that was never confirmed as a fact. It is known, however, that the gallery's first space was a mansion that belonged to Berezovsky. He let them use the building on the condition that they call the gallery Triumph (after the prestigious Triumph Award, a national prize for outstanding achievement in the field of culture). In 2011 they moved to a 500-square-meter space on Ilyinka Street, a block from Red Square.

[84] For example, in 2008 they showed Kandinsky Prize winner Alexei Beliayev-Guintovt, the artist controversial for his fascist symbolism and far-right views.

[85] Triumph Gallery was actually the first to bring Damien Hirst to a Russian audience with his show "New Religion" in 2006. A year later they showed the UK artists Jake and Dinos Chapman.

[86] Most notably, Gelman Gallery and XL Gallery.

does not understand or appreciate contemporary art. Yet Russia has a long history of appreciating the arts and is home to world-famous museums such as the Hermitage and Tretiakov Gallery. And with the fall of the Soviet Union, the country was free from artistic censorship. So how did the market for art in Russia develop in a way that inspires such negative attention? What accounts for the lack of collectors and failure to develop a strong art market? In order to understand this, I look at collecting in historical context within Russia and then situate the practice in contemporary post-Soviet reality, where collecting is not just a sign of wealth and status accumulation but in fact exists in a complex reciprocal relationship with artists and art-making itself.

Collectors play a major role in the construction of a new market (both real and imagined) and affect the production of art in Russia more broadly. Yet simply replicating a developed, Western-modeled art market—as many hopeful gallerists set out to do in the 2000s—without attending to historical and cultural differences have proven to be insufficient for building a class of collectors.

That is not to say that collecting is not taken seriously in Russia. Many collectors understand it as a responsibility: they see their role as crucial for picking up the slack of the state's disinterest in contemporary art by financially supporting artists and helping to conserve Russian art history. Their role also goes beyond that of financial patron. Through their support, promotion, and purchasing power, collectors (and galleries) become important consecrators of art—their engagement is what helps to infuse it with a distinctive *value* that extends beyond its materiality (Bourdieu 1996). Despite these motivated and committed collectors, however, Russia has yet to return to its rich tradition of collecting art in pre-revolutionary Russia (see Bowlt 1991). The criminalization of collecting during the Soviet period altered Russians' relationship to the practice, an impact that has extended to the present. And while collecting has increased in popularity since the end of the Soviet Union, particularly in the 2000s, there are still not enough collectors to sustain a robust market. This has led to poor consequences for both galleries and artists: without enough people buying art, galleries cannot afford to stay open, and artists must find alternate ways to support themselves financially.

The role of market actors (such as galleries, auction houses, and dealers) and collectors are key to understanding a field of art, most obviously because the art market generates an artist's livelihood. But the importance of market actors and collectors for the art world is more than pecuniary. As Bourdieu (1996) points out, the value of a work of art is not given by the artist, but rather "the ensemble of agents and institutions which participate in the production of the value of the work via the production of the belief in the value of art in general and in the distinctive value of this or that work of art" (229).[87] Art dealers, for example, have a direct impact on what is being sold because they choose the artists they will represent, thus consecrating the work and making it "legitimate" art. By "investing" their reputation in a particular artist, they act "as a 'symbolic banker' who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated" (Bourdieu 1993:77). Collectors, then, often rely on dealers for purchasing advice and information on market trends (Plattner 1996). Further, galleries often organize and fund programs that support artists and frequently work in cooperation with museums on larger shows, such as artist retrospectives. In this way, dealers and galleries act as "gatekeepers of the art world" (Crane 1976, 1987; Velthuis 2005).

Similarly, collectors—particularly those who are respected or of high status—are often responsible for setting or influencing trends (Moulin 1987). Having a known collector purchasing

[87] Bourdieu goes on to list "critics, art historians, publishers, gallery directors, dealers, museum curators, patrons, collectors, members of instances of consecration like academies, salons, juries, etc., and the whole ensemble of political and administrative authorities competent in matters of art" (1996:229).

the works of an unknown artist can bring attention and recognition. Collectors of young or "undiscovered" artists often forgo buying art through a dealer or a gallery, preferring to "uncover" new talent themselves. These collectors develop direct relationships with the artists and support them both financially and socially (by giving them their stamp of approval). As patrons of the arts, many collectors feel responsibility for preserving and furthering art.

So what does it mean for the Russian art world that the market, both from the seller side and buyer side, is weak? Bourdieu, who contends that autonomous or "pure" art is free from the restrictions imposed on it via the economic field, might argue that the absence of a robust market would actually be *good* for the art. Without having to subsume their interests to those of the market, artists would be able to pursue their own interests (and that of the field in general)—and thus would create autonomous art. Yet the Russian case suggests that it is hardly that simple. As the most recent downturn of the art market has shown, lacking a robust consumer base has had deleterious consequences for the Russian art world *in general*, as galleries have had to close, artists struggle to make a living, foundations and art journals have folded, and overall morale remains low.

In this chapter I give an account of the development of the art market in post-Soviet Russia from both sides: sellers (focusing primarily on galleries but also including auction houses, and other arts organizations involved in the sale of art) and buyers (focusing primarily on collectors, but also including more-casual buyers of art). I find that the market's slow and uneven development in Russia has occurred for a number of reasons, such as the lack of support and censorship by the Russian state, the increasingly globalized international art market, and cultural domination by the West, themes which I will touch on here but return to in more depth in Chapters Three and Four. Here, I focus primarily on how the legacy of state socialism and the policies and culture of the Soviet Union were significant for the development (or lack thereof) of a class of collectors and a strong art market in Russia. Ultimately, I demonstrate surprisingly that despite the resultant challenges and frustrations of this weak market, it has nonetheless played a critical role in building and preserving the postsocialist field of art—and remains, I would argue, a cornerstone for the continuation of autonomous Russian art into the foreseeable future.

## SELLERS

The post-Soviet Russian art market has experienced three distinct periods in its 25-year history: the beginning of the market in the 1990s, which was difficult but exciting; the explosion of interest from 2000 to 2008; and the post-crisis fallout, which has yet to reach an end. By 2000, there was finally enough money, stability, and interest to allow the market to expand significantly. The art world that the pioneers in the 1990s worked hard to establish was built upon significantly by the culture-hungry *nouveaux riches*, who not only started collecting in in greater numbers, but who also poured money into creating galleries, foundations, and art magazines. However, the high rate of growth in the market and rapidly expanding interest and enthusiasm for Russian art in the 2000s came to an abrupt and painful stop with the financial crisis in 2008. The crisis hit many rich Russians hard, curtailing their excessive spending, particularly on items such as art. And the economic sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 because of the crisis in Ukraine hurt any progress the market had experienced in the previous half decade. Many of the collectors who had cautiously reemerged after the financial crisis of 2008 closed their pocketbooks with the increased instability that sanctions caused.

In this section I lay out how the Russian art market has developed since the end of the Soviet Union. Despite its inconsistent and at times unsteady history, gallerists, private collectors,

and art dealers have been at the forefront of the (re)invention of the Russian art world since the late 1980s. As Elena Panteleeva, former director of the Vinzavod Art Foundation, put it, "Nobody knew anything about contemporary art, so the early galleries were heroes."[88] More than just selling art and supporting artists, then, the galleries' contributions have encompassed a range of critical projects for developing the field of contemporary Russian art. While there is much overlap among gallery activities, here I focus only on one facet of each example to give a range. In particular, I examine the political, educational, and intellectual contributions that galleries have made. Simultaneously, I situate these examples within a chronological account of the postsocialist art market to illustrate its development.

*1990–1999: The "Enthusiastic Years"*

Most cite the 1988 Sotheby's Auction as the unofficial beginning of a post-Soviet art market.[89] The auction was symbolic for a number of reasons, the most obvious being that it was Russia's first international art auction in 70 years. It was also further evidence of the growing freedom of expression under Gorbachev that began with his declaration of *glasnost*.[90] The auction also acted as a public admission by the Soviet government that Russian art did not consist solely of official, state-supported artists. In fact, most of the 100 lots were of Nonconformist artists.[91]

Before the auction, the Russian public could not openly buy art, meaning that diplomats and foreigners were the main collectors of Russian art. Unsurprisingly, then, the auction targeted a foreign audience, and several state-sponsored events were held to attract them to Moscow for the historic occasion. Given the high prices of the art, which had to be paid in pounds sterling (Soviet citizens had limited access to foreign currency), the majority of buyers were from the West. The results of the auction came as a shock to the Russians, who were surprised to see so much interest from the West in Russian art, not to mention such high prices. Aleksandr Kronik, who has been collecting Nonconformist art since 1984, reminisced about the excitement and astonishment of the time:

> An artist friend of mine offered to sell me one of his paintings for 4,000 rubles before the auction. I had to pass because it was too expensive for me. The painting later sold at auction for 50,000 rubles! It was an unimaginable amount. You could buy an entire house with that much money at the time.[92]

Kronik's story was not an unusual one: many artists, who had been unknown to the public, set price records that still seem incredible. For many of the artists at auction, this was a life-changing event. Yet not everyone in the small community of artists and collectors were happy with the outcome, stunned by the changes it suddenly brought to their small but protective art world. As Tupitsyn (1989) recounts, the auction, "surpassed [the artists'] collective imagination about how the capitalist art market can quickly change the notion of 'who is who' in contemporary Soviet art" (137). She cites the example of Grisha Bruskin—who before the auction "[had] only recently

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[88] Interview with author on April 5, 2013

[89] Two "internal" auctions of contemporary art were held in the Soviet Union in 1986–87. The Sotheby's auction was the first auction of contemporary Russian art to be open to an international audience.

[90] The artist Grisha Bruskin (2008) contends that the waiters at the state-organized events for Western collectors during the auction were actually KGB officers.

[91] For a detailed account of the auction, see Solomon 1991.

[92] Interview with author on May 27, 2013

emerged in the Soviet alternative art community"—unexpectedly bringing in the highest price for a living painter.[93]

Although Russians were not able to afford the art being sold publicly for the first time in their country, it was after this moment that a fledgling market in Russia began. Just a year after the Sotheby's auction, the first privately run gallery opened in Moscow, appropriately named First Gallery. This was followed by the Gelman and Regina Galleries in 1990, the Aidan Gallery in 1992, and the XL Gallery in 1993, among others.[94] Despite having commercial formats, however, galleries in the first half of the 1990s opened in Moscow not in response to demand, but rather in *spite* of the lack of a market. Interest in contemporary art was limited to a small but committed and passionate circle. In general, few Russians had money for buying art. As a result, the first galleries in Moscow strayed from the conventional model of a commercial sales-oriented gallery. Instead, they were used primarily as places for exhibiting work. Given the lack of government support for art in Russia at the time, the creation of these galleries-cum-exhibition spaces became critical for the development of contemporary art: they created central meeting spaces for ideas to be exchanged among members of the art world.

A good example of the gallery-cum-exhibition-space hybrid was the artist-run Trekhprudnyi Lane Gallery, which opened in September 1991 in Moscow. It began as an artist colony in a half-abandoned building in the city center, and later functioned as a combination of commercial gallery space and non-profit contemporary-art institution.[95] It was the first of its kind in post-Soviet Russia, and despite its short-lived tenure—it closed in May 1993—it established itself as a central place within the developing art world. Within a short period, the Trekhprudnyi Lane Gallery held 87 shows, including performance acts (especially popular at the time) and interactive installations made particularly for the space. The gallery functioned as a dynamic and key venue for establishing a professional artistic milieu.

Although the number of people involved were small, these first galleries did succeed in building at least a scaffolding for the market. One of the pioneers of the gallery scene was Marat Gelman, who opened his eponymous gallery in 1990, the year he moved to Moscow. Like the other galleries at the time, the Gelman Gallery was a multi-purpose space, hosting exhibitions as well as intellectual, artistic, and political workshops. But Marat Gelman also helped to build the market, at first by accident: after a few bad business decisions, Gelman had to sell his personal art collection to cover costs. But selling art did not prove to be an easy endeavor, and every sale was hard won. After a year spent unloading his own art, he realized that with the experience and contacts he gained in the process, he could become a dealer. By his own account, he "created the art market in the 1990s"—a boast not entirely untrue.

The 1990s were what Gelman has referred to as the "Enthusiastic Period" of Russian art, "when no one was really knowledgeable, but everyone was passionately in love with what they were doing." Along with his then-wife Iulia, Gelman developed a reputation for showing unknown local Moscow artists and introducing artists from southern Russia. They were the first to exhibit then-unknown artists who later became famous, including the Blue Noses, Dmitrii Gutov, Oleg

[93] The painting was *Fundamental Lexicon* (1986), which sold for £222,000 ($416,000).

[94] Including the now-defunct L-Gallery, Gallery 1.0, School Gallery, and TV Gallery (the first gallery to be dedicated to multimedia arts).

[95] The artists first involved were from the Rostov-based "Art or Death" community, when Avdei Ter-Oganian, Konstantin Reunov, and Valerii Koshliakov moved into the vacant apartments in the house. They were later joined later by Vladimir Dubosarskii, Pavel Aksenov, Ilia Kitup, Aleksandr Sigutin, and others. Despite the widespread practice of squatting at the time, the workshop residents actually rented the space from the building's owner.

Kulik, Valery Koshliakov, AES Group, Aleksandr Vinogradov, and Vladimir Dubosarskii. Taking the risk to support new artists was uncommon during this era, but in part it was born of economic necessity. As Gelman explained,

> Moscow's most well-known artists had become extremely expensive because of the prestigious auction, Sotheby's 1988. And even those artists who didn't participate in the auction became crazy about money. I couldn't afford their works; I was running a small business by selling my "mind," not oil or computers. That's why I turned towards lesser-known artists and went on expeditions to the south of Russia, Kiev, etc. I discovered that this region has a powerful, new generation of artists.[96]

Gelman's vision turned out to be prescient. Not only was there a burgeoning market for less expensive works, but as I discuss in the previous chapter, the up-and-coming artists of the Last Soviet Generation were ready to distinguish themselves from the Nonconformist artists who came before them and had been deeply committed to conceptual art:

> Before I opened the gallery, I organized a large exhibition in Moscow titled "Russia's Southern Wave." The exhibition was a success—70 percent of the displayed works were sold. Today, the artists are widely known. The exhibition also began a rivalry, because at the time, Moscow Conceptualism reigned, which, among other things, claimed that there is nothing else interesting or worthwhile in Russian art at the moment—just conceptualism. But the rivalry helped to bring attention to me and to the artists I represented… I can safely say that if you see a well-known Russian artist that rose to the stage in the 90s, then his first exhibition was definitely held at my gallery. I guarantee it.[97]

Gelman also took political risks, making it a mission to support radical and controversial artists, including Oleg Kulik, known for his violent and realistic performances as a dog; Aleksandr Brener, famous for spray-painting a dollar sign on an iconic Malevich painting hanging in a museum; Avdei Ter-Oganian, who incited anger for chopping religious icons with an ax; AES Group, for their images of Islam superimposed onto famous Western sites; and Blue Noses Group, whose work of two policeman kissing caused violent attacks (see Figure 17). Yet even past the "Enthusiasm Period" of the 1990s, Gelman's commitment to radical art and performance did not abate. He and his gallery were the subject of numerous attacks and protests for exhibitions such as "Rossiya 2" and "Spiritual Abuse" (which I will return to in more detail in Chapter Three). Gelman's support for controversial art is not just to create an opportunity for press, however. As he likes to put it, "freedom can benefit from scandal."[98]

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[96] Interview in *Arterritory* (2011)
[97] Interview in *Arterritory* (2011)
[98] As reported in *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (Shenkman 2013).

Figure 17: Blue Noses Group, *End of Mercy* (2005) © Blue Noses Group

When I asked him in 2012 about whether or not the art market in Russia was "dead" like everyone says, he laughed. "Yes, the art market that I built in the 1990s is dead. I brought the first collectors to the market. But things which are born must die… It's time for something new." Yet he emphasized that even if the art market is "dead," that does not mean the art is. People will continue to create, as long as "the mission for art is that they must go by their own mission. Art market for art, not art for art market."[99] In spite of the "death" of the 1990s art market, however, Gelman went on to establish himself as one of the most important figures in the contemporary Russian art world. His gallery discontinued its commercial operations in 2012 due to a lack of profitability in the previous two years. As he explained,

> I can only speculate as to why, but I think the main issue is market conditions. Most wealthy people in Russia are either state bureaucrats or affiliated with the state and they're not interested in revealing their income, so they don't collect. When we looked at our list of clients—people who have bought our art from 1996 to 2008—we saw that more than 80 percent now live outside Russia.[100]

After the closure of his gallery, he focused on decentralizing the Russian art world. Gelman's latest project, Cultural Alliance, seeks to both bring art to other parts of Russia and to bring art from the provinces to Moscow. He works with the local municipal governments to fund contemporary art projects, including bringing in exhibitions and supporting local artists, and he

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[99] Interview with author on October 27, 2012

[100] As reported in *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (Charnay 2012).

started by making the city of Perm into a "cultural center." He also has a commercial side to this plan, and intends to bring the art of the artists from the provinces to Moscow collectors. Gelman sees himself as playing a bridging role. On one hand, he will attract attention to unrecognized artists. On the other, he will make high-quality artwork available to Muscovite buyers at a lower price point, giving a larger audience the chance to buy art. While his strategy for building the market in the 1990s was to get the rich to collect, now his hopes are centered on the middle-class collector. In Chapter Three, which focuses on the restrictive role of the state in contemporary art, I return to Gelman, whose recent clashes with the state prompted him to leave Russia in 2015.

*2000–2008: Time of Growth*
By 2000, the economic vulnerability and unpredictability of the 1990s was giving way to increased stability under Putin. Whereas only the rich had been getting richer in the 1990s, the middle class was now beginning to develop and expand, too. The effects were positive for the art world, which would expand rapidly throughout the subsequent decade. The galleries that had been outposts and incubators of contemporary Russian art could finally move beyond their role as exhibition spaces to focus on selling. The period between 2001–2008 was particularly prosperous for the Russian art world. For example, the total sale of Russian fine art at auction increased by 730 percent from 2003 to 2008.[101] In 2004, the London-based auction house MacDougall's opened, which was the first to specialize exclusively in Russian art. A year later, the auction powerhouses of Sotheby's, Christie's, and Bonhams started holding Russian art sales for the first time.[102] Most of this Russian art was bought by Russians.

The 2000s saw a shift away from flashy consumption and toward greater discernment and seriousness in art collecting. During the 1990s, the newly rich had been most interested in buying houses, expensive cars, designer clothes, and luxury trips (and hotels) abroad. By the middle of the 2000s, however, opening an art gallery, museum, or foundation had become the trendy hobby among oligarchs and especially their wives, girlfriends, and daughters. Although many in the art world disparaged such pet projects at first, some of the new institutions have become influential and important hubs for contemporary art in Russia. Indeed, they play a critical role in funding arts in a country that severely lacks the proper infrastructure and institutions to build a thriving art community.

One of the most significant examples of an oligarch-funded success story is the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. Founded by Dasha Zhukova, the wife of oligarch Roman Abramovich, Garage is now the most important contemporary art museum in Russia and enjoys a steadily improving international reputation. Beyond exhibiting art, Garage has educational programs, fellowships for artists, ongoing research projects (including the *Family Tree of Russian Contemporary Art;* see Figure 18*),* and the country's first archive and library of contemporary Russian art.

[101] Artnet Price Database
[102] Although Sotheby's and Christie's have offices in Moscow, the actual auctions of Russian art take place in London. Because of legal restrictions, it is difficult to hold auctions (and art fairs) in Moscow. This has, inevitably, hurt the market.

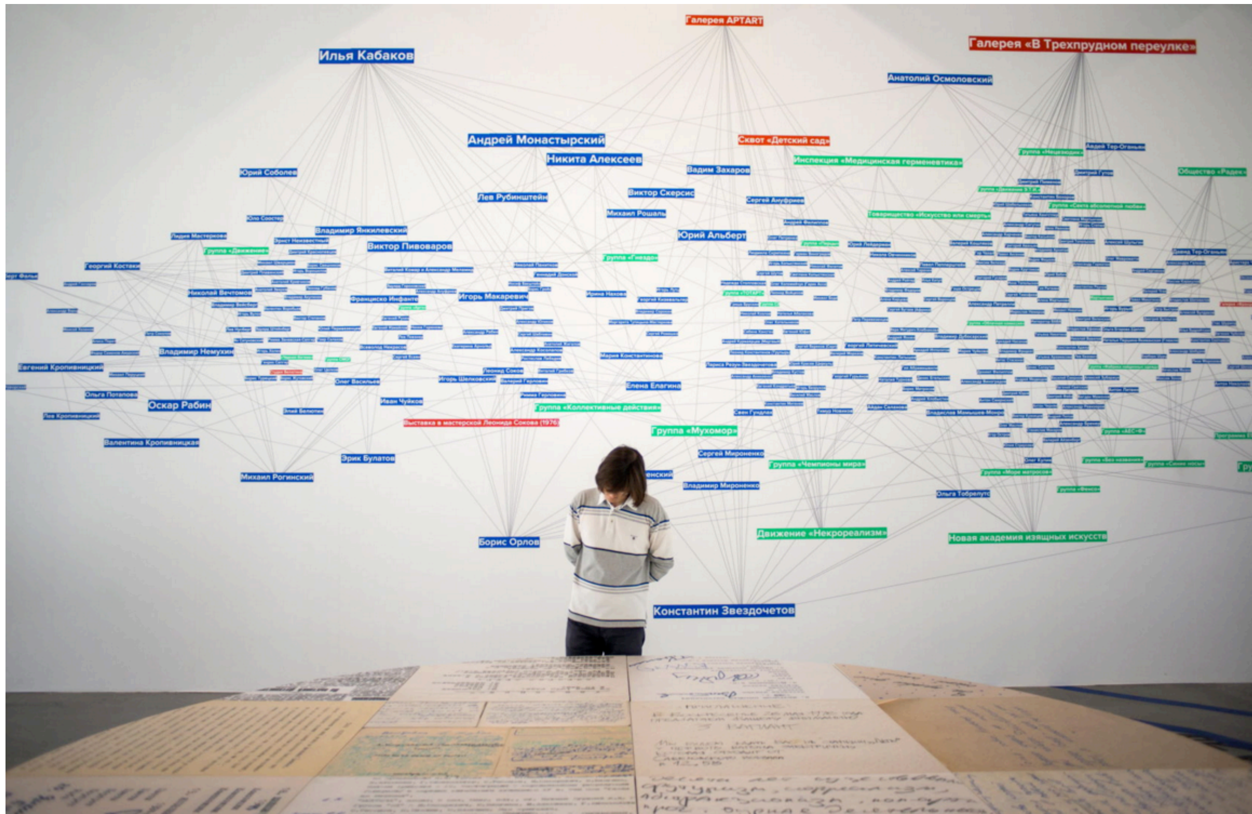

Figure 18: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, *Family Tree of Russian Contemporary Art* (2016). Photo: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art

On the market side, one of the most triumphant achievements of the oligarch-funded institutions is the development of "art clusters" around Moscow. These art clusters (also referred to as "creative clusters") first appeared in the mid-2000s and have become the anchor of Moscow's contemporary art scene. The most popular clusters include ARTPLAY, Vinzavod, FLACON, Proekt Fabrika, and the Red October chocolate-factory complex. They are mostly located in formerly industrial spaces that have been repurposed and reconstructed to accommodate a host of cultural activities (in commercial and non-commercial formats) such as galleries, artists' studios, design schools, cafes, bars, shops, and large-scale cultural-exhibition projects, such as contemporary art shows, music festivals, and art workshops and lectures.

The art clusters have become essential to the contemporary art world in Moscow. By centralizing arts exhibition, arts education, and art sales into attractive new cultural destinations for Muscovites, the clusters have generated "buzz" and a sense of artistic community in a way that isolated galleries or museums do not. Further, they have broadened the consumer base for contemporary art, not only by housing galleries but by offering lecture series and educational programs, including some to educate collectors. The clusters are also the closest thing Moscow has to a dedicated art district for galleries, common in large cities such as New York or London. Founders of the Moscow art clusters are keenly aware of the lack of a Moscow art district and imagine their projects to be filling that void. Sofia Trotsenko, one of the founders of Vinzavod, states on their website:

> The world experience shows that the most successful art-spots were the former industrial facilities transformed to workshops by artists. And previously abandoned areas became fancy that have allowed solving many other questions: involved districts' appearance has become better; new places of interest have sprung there; real estate property value has raised. Such centres are essential of modern metropolises. There are Leipzig Spinnerei, Zurich Lowenbrau, Berlin Kunst-Werke, New-York Chelsea, London Tate Modern, Stockholm centre Fargfabriken among them.

Trostsenko's global (or Euro-American) comparisons notwithstanding, Moscow's art clusters have a particularly Russian flair. Unlike the cultural centers in the West, which often began as squats or through direct actions, Moscow's clusters are the product of business elites. They have skipped the "starving artist" stage of grungy industrial warehouses and gone directly to the slickness of SoHo. The planners of the art clusters have also had the opportunity to see what has worked in other parts of the world, as Trotsenko points out in the quote above, thus allowing them to replicate the end products of these movements without going through the initial stages.

Trotsenko's Vinzavod is the most well-known and perhaps most successful Moscow art cluster. Vinzavod was officially opened in 2007 by Sofia Trotsenko and her husband, the businessman Roman Trotsenko. The Trotsenkos converted an old wine and beer factory ("vinzavod" literally means "wine factory") on the eastern edge of the city center into a constellation of art galleries and exhibition spaces. Vinzavod is made up of seven buildings, totaling 20,000 square meters located on privately owned property. In addition to galleries, shops, cafes, and studio space, Vinzavod also has three large exhibition spaces, which have retained the names of the old wine stores from the factory: Red Hall, White Hall, and Arched Hall. Some of the most important galleries are located here, such as the XL Gallery (the first Russian gallery to show at Art Basel and Frieze), Gelman Gallery, Regina Gallery, pop/off/gallery and Aidan Gallery.

Vinzavod is mostly self-sufficient, earning rent from galleries and shops.[103] Aside from a few large exhibitions a year, such as the "Best of Russia" photography competition, it receives no direct support from the Moscow government. Trotsenko says she has worked "to make Vinzavod as independent as possible from external economic factors." However, she also argues that the relationship with the city is important. She supports state involvement that is in line with a Western policy approach to creative industries, but with the Soviet past in mind, sees this as having limits:

> If the money is there, [the city] should, in my view, spend not only for a one-time event—that's fine too, of course—but for the development environment and education. We need projects that will enable people to invent and implement new ideas. No need to return to the Soviet Union, when the state fully subsidized culture.[104]

Educating the public about contemporary art is a central concern for Vinzavod. More than just a hip space for galleries, it has several projects for the support and promotion of art including

[103] Many complained that the high rents are hurting the galleries but that the owners of Vinzavod "don't care that galleries can't afford the rent, even though those galleries are what made them successful." Trotsenko has defended herself against this criticism, pointing out that they are not a government organization and also experience the dips in the market.

[104] Qtd. in Ostrogorsky 2012

Design Territory, Platform, Best of Russia, START, Project "The Wall," and its own publication. The START project, launched in 2011, gives unknown young artists the experience of a first solo exhibition, providing the artist with space to show, a curator, and a budget. Vinzavod then invites gallerists to preview the exhibition, giving the artists exposure that they otherwise would not receive. It also hosts a variety of lecture series and training sessions, such as the "School of Collectors and Experts." According to its website, the school "is not only an educational institution, but also a club for people who want to make art a way of life and to be guided in the art market." The *Vinzavod Art Review*, a free newspaper with a circulation of 30,000, is distributed in museums, galleries, movie theaters, and cafés and includes interviews and information about the local art scene.

*The Comedown: Staying Afloat after 2008*

The 2008 financial crisis struck the Russian art world hard. Throughout the 2000s, galleries sprung up around Moscow and sale prices climbed. But after the crisis, as many described to me, the market dried up. Prices for Russian artists began to drop and galleries found they could no longer afford the rent in Moscow, having gone from selling nearly 20 pieces per month to struggling to sell one. After 2008, many galleries either left or repurposed themselves. In 2012, for example, Gelman Gallery, XL Gallery, and Aidan Gallery shifted to non-commercial formats. Here I give two galleries' experiences of navigating the tough post-crisis art market.

*Gallery 21*. When I first met Gallery 21 founders Ksenia Podoinitsyna and Stas Uiba in February 2013, their gallery was relatively new (their first exhibition was in December 2011) and was attracting considerable buzz and positive attention from the Moscow art world. I was struck then by their fresh energy—they seemed different from the other gallerists I had interviewed. In their mid-twenties at the time, they were also the youngest gallerists I had met and had both been educated in the West. I went to several openings at the gallery, and while they were relatively small, I was impressed with the curating and attention to detail. In addition to exhibitions, they also had an evening lecture series open to the public.

At that time, they worked closely with about ten artists, and optimistically estimated that they would increase to 60 to 100 artists in the next five to ten years. They focused on younger Russian artists who were just beginning their careers—many who "can't even afford a metro ticket." For Podoinitsyna and Uiba, working with these young artists served three purposes. First, they believed a strong and up-and-coming contemporary art scene would help improve Russia's perception abroad by showing the international community that Russia should be known for producing more than just oil. Russians are interested in something aside from oil. Second, supporting young artists would help to create a Russian "brand" of art that is recognizable internationally, just as Chinese contemporary art has become in the past few years. And finally, on a practical note, young artists typically cost much less, and having a lower price point helps to introduce collecting to the middle class. Gallery 21 sold pieces priced between $500 and $5,000, considerably less than the $40,000 paintings at the Triumph Gallery, for example.[105]

Podoinitsyna and Uiba had carefully thought out their plan for Gallery 21 and had the youthful energy to carry it out. But by the time I returned in the fall of 2014, their gallery appeared to be closed. It turned out that the gallery technically still existed, but while they were trying to figure out their next move they did not have a physical space. This was not an altogether bad thing,

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[105] One of the problems with pricing in Russia, they explained to me, is that the production costs for the art are generally three times more than that in the West. Collectors in Russia do not want to pay the inflated prices, especially compared to the cheap prices they could get in the 1990s, or that they could get for a comparable level artist in the West.

as Uiba remarked: "It's actually good to lay low for now. With the political situation [in Ukraine], no one is buying any art right now anyway." They found the already delicate art market was unable to withstand the financial instability brought on by the sanctions in 2014:

> KP: [Art] is just not important enough to people, there isn't enough compelling [collectors] to take part in the art world. It's the first thing people stop buying.
> SU: And in order to get people out you need to make it so simple for them, like kindergarten. For example, if it's raining or there's no parking, no one will come to an exhibition or a fair or event… it's so frustrating.[106]

Their expectations of the gallery scaled back considerably. Whereas Podoinitsyna and Uiba once worked with ten to 12 artists with the hope to grow, they now planned to only have around four. And while they intended to eventually reopen their physical gallery space, they conceded the format had to change in order for them to stay in business. To make ends meet, they started an "art advising" business that provided services such as helping other galleries deal with the logistical headaches of working with art in Russia, such as legislation, transportation, and customs; getting art pieces commissioned; and even advising on interior decorating.

The year and a half had made quite a difference for the fledgling gallery. When I caught up with them in the fall of 2014, their attitude remained determined ("We will never stop!" Podoinitsyna declared), but it was obvious they had a newly developed cynical edge as they recounted the myriad roadblocks they had encountered in the past year, such as prohibitively expensive international art-fair fees of up to $20,000, losing their gallery due to renovations (and not being able to afford space at Vinzavod), the continued lack of middle-class collectors, international sanctions, and the constant struggle for name recognition. It remains to be seen if and how Gallery 21 will continue in the battered Russian market.

*Triumph Gallery*. Not all galleries struggled completely, however. Dmitrii Khankin's Triumph Gallery has managed to not only stay in business, but to continue expanding. Staying in the art market after 2008, the Russian art publisher Danila Stratovich once told me, required a "secret weapon"—a financial backer with seemingly limitless funds.

It was no secret in the Russian art world that Triumph had money, and Khankin was frank about it. When I first met him in October 2012, he "joked" to me that his rules for running a successful gallery were to never have an exhibition without a catalogue and never have plastic glasses or cheap wine at an opening. (Of the ten or so openings I attended at Triumph, this held true.) Triumph's success is more than skin deep, however. It puts on large exhibitions with substantial budgets that take place outside of the gallery and frequently partners with arts institutions such as Manezhe and the Moscow Museum of Modern Art to host exhibitions. Triumph also holds shows outside Russia, in places such as Berlin, Kiev, and London. It boasts a large roster of artists and usually changes exhibitions every ten days or so.

However, Triumph does not only conduct high-visibility events. It has long supported young artists, and in 2013 Khankin started the Department of Research Arts, which aims to "organize educational projects and exhibitions that can build bridges between contemporary artists and social scientists" by exploring "the modern anthropological and geographical processes taking place in Russia using modern artistic practices." The department organizes public talks that "stimulate the dialogue between art and sciences and also shift the focus from high technologies

[106] Interview with author on September 15, 2014

and natural sciences to social sciences and humanities."[107] Much like the recent projects of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Triumph Gallery is attempting to extend conversations about Russian contemporary beyond the sphere of rich collectors.

## BUYERS

The number of art collectors in Russia is small. While it is difficult to know an exact figure, many estimate that only a few hundred people are collecting contemporary art in Russia—with only around a dozen "serious" collectors. To be a serious collector means having a high profile and major influence; taking part in international exhibitions; establishing museums, foundations, galleries, or art media; or being in some other way involved with promoting the arts. Most collectors are based in Moscow, and to a lesser degree, in St. Petersburg. While they mostly collect Russian contemporary art, they have been increasingly collecting Western art.[108]

Despite the small numbers, the past decade has seen a well-documented rise in the number of art collectors from Russia, prompting the former Moscow-based art journalist John Varoli to suggest in 2009 that "the recent rebirth of private art collections in Russia has been one of the most significant cultural and social movements in the country over the past 20 years." When chronicling this increase in Russian collectors, the news media—particularly in the West—has consistently framed their entrance into the international art market as (1) another example of the conspicuous consumption and attempt to buy status of the newly rich, or (2) a sign that their tastes are finally "growing up," a euphemism that suggests that now they finally have the "right" taste—as Western collectors have. A telling example of the Western media's lack of seriousness is the cheeky 2010 article "How to Sell Art to Oligarchs," by the Washington DC-based art dealer Mark Kelner, in which he advises anyone trying to sell to a Russian oligarch to consider a sex change if you are a man ("it helps to be a girl, or the daughter of another oligarch, or the model/girlfriend of yet another") and to know one's colors ("walk-ins would drop by and announce, 'Hi. We have a red couch. Do you have anything in red?' … If I called it 'rouge', well, that was an extra $500").

But it was not only the international media that propagated the image of the Russian collector as unrefined mark. My conversations with foreigners involved in the Russian art world—from dealers to auction houses to even other collectors—were similar. The accounts I heard ranged from gleefully disparaging ("they collect ghastly, low-brow crap!") to dismissive ("Russians are obsessed with showing others their worth") to annoyed ("If I advise one way, they will always do the opposite") to suspicious ("Trust me, they're not collecting because they love art") to patronizing ("The potential of the Russian art market is huge—we just need to convince them of this"). Like the media, many evoked the caricature of the "New Russian", a negative label for the *nouveau riche* that became popular in the 1990s[109] to describe the collecting habits of Russians and

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[107] From the Department of Research Arts website, researcharts.ru.

[108] A (non-exhaustive) list of some of the most recognized collectors in Russia includes the Ekaterina Foundation (Ekaterina and Vladimir Semenikhin), Igor Markin, the Sepherot Foundation, Pierre Brochet, Viktor Bondarenko, Stella Foundation (Stella Kesaeva), Shalva Breus, New Foundation, Moshe Kantor, Petr Aven, the Igor Tsukanov Family Foundation, Dasha Zhukova and Roman Abramovich, and German Titov.

[109] In general, the label "New Russian" referred mostly to young or middle-aged men (and by extension, their girlfriends and wives) who became wealthy after the end of the Soviet Union from finance, business or crime and were known for their lifestyles of conspicuous consumption. The term is a loaded one, however, and served a larger function in post-Soviet culture beyond demarcating the burgeoning boundaries of class membership. Not only to describe an emerging economic stratum of the population, the image of the New Russian also served to illustrate a new mentality in Russia, one that was directly opposed to Soviet values. Those who were "old" Russians—the rest of

continues to be heard today. Humphrey (2002) described New Russians as obsessed with consumption-as-status, "firmly attached to Western styles and to the accumulation of elite and luxury goods. One of the first things they do, if successful, is to travel abroad and then try to reproduce the signs of capitalist practices in Russia" (58). Elsewhere I have similarly argued that because of the absence of an elite class after which to model themselves, the formation of an upper class in postsocialist Russia was a result of the emulation, and therefore reproduction, of a foreign Western bourgeoisie (Herrala 2011).

Commentators described the New Russians of the 1990s as the ultimate Veblenian conspicuous consumers. Obsessed with well-known brands, they not only wanted the best of everything, but wanted to make sure others knew they had the best. As one art publicist put it, they were essentially buying bragging rights. Konstantin Grigorishin, whose art collection is estimated to be worth $300 million, is a typical example of this. While collectors usually tend to focus on a certain style, time period, or even region of art, the unifying principle of Grigorishin's collection is simply to have the best of whatever type of art it is—"only the top names" (Telitsyna 2012). For collectors like Grigorishin who wanted only the "top names," it also mattered from *where* they were purchasing their art. Buying from the most prestigious outlets, such as Christie's and Sotheby's, conveyed status. One art critic went as far as to insist that auction houses are knowingly selling fakes to Russians, often in private sales instead of at auction, because the auction houses could easily "prey on their naivety." The twist, he told me, was that even if the Russian buyers *know* or suspect that they are being sold fakes, they "wouldn't even necessarily care," so strong is the allure of the brand and, more importantly, the potential to gain status.

These were some of the more cynical accounts of Russian collectors. But from where do these ideas come, and what can explain this behavior and the perceptions that people have of Russian collectors? How much of it is truth and how much is based on misinformed stereotypes? Much of the sociological literature views art collecting as a tool used by elites to demonstrate class status and membership (Veblen [1899] 2007; Weber 1978; Bourdieu 1984; Ostrower 1998) or to consolidate and retain power (DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Zolberg 1990). In general, the prevailing argument is that art is a rarefied interest generally only available for those with the wealth to afford it, and its acquisition demonstrates a way in which the dominant class uses the status that comes with art collecting to achieve social class distinction. The accounts of Russian art collectors I give above seem to conveniently fit into these theories—and in many ways they do. However, as Winegar (2006) points out, these theories are explaining a *Western* tradition of art and collecting, where "possessive individualism and the desire to create disciplinary systems of classification are paramount" (347). Reasons for collecting vary, especially by culture, yet this is generally ignored in popular accounts of Russian collectors. Instead, their motivations, and thus the meaning of their collections, are judged against "an imaginary, essential collector" based on an historically constructed ideal of an "autonomous" collector (Vázquez 2001:3). Even if Russian collectors are attempting to emulate Western ones, understanding how they got to the point of collecting in the first place—or why they think they need to have collections like those in the West—already suggests the need to expand the way in which we examine art collectors. As I suggest at the

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the Russian population, particularly members of the intelligentsia—viewed them with disdain, turning them into the most frequent subject of *anekdoty* in the 1990s (Graham 2003:43). While membership in this social group was variable and not entirely defined (Balzer 2003; Humphrey 2002), it nonetheless became a rhetorical device used to grapple with and explain the abrupt and difficult shift to capitalism. Reflecting this imprecise formulation of the New Russians, Graham (2003) attempts to sum up the public opinion of them as a "filthy rich, amorphous, quasi-mythical social-class-*cum*-criminal-subculture" (37).

beginning of this chapter, it is necessary to contextualize collectors within the cultural specificity of Soviet history and the postsocialist present.

By situating present-day collectors in this way, I show how socialism has had a significant and lasting impact on the development of the Russian art *habitus*, and as a result, on collectors as well. Many people in the Russian art community, for example, believe that many Russians lack the cultural capital necessary to understand and appreciate modern and contemporary art. This lack of competency has prevented the government and general public from supporting the arts and stymied the growth of the contemporary art market. In this view, most Russians do not possess the knowledge to recognize contemporary work as art; their habitus is not one that includes the skills and expertise.[110] This might seem surprising in a country that has long had an emphasis on high culture and fine arts, and indeed had many important collectors at the turn of the nineteenth century (as I will discuss in greater detail below). Yet the cultural policies of the Soviet Union combined with its restrictive art education fundamentally altered the trajectory of collecting in the postsocialist period.

In the following sections, I examine the history of collecting and art education in the Soviet Union, which allows us to see how art collecting has developed in the post-Soviet period—and the reasons for the negative attitudes it inspires. Doing this allows us to go beyond superficial accounts of status-seeking *nouveaux riches*, revealing a much more complex story of how collecting has developed in the postsocialist period and why. I find that many collectors had complicated feelings about collecting, including most importantly a deep sense of responsibility to simultaneously preserve the past, support the present, and help develop the future of art in Russia.

*History of Collecting*

Russians collected art long before oligarchs came along. Some of the most important collections in the world were being amassed during Russia's Silver Age at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, establishing a strong tradition of art collecting and patronage.[111] It was during this period that art collecting expanded from the more conservative and traditionally-minded aristocratic collectors (such as the Gagarins, Golitsyns, and Tolstois), to include those interested in contemporary art. These collectors, known as the "Moscow merchants," were a group of entrepreneurs born from the capitalist development and embourgeoisement of imperial Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. This group included Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov, arguably two of the most famous Russian collectors in history.[112] As a result of adopting the "middle-class values" of their Western counterparts, the merchants developed an "aspiration toward and claim to intellectual awareness, an increased desire to attend scholarly meetings devoted to the arts, and, not least, a vigorous interest in connoisseurship in collecting works of art both antique and modern, Russian and non-Russian" (Bowlt 1991:108). They differed from the established, aristocratic collectors preceding them in that they focused on contemporary art of the

[110] It is important to note, however, that having a general public that is not intimately familiar with art is not altogether different from the West. Plattner (1996) finds that the market in the United States only supports a small percentage of artists, while Halle (1992; 1996) suggests knowledge of "high culture" is not that common even among dominant classes, and that many American collectors do not even know much about the art they collect. Similarly, Moulin (1987) points out that the market for painting in France is not concerned with the general public; rather, it is dependent on a *limited* public of collectors.

[111] For an account on the emergence of private collections in Russia, from the time of Peter the Great, see Neverov 2004.

[112] For more on the Moscow merchants and collectors of this time period, see Dudakov 1989, Bowlt 1991, and Kean 1994, Polunina 2003, Neverov 2004.

period that was modern and "forward looking": Moscow modernists and the Russian avant-garde, in addition to notable Western artists such as Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso.[113]

After the October Revolution, however, private property was nationalized, including items of "cultural heritage" such as art. The art market that was being built in Russia—specifically Moscow—from the active collecting of the merchants was wiped out after the Revolution. A series of decrees were introduced throughout 1918 that legalized the confiscation of cultural objects. The major art collections of the court, nobility, bourgeoisie, and church were seized and transferred to museums or put in the state's care (Dudakov 1989). Private individuals with smaller collections and other owners of private art (such as institutions) were required to register all artistic property with Narkompros (People's Commissariat of Education and Enlightenment).[114] A considerable amount of art left the country during this time.

Yet despite its illegal status, art collecting continued throughout the Soviet period.[115] Somewhat surprisingly, at the beginning of the 1920s, the state even supported it. A journal dedicated to collecting called *Sredi Colleksionerov* ("Among Collectors") appeared,[116] and during the years of the New Economic Policy, even some commerce (including among auction houses and shops). The profile of collectors shifted, however, from the *nouveaux riches* of imperial Russia to the intelligentsia. Being a collector in the Soviet period required fewer economic resources than before; instead, one needed knowledge, skills, and connections. As a result, the majority of art collectors were political or cultural elites. Although collectors were few, their role in the creation of unofficial Russian art was great because their patronage was often the only support given to artists not officially recognized by the state.

Although there were some dedicated collectors during the Soviet period,[117] the tradition of collecting did not really transfer to the postsocialist period. One reason for this was that the Soviet collectors came from the intelligentsia—and in the globalized and increasingly financialized art market, they could no longer afford to collect. Further, because art belonged to *the people* and *the nation* under state socialism—and not to individual people—collecting was not necessarily an obvious thing to do. Even those who became collectors in the post-Soviet period believe art is a collective patrimony. The collector Maria Salina, who opened Proun Gallery in 2007, is adamant that collectors have a responsibility to share their art with a wider audience:

> I think it's important to make [one's] art available… having exhibitions—it helps to educate people about art. And art should be accessible to more people. Why should I just get to see it? That is a waste. Okay, it is "my" property*, but really it also belongs to everyone*.[118]

[113] Not unlike the collectors of the post-Soviet period, the Moscow merchants had varying degrees of knowledge and expertise of art: whereas some had an "extremely refined understanding of art," others "simply acquired works of art simply because ownership offered a traditional status symbol; others felt that the enormous walls of their Moscow *osobniaki* (mansions) needed pictorial relief and decoration" (Bowlt 1991:111).

[114] For a detailed account of the nationalization of art, see Bayer 2001.

[115] For a discussion of the art market during the Stalinist period, see Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006.

[116] *Sredi Colleksionerov* printed articles about collections, collectors, exhibitions, and even auctions (Dudakov 1989:23).

[117] Notably one of the most important collectors of Soviet nonconformist art was actually an American: Professor Norton Dodge amassed the largest collection of Soviet Noncomformist art in the world. It is currently housed at the Zimmerli Museum at Rutgers University.

[118] Interview with author on February 11, 2013

Many believed that the culture had not yet shifted in Russia to embrace art collecting—it still had not been "normalized." However, in the case of Salina and several other collectors I discuss below, this sense of communal ownership can be positive. In a society lacking support for contemporary art, any added exposure helps to further education—one of the other main reasons given for Russians limited knowledge and appreciation of modern and contemporary art. This lack of education had a big impact, as I discuss in the next section.

*Alternative Education*

Viewing art as something that is collectively instead of privately owned was not the only reason art collecting was slow to develop in postsocialist Russia. The lack of art education outside of Socialist Realism had a significant impact on Russians' understanding and preferences in art. As I discuss in the previous chapter, starting in 1932, "officially" approved art was required to be in the style of Socialist Realism.[119] The straightforward depiction of "reality" found in Socialist Realism was thought to be more easily understood by the proletariat and therefore a more effective form of propaganda. The result was the forced retreat of all other types of art to "unofficial" status. This produced a standardization and proliferation of a type of art not seen in the West (although it certainly spread throughout the Iron Curtain as well) to the exclusion of all other types of art. There was little artistic freedom and support to create art, which in turn shaped the artistic community at large. The field of art during the Soviet era, then, was defined by a uniform style and standard controlled by the Communist Party.

Socialist Realism constricted not only artists, but also the average Russian citizen. Exposed only to Socialist Realist art, Russians were cut off from the trajectory of art history during this time, which produced an "alternative art history" from that of the West. Russians learned specific traditions and styles, ending with early modernism in 1932. Art-history education effectively ended with early Picasso. This truncated account of art history extended from schoolchildren to the university level, and few Russians received art education beyond the Soviet canon. The result, as collector and gallery owner Sergei Gridchin told me, is that

> …debates of whether or not Malevich is art still continue! There is a return to the Middle Ages in Russia… A return to orthodoxy… the idea of what is good art is archaic. People think good art is [pre-revolutionary collector] Shchukin's collection… Not only do people not understand contemporary art, but they are often are afraid of it.[120]

Many of my interviewees believe that Russians tend to not like contemporary art because they do not see the particular social and historical circumstances from which such art was born. In other words, they do not see how it is linked to the specific artistic tradition they knew.

According to many in the Russian art world today, this knowledge gap is responsible for Russians' dislike and lack of understanding of contemporary art even today. As the art critic Clement Greenberg famously argued in his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," realist art is "predigested for the spectator" and "spares him the effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art" (1939:9). According to Greenberg, realist art deadens the ability to experience art beyond a superficial reading. Decades

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[119] By decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party ("On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations").

[120] Interview with author on October 12, 2012

of this “lack of effort” calcified and reproduced over time. This type of argument is how many explain why realism remains popular even today—and also why Russians are seen to have “bad taste” in art.

*Art Collectors in Russia Today*

What does the art market look like today? Who is considered a collector? The Russian world of collectors is stratified, divided by those who are considered serious collectors, and those who are just considered clients or customers. Stratification within an art market is hardly unique to Russia. Moulin (1987) distinguishes between “major” and “small” collectors within the French painting market. Although the major collectors are not in the majority of buyers, “it is their tastes, financial resources, and rate of acquisition that set the tone for the market as a whole” (79). The small collectors, who are greater in number, tend to purchase less expensive paintings that are a reflection of mass taste instead of “high art.”

*Clients* are characterized by their potential to purchase as opposed to their seriousness about the art itself. They do not have cohesive collections, nor do they necessarily have a passion for art. These are generally the Russian buyers who are most often perceived as *nouveaux riches* with poor taste. This was particularly the case in the period between 2000 and 2007, when the number of Russian art consumers increased substantially. The Russian rich bought art for both status and decoration. One Moscow gallery owner explained to me that in addition to working with several serious collectors, he also has numerous clients who “tell me ‘I need something yellow to fit a square space on the wall.’ They have free space on the wall and want something to match their color scheme.” Conversations with gallery owners and auction-house specialists revealed that clients often lacked the cultural background typically associated with the serious collectors. Rather, they hired designers from the West who, according to the director of a major auction house, sold them “uninteresting design ideas for too much money and capitalized on their [art] ignorance.” The designers encouraged them to buy expensive and extravagant pieces. This inflated the demand, and thus the prices, for Russian art. As a result, many of these Russian clients were victims of bad deals, including being sold fake and overpriced art.

There has been a significant shift, however, in the consumption patterns of clients. After the financial crisis in 2008, uninformed and flashy purchases significantly decreased. In the 2000s, buying any expensive art—regardless of quality—seemed to be sufficient for showcasing status. However, after nearly a decade of bad deals, fakes, inflated prices, and tasteless art, clients appear to have become more refined, or “grown up.” One current collector insisted that the first Russians buying art were “a little dumb, collecting only because they had money—easy money.” Now, however, these clients tend to buy only the best: art with good provenance that is 100% guaranteed and of museum quality. Yet while they now take the time to be informed (or at least have better art advisors), their purchases may still be considered by some as status-seeking: many search exclusively for “big name” masterpieces, as does the collector Konstantin Grigorishin, discussed in the previous section.

Unlike such status-seekers, some Russians collect art anonymously. It is both clients and collectors who may want to keep their collections private, or at least to maintain a low profile. Former art journalist John Varoli notes that

> The issue of prestige is more private than public. The vast majority of collectors buy anonymously, and they show their art works to a small circle of friends and business partners. They like to be able to say, ‘And I bought this Korovin at

Sotheby's.' Few have a desire for their collections to be known publicly" (qtd. in Friedman 2008).

I came across this assertion in many of my interviews, from different locations within the field of art. Most commonly it was expressed by gallerists, who were the secret keepers for many of these collectors.[121] But it also came up in my interviews with the collectors themselves. Although several of the collectors with whom I spoke were very public and vocal about their collections, a smaller portion insisted on anonymity—even for questions as seemingly innocuous as the size of their collection. When I asked one collector this, she was noticeably uncomfortable.

> XX: I have been collecting for nearly 15 years and have… over 3,000 pieces. But—I'm telling you this as a friend. Please, please do not mention my name in your paper.
> *EH: Of course—you will be anonymous. But can I ask, why does talking about your collection publicly make you uncomfortable?*
> XX: For security reasons. And because I don't want to seem like I'm bragging. I never tell anyone the size of my collection.[122]

Some art buyers also want to remain anonymous for legal reasons. An international art lawyer also suggested to me that some Russians purchase art to hide assets and more easily transfer money out of Russia.[123] As he put it, it is easier to transfer a piece of art, which is often purchased and sold anonymously, across borders than it is to transfer large sums of money.[124] Others said that members of government who buy art often want to stay out of the limelight because in general, government salaries are not high enough to fund museum-quality art purchases. In order to prevent suspicion of potentially nefarious links to money, government officials hide their high-status consumption.

Unlike clients, *collectors* are passionate about art and have cohesive, directed, and thoughtful collections. The international art world began to take Russian collectors more seriously in 2004, after billionaire Viktor Vekselberg purchased the entire Forbes Fabergé Collection for more than $100 million. This exemplified a growing trend of Russians buying back their national art, the sales of which have dramatically increased in the past twenty years. At Sotheby's alone, the totals for Russian art ballooned from $7.6 million in 2000 to $106.2 million by 2005 (Spiegler 2006). This shift in the art market has largely been explained as a Russian reclamation of national heritage, inspiring comparisons to pre-Revolutionary collectors.

Russian collectors have garnered significant attention not only with regard to national art but also in the market for internationally recognized paintings. At a Sotheby's auction in May 2008, billionaire Roman Abramovich made history by purchasing Francis Bacon's *Triptych* for

[121] It should be noted that market secrecy—including keeping prices secretive and protecting the anonymity of buyers' identities—is not unique to Russia by any means. It is a common characteristic of nearly all art markets (Moulin 1987; Velthuis 2005; Horowitz 2011).
[122] Interview with author on April 25, 2013
[123] An example of this is the Russian oligarch Dmitrii Rybolovlev, whose burgeoning art collection became a way to clear his assets out of Russia after his company, Uralkali, was investigated by the government. He sold his stake in Uralkali for an estimated $5 billion. But the cash was creating problems for Rybolovlev, so he had his art advisor find "mobile assets" in which to put his money, including a $127.5 million Leonardo da Vinci and a $183 million Gustav Klimt (Knight 2016).
[124] Interview with author on June 7, 2012

$86.3 million, making it the most expensive post-war work of art, and Lucian Freud's *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* for $33.6 million, the highest price ever paid for a work by a living artist. These pieces signaled his debut as a serious collector, and in just three years, Abramovich and his wife Dasha Zhukova opened Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, by far the most important contemporary art museum in Russia. With an estimated net worth of $9 billion in 2015, the *ARTnews* described Abramovich as "among the most deep-pocketed art collectors in the game," and the couple has been included on the *ARTnews*' "Top 200 Collectors" list every year since 2008.

Historically, art collecting in Russia is not without precedent. As I mention above, there were roughly a few hundred collectors in the Soviet Union (see Burrus 1994). Most were concentrated in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. Because collecting was illegal and potentially dangerous, they collected privately and quietly. After *glasnost*, collecting became more open. Valerii Dudakov, who "took to collecting with a political mission" and an "activist's approach," founded the Collector's Club in 1987 with the help of Raisa Gorbachev (Mudrak 1999).[125] Dudakov was devoted to building a community of collectors, and he frequently lent pieces of his own collection to exhibitions in Russia and abroad (Dudakov 1989). In some ways, the legacy of these Soviet collectors persisted, as many of their collections became the basis for collections in post-Soviet Russia. For example, the collection of businessman Petr Aven, one of the most well-respected collectors in Russia, is modeled after the collection of the Soviet collector Solomon Shuster. Another Soviet collector, Ilia Silberstein, opened the important and influential Museum of Private Collections at the Pushkin Museum in 1994.

Those who started collecting in the beginning of the post-Soviet era often possessed higher levels of cultural capital as a result of having grown up in "good Soviet families" that were part of the intelligentsia. As the wife of a collector from one such family notes,

> …the intelligentsia background is important for collectors. The fact that [her husband] collects is not questioned; being someone who is 'legitimately' cultured and educated means that it seems obvious he would have taste. Someone like Abramovich, however, grew up poor and made his money in the 'nouveau riche' way. Therefore, when he started collecting art, people just assume it is for status. I don't think that's true, but it's what people see.[126]

Now, however, the character of collectors has changed. Even if their origins are centered in the intelligentsia, today they come mainly from the business world rather than the intellectual elite: "Art collecting—once synonymous with cultural capital and intellectual know-how—now moved into the realm of economic capital" (Bayer 2008:80). This change is partially a function of who can afford such an expensive hobby. While some lawyers and doctors have the means to collect on a significant scale, that opportunity is generally afforded by a link with business (e.g., the doctors are managers of a big medical company). This shift is not unique to Russia, however. Crane (2009) notes that whereas in the past the majority of Western collectors were intellectuals, there has been a shift in which the business elite make up the bulk of purchasers of art, particularly the "mega-collectors." In fact, the owners of hedge funds have been known to use their skills of

[125] This later became the Collectors Union, in which anyone who possessed at least three objects was considered to have a "collection" (Mudrak 1999).
[126] Interview with author on October 23, 2012

speculation in the art world to invest in artists, and when demand for those artists' work increases, they artificially restrict the supply, resulting in higher prices for their own collections.

Many serious Russian collectors now also engage their art with the public in some way. They often felt the responsibility to share their collection with a wider audience, as the collector Maria Salina mentions above, either by organizing shows of their collections, loaning pieces to museums, or starting their own museums, galleries, or foundations. One of the earliest instances of this was the 1994 opening of the Museum of Private Collections at the Pushkin Museum. The goals of the Museum of Private Collections were 1) to be not only an art museum, but also a museum of the history of art collection; and 2) to encourage other private collectors to donate their collection "to the public." And in 2006, the businessman Igor Markin opened the first private museum of contemporary art, Art4.ru. Markin was put off by the pretension of the art world and sought to make it accessible to everyone. As the art critic Valentin Diakonov relayed to me, Markin "was the first 'celebrity' collector in Russia. Very provocative. Flashy. But he also had a true understanding and appreciation of contemporary art that was unique then." Although Markin had to close his museum after losing a significant portion of his wealth in 2008, Diakonov maintains, "he made an important contribution to art and collecting. It was fun while it lasted."[127]

Since then, there have been numerous private collectors who have opened galleries, museums, and exhibition spaces; produced art shows; published art magazines; and supported Russian artists. Many were passionate about using their knowledge and resources to help promote and educate the Russian public about art, and especially about contemporary art. In Russia the involvement of collectors, like that of the galleries, has been a crucial component for developing the field of art.[128] Indeed, many collectors take seriously their responsibility to Russian art, especially in the face of the state's censorship and reluctance to fund art. Below, I discuss Viktor Bondarenko and Pierre-Christian Brochet, two collectors driven by their sense of responsibility for preserving Russian art.

*Viktor Bondarenko*

"It's a beautiful day to drive through a Russian village, no?" Dima, my guide to Russian excess for the day, asks me. We both laugh: the day was cold and rainy and the "village" was Rublevka, the elite part of the southwest suburbs of Moscow, home to oligarchs and their multi-million dollar homes. Not that you could see most of the mansions—only their roofs peeked out from behind the 20-foot green fences. A few anachronistic *piatstenoki,* small traditional five-walled Russian houses, were sprinkled throughout the countryside. They looked oddly consistent in comparison

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[127] Interview with author on October 14, 2012

[128] While the market has been in many ways a positive force, not everyone sees it that way. Mikhail Kamenskii, the Managing Director of Sotheby's Russia, told me that the contemporary art market has become "a victim of itself. The money, fashion, luxury that was poured in the artists lowered the quality of the art. A lot of uninteresting art was made, and the value was grossly inflated." But after the crisis, the art world "came back to reality, and the value of the contemporary art that was reflecting the excesses of the 2000s dissolved. Reality turned out to be stronger than artistic representation. Now—the contemporary art market is not *dead*, but it's not very good either. When and if new energy comes into these veins, it will resurrect those artists who were gifted and strong and paid no attention to the life of luxury. They worked with universal values; their work was not dependent on trends" (Interview with author on November 19, 2012). Similarly, Dziewańska, Degot, and Budraitskis write that the market has helped to pervert Russian art: "…in the 90s, [art] tentatively formed bonds with self-proclaimed elites, the ultra-rich, and willingly or unwillingly legitimized their exclusive status. During the 2000s, in its depoliticized form, contemporary art acquired a new role in middle-class recreation and an 'effective' tool of capitalist brainwashing. Already an ally of violent neoliberal transformation, and well established as a status symbol, contemporary art had to take up a role as the demarcator between the educated few and the non-initiated masses" (2013:8).

to the architectural pastiche that surrounded them, however: Bavarian castles neighbored Victorian mansions with the occasional block of modernist design wedged between. To the left I saw a typical Russian forest; to the right, a Ferrari dealership and Prada store.

Our first stop was to see Viktor Bondarenko, a businessman, publisher, collector, and patron of the arts. Our chauffeured black Range Rover pulled up to the gate, the driver exchanged hushed words with the guard in the security booth, and the doors glided open. Dima warned me about the dog ("the largest pit bull you will ever see"), but the four black-clad bodyguards milling around the yard, chain-smoking their boredom away, seemed scarier to me. Our driver was clearly unfazed as he leaned back his seat to take one of his many naps of the afternoon. Viktor met us at the door with a giant smile and a hearty "*Ochen priiatno!*" He was wearing faded jeans and a casual oxford shirt with only one button closed. His stomach hung over the waist of his pants; he seemed not to notice.

The inside of the house was predictably, if uninterestingly, beautiful: marble floors, ornate moldings, dark colors, overstuffed furniture. Although he had some extraordinary pieces of art on display—such as a giant Konstantin Khudiakov from the "Deisis" project that was leaning against the wall of the living area (at approximately 12 feet high by 10 feet wide, it was too big to hang; see Figure 19); a mixed-media piece by the Russian artist Aidan Salakhova took up an entire wall; and the striking painting *Memento Photography* (1994–95) by Erik Bulatov nestled under the stairs—they did not entirely eclipse the generic interior-decorating attempts. The works in his house were mostly Russian contemporary art, until we came to his study, which was almost completely covered with rare Russian icons. Bondarenko is known to have one of the best collections of Russian Orthodox icons. "Here, for you," he said, as he handed me a weighty coffee table book of his collection. And that was all he said of the icons; although he has been lauded for the comprehensiveness of his collection (there are over 500 pieces), his passion now clearly lies with Russian contemporary art. He stresses the importance of supporting Russian artists: "What can I do for US or European artists? There are others out there to buy them. And if I don't support Russian artists, who will?"

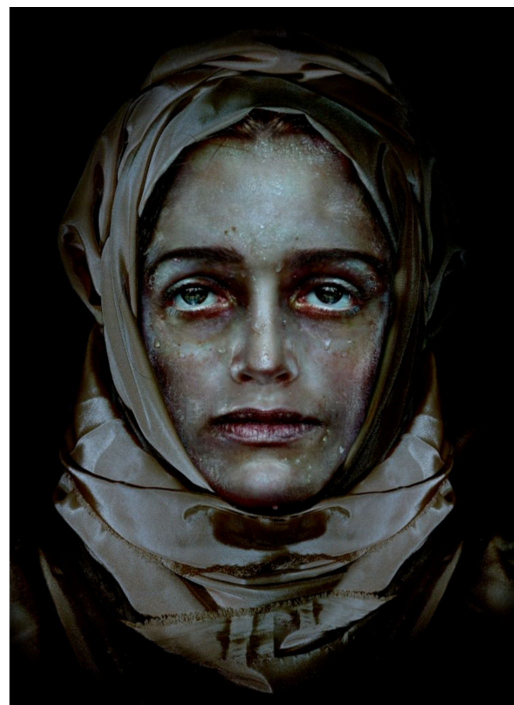

Figure 19: Konstantin Khudiakov, *Maria Omophorion* (2006). Photo: Courtesy of Viktor Bondarenko

Born in 1950, Bondarenko left the Soviet Union in 1978 as a Jewish refugee and became an American citizen in 1984. Although he worked for Prudential during his time in the United States, his lifelong interest in art led him to work with the Tatyana Gallery, the first Russian art gallery in New York City. He returned to the Soviet Union in 1989 for a business venture that brought stretch limousines to the USSR. This trip inspired him to bring Russian art to the United States. In 1992 he organized the exhibition "20th Century Russian Art: The Avant-Garde Years, the Glasnost Years" in the Museum of Nassau County in New York, which was a collaboration with the Russian Cultural Foundation.

He eventually returned to Russia, where he made his fortune—the details of which he

politely withheld during our conversation. But how he made his money notwithstanding, he has been extensively, and publicly, involved in the arts. In 2006 and 2008 he was voted by the prestigious Russian art publication *ArtChronika* as one of the "50 most influential people" in the Russian art world.[129] He has held countless exhibitions of his work, and also produced numerous art projects, including "Deisis" in 2000 and "Russia for All" in 2011. "Deisis," an extension of his interest in icons, was a collection of "portraits" of biblical figures that were created electronically from contemporary faces by the artist Konstantin Khudiakov. The project was inspired by the question, "what would modern icons look like?" and surprisingly had some support and approval from the Russian Orthodox Church. Since, however, his projects have taken a more political turn. His 2011 project "Russia for All" is described on their website as a "social movement" that uses art to support a "Russia for all nationalities and ethnicities."

His 2012 show, "Spiritual Abuse," was held at the Gelman Gallery. The exhibition showed pro-Pussy Riot paintings in addition to "religious" paintings, which included images of Jesus Christ.[130] Supposed pro-Orthodox believers protested at the show, clashing with police, and eventually the exhibition had to be closed for the evening (everyone was barricaded inside the gallery for a short time).[131] I asked him if he was scared about this investigation. "Am I scared? If Nazis came to the US and told you that certain people couldn't exist in your country and you were one of them, would you be scared?" (Me, meekly: "Yes?") He waved his hand, as if to brush away the fear. "But I will deal with these things if I have to. If men break down my doors right now with a warrant and start destroying everything, I'll deal with it then." He was not especially scared or worried. Was he comfortable making a political statement with his projects? "Political statement? Yes. At first I was just interested in icons, but now I feel like someone has to say something… it's important to use art to show the contradictions and problems with the political system here. Russia says they are a democracy but they are not."

*Pierre-Christian Brochet*

The French-born publisher Pierre-Christian Brochet has been living in Russia since 1989, when he was sent to Moscow to publish books about Russian art and culture. Brochet is considered one of the most important collectors of contemporary Russian art, particularly of unknown artists. Before moving to Russia, he was involved in the art scene in France and Germany and was frequently working with or in the company of artists. In Russia, he found that this did not change: he spent much of his time with artists (including his Russian wife, whom he married in 1992) because they were the only ones in "society" with whom he could relate. As he put it, "everyone else in the city was obsessed with money… and they still are."

I visited Brochet at his beautiful fifth-floor apartment near Chistye Prudy on a sunny fall afternoon. Unlike the *nouveau riche*-styled mansion of Viktor Bondarenko, Pierre's apartment was that of an intellectual: pre-war, with parquet flooring, high ceilings, and intricate moldings. There were three bedrooms, a dining room, living room, office, and kitchen, all full of well-curated Russian contemporary art.[132] The kids' rooms—they are teenagers—have art that is playful and subversive, fit for their age. For example, in his daughter's room was a Vinogradov and

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[129] Some estimate his collection to be worth between $30–$50 million.

[130] I discuss the details of this show in greater detail in Chapter Three.

[131] In the post-Pussy Riot atmosphere of Russia, however, this exhibition caused problems for Bondarenko and he suggested the government is investigating him for showing art that "could incite religious hatred"—a topic to which I will return in my discussion of art and the Russian state (Chapter Three).

[132] Halle (1996) argues that home display is important for understanding collectors.

Dubosarskii painting of Barbie with a shaved head; in his son's room were the works of the controversial Blue Noses Group from the series *Mask Show* (2005) in which the heads of George W. Bush, Vladimir Putin, and Osama Bin Laden have been pasted on the reclined and mostly naked bodies of the members of the Blue Noses Group with the captions "Sex!" "Drugs!" "Rock-n-Roll!" (see Figure 20). The long hallway that ran through the apartment was his "black and white corridor," an idea that ran the risk of looking like an interior design gimmick, but which he executed in a tasteful way that also showcased some of the most important names in Russian contemporary art, including the young Russian street artist Starke, Monroe (Vladislav Mamyshev), Brochet's wife Annushka Brochet, Aidan Salakhova from the early 1990s, a Pavel Pepershtain drawing, and a piece with twisted scraps of metal from Liliia Lifanova. There was a playful and sometimes unexpected element to the curation of his apartment—such as the drawing Dmitrii Gutov had done directly on the pocket doors into the dining room—that gave the living space character and a sense of the collector that was missing in Bondarenko's sterile mansion.

Figure 20: Blue Noses Group, *Mask Show* (2005). Photo: Courtesy of Pierre Brochet

After a tour of his apartment, we settled onto a small balcony overlooking Stretenskii Bulvar where we had tea and cigarettes as Brochet told me the story of how he ended up as a Russian art collector. His lifelong obsession with collecting things began as a young child in France, when his grandmother —who was poor and provincial—told him that to be a collector is to be respected. When he began collecting art, he explained, he did not always understand what motivated him to purchase a piece—a feeling he still experiences. He often feels compelled to "have all of something, even if I don't understand why." I pushed him a bit more: could he think of anything specific that would explain his desire to collect? Any feelings or emotions? He responded that he was attracted to pieces in which artists were addressing the "right" questions.

> *EH: So what are the "right" questions?*
> PB: What are we fucking doing on this fucking earth! [Laughs]

These questions, he went on, differed. But essentially he finds himself drawn to work that deals with an issue in society or larger question of existence and reality in a way that is interesting and fresh. After 20 years of collecting, Brochet can now claim some authority about whether an artist's work is "fresh." When seeing a new piece, he often asks himself: "Have I seen that kind of work before?" For example, he brought up the work of the young artist, Ania Titova: "You see, I like her work, but it appeals to me in a *Western* way, I think. I'm not entirely sure, but it seems Western to me—so I didn't buy it. Maybe I'm wrong but it didn't feel like something new in Russia."[133]

[133] Interview with author on September 13, 2014

Like many collectors, art collecting for Brochet is linked with building one's own image—"self-public relations." Through their collections, he argued, collectors are holding up a mirror of themselves, as if to say, "these artists represent also how I am trying to see the world" (even though, he conceded, collectors of contemporary art often do not understand what they are buying). Further, he believes that the egoism of art collecting also extends to the *responsibility* of building a collection—in his particular case, the added responsibility of being an established collector of young, undiscovered artists. His opinion is highly regarded, and he has become a consecrator of what is good and worthy contemporary art in Russia. As he put it, this means that he is now "in the position of helping to literally build the history of art in Russia. Once I buy someone, others do as well."[134]

He stressed the importance of the relationship between the collector and the artist, and said that the history of art depended on that relationship. He gave the example of Shchukin and Matisse:

> Would Matisse have been as famous had it not been for Shchukin's patronage and money and support? No. Sure, he was talented, but he needed promotion, he needed the money to buy the supplies and the house so that he could create his art. The history of art is about the relationship between the artist and the collector.

The sense of responsibility for Brochet, and many others, also extends to a sense of needing to help preserve Russia's culture. A common refrain among people in the art world is that no one cares about contemporary art in Russia—certainly not the government, nor people with money, it seems, since no one is buying art. So how do the artists survive? How do these works get preserved? Brochet takes these problems seriously and attempts to remedy them. Throughout his two decades of collecting, he has often bought pieces from artists simply because they needed money. Yet he did not necessarily intend to collect unknown artists; rather, they were the only artists whose work he could afford to buy when he started. He maintains that to this day, he has never paid more than $3,000 for a painting—in part because he still cannot afford more than that. "I'm broke! I have only 50 rubles in my pocket!" he said gleefully, waving a 50 ruble note in my face as I glanced through the window at a Vinogradov and Dubosarskii painting that must have been worth at least $100,000. Joking aside, however, his rationale went beyond finances. As he explained to me,

> The young artists, they need me. I never bought a Kabakov or a Bulatov because I didn't know those guys. They left before I got here in 1989. I buy from young artists whom I know. Would I like to have a Kabakov or Bulatov? Or more Vinogradov and Dubossarky? Of course! But I can't afford it. And plus, they don't need me. They have made it already.

In 2007 he organized an exhibition of contemporary Russian art that covered all four floors of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA), making it the largest of its kind until that time. It was an ambitious undertaking, organized half by time period and half thematically. The first floor included art from *perestroika* (1986) through 1993, the second floor was dedicated to

[134] He also said that the other collector who sees things "from the beginning" is Igor Markin, whom I discuss briefly above. Often he buys things before Markin does, and sometimes the other way around. Regardless, they both end up buying the same artists, Brochet contends, because they have been in the game long enough (and have good enough taste), to know what is good and what is "boring."

St. Petersburg contemporary art, the third floor spanned the period from 1996 until the present and was called "Renaissance," and the fourth floor displayed photography and video. This exhibition first alerted Brochet to the extent of his responsibility as a collector: "I understood then I couldn't make a mistake when I buy art, because people are looking to me."

Collecting, Brochet explained, is about doing something bigger than oneself and creating a life that means something. "I was at my grandfather's deathbed, and he said to me before he died, 'make sure you didn't live your life doing bullshit.' And that's what I'm trying to do."

## CONCLUSION

An air of defeat swirls around even the most dedicated individuals in the Russian art world as they struggle, often financially, to remain committed to contemporary Russian art. This is true of both market actors and collectors, who are intimately tied. Collectors rely on galleries (the "gatekeepers" of the art world) to not only sell them art, but also advise them. And sellers such as galleries and auction houses need sufficient demand to sustain their business. Indeed, as the most recent downturn in the Russian art market has shown, the effects of a weak consumer base can be felt through the Russian art world as a whole.

Yet despite Bourdieu's assertion that the market is antagonistic to the autonomy of the field of art, it nevertheless is an essential component for the existence of any field of art. And for Russia, the role that market actors and collectors play in the preservation of contemporary art is especially critical. As Marat Gelman, Vinzavod, and Triumph demonstrate, galleries in Russia often wear many hats, filling political, educational, and intellectual gaps in the art world. And nearly everyone in the Russian art world juggles many professions at once; I was continually surprised by the number of projects people pursued at once. The gallerist Sergei Popov, for example, has a Ph.D. in art history, teaches classes on contemporary art at the Surikov Moscow State Academy Art Institute, wrote a monograph about Russian contemporary art and Bondarenko's collection, and is a collector himself. He is clearly passionate about contemporary Russian art, and is adamant about the need to do "something more." Given his intellectual proclivities, though, I asked why he decided to do something commercial by opening his gallery, pop/off/art, eight years ago. "It was the most important thing to do at that moment. And still now. *It was the best way I could do the most for art in Russia—to have the biggest reach and impact*."[135]

This trend of the jack-of-all-trades, hybrid commercial gallery/museum/education center is not as common in the West, where cultural institutions and the state provide more support for contemporary art. But in Russia, "You have to sell [art] to cover special projects, exhibitions, working with museums, publishing art monographs and catalogues," as Elena Gribonosova-Grebneva, a professor of art history and curator of GOST Russian Arts Center, explained to me. "Unless you're an oligarch, you have to rely on the market to finance these projects."[136]

Whereas in other countries artists and arts institutions rely on promotion and support from the state, I show in the next chapter how the Russian state actively works against contemporary art, adopting hostile policies and attitudes. Using censorship that appears to be a relic of the Soviet era, the post-Soviet Russian state has created a culture of fear among artists and galleries. It also does not provide funding or tax incentives for institutions that promote contemporary art. Those

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[135] Interview with author on February 21, 2013
[136] Interview with author on March 17, 2013

in the Russian art world, especially those on the market side, have taken on the responsibility for filling the void left by the state.

# CHAPTER THREE
## *Russian Contemporary Art and the State*

*"What would it take change the situation of Russian contemporary art?*
*Putin would have to commit suicide."*
—Russian artist[137]

Since the Soviet period, the Russian state has played a contentious and controlling role in contemporary art. The Soviet regime's censorship and repression of art is well known, beginning with Lenin's understanding of the ideological power art could wield to Stalin's harnessing of that potential with his 1932 decree requiring all art be created in the service of furthering the goals of socialism and communism. Although censorship loosened after Stalin's death, the state remained omnipresent in the lived experiences and imagination of artists. Consider a joke (*anekdot*) the Soviet intelligentsia told during the Brezhnev years, when artists were still very much under state surveillance by the state:

> Vladimir Lenin and the Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, visit an art exhibition in Moscow. Lenin stops to examine a painting by Kazimir Malevich. Perplexed by the image, he turns to Commissar Lunacharskii. "What is this? Squares? Triangles? What does it mean? I don't understand this art." Lunacharskii shrugs. "To be honest, Vladimir Ilich, I don't get it either." And that was the last time the Soviet government did not understand art.

The irony, of course, is that the Soviet government understood art very well: it was an ideological tool that had to be tightly controlled. Understanding the value of Malevich's black square as art for art's sake was beside the point.

Although blatant censorship and "official" art ended with the Soviet Union's demise, this joke could apply in some ways to the Russian state's stance on contemporary art today, particularly after Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. Like its Soviet predecessors, the Russian state under Putin sees art, and culture more broadly, as ideologically important for nation building.[138] The current Russian state does not utilize art necessarily as an *instrument* of control and propaganda in the overt and sweeping manner of the Soviet regime,[139] but like in the Soviet period, art seen as opposing government interests has increasingly faced reprisals.

The way in which the Russian state now exerts power over contemporary art is multifaceted, using tactics of control that are both explicit and insidious. Often, the laws used to justify censorship are tied to alleged transgressions against religion—specifically, against the Russian Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church and the Russian state share many interests, in particularly those tied with issues of morality. Their increasingly close relationship has strongly influenced the development and policing of culture in the post-Soviet period, as through laws that

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[137] Interview with author, 2014 (artist requested to remain anonymous)

[138] This has, of course, happened throughout the world. Cultural policy has long been used by nations in the service of their political, economic, and nationalist goals (see Guilbault 1983; Winegar 2006).

[139] Although of course the state still uses art to further its own ideological projects. One example would be support of the far-right contemporary artist Alexei Beliaev-Gintovt. Also there is state funding for art education, although this is typically schools to train traditional and figurative painters.

"protect" the sensibilities of the religious believer. Ultraconservative and right-wing religious groups with allegiances or ties to the Orthodox Church also enjoy impunity when they vandalize and destroy art and intimidate and attack artists, claiming those artists illegally offended their religious sensibilities. Acting as unofficial enforcers of state censorship, these Church-linked vigilantes have helped create a hostile atmosphere toward contemporary art and a culture of fear among artists.

While the Russian state's censorship of contemporary art and intimidation of artists has received considerable negative attention in recent years, its attempts to control and sometimes prevent art production also happens in less dramatic, yet still effective, ways. The state also takes a "non-intervention" approach, effectively ignoring contemporary art relative to other forms of cultural production when it comes to state support. State funding is negligible, particularly for contemporary arts education and contemporary art museums, and contemporary artists do not receive benefits or employment protection. City and state cultural policies also discourage private-sector involvement by failing to provide incentives such as tax breaks and having logistically complicated laws and regulations relating to art. When coupled with a struggling art market, the expenses incurred for art-related businesses (such as galleries) and cultural institutions often become unmanageable. The paucity of state support and funding therefore affects *all* creators of contemporary art—not just those whose art offends the state.

Even artists who do not think of themselves as "political" are affected by the presence of the state. Those who do not test political limits in their work nonetheless remain very aware of what those limits are. Further, they compete for the same scarce resources made available for artists by the state and are subject to the same legal obstacles in transporting their work in and out of Russia. But the state's involvement in the lives of all artists extends even beyond Russia to the international art world. The unpopularity of Russia's political decisions in the international community—from ideological battles during the Cold War to the annexation of Crimea in 2014—has influenced how Russian art is received internationally (see Chapter Four). This ranges from Western art institutions not wanting to work with Russian artists and galleries because of the legal and political hassle to showing an obvious bias toward, and fascination with, protest art and activist art. The West's expectation that "good" Russian art be political was rooted in the Cold War, not least in the tactic of championing artists who opposed the Soviet regime.

The expectation that Russian art be politically charged did not end with the Cold War, however, and has increased in the Putin era, frustrating many artists. Artists who do not consider their own work political feel pigeonholed. While post-Soviet artists speak of the West's favorite Russian artists—the Soviet Nonconformists—with admiration and respect, many resent that in order to be noticed within the international art community, they must be resisting "Russian oppression." For example, Russian art receiving the most attention in foreign media tends to be overtly political, focusing on subjects like Putin, the 2014 Sochi Olympics, and Russia's dependency on oil. Russian contemporary artists therefore experience an uncomfortable tension: being true to their own artistic vision may limit the amount of international exposure they receive at a time when the domestic art market is weak. In the end, contemporary artists across multiple generations feel that Russian art and artists will not be taken seriously in the international art scene until Russia's political situation changes.

Being a political artist in Russia is not easy, even when it brings respect from Western critics and collectors. While artists have been an important voice of dissent, particularly performance artists of the last decade, many in the art world feel that the amount and visibility of politically motivated and critical protest art is sorely insufficient. Some attribute this to fear of the

state, while others blame apathy produced by feelings of defeat, hopelessness, inability to effect change. Most agree that self-censorship is pervasive.

In this chapter, I examine the interaction of contemporary art and the state in the post-Soviet period, showing how the state thwarts a robust field of art by (1) targeting contemporary art through censorship and other direct political interventions in the service of building a postsocialist national identity, a project centering on increased patriotism, nationalism, and ties to the Russian Orthodox Church; (2) refusing to provide government support, a form of political non-intervention that helps set the national agenda for what is considered culturally important to the state; and (3) creating an ideological and political agenda for the country that has detrimental consequences for artists in both domestic and international contexts.

## STATE CONTROL: CENSORSHIP

In this section, I examine how and why the postsocialist Russian state has used censorship to create a hostile environment for contemporary art. The laws permitting censorship have often been justified using religious or moral arguments. This is hardly surprising given the state's close relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. Beginning in the late 1990s, the state codified censorship, passing laws to make certain types of artistic expression illegal. Exhibitions were often shut down and charges brought against artists and curators said to be in violation. The violent "enforcement" of these laws was often carried out not by the police (although they too were at times called up, particularly during protests), but by ultraconservative, far-right religious groups such as Bozhia Volia (God's Will), the nationalist youth group Nashi (Ours), Narodnyi Sobor (Popular Assembly), and Obiedinennaia Pravoslavnaia Molodezh (United Orthodox Youth). These groups often act as bridges between the Orthodox Church and the state: the leader of Bozhia Volia, for example, gave a lecture on whether Vladimir Putin will become God.[140]

Why did the Russian state return to repression reminiscent of a Soviet past? In what ways did art (and culture more broadly) pose a threat to Russian society, according to the state? I argue that the renewal of censorship in Russia is the result of its nation-building project: the state has attempted to establish a cohesive narrative about "Russianness" that focuses increasingly on right-wing nationalist discourse and an increasingly close relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. In the postsocialist period, both church and state have perceived contemporary Russian art as a threat.

### *The State and Religion Take on Art*

The ideologically fueled policies of the Soviet Union that had dictated, controlled, and censored art since the 1930s ended with *perestroika* in the 1980s, finally permitting cultural freedom of expression. This period without censorship or government intervention in the arts continued after the fall of the Soviet Union, which seems unsurprising given Russia's new status as a "democratic" nation. In the 1990s, artists enjoyed unprecedented autonomy from the state and were finally free to create art. Unfortunately, the state's disinterest in the cultural sphere also meant the funding and infrastructure that had once supported artists during the Soviet period was cut substantially. In spite of the precarious economic situation, however, many artists remember the 1990s as exciting and full of possibility.

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[140] As reported by *The Moscow Times* (2014).

By the end of the decade, however, the situation started to change. As the Russian economy stabilized, the state began noticing what was taking place in the art world—which did not always coincide with state leaders' evolving vision for Russia. Vladimir Putin became prime minister in 1999 and was elected president in March 2000. In order to build the legitimacy necessary to stay in power, Putin sought to create a collective "we." This was especially important given that Russian identity had been in flux since the end of the Soviet Union. What did it mean to be Russian and not Soviet? Capitalist and not socialist? During much of the 1990s, there had been more pressing and practical concerns, such as having enough to eat and surviving the economic rollercoaster of "shock therapy." But as Russian economic and social life stabilized, the rhetoric of Putin's regime increasingly explored Russian identity and nationalism, trumpeting Russia's glorious past and bright future.

Putin's regime also embraced religion and the Russian Orthodox Church as a cultural moral compass in its quest to establish a Russian national identity distinct from the Soviet past. Although the Russian constitution officially establishes the separation of church and state, the Orthodox Church has managed to gain a foothold in the dealings of the state and reassert Orthodox Christianity as central to Russian identity. The church has played a remarkably important role in the cultural landscape of postsocialist Russia, presenting itself as the arbiter and conscience of morality. The appointment of Vladimir Medinskii as minister of culture in May 2012 exemplifies how the line between state and church has been blurred. A Kremlin loyalist, Medinskii is a controversial historian who has written a series of pro-Kremlin books debunking "myths about Russia."[141] In July 2012, he suggested the Ministry of Culture was a "spiritual-ideological comrade in arms" with the Orthodox Church and that it was an act of "universal justice" for the Ministry of Culture to help rehabilitate religious memorials in order to help "return to people the ability to often think about good and evil."[142] To many in the arts community, beliefs like this held by members of government have led to the increase and normalization of censorship.

The first example of the application of religion to persecute art occurred in 1998, just before the Putin regime, but during the ascent of the Russian Orthodox Church. The artist Avdei Ter-Oganian drew negative attention from religious activists[143] when he destroyed paper reproductions of Orthodox Christian icons in his performance "The Young Atheist" (*Molodoi bezbozhnik*) at the Art Manezh art fair (see Figure 21). The religious activists campaigned for legal action, and in 1999 Ter-Oganian was charged according to Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code, which outlaws art that "incite[s]… feelings of hatred and enmity on the basis of social, religious, and ethnic belonging" (Jonson 2015:106). Facing increasing harassment by Orthodox activists before his court case, Ter-Oganian escaped to the Czech Republic, where he was given political asylum.[144]

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[141] Medinskii asserts, for example, that the history of anti-Semitism in Russia is an exaggeration, Ivan the Terrible was a humane leader, Soviet troops did not invade and occupy the Baltic states and Poland during World War II, and that large numbers of Soviet prisoners of war were not sent to labor camps upon being returned to the Soviet Union after World War II. As Medinskii told *Russia Beyond the Headlines* in 2009, "Dirty myths are purposely forged as an instrument of political propaganda or psychological warfare against certain countries. And no other nation in history [except Russia] has endured such prolonged demonization… If we do not squeeze out the poison of dirty myths, they will be passed on, like a baton, to future generations."

[142] As reported by *Interfax* (2012).

[143] These activists were part of the Committee for Moral Revival of the Fatherland (*Za nravstvennoe vozrozhdenie otechestva*), which was founded by the Patriarchate and led by Archpriest Aleksandr Shargunov (Jonson 2015:106).

[144] Ironically, Ter-Oganian's performance was not "a critique of fundamentalism, religion, image, or anything else—it was a parody of a gesture made by another artist, Aleksandr Brener. While hacking those pieces of paper, Avdey sincerely believed that he remained on art's territory, still protected by this fact. He didn't think for a moment that his gesture could exist not just in art but also in society. The idea of going to an open trial and making a statement about

Figure 21: Avdei Ter-Oganian , *The Young Atheist* (1998). Photo: Open Gallery

The case of Ter-Oganian marked the beginning of an antagonistic atmosphere toward contemporary art that continues to the present. The state went on to use Article 282, a vague and loosely worded law, in broad, arbitrary, and creative ways to suppress contemporary art over the subsequent two decades.

Article 282 has not only been applied to artists, but to those who *support* contemporary art. This includes curators, collectors, and dealers who organize shows exposing the public to "offensive" works. In 2010, Andrei Erofeev, an influential and provocative curator and the former head of the Tretiakov Gallery's Department of Current Trends, and Yuri Samodurov, the former director of the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Center, were found guilty of violating Article 282 and inciting religious hatred for their exhibition "Forbidden Art—2006," at the Sakharov Museum in March 2007.[145] The show included 20 works that had previously been banned from other exhibitions in Russia that year on the grounds that they were pornographic, antireligious, or in some way offensive or incendiary. For example, the exhibition included a painting from Aleksandr Savko's series "Mickey Mouse's Travels Through Art History," in which Mickey Mouse is portrayed as Jesus Christ (see Figure 22).[146] When the exhibition opened, right-wing

his anticlerical and antifundamentalist views (if any) never even crossed his mind" (Degot 2013:206). Although still living outside of Russia, Ter-Oganian continued to have problems with the Russian state. In 2010 his prints were excluded from a Russian art exhibition at the Louvre in Paris, which had been organized by the National Center for Contemporary Arts of Moscow, because of their "potential ability to incite inter-religious hatred" (Dziewańska, Degot, and Budraitskis 2013:43).

[145] The men did not have to serve jail time, although they were both fined: Samodurov paid 200,000 rubles (roughly $6,500) and Erofeev 150,000 rubles (roughly $4,800).

[146] In 2011 Savko's art was found by Russia courts to be "religiously offensive" under Article 282 and therefore banned from all future exhibitions. The prosecutor explained the ruling on its website: "During the court hearing, it was established that Savko's technique of uniting the image of Jesus Christ, which is sacred for Christians, and the comical

nationalist activists began protesting and requested that the prosecutor's office investigate Erofeev and Samodurov on the grounds that the works offended religious believers.

Figure 22: Aleksandr Savko, *Mickey Mouse's Travels Through Art History* (2006) © Aleksandr Savko

Viktor Bondarenko, one of the foremost collectors of contemporary art in Russia, also attracted negative attention from the Orthodox Church and the state after he helped organize "Spiritual Abuse," the 2012 solo exhibition of Evgeniia Maltseva at the Gelman Gallery. According to Maltseva, the objective of the exhibition was to "create images of Christianity that would be in keeping with the spirit of the times."[147] For Maltseva, these new contemporary "religious" icons included saints wearing balaclavas, a representation of a female Savior, and portrait of the members of Pussy Riot with halos (see Figure 23).[148] The church, however, saw this religious re-imagination as inherently offensive to believers. The secretary of the Patriarch's Council for Culture, Tikhon Shevkunov, declared the exhibition to be "an act of cynical terror

image of Mickey Mouse, which in this situation is vulgar, has turned the graphic work into a caricature of Jesus Christ. The Gospel story is therefore presented by the artist in the form of a comic, which is an extremely cynical and mocking insult to the religious beliefs and feelings of Orthodox Christian believers" (as reported in *Huffington Post* 2012).

[147] As reported in *The Calvert Journal* (Shestakova 2015).

[148] Bondarenko and Maltseva (2013) explain their motivations for the show further: "The icon must be free from the historical 'train' that carries the remnants of the slave system, feudalism, despotism, chauvinism, obscurantism, ignorance and suppression of the personality. This is why the images of the members of the feminist band Pussy Riot were used as the starting point – as a symbol of the struggle for spiritual freedom and live religious affinity; as opposed to attempts to usurp it on the pretense of 'traditional religions,' 'public morality,' 'spiritual foundations of the statehood' and other sorts of sham."

against Russian culture."[149] Pro-Orthodox believers and Cossacks violently protested the exhibition, clashing with police until the gallery had to close for safety reasons. At one point, people were even barricaded inside the gallery for a short time. Bondarenko recounted this with bemusement and irritation to me during an interview at his home, becoming particularly animated when talking about the religious activists. He considered the event ludicrous, and insisted we watch the incident in the many YouTube clips he had bookmarked, as if to convince both of us that it actually happened. "These people are crazy!" he shouted, throwing his hands in the air. "During Soviet times they didn't believe in God, and *suddenly* they're protesting this art because it's *anti-religious*? It's absurd."[150] Both Maltseva and Bondarenko were questioned as part of the investigation into whether or not the art and exhibition violated Article 282, although no charges were filed against them.

Figure 23: Evgeniia Maltseva, *х.смеш. т-ка* (2012) © Evgeniia Maltseva

Religious activists frequently damage and deface art as part of their protests, often with relative impunity, protected by a law that is riddled with ideological loopholes. The first such case of defacement was the 2003 exhibition "Beware! Religion!" at the Sakharov Center in Moscow. The purpose of the exhibition was to encourage more reflection on religion in Russian society, as something that deserves respect and critical examination—especially in regard to its relationship with the state. Religious activists, however, were outraged by the exhibition, especially the paintings by Aleksandr Kosolapov. They were further angered when Anna Alchuk, the coordinator of the exhibition, said that the Church had "completely lost its autonomy in relation to the state and blesses violence" (qtd. in Jonson 2015:109). Shortly after the exhibition opened, it was attacked by protestors who defaced most of the art by spray painting "blasphemers", "bastards", "sacrilege", and "you hate Orthodoxy, damn you!" on them (Jonson 2015:110). Although the protestors were arrested and charged with "hooliganism,"[151] they were quickly acquitted on the grounds that their violent behavior was not, in fact, their fault: it was the art that made them do it, a claim they could *legally* make under Article 282 because the exhibition *itself* elicited this extreme reaction. However, the religious activists were not finished. After being cleared of all charges, they campaigned to have the organizers of the exhibition charged with violating Article 282. In the end, the religious activists destroyed the art they found offensive and also managed to deflect responsibility for their crime onto the *organizers*.[152]

The censorship and repression of contemporary art deemed outside the ideological and national interests of the state and Orthodox Church feels similar to Soviet state tactics against the art community. Aided by legal loopholes allowed by Article 282, vandalizing, intimidation, and

[149] As reported in *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (Kvasha 2012).
[150] Interview with author on October 21, 2012
[151] As per paragraph 213 of the Russian Criminal Code.
[152] The director and co-organizer were found guilty and the coordinator was eventually acquitted.

violence have become standard methods for ultraconservative religious organizations to undermine and destroy contemporary art—and effectively act as vigilante enforcers of censorship. Whereas the Soviet Union's repression of art came directly from the state, today it has "subcontracted its role as the guardian of morality" to far-right Orthodox Christian organizations (Khodarkovsky 2015).

*Image Control*

Censoring contemporary art has also become a way to control the state's moral agenda and image. The state has become increasingly homophobic, and in June 2013 passed anti-gay legislation known as the "gay propaganda" law, which criminalizes any content seen as promoting "non-traditional lifestyles" in front of minors.[153] Since its passage, the law has been applied to cultural content from literature to Hollywood movies to art. In September 2013, the Russian Interior Ministry's St. Petersburg branch sent police officers to raid the gallery Museum of Authority after receiving a complaint about the potentially "illegal" content on display there. The Interior Ministry's official statement said, "Following an initial inspection, police seized four paintings that have been sent off for analysis, on the basis of which a procedural decision will be made."[154] Two of the confiscated paintings were by Konstantin Altunin, including *Travesty* (2013, see Figure 24), in which Dmitrii Medvedev and Vladimir Putin are wearing women's underwear, and *The Erotic Dreams of Deputy Mizulina* (2013), which featured Elena Mizulina, the Kremlin-allied Duma deputy who led the push for Russia's "gay propaganda" law on a national level. The gallery was eventually shut down, and Altunin fled to France, where he sought political asylum.

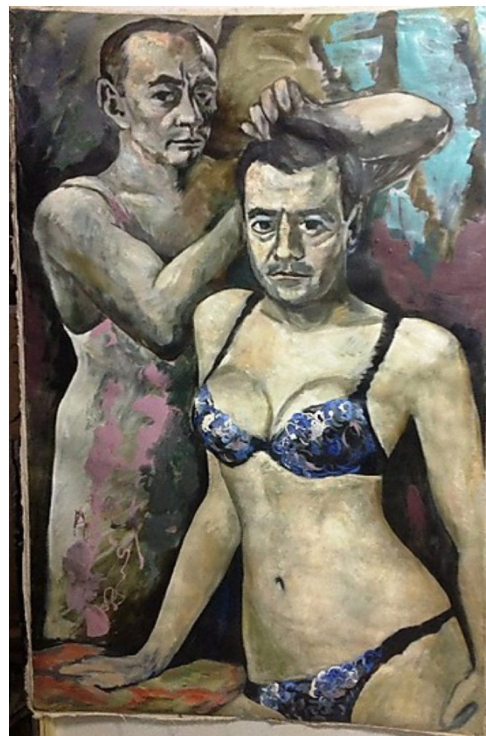

Figure 24: Konstantin Altunin, *Travesty* (2013). Photo: The Museum of Authority

In addition to being homophobic, then, the state targets art that depicts it or its leaders in a negative light. In July 2013, the Russian art world was shocked to learn that Marat Gelman, one of its most prominent figures for two decades, was fired from his post as director of the PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art—a position he had created after being largely responsible for bringing art to the city of Perm. The Ministry of Culture demanded Gelman be fired after he included paintings by Vasilii Slonov, which portrayed the Olympic rings as nooses with the accompanying text "Welcome! Sochi 2014" (see Figure 25). The work was a critical commentary on the 2014 Sochi Olympics, which had become an international embarrassment with charges of unfair labor practices and a budget of more than 50 billion rubles, most of which was rumored to have disappeared into local pockets.

[153] The law was passed "for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values."

[154] As reported in *The Wall Street Journal* (Sonne 2013).

Finally, the plight of the feminist punk-rock collective Pussy Riot is the best-known recent example of how the state fuses religion, its own image, and morality in an attempt to silence dissent. In February 2012, dressed in neon balaclavas and dresses, five members of Pussy Riot performed their one-minute punk prayer "Mother of God, Drive Putin Away" at the altar of the Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. They were protesting the relationship between Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church, for which they were eventually charged with hooliganism (or the "rude disruption of social order") after a farcical show trial.[155] Two of the women fled the country, while the other three were sentenced to two years in prison.[156] The response of the state underscored both their dismissive and controlling attitudes toward contemporary art. The Minister of Culture Medinskii said during a press conference, "Pussy Riot has no relationship to art … to modern art, to old art, to any art. They are sitting in jail not as artists, but as hooligans. *There is no censorship in the country in any form*."[157] Even their early release from prison was in the service of the state's needs: they were "coincidentally" pardoned right before the 2014 Sochi Olympics, when Russia was desperate to repair their image—increasingly damaged by the expense and corruption of the games—to the rest of the world. Releasing the artists had nothing to do with a change of the state's position on art; rather, art was once again used in the service of their larger national project.

Figure 25: Vasilii Slonov, *Welcome! Sochi 2014* (2014) © Vasilii Slonov

STATE NEGLECT: LACK OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Censorship is not the only challenge facing the art community in Russia. When discussing what makes life in the arts difficult, many point to the refusal of the state to provide support for culture and contemporary arts. The government appears to be interested in contemporary art only when seeking to control it; otherwise, it is ignored or dismissed. As one frustrated collector put it, "If Putin started buying contemporary art and showed it's important, then other people would follow suit. As it stands, people don't think it's important because there is no education, no propaganda, telling them so."[158] Similarly, many artists feel that culture and art are in a dire position because the present government is not "intellectual" enough, and does not understand how culture is

[155] For a detailed account, see Gessen 2014.
[156] Ekaterina Samutsevich was released from prison two months later on appeal, while Nadia Tolokonnikova and Maria Alekhina were sent to prison camps.
[157] As reported in *The Guardian* (Elder 2012).
[158] Interview with author, 2012 (interviewee requested to remain anonymous)

important to the nation;[159] or rather, that the state sees only certain types of culture as valuable, such as ballet and figurative art.[160]

As a result of this lack of support by the state, Russian art has been deprived of funding, there is little to no incentive (e.g., tax breaks) for businesses and organizations related to art, and the Russian art world has been largely cut off from international networks and markets because it is logistically and financially difficult to transport art in and out of the country. The Russian government offers little in terms of funding for cultural projects related to contemporary art, such as education. As of 2013, no state-organized or financed education in contemporary art existed (Jonson 2015). Many argue that even the most basic foundation is lacking for contemporary art to survive.

*Russia's Cultural Policy*

Although the Soviet Union controlled the arts tightly, it at least had some institutions and infrastructure in place to support artists—a marked contrast to the present Russian state. At the end of the Soviet Union, Russia's main goal of federal cultural policy was to move away from authoritarian control by establishing freedom of expression. Yet at the same time, the Russian state also sought to preserve cultural heritage and the network of state cultural institutions. These seemingly contradictory goals came to represent a tension within cultural policy debate which persists today: on the one hand, expanding state support for cultural production and institutions; and on the other, moving to a more privatized and commercial model of support. The state initially sought to limit its involvement within the cultural field in the 1990s, with the hopes that it would grow on its own thanks to self-supporting activities of cultural institutions, market regulations, and private sponsorship. Despite some successes of destatization, however, the state remained a main supporter in culture and the arts in the 1990s, leading Fedorova and Kochelyaeva (2013) to suggest that the "legacy of the Soviet institutional network remains the backbone of the contemporary cultural infrastructure" (42).[161] It is worth noting that the support that was provided by the state often ignored contemporary art, settling on more traditional forms of Russian culture and art such as the ballet or classical figurative painting.

This framework has contributed to the difficulty of expanding private involvement with this sector. The private and independent institutions involved with the development of contemporary art or creative industries are out of the purview of state cultural policies, in general leaving this part of the cultural sector unregulated and often times unfunded. Thus, while the state's cultural policy objectives include goals such as modernizing arts education and cultural institutions; providing for quality and diversity of services within the arts sector; building sustainable development of the culture and arts sectors; and supporting creative initiatives of the

[159] Kagarlitsky suggests that this attitude is all part of a new "official culture" that is "deeply reactionary in a cultural sense because it opposes innovation. This leads to a very interesting state of affairs. On the one hand, you have a host of new technologies, especially in the field of reproduction. But on the other hand, there is no originality whatsoever; projects are either derivative or suffer under a fundamental lack of content. You can see this problem in art, politics, advertising, whatever you like. […] It is precisely this kind of conservative modernization that the Putin project has as its aim" (2005–2007:10).

[160] For example, they recently renovated the Bolshoi Theater.

[161] What does culture mean for Russia? There is no official national definition of culture within Russian law on culture, yet Fedorova and Kochelyaeva state that culture and cultural heritage are "addressed as the whole system of values that underpins national identity, influences all sectors of society and is stated as a source of pride and patriotism" (2013:5). Further, they argue that culture in Russia is understood as a public good and responsibility, a mentality I found exists amongst collectors today.

general public, arts unions, artists, and cultural works and institutions,[162] these are not always realized.

For example, market-oriented creative ventures, such as the popular Moscow art clusters Vinzavod and ARTPLAY, fall outside of the Ministry of Culture.[163] This makes development of these ventures difficult as they do not have access to seed money from the government and are not eligible for tax benefits.[164] In his study of the cultural industries in St. Petersburg, O'Connor (2005) found that the establishment of institutions supporting something such as art faced structural constraints. In addition to reduced state funding for culture, there is also a problem of definition. Many organizations desire to be legally defined as "cultural" because this makes them eligible for state money and benefits such as tax breaks. However, a "cultural" organization is not permitted to engage in commercial activity. Because many organizations are dependent on state funds to exist, the development of the commercial side of cultural production is severely hindered. The result, O'Connor argues, is that it is difficult to make the "link between innovation, enterprise and a thriving small business sector, central to many Western accounts of economic modernization, and especially those promoting the cultural industries as the cutting edge of the new creative economy" (2005:53). Ruutu (2010) found much the same in her study of art clusters in Moscow and St. Petersburg, adding that the lack of specific policies regarding "creative clusters" has thwarted interest.

Further hindering the support of arts from the private sector is the difficulty of creating partnerships between public institutions and private sponsors or foundations. Even when there is co-operation, smaller benefactors prefer to have private funding in order to ensure autonomy and independence in decision-making.

In addition to the challenges facing the private growth of cultural industries, the cultural legislation of the state gives little advantage for artists in terms of social security and tax breaks. Thus, much like in Soviet times, many artists receive benefits by being somehow employed by state institutions, receiving state commissions, or being members of Artists' Unions, which receive funds from the Ministry of Culture (Fedorova and Kochelyaeva 2013). Attempts to increase support and protection of artists and cultural workers have been attempted without success. For example, a law on *Creative Workers in Literature and Arts and on their Creative Unions* has twice passed through the Parliament, but was declined both times by the Russian president, as it was perceived to provide privileges and exemptions from existing laws. One of the reasons why the president did not approve the proposed law was because of its provisions "for special norms of taxation for creative workers" (Fedorova and Kochelyaeva 2013).

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[162] See the *Culture of Russia (2012–2018)* Federal Target Program, and the newly drafted *State Program of the Russian Federation on Development of Culture and Tourism for the period of 2013–2020*.

[163] The Ministry of Culture (Minkultury) is a federal executive body responsible for drafting and implementing national policy and the legal regulation of culture, the arts, historical and cultural heritage (including archaeological heritage), cinematography, archiving, tourism, copyright and associated rights. It is authorized to manage state property and provide state services in culture and cinematography, to protect cultural heritage, copyright and associated rights, and to perform state oversight in this sphere. More information can be found at the Minister of Culture's official website (http://mkrf.ru).

[164] For example, the *Taxation Code (1998–2000)* eliminated almost all tax deductions, leading to no support for cultural production and little encouragement for investment in culture. Similarly, the *Main Directions of Taxation Policies in the Russian Federation for 2008–2010* fails to provide any support for state-private partnerships within this sector (Fedorova and Kochelyaeva 2013).

*Survival Without Support*

Many of the artists expressed frustration over the state's lack of support, and held it up as one of the main reasons the Russian art world was suffering. I had asked the artist and curator Sofia Gavrilova why she thought young Russian artists were having so much difficulty achieving international success. What was it about their art that did not appeal to an audience outside Russia? While reflecting on this, she shifted away from the art as the reason for failure:

> SG: Honestly it's because many people… they just give up, you know? Well, you should understand—I haven't yet sold any of my work. Yeah? And I'm working really strange jobs to get money when I don't have any curatorial projects. And people… I mean, no one can sell anything here. This is not a problem unique to me. So people just give up. They move on to other jobs. And I can't blame them, because being an artist here is so hard… to support yourself. So it's the question of who remains in the system.
> *EH: So it's not so much about the artwork itself…*
> SG: Right. It's about the system that creates or restricts opportunities. Many of my friends are artists, or would like to be, but they can't really get their careers off the ground, they can't spend enough time doing their work because they have to do a bunch of other jobs. They may be working in the "art world" at a gallery or something, but that doesn't make them artists, you know? It keeps you in the world but you're not developing yourself at all. You don't have the time or the possibilities.[165]

How did they get by? As Gavrilova states, it is difficult to support oneself as an artist in Russia without any institutional structure or safety net. Many worked a variety of odd jobs (usually in the art world) that they continually had to patch together. It should not have surprised me to learn that creating art was just one job of many for Vladimir Potapov, a successful, award-winning artist in his early thirties. He was also a prolific curator, organizing shows that were often ambitious in size and scope; wrote in exhibition catalogues; and occasionally taught courses at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art. "I also have a 9 to 5 job, but that's just for money," he added with a dismissive wave of his hand. "It doesn't have anything to do with art."[166] I was exhausted just listening to him recount his various jobs, although he was enthusiastic and energetic, clearly passionate about his projects.

Some artists figured out ways to use the remains of Soviet-era institutional support for art. For example, the artists Sasha Povzner (b. 1976) and Andrei Kuzkin (b. 1979) both had cheap live/work studios as a result of connections with the Artists Union. Given the type of art that they both made (particularly Kuzkin's, which was at times political) it was surprising that they were part of the Union—an organization known to be traditional and conservative, having little to do with contemporary art. As Kuzkin described it, "everything about the Union has stayed Soviet: no Internet or computer and everything is on paper, with stamps." I sat at the drafting table in his apartment/studio, which felt more the latter than the former, as he described the bureaucratic maneuvering necessary to end up in one of these studios.

[165] Interview with author on September 8, 2014
[166] Interview with author on September 10, 2014

> AK: I joined the Union for the perks, like the studios. You still have to pay for them, but not very much.
> *EH: That makes a lot of sense… why doesn't everyone do that?*
> AK: [Laughs] Of course it is not so easy to join—you have to go around the rules. It's corrupt. And it helps to have friends or especially family in it already. My parents were both in it, and so was my grandfather… but it still takes years to get one of these studios—like five years, maybe. But sometimes you can sublet them because many of the studios… they are "technically" rented by older artists. But a lot of them don't use the space anymore, or can't pay even the small amount of rent. So they sublet to other artists.
> *EH: Another reason having connections in the Union is so important…*
> AK: Exactly.[167]

Similarly, Povzner's parents were also artists during the Soviet Union, and his studio had been his mother's.[168] The location was incredible—just minutes from Red Square, near the Kitai Gorod metro stop, although the building was antiquated and decaying. Still, it was free studio space in the center of one of the most expensive cities in the world. For an artist in any country this would be considered a boon; in Russia, with little to no support from the state, this was downright amazing.

## POLITICS, ART, AND POLITICAL ART

The impact of the Russian state on the lives of contemporary artists is, of course, not homogenous. As I have discussed in the previous two sections, the state impinges on artists' lives in several ways. The most extreme examples include legal repression such as criminal charges and fines, imprisonment, and censorship, which garner the majority of attention from domestic and international media. The more indirect—or at least less dramatic—impact of the state is in its failure to provide financial support for contemporary art (and culture more broadly). A third consequence of the state's attitudes and response can be understood, more broadly, as ideological. Regardless of whether an artist considers his or her art or actions "political"—or even something that has the slightest possibility of triggering the ire of the state—increasing state hostility to some members of the art community has contributed to an overall feeling of fear among artists. In this section I examine how the artists interpret the effects and consequences of the state's ideological agenda and politics on their daily lives and the development of their art and careers, both domestically and internationally.

### *The Paradox of Political Art*

State repression of artists has a long history in modern Russia, from the 1932 decree requiring art to be in the style of Socialist Realism to the censorship of art that "incites religious hatred" in the 2010s. Many Russian artists have responded by making art critical of the state. Much of the unofficial art during the Soviet period was developed in opposition to the "official" aesthetic mandate of socialist realism and sought to subvert socialist ideology strategically through conceptual art. In many ways, Russian contemporary art was born from this underground

[167] Interview with author on September 23, 2014
[168] His mother was an official artist while his father was an unofficial artist.

Nonconformist art of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s until *perestroika*, particularly Moscow Conceptualism and Sots Art. Although their protest lost its "enemy" with the end of Soviet Union, this art remains some of the most recognizable (and priciest) Russian contemporary art.

Although the object of protest has changed, political art has continued into the postsocialist period. As I discuss earlier in this chapter, political art frequently focuses on religion's relationship with the state or Putin. In recent years the most overt—and, perhaps, effective—artistic protests have been performance art. Russia has a rich tradition of radical performance art, from the 1920s avant-garde to the Conceptualists of the 1970s. The provocative nature of the performances of art collectives such as Voina and Pussy Riot, and artists like Piotr Pavlenskii, has received considerable attention from both Russian and international audiences.

The "street art" collective Voina (which means war) set the tone for political protest in the Putin era. They began in the mid-2000s and followed the traditions of the shock tactics of Moscow Conceptualism by reinserting blatant political criticism into the Russian arts scene. By spearheading this protest, they became the faces of the call for freedom of expression across Russia.[169] Members of Pussy Riot, which I discuss above, had also been involved with Voina and staged protests in the same vein. And to protest the imprisonment of Pussy Riot, Pavlenskii sewed his mouth shut (see Figure 26). Pavlenskii has used his body as his "canvas," mutilating it in forms of protest impossible to ignore. In addition to sewing his mouth shut, he cut off a piece of his ear, nailed his scrotum to Red Square, and wrapped himself naked in barbwire so that the police had to spend hours cutting him out. His most recent performance did not involve his body; rather, he set the door of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) on fire. He was quickly arrested and was being subjected to mandatory psychiatric testing by the state—a standard way to discredit any dissenter.

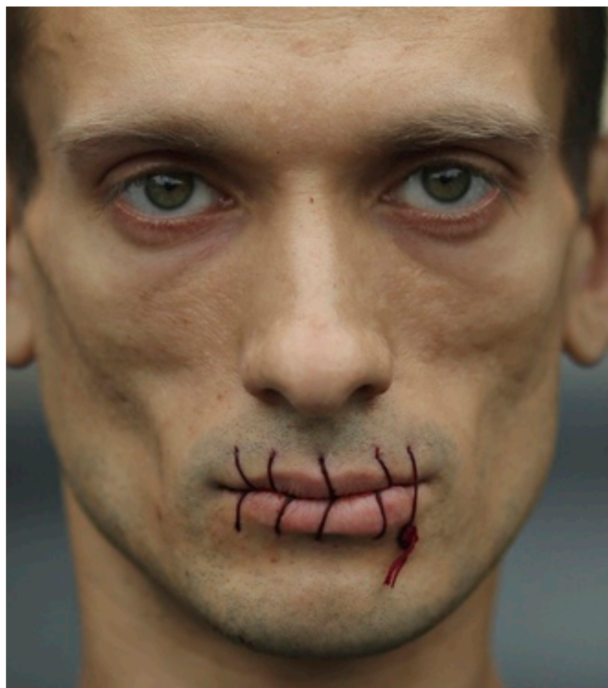

Figure 26: Piotr Pavlenskii, protesting the imprisonment of Pussy Riot (2012).

The Russian contemporary art world considers these acts of resistance vitally important, both for contemporary Russian art *and* for society in general. Andrei Monastyrskii, founder of the 1970s Collective Actions group, remarked, "if not for the Voina group, contemporary Russian art would be terrible, provincial, a commercial fuck off."[170] Indeed, protest performances by groups like Voina have helped to bring much-desired international attention not only to political issues, but to Russian art as a whole. But some artists do not see the "artistic legitimacy" that political art brings as always a positive thing. Rather, many feel it is only when art is "against" the state or Putin that it receives international recognition. For Russian artists, this is not new. Scholars have argued that the interest from the West in the Soviet Nonconformists was ideologically bound up

[169] As Degot put it, "the hatred for United Russia…has reached a level comparable only to the hatred for the communists in 1988. That hatred is at boiling point, eating up people inside and—unlike 1988—it has no constitutional expression. That hatred is Voina" (qtd. in Sturdee 2011).
[170] As quoted in *ARTnews* (Akinsha 2009).

in Cold War logic. Soviet artists were romanticized as repressed, censored cultural soldiers in the fight against the communists. However, many artists of the period, such as those considered to be "Nonconformists," were not openly antagonistic to the state and did not consider themselves dissidents.[171] Yet because they produced art that was not Socialist Realism, they were labeled unofficial artists. Following the binary structure of thinking that characterized the Cold War, then, art from socialist countries was slotted into one of these two categories: official or unofficial. This binary obscured the nuance of art from the period. To the West, unofficial became conflated with dissident; these artists were seen as making political statements with their art by virtue of not openly supporting the state.

With the end of the Cold War, international interest in Russian art dropped noticeably, as did international support of it. When interest returned, it usually centered on art addressing the ways in which socialism had ravaged the country and society. Socialism continued to cast a long shadow, and if an artist wanted international recognition, getting out of that shadow was nearly impossible. Even for the established artists of the Soviet period, Gupta (2010) argued, this meant "to keep [them] in the post-Communist fold he or she has to be reinvented (often implausibly) as being at odds with the Communist era" (571). By the mid-2000s, however, the threats from the Russian state were clearly legible to the West again as "repression." The world watched as artists were censored and imprisoned.

As a result, Russian artists must wrestle again with the paradox of Russian art: *without an oppressive regime to protest against, would anyone care about what they did, in Russia or internationally?* The answer seems to be "no." Historian of European art Hans Belting suggests that there are "two voices of art history"—the West and the East—that coexist as hierarchical and contradictory narratives. After 1945, art in the East has been viewed as fundamentally different than that of the West, because in the East people had a "conviction in the power of art, something that had vanished long before in the West" (2003:57). This conviction refers in particular to Soviet art's political dimensions, which the West has held onto as its defining characteristic. Some critics have even suggested that the West has had a vested interest in preserving the culture of nonconformism as a way to keep Russian art as "other" and thus outside of the dominant "Western voice" of art history.

For those artists who are not and do not consider themselves "political," this is frustrating. As the artist Sergei Lotsmanov (b. 1982) explained, "that's the problem in the Russian art market—you have to be for or against politics. It's about content and not form."[172] Lotsmanov is part of a group of artists born in the early 1980s who trained under the Russian artist Stas Shuripa. The art critic Valentin Diakonov labeled them the "New Boring" for their minimalist, post-Conceptual, and somewhat formalist nature—a style not often seen in contemporary Russian art (see Figure 27). Although their work is not necessarily recognizable by a similarity in form, they share an

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[171] A telling example is Ilia Kabakov, arguably the most well-known artist of this generation, whose installations were seen as emblematic of artistic critique of the Soviet Union. Yet in an interview conducted in the early 1990s, when asked when he realized he was a dissident artist, he responds, "I was not a dissident, and I even consider it problematic that I am an artist. […] But in any case I was not a dissident. I did not fight with anything or anybody." And when asked if he made "official and unofficial works," he replied, "These terms do no entirely apply to me because the term 'unofficial artist' was applied by others to the artists. It was not the artists' term. In reality, they were just doing whatever their imagination told them to do. They did not feel themselves as being in conflict or denying something or fighting with something. Since these artists could not sell or exhibit their works, me included, we had to look for other ways to make a living. […] A large group of us were illustrators for publishing houses, especially for children's books" (1995).

[172] Interview with author on September 10, 2014

intellectualist approach to art, obsessing over ideas and discourse as the central focus of what motivates them as artists. Diakonov explains that these artists "have taken the course of extreme adaptation to international trends… 'The new boring' have made a principle out of their kinship with Western patterns. Ideologically they are against glamour and art as a commodity; in their style they are close to the *transatlantic* Conceptual art of the 1970s" (qtd. in Degot 2011; emphasis mine). In other words, they want to be part of the *global* conversation of art—and not just as oppressed Russians. As "new boring" artist Sergei Ogurtsov (b. 1982) put it, "we want to *live* locally but *think* globally."[173]

Figure 27: Sergei Lotsmanov, *West Comet* (2012). Photo: Gallery 21

Critics in Russia argue that the artists of the New Boring are merely copying Western artists in an effort to be seen as more "international"; they are pandering to a global market by ignoring Russian artistic tradition and local context. Yet Lotsmanov explains that they are actually turning this criticism on its head:

> Why are we criticized for trying to be part of a global conversation? Because we don't engage in the political discussions [here], we are outside of the art community establishment in Russia. But other artists… can't you say that they are doing the same because they make "protest" art that is so popular with the West?[174]

[173] Interview with author on August 31, 2014
[174] Interview with author on September 10, 2014

Responding to one's social reality is often a main motivating influence for an artist, and art that responds to the repression of authoritarian state is certainly not unique to Russia. In this way the state continues to not only shape the type of art that is being produced in Russia, but also how this art is being perceived by the international art community. Not all Russian artists mind fulfilling the trope of repressed dissident Russian artist for the international art community, however. Some artists agreed with this assessment and embraced it, maintaining that the political situation was often what helped produce Russian art that was distinct and powerful. As the artist Pavel Kiselev (b. 1984) put it,

> [The Russian art world] seems doomed most of the time… but I don't know, with how bad things are politically… maybe it makes the situation better for us, because I think a worse political situation creates better art. It produces more styles, more inspiration. Maybe Russian art needs the bad situation [we're in].[175]

*"So why isn't there more political art?"*

Many artists felt pressure to create art that would be considered politicized, and therefore more authentically (or interestingly) Russian to international art world. But talk among artists often turned to the *lack* of political art—with the current state of affairs in Russia, some were frustrated that more artists were not making a statement with their work. As the artist and curator Vladimir Potapov lamented,

> The new face of Russian art is absent. Maybe political art—maybe—will be the face of Russian art. The future of Russian art depends directly on the political situation. It's a problem. But [the political situation] influences artists. Or it *should*. Of course not all art has to be so directly political, but… [art] needs to represent the reality of that political time. And it's a different time here—a very political time.[176]

One artist suggested that the bottom line was that people were too scared, and were comfortable enough to live decent lives. Protest art was not as urgent. Others seemed genuinely perplexed as to why a new tradition of political art (exempting Pussy Riot and performance art in general for the moment) had not developed as it had in previous generations. The artist and curator Sofia Gavrilova explains:

> After the fall of the Soviet Union, around like 1993, the Western world was like, "Okay, show us your art." Poland, Ukraine did. But Russia didn't—they didn't have it. They didn't have anything to bring to the table. There was a gap. But why was there nothing new then? Why wasn't there a resurgence of the avant-garde in post-Soviet Russia? I understand why avant-garde came in the beginning of the 20th century in Russia. I can completely understand that. But why is that after such an important thing—the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and the wild capitalism that came to Russia—why did not produce any kind of cultural movement? This is a mystery. Because you know, there have been this kind of protest art now, I

175 Interview with author on September 8, 2014
176 Interview with author on September 10, 2014

participated in some of it, but it wasn't… natural. It was too "created"—because it understood that it could be "popular."[177]

Fear of reprisals is, unsurprisingly, a deterrent to making outwardly political art. But the situation is more complicated than that. Gavrilova's critique that much of the protest art lacked authenticity—and therefore power—because it had been "created" echoed the position of many left art critics and academics, who see political art in Russia as compromised not only by the state but by the influence of "imported Western discourses of critique" that do not accord with the post-Soviet version of capitalism. According to Chukrov, this has meant that the "majority of contemporary artists find it obligatory to conform to the global Esperanto of commissioned criticality—which often happens to be left in its original form and therefore in agreement with capitalist modes of production" (2013:260).

Chukrov's line of argument is usually directed at younger artists in particular, with those of the First Postsocialist Generation often shouldering blame for the lack of political engagement in art. Many commentators feel that in general, young Russian artists are not aware of the political potential of art, do not know how to wield it, or fear the repercussions. And although they often feel the unspoken expectation of the West for political art, they often do not know how to address it. Gavrilova (b. 1987), for example, sees herself and and her generation in this position, as her quote above suggests. The artist Antonina Baever (b. 1989) reflected similarly on their generation:

> Being a leftist artist is trendy right now [in Russia]—but it is only *aesthetically* accessible. Leftist artists have the aesthetic, but no action. And they get attention for this… they copy something and make it "left," but really it means nothing because there is no action. But you know, I am also critiquing myself here. I am also part of this, I don't do anything to make the world better, right? Activists of [our] generation… this is our problem. We are just placated with consumerism.[178]

Erofeev (2012) suggests, however, that political art was limited for artists working in the 2000s because internal Russian issues seemed trivial compared to the world-historical character of the fall of communism. The "emergence from decades of isolation" allowed Russian artists to become part of the European cultural space, and to "feel European and speak an artistic Esperanto" (20).

Another argument is that state pressure and the climate of repression has prevented private foundations from funding a robust political-art scene. Major private funders such as Victoria Foundation, Ekaterina Foundation, and Vinzavod[179] must tread carefully, because they can face difficulties or even held responsible for supporting an artist found to be in violation of Article 282. (This happened to the collector Viktor Bondarenko, as I discuss earlier in this chapter.) Thus, artists who are "too political" run the risk of alienating the more conservative foundations and benefactors. One artist (who requested to remain anonymous) suggested to me that accepting money from these institutions—which provide some of the few monetary opportunities—makes it impossible to create autonomous art. The problem, as he sees it, is that there is no critique from the artists of the structural position of these institutions vis-à-vis the state:

[177] Interview with author on September 8, 2014
[178] Interview with author on September 4, 2014
[179] Gelman left Vinzavod in November 2015. Trotsenko claims it was because he did not pay rent, while Gelman says it was political pressure that forced her to kick him out.

> Here's the thing… even though [the private foundations] give money, which is good, they are part of the power—they are the wrong side. If you are a leftist artist, you need to analyze this, because where you get your money from—it's all connected to the power of the state. So if you take money from Victoria Foundation [which is funded by the owner of a gas company] for art then you are not being critical. There are a lot of compromises for artists. That's why we see more of the 'political minimal' art—because they are getting some funding from these foundations.[180]

*"Our future is becoming our past."*

Beyond these debates, however, it is undeniable that the political climate and specter of the state are omnipresent concerns for most contemporary artists. Their emotions range from anger to fear to resignation. Although the older artists (from the Last Soviet Generation) are critical of the political situation, their anger toward the state is coated with a resigned, and almost blasé, sense of "been there, done that." Vladimir Sorokin (b. 1955), a well-known Russian writer known for novels critical of the state, has put it poetically: "Our future is becoming our past."[181] Members of the Last Soviet Generation express this sentiment often, even from different positions within the Russian art world (artists, gallerists, collectors). As the artist Dmitrii Gutov (b. 1960) situated his work in the context of recent Russian history, he reveals the origins of this sense of inevitability:

> DG: At the end of the 1980s and beginning of '90s, it was an epoch of hope that we will be in a free world, that this totalitarian state would never come back. And every year the situation has gotten worse. And now… I think you know what's going on here. But it is very easy to see [the hope] in my work at the beginning, in the '90s—very light. And then in the middle of the 2000s, I already knew what would happen with this country. I made a work that was very important to me, titled "Thaw" [video]. 2006—that is when I realized this country really has no future at all. It's a new totalitarianism. This notion of thaw is quite important for me because my childhood was the epoch (time) of thaw, of de-Stalinization. This epoch gave me inspiration for many, many years. […] But my work "Thaw" has absolutely different meaning. Thaw usually has positive characteristics. However, it has another meaning: you can't walk, it's very depressing, there is mud everywhere, you are hungry. Hopelessness. So [Russia] went from one thaw to another thaw. History is repeating itself. It's like a pendulum, just keeps swinging back and forth between totalitarianism and disorder. Destruction, violence. We've seen it all before.
> *EH: Doesn't that worry you? You sound so… relaxed. Almost cheerful!*
> DG: [Laughs] I'm too old to be nervous about the country being destroyed!

The artists of AES+F were also not surprised by the return to "very archaic and ugly and terrible things" and to a leader and state isolated from the rest of the world, unable to "communicate in cultural language with the West." History was repeating itself, according to Evgenii Sviatskii:

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[180] Interview with author, 2014

[181] Known for novels that are critical of the state, and Putin in particular, he has become a target for ultraconservative, right-wing nationalist groups. For example, in the early 2000s a nationalist youth group destroyed his books and then stuffed them into a giant *papier-mâché* toilet (Kimmelman 2007).

…it's a kind of attempt to take advantage and replay the game—to have a better place for Russia after the Cold War was lost. So they know they lost but… they think they should try to just… to apply forces to bring Russia into first place. But instead of a big step by step job, which should be made inside the country to build a society, build institutions, build the economy and so on, instead of that they try to make something which will *symbolically* bring back Russia to first place. It's more about symbolism, it's in their heads, that Russia should build and be the most powerful place in the world just because it's *Russia*. Because it's a *Great Nation*. Okay, so.[182]

Members of AES+F hoped that by the "next perestroika"—a term they used with a casualness suggesting inevitability—that Russia would be able to escape its obsession with its past "greatness," live in the present, and be part of the global conversation.

*EH: Are you talking about Russia's past greatness in a specific period, or just Russia's greatness in general?*
LE: [Laughs] In general.
ES: Yeah but you know this is absolutely… neurotic. A neurosis. A neurotic position, when you can only look to the past for the answers of the future… when you are afraid of the future and of course you are afraid of globalization, afraid of competition, this global competition, and so on. With this neurosis, you start to live in the past. This is what Russia does.
*EH: It's comfortable in some ways.*
LE: Yes… it is, in some psychological sense, comfortable.

Living in the past is certainly uncomfortable for many artists, even if it comes as no surprise. Many dream of being able to leave Russia to escape censorship, repression, and the unsupportive government. Yet leaving is not always easy and creates new challenges. Younger artists in particular are usually not yet established, so upon moving to New York or Berlin find themselves struggling as just another expat artist in an oversaturated global art mecca. Many also do not want to leave their homes—they love Russia, even if they do not love the politics. Even among those who want to stay, many split their time between Russia and Western Europe, or at least try to do so by continually applying for grants and residencies to send them abroad.

In this way, artists often feel caught between the discomfort of an environment hostile to contemporary art and the intimacy of the place they know and—for better or worse—understand. As the art duo Dmitrii Okruzhnov (b. 1984) and Maria Sharova (b. 1987) explained:

MS: We haven't been censored, but we know the topics we shouldn't touch. Putin. State violence, religion. Kiev.
DO: Yes—we know the rules. That's the most important thing. In some ways, then, we have no fear because we have always had to live with the idea that there is censorship… it's always a compromise.[183]

[182] Interview with author on September 2, 2014
[183] Interview with author on September 9, 2014

Yet this compromise is starting to crumble for many. “Knowing the rules” for navigating censorship and surviving under Putin is meaning less as the state expands its repression and censorship of art. Many in the art world are also demoralized by political decisions that they find questionable. It was after Russia’s invasion of Crimea in 2014, one artist told me, that she first seriously considered leaving Russia altogether.

## CONCLUSION

The Russian state has a considerable amount of power and control over contemporary art, especially given that it brands itself a democracy. The state makes life as an artist difficult in direct and indirect ways. Their most direct, and at times violent, exercise of power is through censorship, which is anchored to a law criminalizing art that “incites religious hatred.” Due to the law’s vague wording, it is enforced in uneven and controversial ways, shutting down exhibitions and imposing fines and prison sentences on artists, curators, and dealers. The state exercises power in less direct ways as well, as by refusing to support contemporary art endeavors or institutions, including arts education. Together, these policies have fostered a culture of fear among those in the Russian art world, leading many to self-censor or leave the country. As Gutov put it when I asked him if he felt as though he had been censored by the state,

> You see, I don’t do works with political meanings. But, really—it’s not a question of censorship of your own work. It’s a question of *atmosphere* and what you can create, or what you can’t. This is the main question. And now… there is an atmosphere of fear among artists. Among everybody.[184]

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Russian artists already face difficulties because of the weakness of their art market. And as this chapter shows, the state creates further roadblocks to the emergence of a robust field of art. Russian artists suffer, then, from the absence of a market and the presence of the state. But given the increased interconnectedness of the art world with globalization, Russians have a way to circumvent Russia entirely—both their market and the power of the state—by attempting to become part of the international art market. This can be done either by leaving Russia completely and trying to assimilate as part of another art capital (usually in the West), or by being successful on the international art market (which, again, usually means with Western collectors). As I discuss in the next chapter, however, the international strategy is rarely easy and only sometimes fruitful. Although the art world has seen significant changes because of globalization, especially for countries on the periphery such as Russia, the real power to make taste and shape trends remains in the West.

[184] Interview with author on September 3, 2014

# CHAPTER FOUR
## *Russia in the Global Art World*

In 1998, Vitalii Komar and Aleksander Melamid—founders of Sots Art—introduced a Moscow Circus chimpanzee named "Mikki" to photography. This was part of a multi-decade project[185] in which they taught animals how to create art. The project questioned the very notion of art and value: is what we consider artistic ability and talent unique to humans? Fifteen years later, in May 2013, I saw Mikki's *oeuvre* at the Novyi Manezh in Moscow, as part of a preview for an upcoming auction at Sotheby's of Russian art. The 18-piece series, "Our Moscow Through the Eyes of Mikki," consisted mostly of blurry photos taken at odd angles, with a few portraits of the artist wearing red gym shorts, stoically standing beside his camera (see Figure 28). Momentarily amused by the photos, I flipped through the auction catalogue to see what Sotheby's anticipated the photos would get at auction: $76,500–$107,000.[186] Komar and Melamid's project now contained an implicit critique of art valuation's the arbitrary nature. When sold under the name of famous artists, art "created" by animals is imbued with value it perhaps otherwise would not have. Blurry photographs fetching upwards of $75,000 underscore the social aspects of art valuation and the field of art humans have created in order to understand and give value to a work of art.

Figure 28: Komar and Melamid, *Mikki on Red Square* (1998). Photo: Sotheby's

After viewing Mikki's masterpieces, I spotted the chairman of Sotheby's Russia, Lord Mark Poltimore, having a rare moment alone. I had met Poltimore the previous spring in London, and unlike many others who were in the business of selling Russian art, I found him to be positive and enthusiastic. After nine months in the field, I was eager to talk to him again. Gracious and interested, he remembered our discussion and was curious to know how my research had progressed. I told him that much of what I had discovered in Moscow corroborated what he had said in London: Russian collectors were not just tasteless *nouveaux riches* as the media suggested. Rather, many were knowledgeable about art, and there was a mounting excitement for art in Russia. He nodded approvingly. "The Russian art world is so dynamic right now. It's a very exciting time—Moscow is positively mad!" Yet his assessment of Russian art and the "art world" did not extend to *contemporary* art. When I made the distinction between "Russian art" and "Russian contemporary art," his enthusiasm dampened. "Well, you know, contemporary art here is still not very good," he

[185] Komar and Melamid began their project "Collaboration with Animals" in 1978 by teaching a dog named Tranda how to draw. In early 1990s they painted with Renee, an elephant in Ohio, a collaboration that inspired them to open three "Komar Melamid Art Academies for Elephants" in Thailand. They even attempted to make wood sculptures with beavers.

[186] The series of 18 photographs sold for £50,000 ($75,000).

said in a lowered tone, crinkling his nose, his impeccable British civility slipping ever so slightly. "It's all very derivative." This did not come as a surprise, as it was the prevailing opinion. Why, then, did Sotheby's include contemporary photography at the auction? "Yes, well…" he started, a bemused look on his face. "It's interesting, isn't it? Quite interesting, actually. But honestly, I have no idea who would actually purchase it. This is an experiment."

Poltimore's charge that Russian contemporary art is "still not very good" and "derivative" of Western art was the most common critique I encountered of contemporary Russian art. Both Westerners and Russians levied this charge. Despite the tepid reviews Sotheby's gave and the somewhat noncommittal stance it took toward contemporary Russian art, however, its expansion into this arena was viewed by members of the Russian art world as a sign of progress. They considered Sotheby's entrance to be a positive byproduct of the increasingly global nature of the art world—or, at the very least, the art market. Sotheby's, for its part, was hoping to capitalize and build on slowly increasing interest in Soviet Nonconformist artists in order to broaden the market for newer and less-well-known contemporary Russian art. Traditionally, Sotheby's focus had been on late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century art,[187] with contemporary art only comprising a small fraction of its biannual Russian sales.[188] Now, however, the auction house was beginning to sell more contemporary Russian art, including works by living artists.[189] The 2013 spring auction in which Mikki's photos were being sold was the first time that contemporary Russian photography was sold at international auction.

Poltimore's uncertainty about Sotheby's foray into Russian contemporary art highlights a central tension that has developed between Western and non-Western countries as a result of globalization, what art historian Keith Moxey describes as the "intractable philosophical issue of universality and particularity" (2010:17). Artists in countries of the periphery, such as Russia, must be *discoverable* by virtue of speaking a theoretical, conceptual, and aesthetic language that is accessible to and determined by collectors and gallerists in the countries of the core (West); or, at the very least, must be an example of whatever feels invitingly exotic enough at the right moment (Elkins 2010). This exocitism cannot venture too far, however, for fear of alienating the Western audience (Inaga 2007). Therefore, it must employ a symbolic lexicon that is simultaneously mysterious, familiar, and "patternable"—identifiable with a particular artist in such a way that the artist can market this "pattern" as that for which he or she can be "known" (Erić 2007). Perhaps the perfect example of this is that of Soviet Nonconformism, thought of in the West as "underground" or "dissident" art, which generally escapes the charge of being "derivative." Why is this? After all, Sots Art—a form of Soviet Nonconformist art from the 1970s and 1980s—was the very definition of "derivative" as it reimagined Western Pop Art by adding a Socialist twist. *Yet this art is celebrated by the West because it carefully balances the exotic and familiar.*

Whether or not a Western interpretation coincides with the intention of the artist is beside the point. The meaning that a work of Russian art generates in the mind of Western buyers is inextricable from the art history created by Western modernity, made possible within a certain set of Western bourgeois sociopolitical conditions (Degot 2012; Efimova 1999; Peraica 2006; Valiavicharska 2010). Western art history is dominant art history, contextualizing contemporary art in the broader international art world (Belting 2013). Art-world interlocutors in Russia—such as critics, gallerists, and art historians—have also adopted Euro-American understandings of what

[187] E.g., Ilia Repin (1844–1930), Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964), and Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962)
[188] The sales themselves are held in London, but the venerable auction house typically holds previews of the auctions in Moscow as well. Given most of the sales from these auctions are to Russians, this makes sense.
[189] E.g., Oskar Rabin (b. 1928), Natalia Nesterova (b. 1944), and Aidan Salakhova (b. 1964)

counts as authentic and original art. Evaluating their national art against the "universal" Western art-historical canon helps to perpetuate notions of Western art's superiority. This is not new, however, as the West has been an important arbiter of cultural production and evaluation throughout Russian history, beginning with Peter the Great's European-influenced cultural revolution at the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth. The specter of the West continued to exist in the imagination of Soviet artists, and remains an orienting force for Russian artists today, who see Western recognition as the ultimate mark of artistic legitimacy, whether or not they agree with its standards of evaluation.

In this chapter, I situate the Russian field of contemporary art within the Western-led international art world and argue that countries in the periphery are faced with contradictory constraints that limit and shape their field of art—from artists to collectors to the market. Although globalization has brought more Western attention to non-Western art, it has done little to shift the locus of power and influence in the art world away from Western art capitals such as New York, London, and Paris. Therefore, even the growing presence of non-Western artists in museums and biennials does not change the objective structure and hierarchy of the international field of art. Dominant Western conceptions of aesthetics continue to render non-Western art as exotic and other (Buchholz and Wuggenig 2006). As a result, Russian artists face the complicated and often perplexing task of asserting their own individual and cultural artistic vision in a way that international buyers consider to be at once on par with the West yet distinct from it.

## THE GLOBALIZED ART WORLD

Art has never been immune to the forces of globalization, and the international art world that existed when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 looked very different than it did the last time the country had participated in it, 70 years earlier. High art has long been an interest of the wealthy, but neoliberal globalization, structural adjustment, and the redistribution of wealth since the late twentieth century toward the top of income pyramids in both developed and developing economies cemented art ownership's status as the preserve of the ultra-rich. Art prices have risen astronomically since the 1980s. The dramatic increase in wealth among fewer people flooded the market with collectors with very large budgets.[190] Crane (2009) suggests that globalization has resulted in the expansion of both economic and cultural inequality, which have "produced a high-end enclave in the art market in which very expensive art works circulate among extremely wealthy collectors whose tastes shape the symbolic and material aspects of products" (352). Globalization had certainly penetrated the art market. The wealthy of the West have been joined, and often surpassed, by the newly super-rich of Russia, China, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the Global South at the top end of the art market. The biennials and art fairs they frequent have also "globalized," transporting the same experience of the art market anywhere in the world.

Of course to some extent, the art world has always been global. Collectors have long pursued works outside of their home countries. In early twentieth-century Russia, for example, businessmen Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov amassed arguably the most important collections of French modernist art in the world. But the globalized element of the art world has not been limited to acquiring European works. Acquiring "primitive" art, as it was condescendingly known, from regions in the developing world was not unusual. This fascination also extended from

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[190] These powerful and influential "mega-collectors" make up a reported 80% of the recent buyers of contemporary art (Crane 2009).

collectors to art institutions in the West, which displayed "exotic" art taken from the countries they defeated or colonized.[191]

These earlier international flows of art notwithstanding, the past 30 years (many offer 1989 as a starting point) of globalization have brought dramatic changes to the international art market.[192] And while different models of analysis have produced varied understandings of how and to what degree globalization affects cultural production, most scholars agree that the field of art is globalizing as never before. As Jameson (2010) suggests, the idea that the art world experiences globalization itself is not new, but the economic processes of production, distribution, and consumption *are* different today. How and where art is produced has shifted as globalization has caused the "spatial extension of social relationships" in the art world.

Other than collectors buying across borders, though, what indicates that the art world has globalized? Buchholz and Wuggenig (2006) argue that three main indicators point to an increased globalization of the field of art. First, there is the "spatial extension of social relationships," such as the expansion of art biennales into non-Western countries and the internationalization of art institutions like the Guggenheim. Second, there is an "increasing density of social interactions," which can be seen most obviously through the proliferation of information through the Internet in addition to the increased mobility of artists and curators. Last, the authors show that the number of non-Western artists and curators included in "mainstream exhibitions" has increased over the past 20 years (see also Velthuis 2013).

Current critics point out that benefits of globalization are often distributed unequally throughout the world. Perhaps the most common model of analysis that produces such critiques is what Crane (2002) calls the "cultural imperialism theory," which focuses on center-periphery processes of cultural transmission. Following Wallerstein's (1974) world-systems theory, this has created what Janssen et al. (2008) call a "cultural world-system." While this has expanded access to culture from all over the world to greater numbers of people, scholars argue that it can lead to homogenization of cultural forms and ultimately create social polarization, one-sided dependencies, and asymmetrical relationships between cultures (Buchholz and Wuggenig 2006). The consequence is that cultural forms are generally produced in the center and flow out to the semi-periphery and periphery, potentially eclipsing local culture. The center, then, has much more influence over the production and consecration of what is considered legitimate art (Adams 2007; Quemin 2006; Janssen et al. 2008), which matters greatly especially with regard to who and what type of art is successful on the international art market (Buchholz and Wuggenig 2006; Crane 2009; Quemin 2006; Velthuis 2013; Wu 2009).

The idea that art has been successfully "globalized" is often criticized, then, because in large part it fails to take into account the hegemonic role of the West and its symbolic domination of the non-Western art world. For example, Wu (2007, 2009) demonstrates how symbolic domination works in the case of biennales, the large-scale international contemporary art exhibitions that take place every two years. Biennales have become one of the most common modes of organizing large-scale international exhibitions, and their prevalence continues to

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[191] These art institutions have been pressured in recent years by foreign governments to return antiquities to their original country of origin. One of the highest profile examples is the British Museum's refusal to return the Rosetta Stone to Egypt. Since 2006, however, more than 100 statues, bronzes, vases, mosaics and other works were removed from public collections in the United States to be returned to their country of origin (Eakin 2013).

[192] Buck-Morss (2006) argues that globalization as a spatial situation is not new; rather, the newness comes from the element of *time*. Following this logic of an "ontology of time," then, she contends that since 1989, the entire world can be considered "post-Soviet." Using "post-Soviet" as a way to categorize the world beyond the borders of the FSU is to describe a *universal historical condition* as opposed to a universal global culture.

increase, expanding to non-Western spaces. Some suggest that this expansion to the periphery is proof of how globalized the art world has become, moving beyond its historical Euro-centric focus. Erić (2007) agrees that the "old geographical hegemonies of the big art centers" have been disrupted by the international proliferation of these bienniales. However, he points out that the bienniales themselves have become homogenized: "the same 'flavor' is to be found everywhere—it just needs to be branded and linked to the global and cultural economy" (209). Similarly, Wu (2009) argues, "despite its decolonizing and democratic claims, [the bienniale] proved still to embody the traditional power structures of the contemporary Western art world; the only difference being that 'Western' has quietly been replaced by a new buzzword, 'global'" (115; see also Quemin 2006). Even with the growing presence of non-Western artists in museums and bienniales, then, little has changed in the actual structure and hierarchy of the art field. Western agents still enjoy greatest symbolic power, ultimately keeping "non-occidental art [in] the role of playing its 'exotic,' but nevertheless self-assuring, 'other'" (Buchholz and Wuggenig 2006).

Further, the critique of globalization goes beyond museums, art fairs, and the market. Art history has also had to adjust to this inclusion of a greater range of art, which has led to persistent debate over the last few decades of whether a "universal" or "international" art history can exist (Belting 2009; Elkins 2010; Harris 2011). Critics of this idea suggest that the teleological master narrative of Western art history is inadequate for explaining and contextualizing art from outside its boundaries (Chakrabarty 2000). For example, Belting (2009) argues that the birth of Chinese contemporary art—"an art without roots in the modernist tradition"—differs from that of the West because of its divergent ideological context, in which economic and political conditions created a different trajectory for art (47). In the case of the Soviet Union, Degot (2012) notes that differences in the "institutional aspects" of Russian and Western twentieth-century art history matters a great deal for ways Russian art is understood. Soviet art was seen as being in opposition with the West's modernist abstraction (particularly with regard to style), and therefore, like China, not seen as having roots in the modernist tradition. Degot suggests, however, that Soviet art was "super-historical, synthetic, and unique"—and that this very claim of absolute novelty reveals Soviet art to be part of the worldwide modernist project. This reframing of Soviet and Russian art is a departure from most historical narratives (Degot 2007), and gestures toward the need to reconcile Western and other art histories.

*National Identity in the Global Art World*

What does this mean for the global art world and its players, particularly in a place like Russia on the periphery? That there is actual access to a global art world and market now—even if this remains difficult to access—is seen as positive. However, what is important is that symbolic domination and the power to make decisions remains in the West. It is organized by geographies of power in which issues of nationality remain surprisingly relevant and the importance of the national field of art has not disappeared (Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim 2010; Janssen et al. 2008; Sapiro forthcoming; Quemin 2006; Velthuis 2013).

Despite the increasing ease with which goods, culture, and people can now pass across national borders, the importance of bounded space has not diminished completely and globalization has not necessarily resulted in the deterritorialization that some scholars assert (Appadurai 1996; Hardt and Negri 2000). Buchholz and Wuggenig's (2006) data indicate that success in the international field of art is still very much based on "territorial, social and (macro)cultural characteristics" (12), while Quemin (2006) found that although artists from

peripheral countries are gaining more international recognition, they often do not actually reside in their native country. This further suggests that geography *does* matter.

Given the expansion of the international art market since the 1980s, why study *national* fields of art? Why continue to use the country as the principal unit of analysis? National delineations and categorizations of art have persisted and continue to shape global art because countries remain a helpful organizing principle for the art world. For example, with the increased inclusion of art from the periphery, art history has moved from a Western-centered discipline (Belting 2013; Piotrowski 2012). Focusing on nationality, then, also helps "fill in the holes" when art history started to decolonize (since non-Western art was largely not considered part of modern art in traditional art history). With the continued expansion and recognition of art beyond the Western paradigm, art history has become unwieldy. In order to reconcile the large differences in types of art from around the world, categorizing based on nationality has become easiest.

Further, emphasizing nationality has been a key way to further the expansion of art markets (Sapiro forthcoming). The nationality of Western art is less frequently invoked to describe or market it.[193] Yet as I demonstrate with the Russian case below, art from the periphery is often described in these terms. Nationalities become brands: palatable and desirable forms of identity, and therefore worth collecting. Repackaging art that otherwise may not receive much attention on the international art market helps it become a sought-after brand or trend.

Some argue that this aspect of globalization is a positive thing: using nationality to brand non-Western art helps to bring it to a greater audience and thus increase its sales. In this way globalization *has* been successful as artists in the periphery have become an important part of the global art world and *are* encouraged and celebrated. As Inaga (2010) puts it, "Cultural heterogeneity *must* be represented: otherwise there is a flattened global market" (29–30). However, the furthering of the market is done within a set of parameters that those in periphery do not set. Art must be "patternable," familiar but not derivative, distinct but not alienating.[194] Similarly, Elkins (2010) argues that the "international art market is 'coy' about signs of nationalism and ethnicity: it requires them—they are permissible—but not if they appear overly articulated—beyond the admissible" (31).[195]

*Russian Galleries and National Branding*

Like agents in the international art market, galleries in Moscow are eager to capitalize on the national brand. Yet this is difficult, because according to many involved in the market, Russia is suffering a "deep crisis" caused by the lack of a "strong national identity." For those who believe this, it has a two-fold impact. For example, as the curator Sergei Safonov explained,

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[193] The exception is when describing a very particular art movement.

[194] Inaga continues: "But the heterogeneity must be an acceptable one, and if it is accepted, then it will fit with a conception of heterogeneity that is already presupposed at a meta-level. The acceptable heterogeneity implicitly presupposes admissible homogeneity. […] So what is permitted in the art market is just the interplay between permissible heterogeneity (as for items in circulation) and the admissible homogeneity (as for market tolerance). Things advance within that zone, and if you are outside that zone, what you say is not communicable at all; you have to be literally "ex-communicated" (ibid.).

[195] More expansively, Elkins argues: "…there is the question of the literature on artists who are understood as representatives of some local practice. I find that writing on them is often incomplete, even coy, when it comes to describing what comprises their local character. [example] The art world needs signifiers of the local and national, but it is also coy about those same signifiers. The notion would be that visual art can somehow express cultures, places, nationalities, and communities, but that because it is visual those cultures, places, nationalities, and communities do not need to be articulated. It's an enabling obfuscation […] and it permits some contemporary art to seem international, to seem to be about differences" (2010:3).

> Russians suffer from a complex that they are 'behind' the West and they need to catch up. But they also suffer from a lack of a *Russian* voice in art. Unlike the West, which does not look to others when making their art, Russians still do because they do not understand themselves yet—they have not matured and evolved.[196]

Without having an identity in contemporary art that is strong enough to compete at the same level as Western art, they see themselves as being behind. This feeling does not just come from historical geopolitical insecurities, however. Even among emerging art markets, many members of the Russian contemporary art world feel their "brand" sits at the bottom of the list. Although Soviet Nonconformist art has had some renown and attention internationally (see Chapter One), in general, Russian contemporary art pales in comparison to the international (or even domestic) clout of other newly popular emerging markets for contemporary art. For example, as I mention in Chapter Two, Chinese contemporary art, which has enjoyed great success in the past 20 years, was frequently cited by my interviewees as the model for what a successful brand of national art should be.

Many Russian gallerists believed that the lack of a strong national brand hurt not only their perception in the West but their *domestic* market as well. Convincing Russians that their art is worthwhile to buy has not been easy. As I discussed in Chapter Two, rich Russians are known for wanting to collect recognizable names in art. In other words, they perceive artists as brands.[197] William MacDougall, the founder and director of MacDougall's Fine Art Auctions,[198] explained to me,

> The Russian contemporary art market is weak, the result being that the art is cheap. The lower price of the art in turn lowers the status it conveys, meaning it does not improve one's status and does not impress one's friends, meaning therefore [Russians] are not as interested in buying it and turn to established Western artists instead.[199]

Being more interested in Western art than art of their own country perpetuates a "general lack of passion for contemporary Russian art" among Russians themselves, which in turn can discourage interest in collectors abroad as well. The result, Groys (2003a) suggests, is that this art "remains ensconced in a minority enclave, making it doubly dependent upon international acknowledgment by art institutions that are dominated by the West" (324). Or as the gallerist Stas Uiba put it, "The problem with Russian collectors is that if something is 'foreign' it suggests it is better or the best; therefore, they don't want Russian art."[200]

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[196] Interview with author on February 27, 2013

[197] The same yen for brand-name art is certainly not unique to wealthy Russian collectors, however: around the developing world, accumulating "branded" Western contemporary art is a way for the highest stratum of *nouveaux riches* to convert their wealth into cultural capital. For example, Sheikha Mayassa Al Thani of Qatar—the sister of Qatar's emir—is at the top of *ArtReview*'s "Power 100" for her collection of the best-known works of Rothko, Hirst, Koons, Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Francis Bacon, not to mention Gauguin and Cézanne (Brown 2013).

[198] MacDougall's is based in London and sells exclusively Russian art. They have recently been moving in the contemporary Russia art market as well.

[199] Interview with author on November 4, 2012

[200] Interview with author on February 13, 2013

This focus on established artistic brand names also becomes a problem for Russian contemporary artists as well, given that none of them enjoy the international renown of stars such as British artist Damien Hirst or Japanese artist Takashi Murakami. Becoming a "brand" is nearly impossible for Russian artists, who have an even more difficult path to becoming well known. "Ironically enough," the artist Oksana Simatova told me, "in order to have any success or stability *in Russia,* you need to first have success internationally. Stability relies on the West."[201]

As I show in the next section, there is a danger in this type of "culturalism," or the reading of art as "unique" to a specific nation or place as it often relies on stereotypes or current geopolitical perceptions (Jameson 2000, 2010). As a result, art from outside the core is always Other. It is either an "exotic Other" with national characteristics legible to international critics and buyers, or an "illegible Other" whose symbolic vocabulary renders it inscrutable to Western taste-makers and therefore unable to penetrate international markets. Of course this does not go unnoticed by the artists within the countries of the periphery, who are keenly aware of the way in which they are regarded abroad and the type of art they should make to be successful there.

## DEFINING RUSSIAN ART

The importance of nationality and identity for defining Russian art and artists within the international art world was an ongoing theme of debate in Moscow. Most of my interviewees agreed that their nationality was central to the way they were viewed by the outside world, whether or not they wanted to be seen that way. They frequently complained about being forever defined through the lenses of Russian history and Russia's domestic and international political activity. Such lenses stripped their art of the power to speak for itself.

### *West Looking East*

The impact of globalization on Russian art is visible in several ways, largely filtered through West-centric geopolitical history. As I discuss in Chapter Three, this has mostly meant that Russian contemporary art is understood as political. Despite the current political situation in Russia, this expectation has had less to do with the present (although the international attention of current politically minded artists such as Pussy Riot has changed this) and more to do with stale Cold War stereotypes. Forged in the threat of imminent nuclear war and red scares from a generation ago, the West's fascination and romance with Soviet "dissident" art has yet to wane.

In the West, unofficial art[202] from the Soviet period was regarded with a mix of sympathy and admiration. In spite of difficult working conditions and repression, Soviet artists continued to

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[201] Interview with author on September 10, 2014

[202] Unofficial art from the Soviet period is also known as Nonconformist or, as seen more commonly in the West, dissident art. While these terms seem relatively interchangeable, each signifies something slightly different. As Heartney (2011) points out, this is significant for how this art is assessed and understood outside of Russia, as the "shifting terms themselves suggest how difficult it is to pin this tendency down" (24). Gupta (2010) has similarly suggested the importance of these labels, pointing out the polarizing effect the labels "official" and "unofficial" have on art from formerly communist countries as they are either deployed to dismiss or "recuperate" artists so they will be desirable for international consumption. "The hard polarity between 'unofficial' and 'official' now derived not from the exercise of bureaucratic and political power, but from the natural/traditional European affinities between Eastern and Western art. This account entirely elided certain questions: was it possible for 'official' art to evidence variety and aesthetic discernment?; was it possible for artists to operate in both 'official' and 'unofficial' realms, or move between them?; did these realms ever mix and negotiate with other?; were there grey areas and ambivalences between the 'official' and 'unofficial'?; and so on" (Gupta 2010:574).

create art outside the officially sanctioned style of Soviet Realism. They were heralded as brave critics of the authoritarian system, fighting the same ideological enemy as the West. But while it is true that many unofficial artists were indeed critical of the Soviet regime or of socialism, it by no means motivated all of them. Russian unofficial art is still seen through this simplistic understanding of being either for or against the state. There is no room for an alternative assessment that includes nuance, nor is attention paid to the fact that images and ideas have different meanings in the West and East. As a result, much can get lost in translation (Heartney 2011).

Efimova (1999) describes how unofficial Soviet art was digested by American audiences once it became available to them. Because the Soviet world has long been imagined as not only anti-materialist but also as immaterial, she argues, the interpretation of Soviet art was constrained in terms of ideological and political rhetorical schemata. This simplistic political reading of heroic artists creating in the face of the evil Soviet regime is much easier to sell on the art market than, as Efimova puts it, "the art of resourceful young artists who explore the complexity of the bittersweet legacy of Soviet life" (1999). The latter reading humanizes an old enemy while also failing to provide the thrill of Hollywood representations of Cold War tensions and stereotypes.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, interest in Nonconformist art dropped noticeably (Erjavec 2003). The West had "won" the Cold War and no longer saw Russia as a serious enemy. Without an oppressive Soviet state against which to define themselves, the Nonconformists could not be defined at all. Western buyers lost interest in Russian contemporary art even though the artists themselves remained the same. Groys (2003a) suggests that while *politically* the West welcomed the end of socialism, *aesthetically* it was not as excited given that art from the East now "employ[ed] the same language and the same procedures as Western art" (324). Because the international art world seeks difference, constantly in search for the exotic other, the end of socialism signaled the loss of "the most significant alternative to Western uniformity in recent history, one that was not merely formulated but also brought about. Its disappearance has made the world a poorer place in terms of differences and alternatives" (ibid.).

Aided by an atmosphere of chaos and disorder in the 1990s and economic stabilization under Vladimir Putin, Russian art went largely unnoticed until the mid-2000s. But as I discuss in Chapter Three, the past decade has seen the state return to Soviet-style behaviors such as openly censoring political art. During this time, the Russian state has also had an increasingly antagonistic relationship with the West, souring public opinion about Russia abroad.

In 2012, however, Pussy Riot reignited the Western imagination about Russian political art. The group's arrest and trial appeared to be history repeating itself: dissident artists being oppressed by a controlling state. Although they received extensive positive coverage in the international media, however, they were not received nearly as well domestically, eliciting little sympathy from fellow Russians (Pinkham 2014). Pussy Riot's performance, then, is a good example of how meaning in art can shift in translation. It is also a telling example of the way in which art from formerly Soviet countries is seen "as a well of information on the state of affairs in those societies from which it has emerged, and not purely as the work of individual artists who conceivably might not even wish to be associated with these societies" (Groys 2003a).

Interestingly, like the international art world that expected to see political art (particularly that which addressed socialism) from Russian artists, the *young* artists from the First Postsocialist Generation also made the same cognitive associations. When I asked them if they considered themselves "Russian" or made art they felt was "Russian," nearly all connected what it meant to be "Russian" with the Soviet past in some way—even though most were too young to have lived

through it. A telling example is from Andrei Blokhin (b. 1987) of the internationally successful group Recycle: “So if I’m from this country, it’s necessary to make an art piece that will be connected to something ‘Russian,’ like Socialist Realism? I was born in ‘87 but I really was a child when it was the end of the Soviet Union and I really don’t care about this time.”[203] What is interesting here is that we were not discussing the past or how he felt the Soviet Union shaped his art, yet much like his interlocutors in the West, his first association with the adjective *Russian* was *socialism*. Many of Blokhin’s peers likewise said they tried to stay away from “Russian clichés” in their art, which always included “Soviet,” “socialism,” or “Socialist Realism.”

Of course the younger generation’s need for an identity distinct from the previous generation’s identity is not unusual. But the attempt by members of the First Postsocialist Generation to disentangle themselves from the older generation coincides with their desire to be considered universal and international artists, devoid of the markings of Russian clichés. But why do they consider these themes “clichés?” No doubt this is tied up in the way in which Russian art is received by the international community, pigeonholed as political in some way. That is not to say that Russian artists do not genuinely want to make art that supersedes Russian influences. However, it is telling that their disavowal of being labeled “Russian” is rooted in knowing what the West expects of “Russian” art: art that presents itself in relation to the politically charged past of a country they never knew.

*East Looking East: The Imaginary West*

It is not only Western narratives about Russia and the Soviet Union that determine the experiences of Russian artists. How *Russia* responds to the West is also significant. This has historical precedents. Neither part of the East nor West, Russia has often struggled to accept, or perhaps develop, its own unique cultural position. Yet despite its own rich national traditions, Russia has been emulating the West for centuries.[204] Peter the Great was responsible for Europeanizing Russia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and under Catherine the Great the Russian élite continued looking toward Europe, particularly enamored with France. The nobility wore European fashions, spoke French, and became interested in literary pursuits. Painters were even brought from Western Europe to train Russians in their style.

This westward focus continued throughout the Soviet period. Yurchak (2006) argues that during the period of late socialism, the understanding of the West was produced with limited information, the result being what he called the “imaginary West.” The West (*zapad*) was the prototypical example of *zagranitsa*—a term in Soviet culture meant to signal “the peculiar combination of insularity and worldliness in Soviet culture” (158). In other words, while communist ideals were supposedly international in scope, those who believed in them were ironically unable to move internationally. Their view of the West was constructed *locally* to produce an idea or approximation of what it was actually like. *Zagranitsa* therefore signifies “an imaginary place that was simultaneously knowable and unattainable, tangible and abstract, mundane and exotic” (159).

The “imaginary West” is not unique to late socialism or even to Russia. Indeed, it has been used to describe how the West is understood in postsocialist and postcolonial cultures. The “imagined west” informs not only an idea of what the West is like, but also the way in which people interact with and respond to their own culture. Pilkington (2002) notes that the role of the West as “other” played a significant role in constructing a *Russian* sense of self among post-Soviet

[203] Interview with author on September 2, 2014

[204] For an illuminating discussion of Russia’s quest for a national identity vis-à-vis the West, see Groys 1992.

youth. Similarly, Marsh (2007) found in her study on post-Soviet Russian writers that they used their idea of the West, both from real and imagined experiences, "to explore, or even to rediscover, their own country" (555).

The "imaginary West" is not a uniform construct across cultures, or even within a specific culture. Rather, it is shaped by the historical, political, and cultural situatedness of a particular place. This does not mean, however, that there are no continuities across time. Although Russia now has access to the West, the imaginary West has persisted. Marsh (2007), for example, found that though there was more contact with the West than ever before, post-Soviet culture still relied on using stereotypical and undifferentiated views of the West that had been circulating in one form or another since the nineteenth century.[205] My findings also suggest similarities with the Soviet period as the idea of the West is being created with limited information, alongside themes of needing to "catch up" to a superior West, and above all, to emulate it. This feeling impacts the range of Russian art actors, from dealers to artists to critics to collectors.[206]

*The Imaginary International*

Today's version of the imaginary west for young Russian artists is, broadly speaking, the "international art world." Although describing it as "international" would imply a global audience, really what this is referring to is gaining acceptance or access to the Western art world. The interchangeability of "international" (or "global") and "Western" is the norm within the art world. Russian artists use "international" and "Western" to describe the art world to which they feel they belong artistically, even though most have little indication that the international art community feels the same way. This does not seem to deter young Russian artists from pursuing that an international community or identity. As I discuss in Chapter One, many of the young artists, such as Andrei Blokhin, seamlessly took on the identity of "international" artist. In spite of the peripheral status of the Russian art world, for artists like Blokhin, growing up in a world dominated by the message of "globalization" has superseded the national idea for what is possible in art. The artists of the First Postsocialist Generation were comfortable with the idea that they were international artists who lived in Russia.

While many inwardly felt as Blokhin does, most were not as confident as he was in the success of their international self-identification outside of Russia. In this way, being an "internationally oriented" artist was an aspirational identity. CrocodilePOWER, made up of Oksana Simatova (b. 1979) and Piotr Goloshchapov (b. 1982), was an up-and-coming duo building a solid career in Russia, with several large solo shows in Moscow at museums and galleries. Simatova and Goloshchapov were eager to expand beyond Russia, and saw their limited experience and success as the opportunity to actualize this identity, which otherwise was tied to the future.

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[205] For more on the post-Soviet fixation on the West, see: Goscilo 2000; Humphrey 2002; Oushakine 2000; Patico 2008; Pilkington 2002; Shevchenko 2009; and Yurchak 2006.

[206] "The issue of universality and particularity in terms of national identity and globalization in Europe is inevitably linked with the issues of belonging and participation. There is still a contradiction, especially among the candidate countries for accession, between the desire to acquire European citizenship (and thus to belong to the European 'family') and the inherited belonging to a certain local cultural or ethnic community. The urgent question here would be how to reconcile the historic *belonging* with participation that tends towards *belonging without belonging*" (Milevska 2010:18).

PG: We participated in the Martini exhibition[207] and the prize was to take a course at Saint Martins in London. And we won, which was a very important moment for us because it wasn't only about winning for the prize—it was about the opportunity to go abroad.
*EH: Why was it so important to go abroad? Why has that been a motivation in your art?*
PG: Before our trip to London, we did not have a professional environment for art [in Russia]. However, we have always thought of ourselves as very international artists. And we have always had an orientation toward the West and western artists. So when we were creating something, we were imagining ourselves in conversation with someone like Anish Kapoor or Jeff Koons,[208] for example.
*EH: So basically all the biggest contemporary artists in the world today (laughs).*
OS: (laughs) Yes, we imagined ourselves as part of an exhibition with all the big stars of the art world.
PG: (laughs) Yeah. You could say that we have very high standards for the kind of art we wanted to make. So not looking at Russian art—but straightaway looking at art worldwide.
*EH: Why don't you look to Russia?*
OS: We respect conceptual art,[209] like Kabakov, those guys, but it is not interesting for us as artists. And by the time we started making art, of course, there's nothing new there. It was already done, so trying to get into the system to create something new was impossible. But anyway, we always wanted to create our own language—
PG: Our own identity. Not part of a particular school or tradition. But you know, there are not a lot of Russian artists who are famous in the international contemporary scene—well, AES+F is one good example, but there are so few—this meant that there were really no role models of how to be successful internationally.
OS: And there was no one to be in competition or conversation with [in Russia].
*EH: So you really want to be part of a larger conversation in the art world—not just in Russia.*
OS: Yes—right. In my opinion, nowadays it wouldn't be right to keep yourself in the boundaries of a country. The world is… for me, the world is much wider than just Russia. The art world in general—it is a different space, a different universe…
*EH: You mean its own separate entity, not necessarily tied to nationalism or a nation?*

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[207] This was a competition sponsored by Martini Bianco and Martini Asti and held at the ARTPLAY Design Center in Moscow in 2014. The winner's design was featured on bottles for limited-edition labels in the Russian market, and were also to be put on display at the Turin Museum of Martini&Rossi. Further, they were awarded a course in art at Central Saint Martins in London.
[208] Anish Kapoor is a British-Indian sculptor whose works can be seen all over the world, including *Cloud Gate* (or "the Bean") in Chicago's Millennium Park and *ArcelorMittal Orbit* in London's Olympic Park. He represented Britain in the 1990 Venice Biennale and won the Turner Prize in 2002, among other awards. Jeff Koons is an American artist, known for working with pop-culture objects, such as his giant reproductions of balloon dogs. Although many see his work as kitsch or based on self-merchandizing, he is popular on the art market—he has earned the distinction as one of the most expensive living artists in the world. In 2013, is *Balloon Dog (Orange)* sold at auction for $58.4 million USD—the most expensive work by a living artist ever sold at auction.
[209] Simatova is making a reference to Moscow Conceptualism, also known as Soviet Nonconformist art.

> OS: Exactly. It's a separate world. And in the global art space, one shouldn't be framed with any kind of borders. It is completely isolating, not being part of that global art space. It's like everyone else is using electricity, and you're still using a candle.

One way young Russian artists tried to make this international future into a reality was by trying to spend time abroad, usually in the West. Often this was not a permanent possibility, however, because "living globally" for young Russian artists is nearly impossible. Unlike the Soviet Nonconformists who experienced success internationally while maintaining their Russian identity after they had emigrated in the 1970s and 1980s, making it as an artist abroad is not common for today's young artists. The Russian artists who want to leave today do not have refugee status. "Only those artists who study in Europe at a young age and stay there," the artist Sergei Ogurtsov explained, "will be actually integrated in the society—as opposed to being a *Russian* artist living abroad."

The artists I interviewed were nearly unanimous in this type of assessment: the difficulties facing Russian artists living abroad were relatively insurmountable. The difficulties were not confined to living abroad, however. Many talked about what it meant to be "marked" as Russian when showing work abroad. This often results in self-consciousness: how do others see them or understand their work? Even young artists like Sofia Gavrilova (b. 1987)—who speaks fluent English, has lived in Paris and New York, and is currently studying for a Ph.D. at Oxford—feels self-conscious about showing her work outside Russia. It was her time in the West that made her understand how Russian art is perceived abroad.

> *EH: What do you think about contemporary Russian art today?*
> SG: Well I do think we have a very interesting scene. But honestly speaking… I think that only a small number of the Russian artists of my generation, maybe two or three, would be interesting to an international audience, or successful. And I'm not considering myself one of them! [Laughs]
> *EH: Why not?*
> SG: Because I understand that I have a limited appeal… well okay, so when I first went to Vienna [for a group show] it was an absolute shock to me when I realized that my project was so deeply, culturally Russian… to the point that no one else was going to understand it! How could they?! It was so specific to Russia. I was going on about the Moscow ring road, the city of Leningrad… all this Russia stuff and suddenly I thought "Fuck! No one understands anything I'm saying!" There was a total cultural gap, you know? But I only understood that *after* going [to the West], after seeing my art as others saw it. Anyway, yeah, so I do think [the art scene] is interesting here, even though it's so small. But generally speaking about the whole world of art here… yeah, only about two or three people have what it would take to make it outside of Russia.[210]

It is telling that when I asked Gavrilova what she thinks about Russian art, she immediately made her assessment based on how well she thought it would do in a Western art context.

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[210] Interview with author on September 8, 2014

When unable to live abroad permanently, Russian artists find other ways to get international attention. Many of the younger generation have had some art education in the West, and always hunt for new fellowships, residencies, or other opportunities that would let them engage with art outside of Russia. They promote themselves tirelessly on personal websites and social media to reach new audiences. And in the case of the art duo crocodilePOWER, they go so far as to strategically name themselves:

> *EH: Why did you decide to use English words for your name?*
> OS: It's a bit of a funny story. We were doing an installation project for an international art competition and the names… they always put the English names at the top of the list and the Russian alphabet comes second. We wanted to be in the beginning, because, you know, people only look halfway down a list and then they toss it aside. It was important to show up first!
> *EH: Ah, that was forward thinking.*
> OS: Yeah. But more general—we also made that decision [to have an English name] because from the beginning [of our career] we were interested in trying to become part of the global art scene. We knew we wanted to aim internationally.

This was a fine line for many of these artists, and they were aware that their Russianness could be either alienating or exotic. They were wary of garnering attention that only came from their status as the "other," as opposed to the merit of the art itself. Particularly for the younger artists of the First Postsocialist Generation—many who consider themselves "international" first and "Russian" second—being evaluated based on the degree to which they have communicated Russianness in their work could be frustrating. Although the artist Ustina Iakovleva (b. 1987) wants to spend time abroad and exhibit internationally, she firmly considers herself a Russian artist: "But I'm 'multicultural' in a way, because… well, I'm Russian, right, but you can't tell from my art that I'm Russian." The lack of overt markers of national identity in her work has created problems for her outside of Russia. "A gallery in Hong Kong was looking at my work and the first thing they said was, 'where's the Russian?' That was disappointing."[211] Sometimes even when a work was missing "the Russian" as Iakovleva's, it was still seen through the filters of Russianness. Oksana Simatova explained how in spite of their best efforts to avoid it, her duo crocodilePOWER was always Russian:

> *EH: What are your main inspirations for your art?*
> OS: Well, we really didn't want to use any Russian clichés in our art, like poverty, politics, or the Soviet Union. We want to speak to universal themes that could be felt in any part of the world.
> *EH: So looking more at the "shared human experience?"*
> OS: Yes. Although… well… even if that's what *we* think, our art is not always seen as though it's about the universal experience! We had an exhibition here [at Triumph Gallery] called "Inner Taiga" (see Figure 29). We didn't want it to be seen just as Russian, you know, with strong Russian themes. So we were careful not to give it Russian "coloring." But then at the opening [of the exhibition] there were

[211] Interview with author on September 3, 2014

two British artists—they came over to me and said, "Oh your work is *so* Russian!" (laughs) and I thought, "No! That's what we *didn't* want."

Figure 29: crocodilePOWER, from the exhibition *Inner Taiga* (2013). Photo: Courtesy of artists

Simatova's frustration is not without precedent, nor is it unique to Russians. As Groys (2003a) points out, with artists all over the world today using the same forms and procedures to create art, the different cultural, political, and historical contexts from which art emerges has become increasingly important for understanding it. This is so true that "an artist can and must expect the viewer to regard the context in which he produces his art as *an intrinsic dimension of his work*" (323; emphasis mine). In other words, because it is so embedded in a specific context, it cannot be disentangled from it, and thus these works are "perceived immediately as signs, symptoms or information that instruct the viewer about the specific conditions prevailing in that part of the globe from where these works come" (2003a:323).

Yet as I discuss in Chapter Three regarding political art, some artists found that the expectation of "Russianness" was not always a negative thing; rather, having their Russianness assessed and labeled by the West could at times have positive outcomes. This at times complicated the artists' feelings about their autonomy and self-definition, leaving them conflicted about the utility of nationalities and national culture. Goloshchapov felt this acutely:

> We have definitely learned that you can't get rid of your national culture or nationality… we think of ourselves as "international" and "universal"—but you know, our art will probably always be seen as Russian, as having a character… a

> sense of Russianness. But… maybe it's not always a negative thing? I think it can also be positive, too, because it *does* make our work special. Makes it different from everyone else. And we need help getting people to see our art, to let us be part of the conversation, right? So yes, we will always be making "Russian" art. There is still this kind of separation—there probably always will be. But the really the important question is: will there be *interest* in Russian art?[212]

While many would see this as the burden of nationalism, Winegar (2006) in some ways aligns with Goloshchapov, suggesting that when viewed from *within* their culture (in her case, from the Egyptian case), "nation-oriented frames" *can* be a useful heuristic for cultural producers in formerly colonized and postsocialist countries because "in these contexts, cultural production, while not reducible to or wholly defined by national allegory, was certainly shaped by histories in which culture and nation became intertwined in struggles against colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism" (9, 130; see also Sapiro forthcoming).

Although some artists were resolute in not bending to the whims or desire of a global art world, they were still keenly aware that the ultimate consecration as an artist would be attention from the West. In an interview with *Gazeta.ru*, video artist Evgenii Granilshchikov, winner of the prestigious Kandinsky Prize[213] for best young artist, was asked whether he shared the concerns of many in the Russian art community about their place in the international context:

> I have heard this a lot, and I have always been extremely annoyed [by it]. Although I understand that many artists of the previous generation were not part of [the international art world], so non-inclusion in the global process is really perceived as trauma. I cannot speak for all of my peers, but for me it is not [a trauma]. In my circle it is simply not discussed. I do not see any problem here and I do not feel that this problem should arise in the future. All these complaints somehow revolve around the art market, and I am not guided by it. That may sound arrogant, but I'm just working as I see fit, and it does not feel secondary in relation to Western art. Quite the contrary: often I find in it a certain fatigue, ideological exhaustion. So my task [is to] formulate artistic goals and move towards them, to do my projects. If they are someone who will be interested in my work, the rest will follow. A chronic complaint can certainly evoke sympathy, but no more.

I found Granilshchikov's assertion of autonomy from the pressures of the international art world relatively unusual, so I asked him and his collaborator and director of photography Iasha Vetkin about it when we sat down for an interview. Although his comments in the *Gazeta.ru* interview seemed to dismiss the international art world outside Russia, this was hardly the case. Like so many of his peers, Granilshchikov was eager to make international connections. As he put it, "We want to have a dialogue with the world at large, not just make art films for a small group of people. Film is a way of communicating with others, it doesn't matter about the language or translation." But what made Granilshchikov and Vetkin different was that they were not interested in only having this conversation with the West. While they certainly would like to take part in film festivals and competitions in Europe, their focus was further east: "Right now, we want to have more of a conversation with Asia," he told me. "We are very influenced by Thai filmmakers and

[212] Interview with author on September 3, 2014
[213] The Kandinsky Prize is the Russian equivalent of the Turner Prize in the United Kingdom, for example.

we feel like we are doing the same kind of stuff, you know, no narrative, no plot… the first impression is you don't understand how to understand it."[214] They were also influenced by political films from Iran and the Philippines, in which they saw similar themes and ways to express what they were experiencing in Russia.

> A filmmaker from the Philippines, he wanted to show a reaction to political events, about revolution. "After History" it was called. The film reconstructs the events but you don't realize it. It doesn't appear political, and you don't know until you read about it afterwards that it had that political significance. Because that's what life is just like. So that… that is what we are trying to do. In our film, it's 20 minutes, there are three screens, and mostly it's just the characters talking to each other. They're mostly at home and closer to the end of the film they realize that one of the characters is about to leave Russia, but the other characters decide to stay. We wanted to reflect reality—a different reality of Russia, a new reality… one that people don't see. So we showed the bigger picture in a small way, sometimes unarticulated. And you don't even know until after."

CONCLUSION

During the Soviet period, artists were hungry to engage with the outside art world. With repressive laws and closed borders, they could only access contemporary Western art through whatever texts came through the black market. And unless they left the country or their art was smuggled out by a foreigner, their art was confined within the borders of the Soviet Union. They were finally able to enter the international art world during a period of globalization, increased diversity, and inclusiveness. It would seem that this would work to Russian artists' advantage. And yet as I have shown in this chapter, the opportunities afforded by the international art world are limited. Attitudes toward Russian art range from dismissive to disinterested (unless it is "political" art), meaning the collector base remains domestic. The West has failed to cede its place as the canonical standard for contemporary art, and Russian art is frequently compared unfavorably to it—both by Russian artists (who have internalized this hierarchy), and by those in the West. While open borders give the opportunity for mobility, leaving Russia is an expensive endeavor that most cannot afford. In the end, the Russian art world comes up against yet another roadblock to a thriving field of art.

[214] Interview with author on September 5, 2014

# CONCLUSION
## *The Field of Art in Russia and Beyond*

Interest in art produced outside the West has increased in the past several decades. This has happened in part as a result of political and economic changes that have occurred in some countries located in the periphery. For example, artistic repression and censorship ended with the demise of oppressive regimes such as the Soviet Union, allowing artwork to flow more easily in and out of the country. The transition to capitalism in formerly socialist countries has also created a new wealthy stratum of society, creating a new class of art collectors, many of whom begin their collections by buying their national art. The international art market has responded to burgeoning interest in the art of the periphery with a proliferation of international art fairs and bienniales located outside traditional Western art centers. Curators at museums around the world have turned to questions of the "globalized" nature of art in their exhibitions, and art historians have asked what this expansion means for their discipline, which has historically been defined by European and American standards and scholars.

Despite these shifts, many argue that Western art continues to dominate the international market, canonical art history, and the fashioning of international standards for what constitutes good art. Indeed, as I have tried to demonstrate in this dissertation, existing theories of cultural production fail to explain fully the position in which Russian art is created, collected, and understood. Developed from the historical conditions of nineteenth-century France, Bourdieu's theory of the field of art misses the complexity and specificity of what a field might look like outside of this context. For Bourdieu, France's field of art developed because artistic and literary production became autonomous from the heteronomous forces of political and economic power. This meant that the artistic and literary fields were free to establish their own rules, no longer beholden to the various institutions that formerly impinged on their creativity, such as the church, the courts, and the *académie*. A field of art hinges on the acquisition of this autonomy, which Bourdieu sees as a universal value. Yet as I discuss in the introduction, autonomy, is not a one-size-fits-all concept, and far from a sharply-defined concept. Thus, regarding autonomy as something that is universal and can be achieved—and as fundamentally *modern*—reinforces a hierarchy of societies in which those that do not share that construction of autonomy are somehow not part of modernity.

Yet despite this critique, I do not dismiss Bourdieu's theory on the grounds that he does not speak directly to the experience of art in the periphery. Rather, I agree with Hockx (2003) who urges us to separate "Bourdieu's basic theoretical framework distinction (which is relatively value-free) from Bourdieu's own application of that framework (which is Eurocentric)" (221). In this way, I find that the concept of a field of art is still useful for developing a sociology of art in Russia—in other words, for helping us to understand all the moving parts that go into creating it—but that it needs to be reconfigured in order to fit with the specificity of the Russian case. I attempt to do this by examining Russian art and the various actors within the Russian field of art, on its own terms, thus emphasizing the importance of contextualizing the art in its specific history while also seeing how it interacts and is shaped by the international art world.

In this dissertation I have sought to expand field theory beyond the West to consider how it can help create a genealogy of postsocialist Russia art. To do this I present a detailed development of contemporary art in Russia since the demise of the Soviet Union and end of state socialism. Counter to the often one-dimensional portrayal of the Russian art world in the West, I have tried to

tell this story as comprehensively as possible, taking into account the varied perspectives from the range of actors who have a stake in contemporary Russian art. Field theory helps to illuminate the interests and roles that different actors have and how their positions within the field have shaped outcomes for Russian contemporary art in the post-Soviet period. Specifically, I show how the interaction between Russia's history (particularly the legacy of socialism), the market, the state, and Russia's position within the international field of contemporary art have created tensions and impediments to developing a robust and stable environment for the production of art in Russia. Ultimately, I find that although the field of art has changed dramatically since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia's experience has mostly been marked by substantial instability and precariousness.

## A THEORY OF POSTSOCIALIST FIELDS? RUSSIA AND CHINA

So what does Russia's story tell us about the development of fields of art in countries in the periphery? Or of emerging markets? About the sociology of art in general? Does the Russian case offer a generalizable theory of fields of art from other postsocialist countries that have experienced dramatic changes in the last several decades?

The Chinese case would suggest that it does not. China has had a dramatically different experience: heralded as an emerging-market success, it now has the third largest art market in the world, making up 19% of global art sales (McAndrew 2016).[215] Since 2003, Chinese art-auction revenues have increased a reported 900% (Barboza, Bowley, and Cox 2013). In 2011, five out of 15 of the top-selling contemporary works of art sold at auction were by Chinese artists (Rogers 2012). China boasts over 350 auction houses, and in 2012 the Chinese auction house Poly Auction was the third largest in the world, behind Christie's and Sotheby's. Russia, however, has experienced a very different trajectory. Its art market has not yet recovered from the financial crisis in 2007. Only one auction house actually sells in Russia. Auction houses with an international presence, such as Sotheby's and Christie's, have offices in Moscow, but their auctions take place in London. Galleries have continued to close, and by 2016 there were only a handful in Moscow. None of their living contemporary artists make the top-selling lists at auction. And while the world coos over the emergence of Chinese contemporary art with articles titled "Top 10 Must-Know Chinese Artists," the coverage of Russian contemporary art typically focuses on government censorship.

The disparity between the experience of the two countries is not lost on Russians, who frequently cite the success of the Chinese contemporary art market as a way to explain their own failure. A common refrain I heard was that, "[we] need to become a *brand* of art, like the Chinese did." So what accounts for the difference? And does field theory help us understand it? Explicating the precise cause of divergence is difficult, because at first glance, Russia and China *do* share important characteristics relevant to art production and consumption. Both are large countries that have had relatively parallel histories of socialism in which artistic production was regulated and censored for nearly a century and, until the late 1980s, commercial markets for art did not exist. Both are now considered emerging markets (and members of the BRICS grouping), and both had and continue to have authoritarian governments to some degree. In terms of their position in the international art world, China and Russia are both considered to be on the periphery, and their art has never been a considered standard in the Western art historical canon. China could be considered even further from Russia in this respect, as Asian art has long been an exotic other to

[215] It had previously been the second largest. See McAndrew 2016.

Western arbiters of artistic taste. Given these similarities, what explains the divergent experiences of contemporary art in Russia and China? Let me consider each element of field analysis in turn.

*The Legacy of State Socialism*

The end of the Soviet Union brought profound uncertainty economically and politically. For many, it also created a crisis of identity: what did it mean to be a postsocialist person? The artists of the Last Soviet Generation—the last to come of age during the Soviet age—felt this crisis keenly in the immediate transition to capitalism. They had spent their artistic careers chasing the coattails of the celebrated Nonconformists who came before them, wanting to assert a different identity, and the end of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity to do this. Many of the more famous Nonconformist artists had left Russia in the 1980s, leaving the Last Soviet Generation to respond to the changes in society through their art. The abrupt shift certainly had an impact on their art, which contrasts with that of the First Postsocialist Generation, who barely remember socialism and whose ambitions lie beyond the border. Yet even though the Last Soviet Generation made art that was responding to the unique set of circumstances of post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s, and the First Postsocialist Generation considers itself part of the international art world, Russian art is often seen as not finding its own voice. Although there are a few internationally successful Russian contemporary artists in both generations, in general their lack of exposure to contemporary art during the Soviet period is still seen as a reason why Russian art is not innovative—at least in the eyes of international critics.

China does not suffer from this problem in the same way. Why? Arguably China experienced the same artistic isolation from the West that Russia did, yet Chinese artists do not receive nearly the same amount of criticism for being "derivative" and instead are seen as distinctive. What accounts for this? One consideration is that China did not experience the same shock of an overnight transition from state socialism that Russia did. Instead, China has had a gradual evolution to marketization that has not been marked by the instability that characterized Russia, particularly in the 1990s. Has this different trajectory to capitalism shaped the art and artists in China in such a way that can explain why their art is received in a more positive way? And what does the generational difference look like among contemporary Chinese artists, and does it matter? Comparing the two also brings up the question of the conditions under which Russian and Chinese artists have developed a postsocialist identity—and how and to what degree the legacy of socialism has shaped their art.[216] Does the difference between them have to do with a less chaotic economic transition? A further comparison would be useful to explore how the transition impacted Chinese art in such a way that it is viewed as positive and novel.

*The Market*

One of the most difficult parts of transitioning from socialism to capitalism for many Russian artists was the almost total absence of infrastructure to support art, including art education, the market, and the official art unions of the state. During the Soviet period many Nonconformists were part of these unions because it allowed them to earn a living doing "official" work, such as illustrating, while they made "unofficial" art in secret. In the early postsocialist period, however, being a professional artist was nearly impossible. Even "day jobs" with which artists could support their creative work were hard to find. Although the Artists Trade Union of Russia still survives, it

[216] See Tan 2012 for a discussion of how Chinese artists understand China's Communist legacy.

has remained a conservative organization with no ties or interest in contemporary art or the market for it.

Agents in the Chinese art world faced similar problems as China shifted toward a market economy. Starting a commercial art market with no cultural infrastructure with which to consecrate and legitimate art is challenging, costly, and time-consuming. But unlike Russia, China was able to retain the strength and organization of its art unions because they did not endure the same shock therapy transition to capitalism. Chinese art unions and other art-supporting state institutions did not disappear almost overnight, as in Russia. Instead, they were able to gradually build the market, adapting what they already had to the new economic conditions. Many who became involved in setting up the Chinese art market had ties to these state art organizations, relying on them for support and adapting so that they worked with the market (Kharchenkova et al. 2015).

*The State*

The Russian state, particularly under Putin, has been openly hostile to contemporary art, censoring it when state managers feel it questions their authority or clashes with their ideology. The state also limits funding for contemporary art, instead allocating culture funds to more traditional forms of Russian art, such as ballet and theater. One gallery owner saw the state's unwillingness to support contemporary art as a missed opportunity, suggesting that promoting contemporary art would help improve Russia's image abroad ("so that the rest of the world could see we are interested in culture, not just oil"). The state's reach is felt in all parts of the Russian art world, from the artists whose art is censored to the galleries that cannot afford to go to international art fairs due to the double taxation of art in and out of the country. This has created an atmosphere of defeat, because without any financial support from the state, it is very difficult for artists and artistic institutions to support themselves. Further, the Russian state under Putin has produced legitimate fear in many producers and appreciators of Russian contemporary art, discouraging involvement in it because of the looming specter of repression.

China also has a controlling state, and has been arguably even more infamous than Russia in recent years for censoring art its leaders find threatening, such as the work of dissident artist Ai Weiwei. Yet Chinese repression differs from Russian repression in that the Chinese state has identified culture—and not just "traditional" culture—as a core area for economic growth (Barboza, Bowley, and Cox 2013). *Art is a tool of soft power*, as it brings international attention to a positive aspect of the state with the hope that it will obscure that state's political imbroglios and human-rights record. This attitude toward art has greatly bolstered the market for Chinese contemporary art. Can the support that Chinese artists receive from the state be considered a fortuitous byproduct of the Chinese state's political manipulations? And if a state supports contemporary art in part to deflect attention away from other issues that shape its domestic and international reputation, should that exercise of power be considered when judging art? Perhaps beyond monetary or market support, the cultural loosening of China has the biggest impact on the ideological atmosphere of the artists, who feel more at ease. It is not hard to think this could be the case. As one Russian artist told me,

> I've always been aware that government will never support us as artists—not financially, they won't promote us… but I hope that it's not… negative. I mean, I hope that the government will leave us alone, let us do what we want. I wish it could

> be more like China here—they leave their artists alone *and* they promote their art, and look at how many Chinese artists are famous now. They are everywhere.[217]

*Globalization*

The Russian contemporary art world has yet to become influential in the international contemporary art world. Although it is weak, it has built a market and fostered a small community that supports contemporary art. Yet its influence and reach extends only weakly beyond Russian borders. Though not closed to the international art world as they were during the Soviet period, Russian contemporary artists have struggled to earn recognition and respect from the international art community. In part, this has to do with the difficulty Russian contemporary artists have had in asserting a unique identity; they are frequently pigeonholed by the West as only having good *political* art. Further, becoming part of the international art world is difficult on a practical level: due to laws that require excessive taxes for both taking out and bringing art back into Russia, gallerists and artists often cannot afford to attend the internationally oriented art fairs that have become ubiquitous in the past decade, meaning they are physically left out of the conversation.

China does not seem to have this problem. In part this is because the state has made life easier for most contemporary artists, and, importantly, has encouraged and fostered relationships with major Western auction houses (such as Christie's and Sotheby's) and galleries (such as Gagosian). These Western sellers see the expanding class of wealthy Chinese as a huge opportunity for market growth. The Chinese government has welcomed this expansion as consonant with its desire to invest in culture and to project China's soft power abroad. In addition to serving the massive Chinese market, Western market agents have also exposed Chinese art to international audiences. In this way, being amenable to the Western market and to the promotion of contemporary art has helped the Chinese state and Chinese artists extend its "national brand" abroad.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

My field analysis provides a series of hypotheses as to why a much more vibrant and dynamic field of contemporary art has appeared in China than in Russia since the transition to a market economy. To determine which of the factors is crucial would require a very different study. Nonetheless, the comparison demonstrates the importance, once again, of situating the field within its broader context of determination, something Bourdieu undertook in only a limited way. I have shown that Russian art was deeply shaped by its socialist antecedents and global context as well as by market and state forces. As we saw in Chapter One, the legacy of state socialism is becoming weaker generation by generation. This only makes the impact of market and state more important. In the short run, the market is filling the gap created by a hostile state in economic and cultural support for artists. But in the long run, a field can only thrive in a political climate that fosters its autonomy. Whereas the immediate prospects are grim, we cannot assume that the Russian state is unchanging and that a new nationalism might not find a symbol of its own power in art. At the global level, the art market is, after all, still a market: fickle about discovering new fashions, even as it continues to consecrate art according to canonical Western conventions and a Western vantage point. What I have shown with the case of Russia is that the field art has its own internal dynamics while the forces shaping it are themselves in flux.

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[217] Interview with author on September 10, 2014

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