

**THE PHANTOM OF INSPIRATION:
ELENA POLENOVA, MARIIA IAKUNCHIKOVA
AND THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN ART IN RUSSIA**

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This dissertation provides an examination of the lives and works of two Russian artists: Elena Dmitrievna Polenova (1850-1898) and Mariia Vasil'evna Iakunchikova (1870-1902). It takes a biographical approach to elucidate how Polenova and Iakunchikova negotiated the constraints imposed by their gender and the rapid changes occurring in Russia's social structure in their search for a modern Russian art. The dissertation begins with an investigation of Polenova's activities in the spheres of social activism and art in the 1870s and concludes with both women's contributions to the Russian handicrafts (*kustar*) pavilion at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle. While Polenova's contributions to the Russian *kustar* revival have been the subject of scholarly research, her activities in the broader art world have not. This dissertation seeks to remedy the skewed vision of Polenova's artistic output that has been a result. In addition, her close friendship and artistic synergy with Iakunchikova has been neglected. Iakunchikova is virtually unknown outside a small group of Russian-art specialists. Thus, an investigation of both women's work together provides a more rounded history of their contribution to Russian artists' search for a modern, yet uniquely Russian, art at the end of the nineteenth century.

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PREFACE

I have employed the Library of Congress transliteration system without diacritics except for words and names that have accepted spellings in English, e.g., Peter the Great, Nicholas II, Tretyakov.

There are many people who have my eternal gratitude for their assistance in completing this dissertation. Dr. Barbara McCloskey, my dissertation advisor, provided sage counsel and deft editing at all stages of the process from its inception to the very end. My committee members, Dr. Helena Goscilo, Dr. Kirk Savage, and Dr. Anne Weis, all shared their varying perspectives and expertise in ways that only strengthened the text.

The Fulbright Program provided me with the funding necessary to spend an academic year in Russia researching this topic. Without their generosity to young scholars this project would not have come to fruition.

I am also indebted to the staff of the Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, the State Russian Museum Manuscript Division, the Archives Center of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, the Russian State Library (Moscow), Russian National Library (St. Petersburg), the Library of Congress, the Frick Fine Arts Library (University of Pittsburgh) and the Interlibrary Loan Services of Hillman Library (University of Pittsburgh). Special thanks go to the following for helping me track down the elusive Miss Netta Peacock: Richard Davies of the Leeds Russian Archive (University of Leeds), Richard Loveday of the Victoria and Albert

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Finally, I wish to extend my thanks to family and friends who saw me through this long journey. Thank you for your unceasing support.

INTRODUCTION

Elena Dmitrievna Polenova (1850-1898) and Mariia Vasil'evna Iakunchikova (1870-1902) played important roles in the redefinition of Russian art that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. In spite of an age difference of twenty years and, for a decade of their careers, a separation of many miles, these two women shared a passion for art that fueled their close friendship and inspired each other's production. Their lives provide a window into challenges faced by Russian artists as they struggled to create a modern, yet distinctively Russian, art. In addition, their biographies afford an opportunity to examine how women artists in particular surmounted the problems of modern art and gender-based biases to forge successful careers.

Polenova was born on November 15, 1850¹ in St. Petersburg to Dmitrii Vasil'evich Polenov (1806-1878) and Mariia Alekseevna (Voeikova) Polenova (1816-1895). Polenova was the youngest child of this highly artistic family; her brother, Vasilii Dmitrievich (1844-1927), would become one of Russia's most famous painters.² The Polenovs were a gentry family who

¹ Until 1918, Russia followed the Julian calendar, aka "Old Style," which in the nineteenth century was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. Unless otherwise noted, all dates are given Old Style.

² In order to keep clear the various Polenovs, and later the various Iakunchikovs, I have settled on the following method for names: "Polenova" (the variant of the last name for a woman) by itself will always mean Elena Dmitrievna Polenova. All other Polenovs will be referred to by name and patronymic in the Russian tradition after their first appearance in the text, where they will be identified in full. The same system will be used for the Iakunchikov family. Except for the imperial family, all other Russians will be identified fully at first and then referred to by last name. In the case where this would cause confusion, I have used initials after the first identification, e.g., P. M. Tretyakov.

proudly traced their origins to the emergence of an enlightened intelligentsia during the rule of Peter the Great. They rose in status primarily through government service, and their liberal leanings went back to Aleksei Iaklovich Polenov (1738-1816), who was awarded a gold medal by the Free Economic Society in 1766 for his essay arguing for the abolishment of serfdom.³

As with most Russian families looking to enlightened Europe, the arts were extremely important to the Polenovs. Dmitrii Vasil'evich was active in archaeological circles. He was also a strong supporter and personal friend of such renowned academic artists as Karl Pavlovich Briullov (1799-1852), creator of the famous *Last Day of Pompeii* (*Последний день Помпеи*) (1833), and Fedor Antonovich Bruni (1799-1875) (e.g., *The Bronze Serpent* (*Медный змий*), 1841).⁴ Both men were appointed professors at the Imperial Academy of Arts in 1836. The family also greatly admired Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov (1806-1858), purchasing one of the studies for his monumental painting *The Appearance of Christ to the People* (*The Appearance of the Messiah*) (*Явление Христа народу* [*Явление Мессии*], 1837–1857) in 1858.⁵

Mariia Alekseevna was an illustrator and writer of children's books. Her mother, Vera Nikolaevna (L'vova) Voeikova, was a strong patriot. She was the widow of a Napoleonic War hero and had close ties to Russian literature, having grown up in the household of the poet Gavriila Romanovich Derzhavin (1743-1816) after her parents' death. In addition, Vera

³ Ekaterina V. Sakharova, *Vasilii Dmitrievich Polenov. Elena Dmitrievna Polenova. Khronika sem'i khudozhnikov*. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), 6. This is the primary reference on the Polenovs. Ekaterina Sakharova is Vasilii Dmitrievich's daughter. It contains annotated correspondence and an introductory essay by Sakharova. In spite of the family's early support of abolition, they did have populated estates. For example, the Polenovs had peasants on *obrok* at their estate Imochentsy. *Obrok* was a tax a peasant paid for using land given to him by the state. To her credit, Mariia Alekseevna was very worried about their welfare, expressing concern that their construction of a house and taking up residence on the property might be to the peasants' detriment. M. A. Polenova to F. V. Chizhov, September 27, 1855, 49-50 (unless otherwise noted, all letters come from the Sakharova volume). In 1861, Dmitrii Vasil'evich undertook to write the biography of his great-grandfather, Aleksei Iaklovich, "the first emancipator in Russia." D. V. Polenov to F. V. Chizhov, June 29, 1861, 51.

⁴ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 7.

⁵ M. A. Polenova to F. V. Chizhov, November 18, 1858, 51.

Nikolaevna's father, Nikolai Aleksandrovich L'vov, had been a well known architect and honorary member of the Imperial Academy. Vera Nikolaevna exerted a strong influence on her grandchildren, often sponsoring family competitions for the best drawing on a specific theme from Russian or Biblical history. Mariia Alekseevna followed her mother's example, hiring the future academician Pavel Petrovich Chistiakov (1832-1919) to tutor her children in drawing in 1859.⁶

In spite of their love of the arts, a stance expected of any educated member of the gentry, the family elders recoiled when in 1863 Vasilii Dmitrievich declared that he wished to study at the Imperial Academy of the Arts. His parents insisted that he attend the university and study law. He did so, but entered the Imperial Academy as an auditor at the same time, becoming a full-time student in 1864. His parents continued to worry in spite of Vasilii Dmitrievich's success. In 1864 Dmitrii Vasil'evich wrote to a family friend, Fedor Vasil'evich Chizhov (1811-1877), "For his last exam at the Academy Vasia again received first place for his drawing and has been allowed into the life drawing class. He has requested resignation from the university and will become an official [Academy] student. What will happen to him? This sort of unusual path is somehow frightening" ⁷ In 1871 Vasilii Dmitrievich graduated from both the Academy and the university.⁸

⁶ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 6-7, 9. Chistiakov would later develop his own method of instruction and be the primary instructor for such artists as Il'ia Efimovich Repin, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel and Valentin Aleksandrovich Serov.

⁷ "Вася на последнем экзамене в Академии получил опять № 1 за свой рисунок и переведен в натурный класс. Он подал просьбу об увольнении его из университета и поступает в формальные ученики. Что-то с ним будет? Как-то страшно за эдакую необычайную дорогу" D. V. Polenov to F. V. Chizhov, January 1, 1864, 56. Ellipsis in the original. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Russian are my own. Chizhov was a Slavophile and historian who had written about Russian icons. It is possible his knowledge of pre-Petrine Russian culture also had an influence on Polenova.

⁸ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 11.

Meanwhile, in 1864, while Chistiakov was in Italy, Polenova began studying with Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi (1837-1887), one of The Fourteen who had revolted at the Imperial Academy during the Gold Medal competition the previous year for what they perceived as a lack of artistic freedom and the Academy's increasing remove from Russian life. Kramskoi would become a leading member of the Peredvizhniki, an artist group I will discuss further below. Polenova studied under him at the School of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in St. Petersburg. He also gave her private instruction.⁹ While this brief biographical sketch illustrates that Polenova's close association with the arts began early in life, her career did not begin until she was nearly thirty, for reasons I examine in Chapter 1.

Iakunchikova, in contrast, began her career in earnest quite early. Her family was well connected with major art world figures and was also heavily invested in the arts, music in particular. She was born on January 29, 1870 into a wealthy Moscow merchant family.¹⁰ Her mother, Zinaida Nikolaevna Mamontova (1843-1919), was an accomplished amateur pianist and her father, Vasilii Ivanovich Iakunchikov (1827-1909), was a competent violinist who heavily subsidized the founding and construction of the Moscow Conservatory. As a result of the family's musical connections, luminaries such as Anton Rubenstein frequently gave concerts in the Iakunchikovs' Moscow home, and one of Iakunchikova's sisters, Vera Vasil'evna (1871-1923), became a concert pianist. Iakunchikova's maternal aunt, Vera Nikolaevna Mamontova (1844-1899), married Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov (1832-1898), a merchant who was an avid

⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰ According to Lev Weber (Iakunchikova's husband), Vasilii Iakunchikov was an anglophile industrialist. He studied cotton production in Manchester, England, and started a cotton manufacturing factory outside Moscow c. 1850. *From Orient to Occident: Memoirs of a Doctor* (New York: Oxford U Press, 1941), 183-184. He later developed brick-making factories and co-founded the Moscow Commercial Bank. Liudmilla Dubina, "Iz lichnoi zhizni kuptsa Iakunchikova," *Osnova: obshchestvenno-politicheskaia gazeta Naro-Fominskogo raiona*, April 14, 2006, <http://www.osnova-nf.ru/index.php?a=1252&PHPSESSID=d3d0ce16eb622f01a90a6dd9d6c8d080> (accessed January 31, 2008).

collector and supporter of Russian art. He eventually bequeathed his collection to the city of Moscow for what would become the Tretyakov Gallery. Iakunchikova's sister recalled that they played in P. M. Tretyakov's famous galleries when they were very small.¹¹ The family was also related to the Shchukins. Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin (1854-1936) actively began to collect French modern art around 1890.

On her mother's side Iakunchikova was also related to Savva Ivanovich Mamontov (1841-1918). At his estate, Abramtsevo, Iakunchikova had the opportunity to meet many of Russia's most prominent artists, writers and musicians. She was also exposed to new artistic experiments from a very young age. In 1882 Iakunchikova's half-sister, Natal'ia Vasil'evna (1858-1931), married Vasilii Dmitrievich. The wedding took place at the Slavic Revival style church at Abramtsevo that the colony of artists Mamontov had attracted had designed and built. After the marriage, Iakunchikova forged a very close friendship with Polenova.

Both women were keenly interested in art-world developments both at home and abroad and they attracted the attention of the art world in both realms. Their lives and works are important because they themselves are understudied and because they were both deeply connected to the Russian and the European art worlds, contributing significantly to the emergence of modernism in Russia. Indeed, Pamela Chester has suggested that

Iakunchikova forms, with Polenova, a kind of 'missing link' between the realist art of the 1880s and the modernist work of [Natal'ia] Goncharova and [Marina] Tsvetaeva. These painters, both members of the Abramtsevo circle of arts and crafts enthusiasts, differed from their male peers, who used folk art as source material for motifs in their canvasses, in adopting the techniques of folk artists—

¹¹ M. F. Kiselev, *Mariia Iakunchikova* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 2005), 6-7.

embroidery, wood-carvings, and so on—and the world-vision associated with them.¹²

Polenova's and Iakunchikova's careers illustrate the shifting roles of women in Russian culture in the late-nineteenth century and the changing status of the artist in Russian society.

Part of their success is due to their position among the elites of the imperial Russian social system. The fact that they had a strong personal and professional relationship, even though Polenova was gentry and Iakunchikova of the merchant class, also illustrates the rapid shifts in social structure that occurred in the wake of Alexander II's Great Reforms (1855-1874). They were undoubtedly also aided by their family ties to some of the most prominent members of the Russian art world in the late-nineteenth century. In this thesis I take a biographical approach to examine how Iakunchikova and Polenova functioned as a link between Russian realism and modernism in the visual arts, both through their artistic output and in their negotiation of the changing landscape of the art world in Russia and abroad.

While Iakunchikova and Polenova were recognized by their contemporaries in Russia and in Europe as important contributors to the development of Russian art, there is little scholarship on their work, which makes it even more pressing to place them back into the history of Russian art as it is currently being told. There are no scholarly monographs on Polenova in either the Russian or Western literature. In 1979 and 2005, the Russian art historian Mikhail Fedorovich Kiselev published the only two monographs dedicated to Iakunchikova's life and work. While both Iakunchikova and Polenova are often mentioned in the extant literature as major players in the late-nineteenth-century Russian art scene, the literature has generally

¹² Pamela Chester, "Painted Mirrors: Landscape and Self-Representation in Russian Women's Verbal and Visual Art," in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, edited by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 278-305.

neglected the key issue of gender and its significant role in their career choices.¹³ It has also, especially in the case of Polenova, concentrated largely on their contributions to the Russian arts and crafts movement, ignoring their work in the traditionally defined categories of “high art.”

Both artists died young: Polenova in 1898 at the age of 47 and Iakunchikova in 1902 at the age of 32. Vladimir Vasil’evich Stasov (1824-1906), the most powerful and most qualified Russian art critic of the nineteenth century, published a forty-nine-page biography of Polenova in the journal *Fine Art and Industrial Art* (Искусство и художественная промышленность) in 1899. The progressive World of Art (Мир искусства) group—sworn enemies of Stasov—organized a small retrospective exhibition and published a memorial article in their eponymous journal, which Polenova’s sister-in-law, Natal’ia Vasil’evna, wrote under the pseudonym Borok. I discuss both of these articles in Chapter 4.

Netta Peacock, an English journalist responsible for much of the attention Polenova and Iakunchikova received in the foreign press, published a brief memorial article about Polenova in *Fine Art and Industrial Art* that concentrated on her contributions to decorative art. In 1902 Andrei Ivanovich Somov published a short biography with many excerpts from her letters (without documenting the date or addressee of the letters), but little analysis of her art.¹⁴ Short articles about Polenova also appeared in the journal *Field* (Нива) (1903) and *Russian Antiquities* (Русская старина) (1912). Natal’ia Vasil’evna wrote her memoirs about Abramtsevo in 1922.

¹³ Except for the so-called “Amazons of the Avant-Garde,” the issue of gender in Russian art has been neglected. Two recent landmark exhibitions have broached the topic, but it remains in need of further scholarly examination. See Tretyakov Gallery, *Iskusstvo zhenskogo roda. Zhenshchiny-khudozhnitsy v Rossii XV-XX vekov/Femme Art: Women [sic] Painting in Russia: XV-XX centuries* (Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery, 2002) and Jordana Pomeroy, Rosalind P. Blakesley, Vladimir Yu. Matveyev and Elizaveta P. Renne, eds. *An Imperial Collection: Women Artists from the State Hermitage Museum* (Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2003).

¹⁴ On the article itself, only the initials A. S. appear. The Russian National Library indicates that this was a pseudonym for Somov. This is entirely possible. Somov was a curator at the Hermitage and father of the artist Konstantin Andreevich Somov, a major figure in the World of Art group, with which Polenova was allied towards the end of her life.

She gives Polenova's work at the workshop receives pride of place and discusses Polenova's work in illustrating Russian folk tales, but neglects the rest of her oeuvre.

Both Iakunchikova's and Polenova's stories suffered the strictures on scholarship imposed by the Soviet government. Polenova's niece, Elena Vasil'evna Sakharova, was the next to write about Polenova, publishing in 1952 a small book in the series "Library for the Masses" of the art publisher Iskusstvo. This is probably the earliest example of the "Sovietization" of Polenova. Her work and reputation abroad, her status as a gentry woman, and her complex relationship to folk art could not be foregrounded due to the politics of the Soviet state, which stressed the involvement of nineteenth-century artists with the *narod*, which means "the people" in the sense contained in the German *Volk*. For Soviet scholars, a pre-Revolutionary artist was acceptable material for research only if a connection to the *narod* could be made, thus "proving" that the artist was not a mere bourgeois dilettante. In this text Sakharova carefully crafted an image of Polenova as a progressive artist deeply attached to the *narod* and all things democratic and truly Russian.

Scholars are deeply indebted to Sakharova for information about Polenova, for she persistently struggled to keep Polenova in the public eye, or at least that of the art world. This effort was successful largely because of Vasilii Dmitrievich's status as a famous member of the Peredvizhniki,¹⁵ a group of artists who banded together in 1870 in opposition to the rigid academism of the Imperial Academy of Art. They formed The Society for Traveling Art Exhibitions (Товарищество передвижных художественных выставок), which embraced two main goals: (1) to create art that offered an unvarnished representation of Russian contemporary

¹⁵ The Peredvizhniki (singular = Peredvizhnik) are commonly referred to in English as the Wanderers or Itinerants. I have chosen to follow the example of Elizabeth Valkenier and use the Russian term because, as she states, the English translations are "misleading with [their] connotation of aimlessness." *Russian Realist Art: The State And Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977), xi.

life and (2) to bring art out of Russia's capitals and into the countryside, to the people, in order to create an art for the nation.¹⁶ In the Soviet period, the Peredvizhniki were celebrated as radical proto-socialists who were deeply interested in the fate of the oppressed masses.

The post-Stalin Thaw period allowed Sakharova to publish a massive compendium of Vasili Dmitrievich's and Polenova's letters with only a few (relatively speaking, given Soviet scholarship) strategic edits. This volume has been a major resource for this dissertation because the Polenov family archive in the Tretyakov Gallery alone contains upwards of 12,000 items, by itself enough for years of research. The letters reveal Polenova's activities both in Russia and abroad, in the crafts world and in the world of the fine arts, as well as inside and outside the artistic circles that formed during what Severiukhin and Leikind have characterized as "the golden age of arts organizations."¹⁷ In spite of the evidence presented in this well annotated volume, Soviet and post-Soviet scholarly literature has continued to confine Polenova's contribution to Russian art largely to her activities at Abramtsevo and in folktale illustration.

The scant Western literature has been no different. While treating subjects Soviet scholars could not examine at length, such as Polenova's turn away from Abramtsevo, it remains focused on her craft activities. The scholars who have contributed most significantly to this topic are Alison Hilton and Wendy Salmond. These two scholars' books were researched simultaneously and appeared in rapid succession, Hilton's *Russian Folk Art* in 1995 and Salmond's *Arts & Crafts in Late Imperial Russia* in 1996. Hilton's work is a thoroughly researched study of the significance of folk art in Russian culture from its earliest incarnations to the late-Soviet period. Hilton examines Polenova's work at Abramtsevo and in illustration in

¹⁶ Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 39 and David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 28.

¹⁷ D. Ia. Severiukhin and O. L. Leikind, *Zolotoi vek khudozhestvennykh obedinanii v Rossii i SSSR, 1820-1932* (St. Petersburg: Chernysheva, 1992).

terms of her approach to design and synthesis of Russian folk motifs with other sources. Salmond devotes more space to how Polenova's personality, training and experience abroad may have influenced her work at Abramtsevo, as well as how the sociocultural atmosphere affected her perception of folk objects. She considers some of Polenova's other activities, especially in terms of her work at and break with Abramtsevo, but ultimately her focus is the craft production. Both of these volumes made major contributions to the literature on the Russian arts and crafts movement, an aspect of the broader, European movement that has largely been neglected by scholars.¹⁸ While Polenova's activities in the arts and crafts realm are of notable significance, the neglect of her work in landscape, her exhibition activities, her involvement with other arts organizations and her support for young artists provides a skewed picture of Polenova herself and of the emergence of modernism in Russian art. I offer this dissertation in part as a correction to this one-sided picture.

In Russia and the West, Iakunchikova achieved significant attention during her lifetime. Her work was published in the English journal *The Studio* and in Russia in *World of Art*. She also received attention in some Russian exhibition reviews, albeit often with accusations of "decadence." In 1904, *World of Art* published a retrospective article by Polenova's first biographer, Natal'ia Vasil'evna, which included 54 reproductions. In 1905 there was a retrospective exhibition organized by her husband and members of the World of Art group. In addition, the poet Maksim Aleksandrovich Voloshin (1877-1932) published an article in *The Scales* (Весы) and the article appearing the prior year in *World of Art* was released as a separate

¹⁸ With rare exception, the copious literature on the arts and crafts movement is confined to England, France and Belgium. Only in the 1990s did the literature begin to consider movements in other countries. See, e.g., Nicola Gordon Bowe, ed. *Art and the National Dream : The Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-of-the-Century Design* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1993) and David Crowley, *National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

booklet. After this, Iakunchikova disappeared from view largely due to the fact that the majority of her works remained in Switzerland, where she died. As a wealthy bourgeois and a member of “decadent” *fin-de-siècle* art groups, she was also rendered an untouchable for Soviet scholars.

That said, it is important to note that the only monographs about Iakunchikova were published in Russia.¹⁹ Kiselev’s works, which appeared in 1979 and 2005, are essentially two editions of the same monograph. They rely heavily on biographical and formal analysis. Kiselev benefited from gaining access to Iakunchikova’s descendants in the 1970s and published on her work regularly as more information became available. His work is important (especially his 2005 edition) and provides a wealth of information, but does not consider the aspect of gender or the broader sociocultural context of Iakunchikova’s work, such as the educational opportunities available to women or the sociological shifts that made it possible for a merchant’s daughter to gain entry to “high society.” The interest in Iakunchikova and in Russian *fin-de-siècle* art in general has increased steadily since glasnost and the fall of the Soviet Union, but Kiselev remains the major source of scholarship on Iakunchikova in Russia.²⁰

Since the publication of Camilla Gray’s *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922* in 1962,²¹ Iakunchikova has often been named in Western scholarship as an important contributor to late-nineteenth-century Russian art, but her work has been given little notice beyond that.

¹⁹ Irène Weber, Iakunchikova’s granddaughter, told me that she is currently working on a French translation of Kiselev’s 2005 book. E-mail message to author, March 29, 2008.

²⁰ For example, in 2000 a major exhibition on the arts and crafts and art nouveau movements was held at the Tretyakov Gallery. The catalogue contains several scholarly articles on the topic, including one by Kiselev on Iakunchikova. Both she and Polenova are considered throughout and had numerous works in the exhibition. E. V. Paston and Gosudarstvennaia Tretyakovskaia Galereia. *Stil zhizni, stil iskusstva : Razvitie natsionalno-romanticheskogo napravleniia stilia modern v evropeiskikh khudozhestvennykh tsentrakh vtoroi Poloviny XIX - nachala XX veka: Rossiia, Angliia, Germaniia, Shvetsiia, Finliandiia* (Moskva: Ministerstvo Kultury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Gosudarstvennaia Tretyakovskaia galereia, 2000).

²¹ This publication was groundbreaking, but riddled with errors. For example, Gray confuses the two Mariia Iakunchikovas and also is mistaken about which Iakunchikova married Vasilii Polenov. The revised edition by Marian Burleigh-Motley corrects most of the errors.

Hilton and Salmond both mention Iakunchikova in their work, but the focus of their scholarship precluded an intensive analysis of her artistic production since most of her work is in the fine arts rather than the crafts. A major problem in researching Iakunchikova is the confusion between her and her sister-in-law, Mariia Fedorovna Iakunchikova. This confusion occurs in some of the earliest sources and persists to the present day, as, for example, in the catalogue for the 2005 exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay, *L'Art russe dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle: en quête d'identité*.²²

Due to the relative paucity of materials on the topic in Russian, English and other European languages, my dissertation relies heavily on published primary sources, especially letters and other personal documents. I have examined a number of these documents in the Tretyakov Gallery's Manuscript Division, which reveals that while the published versions are mostly faithful to the originals, there are omissions. Some of these resulted from official constraints imposed on scholars by the Soviet regime, others from the notion that certain information was perhaps too personal to be of interest to a casual reader. Yet such documents, especially the exchange of letters between Polenova and Iakunchikova after the latter began spending winters in France, are the most revealing. They show just how determined these two women were to have a career in the arts and how they struggled to achieve it. Therefore, I think it important to restore these letters to wholeness, which I have done in the chapters that follow.

In particular, the correspondence between Polenova and Iakunchikova illustrates what is perhaps the most curious aspect of their understanding of their roles as artists: the phantom (призрак) of inspiration. In discussing their difficulties with inspiration, Polenova and Iakunchikova hit upon a mutually satisfactory way to describe how inspiration behaved in the

²² This catalogue also considers Polenova's works, but only within the realm of the Abramtsevo workshops.

concept of the phantom. It is curious that they did not resort to typical language about “the muses,” but that they chose a masculine noun to embody the grammatically neuter inspiration (вдохновение). It would be stretching the metaphor to read a sexual undercurrent into their choice of terminology—as sometimes emerges in male artists’ relationships with their muses—but for them inspiration is decidedly male and fickle.

The image of the phantom evokes other associations and concepts with which both artists struggled. They wrestled with their emotions, Iakunchikova being prone to depression and Polenova to fits of ill-temper. They struggled with the shadowy image of Russia on the international scene. They grappled with their own elusive sense of identity as women, as artists, and as modern, progressive individuals, which was in great contrast to how most of the world saw the Russian Empire in the late-nineteenth century. What is perhaps most significant is that almost all discussions of the phantom were carefully edited out of the published letters. Thus, a significant aspect of Polenova and Iakunchikova’s discussions has been brushed aside. Sakharova may have felt that any discussion of mystical phenomena apart from period-appropriate references to Christian holidays was still too sensitive, or perhaps just too intimate, to be published.

In addition, examination of contemporary journals such as *The Artist*, *The Studio*, *L’Art décoratif*, *Revue des arts décoratifs*, *Figaro illustre*, *World of Art*, *Fine Art and Industrial Art*, *Russian Antiquities* and *The Herald of Europe* (Вестник Европы), among others, provides a picture of the contemporary response to their work. At times critics provided a source of pride, at others an occasion for self-doubt. In this thesis, I examine all aspects of the phantom(s) that haunted Polenova and Iakunchikova throughout their artistic careers. By this, I hope to provide a fuller picture of their lives and works than has been possible to date and a consideration of how

they negotiated the opportunities and obstacles provided by Russia's rapid modernization in the second half of the nineteenth century.

I have structured the thesis over four chapters. What follows is a brief description of each and its significance for my argument. In Chapter 1, "Art and Social Work: 'The Healthiest and Most Fortifying Food,'" I treat Polenova's early years up to her move to Moscow in 1882. I consider Polenova's activities in the context of the women's movement in Russia, especially as it relates to opportunities for education and social activism available to women. I also look at the issue of class and national identity and the role they played in molding the young artist's outlook on life and art. Chapter 2, "Moscow, Abramtsevo and a New Generation of Russian Artists," addresses Polenova's artistic development and her contribution to the Abramtsevo arts colony during the 1880s. In this chapter, I also examine Iakunchikova's early introduction to the Polenovs' artistic world. In particular, I look at Polenova's exhibition activities and efforts to support herself as an artist. In Chapter 3, "Into the Whirlwind," I examine Iakunchikova and Polenova's determined quest to find a new path for art in the early 1890s. Iakunchikova threw herself full tilt into the French art world, studying at the Académie Julian, exhibiting at the Salons, and attending as many exhibitions as she could, rapidly gaining a strong reputation. In the same period, Polenova grew increasingly interested in European modernism, for which Iakunchikova proved a valuable touchstone. In this chapter, I also examine Polenova's involvement in younger Russian artists' protests against the Peredvizhniki's restrictive policies on exhibition and membership and what they meant for Russian art. The final chapter, "Endings and Beginnings," concerns Polenova's and Iakunchikova's artistic activities in the late 1890s. It concludes with an appraisal of their involvement in Russia's exhibitions for the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle.

I have provided three appendices to assist the reader in keeping track of the plethora of actors in the manuscript. Appendix A is a timeline of important events in Polenova's and Iakunchikova's lives, and of contemporary Russian history. Appendix B contains a chart illustrating the complex network of familial and marital relationships among the Iakunchikovs, Polenovs, Tretyakovs and Mamontovs. Appendix C is a glossary of the main personages and organizations appearing in the dissertation along with brief identifying descriptions.

1.0 ART AND SOCIAL WORK: “THE HEALTHIEST AND MOST FORTIFYING FOOD”

The 1870s were Polenova’s formative years. During this period her early experiences with Russian history, ethnography and archaeology coalesced with her study of art and with an increasing emphasis on social work among the intelligentsia. Such exposure produced an uncommonly independent young woman intent on making a career in the arts. These years were generally marked by an increased shift towards self-reflection among Russian artists regarding their role in society, which coincided with the sociopolitical movements emerging in broader intellectual circles.²³ Significantly for the arts, the 1870s was the decade in which the Peredvizhniki emerged and began to dominate the Russian art scene. In this chapter I will demonstrate that many of the personal characteristics and artistic interests that Polenova displayed over the course of her life and career had roots stretching back to this period.

1.1 ETHNOGRAPHY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND IDENTITY

Polenova’s lifelong interests in Russian art and folk culture are in part due to her father’s archaeological activity and to the atmosphere that prevailed at the family’s summer residence. In

²³ Grigorii Iur’evich Sternin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn’ Rossii vtoroi poloviny XIX veka 70-80e gody* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997) 5-6.

this section I will provide background information to illuminate the questions of Russian fin-de-siècle identity, caught as it was between tradition and modernity, that shaped Polenova's later artistic activities.

After the death of his father in 1851, Dmitrii Vasil'evich began looking at the family property that he had inherited in remote Olonets province in Karelia. He found a picturesque spot above the Oiata river near Lake Ladoga and had a house built there. In 1855 the Polenovs began spending summers on the family estate, Imochentsy, about 200 versts²⁴ northwest of St. Petersburg. Imochentsy would provide an inspiration for many future artistic endeavors by both Polenova and her brother. The region was rich with forests, rivers, animal life and many examples of old Russian wooden architecture. The last is particularly significant for Dmitrii Vasil'evich, who was known for his enthusiastic work in archaeology, particularly domestic expeditions that focused on Russia's medieval history.

Dmitrii Vasil'evich's dedication to Russian history and archaeology left its traces on all of his children, but it had a particularly profound effect on Polenova and Vasilii Dmitrievich. As such, it is important to consider the significance of archaeology and ethnography in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. As in other countries, archaeology had its roots in the early eighteenth century in Russia, and was no doubt connected with Peter the Great's emphasis on science and technology.²⁵ Peter had long been collecting scientific instruments and varied curiosities, and in 1719 put his collections on public display in his *Kunstkamera*, thus founding the first museum in Russia.²⁶ This event spurred an interest in studying the peoples and history of the Russian Empire.

²⁴ A verst (versta [верста] in Russian) is an old Russian unit of measure equal to 1.067 kilometers or 0.663 miles.

²⁵ Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 91-92.

²⁶ It still functions today as the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

In 1730 Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev (1686-1750), considered Russia's first ethnographer, published instructions on proper excavation techniques.²⁷ Nevertheless, in the early nineteenth century most of what passed for archaeology was still the gentleman scholar's investigation of old Russian church architecture. These gentlemen were, however, active enough that by 1830 Peter the Great's Kunstkamera had grown to the point that the decision was made to disperse part of its collections to other museums and to concentrate its collections on ethnography and anatomy of the peoples of the Empire and elsewhere. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, however, that archaeological societies officially emerged in Russia, as elsewhere in Europe.²⁸ As Philip Kohl points out, "archaeology became a legitimate scientific pursuit and an academic discipline during the nineteenth century, the heyday of nation-building in Europe. These processes were chronologically coincident and causally interrelated."²⁹ This fact is significant for Russia as the formation of its archaeological societies occurred during the peak of Tsar Nicholas I's Official Nationalism policy.

Official Nationalism was concretized in 1833 under Nicholas I in a memo by Sergei Uvarov,³⁰ the tsar's "minister of popular enlightenment," who commanded that Orthodoxy (*pravoslavie* [православие]), autocracy (*samoderzhavie* [самодержавие]) and nationalism (*narodnost'* [народность]) be taught as the values every Russian should embrace. Interestingly, the Russian word for nationalism used here, *narodnost'*, literally means "people-ness." The

²⁷ Jaroslav Malina and Zdenek Vašiček, *Archaeology Yesterday & Today: The Development of Archaeology in the Sciences & Humanities*, trans. Marek Zvevibel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

²⁸ Trigger, *Archaeological Thought*, 230-232.

²⁹ Philip L. Kohl, "Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote Past," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998), 227.

³⁰ One of the ironies of this episode in Russian history is that Uvarov himself was thoroughly Westernized in the vein of the eighteenth-century Russian aristocracy. Most of his correspondence is in French or German and he made no bones about his disdain for "traditional" Russian culture. Hubertus F. Jahn, "'Us': Russians on Russianness," in *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, edited by Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 60.

Russian word *natsional'nost'*, a cognate from French, was in use before the declaration of Official Nationalism, but it was not employed here. The word *narodnost'* itself, however, had been coined from the noun *narod* by leftists only in 1819.³¹ The meaning of *narodnost'* became a point of debate for the intelligentsia right from the start, with some intellectuals insisting that it should “denote a closer connection between the monarch and the people from all the different nationalities of the empire.”³² Under the rubric *narodnost'*, Official Nationalism posited a very specific meaning from the tsar’s point of view, however: Great Russians (*velikorossy*). Imperial ideology held that Ukrainians, in spite of their lands being the cradle of the Empire, were Little Russians (*malorossy*) who aspired to be Great Russians. All other peoples in the empire should be turned into Great Russians as well, whether by simple assimilation or force for the more recalcitrant. In addition, *narodnost'* expressed a specific conception of unity and solidarity among the peoples of the Russian Empire that differentiated them against the West. Thus, the Official Nationalism policy was less about national identity than about imperial identity.

The anxiety surrounding *narodnost'* reached a point of crisis in 1836 with the publication—in French—of Petr Chaadaev’s infamous Philosophical Letter in the journal *Telescope* (Телескоп), in which he claimed that Russia had no culture of its own, had made no contribution to world (i.e., European) culture and, if it wanted to overcome these handicaps, Russia would have to start building a culture from scratch. This letter was so incendiary that Nicholas I had Chaadaev declared insane and put under house arrest. It also galvanized what is now commonly termed the Slavophile vs. Westernizer polemics. Both camps argued that Russia could become infinitely superior to the West, but they differed in opinion as to how Russia could develop and triumph over the West. The Slavophiles argued that Russia needed to focus on its

³¹ Rosalind P. Gray, *Russian Genre Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

³² Jahn, “Russians on Russianness,” 61.

unique, non-Western heritage, whereas the Westernizers felt that Russia should continue developing along Western European lines.³³

It was at this point that archaeological, anthropological and ethnographic expeditions began to increase greatly in number and attract the attention of the state. The Russian Archaeological Society was organized in St. Petersburg in 1846 and became the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society (IRAS) three years later. In 1859 an Imperial Archaeological Commission was formed to protect discoveries made in the Empire. The IRAS focused on Russian archaeological history, especially after the critic and bibliographer Stasov became the editor of the society's proceedings in 1861.³⁴ In 1864 Count Aleksei Uvarov established the Moscow Archaeological Society, which embarked on an ambitious program of conferences and publications. It focused primarily on the south of Russia with particular attention given to early architecture and painting in the Kiev region, the original center of what would become the Russian Empire.³⁵

During this period Dmitrii Vasil'evich began to participate actively in archaeological study. He was first inspired to study archaeology after he was appointed the secretary of Russia's embassy in Athens. He lived there for three years, where Roman Ivanovich Kuz'min, an architecture pensioner³⁶ of the Imperial Academy of Arts, interested him in the archaeological digs in Athens. After Dmitrii Vasil'evich's return to Russia, he continued to pursue archaeology,

³³ See James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1970) 315-316; D. W. Mackenzie and M. W. Curran, *A History of Russia, the Soviet Union, and Beyond*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993), 378-384; and A. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 81-114, 135-151.

³⁴ He served in this role until 1864. Yuri Olkhovsky, *Vladimir Stasov and Russian National Culture*, edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 123.

³⁵ George H. Hamilton, *The Art and Architecture of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 388-389 and Trigger, *Archaeological Thought*, 230-231.

³⁶ There is no good translation into English for the Russian *pensioner*. This term refers to students who were awarded the prize of a state-sponsored trip abroad (i.e., a pension) to perfect their art. Before Napoleon this often meant Paris; after Napoleon this usually meant Rome. Paris again became a desirable location in the 1860s.

serving for many years as the secretary of the Russian Archaeological society. He also studied Russian history, particularly that of monasteries in the northern reaches of the empire.³⁷

Her father's emphasis on Imperial history and archaeology was not the only influence on Polenova's conceptualization of Russianness. The Polenov children's nannies, both from the peasantry, continued a long-standing national tradition of transmitting oral folklore to their charges.³⁸ Likewise, their maternal grandmother told them folk tales during the long journey to her estate, Ol'shanka, in Tambov province.³⁹ Growing up in this atmosphere, Polenova could not have escaped acquiring a vast knowledge of Russian history, folklore and art—at least that of the north—and this knowledge facilitated her later work in both the fine arts and the crafts. Perhaps even more influential on the development of the future head of the Abramtsevo workshops, however, was her older sister, Vera Dmitrievna (1844-1881), Vasilii Dmitrievich's twin.

1.2 SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL STRICTURES

Vera Dmitrievna was an early supporter of Polenova's talent, writing as early as 1863, "How wonderfully Lil'ka draws from casts: the angel's head came out pretty well, and even [drawing from] originals is going fine ..."⁴⁰ Her particular influence on Polenova, however, came in the realm of social activism. Wendy Salmond points out that Vera Dmitrievna was "a typical 'woman of the sixties' consumed with her generation's passion for social service and self

³⁷ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 7-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9 and Wendy R. Salmond, *Arts and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

³⁹ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 498 and Sakharova, *Khronika*, 7.

⁴⁰ "Как Лилька славно рисует с гипса, головка ангела вышла у нее очень недурно, да и с оригиналов очень хорошо идет" V. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, September 8, 1863, 55. Ellipsis in the original. Lil'ka or Lilia was the family nickname for Polenova.

sacrifice.”⁴¹ Those passions had a considerable impact on Polenova’s world view, for both the good and the bad.

The 1860s was a period of great social change in Russia, starting with the 1861 emancipation of the serfs. Among the many social questions—known among Russian specialists as the “burning questions” or the “accursed questions”—confronting Russians during this period was the “woman question.” While it had begun to be debated in the 1850s, it became particularly important after the Emancipation Act because of the economic changes it wrought, for both serf and gentry women. Traditionally, unmarried gentry women were supported by family networks, but after the loss of serf labor, many gentry families found themselves in economic straits. Thus, many upper-class women were forced to seek work. The traditional mode of employment for such women, governess, also disappeared as gentry families could no longer afford such luxuries.⁴²

These questions reached a peak after the 1863 publication of the radical critic Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky’s (1828-1889) *What Is to Be Done?* (Что делать?). This polemical novel about a young, well-born woman’s intellectual development into a socialist utopian was scandalous for its “fictitious marriage,” rather frank (according to nineteenth-century standards) treatment of a love triangle, and the “consciousness raising” activity of its heroine at the sewing cooperative she set up to help other women. The novel sparked a firestorm of public debate ranging from immediate condemnation by conservative camps to high praise from the radical intelligentsia.⁴³ Most significant was that it accelerated debate on the “women question” and

⁴¹ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 25.

⁴² Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 56-57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

spurred many women into action, whether they were conservatives, radicals or somewhere in between.

For the “women of the sixties” like Vera Dmitrievna, the main focus was to increase educational and economic opportunities for women. Questions of sexual liberation and gender vital to feminism today were of minor significance to them. Instead, they agitated for full educational access for women and for new avenues of employment.⁴⁴ One of Vera Dmitrievna and Polenova’s earliest exploits in this realm was the school for peasant children they organized at Imochentsy in 1866.⁴⁵

Polenova and Vera Dmitrievna continued their social service activities into the next decade. In 1873-1874 they taught at a school in Kiev.⁴⁶ Feeling the need for proper training, in March 1875 Polenova took the exams required to enter pedagogical courses, but failed them because she had only a week to prepare. She decided to study hard and try again for she thought she needed a diploma to get a good position.⁴⁷ In 1876 she took the exams for and received certification as a “domestic instructress,” which enabled her to be hired as a private teacher or governess.⁴⁸ In their spare time, the sisters kept up with current scientific discoveries, reading treatises such as those by Darwin and Lyell, philosophy (Kant in particular) and German literature.⁴⁹ In general, Vera Dmitrievna and Polenova did their best to act as befitted female members of the progressive intelligentsia.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 64-65.

⁴⁵ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 9

⁴⁶ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, December 9, 1873, 104.

⁴⁷ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, March 15/27, 1875, 166.

⁴⁸ Ekaterina V. Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952) 4-5. Here Sakharova indicates that Polenova received her certification in 1875, but letters from early 1876 between Polenov and Polenova indicate that she was still studying for the examinations then, e.g., Sakharova, *Khronika*, 195.

⁴⁹ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, December 9, 1873, 104.

In the summer of 1874 Polenova was residing in Kiev with Vera Dmitrievna and became the subject of family scandal that is important to consider at some length because (a) it illustrates the gender and class issues present even in a liberal family and (b) it had a lasting impact on Polenova's psyche, coming up in letters long after she had made peace with the outcome. Polenova had become acquainted with a medical doctor and professor at Kiev University, Aleksei Sergeevich Shkliarevskii, and the relationship quickly developed into a romance. They wished to marry, but the family was against it. In July Polenova's mother traveled to Kiev to control the situation. Vera Dmitrievna reported to Vasilii Dmitrievich that she did not trust Shkliarevskii, not on account of class differences she was quick to note, but because she did not believe he was really in love with Polenova. The family decided to take Polenova abroad on the pretext of visiting Vasilii Dmitrievich, who was on his Academy pension.⁵⁰

Polenova was desperate, writing to Vasilii Dmitrievich that the entire family had turned against her, and she knew he would support her. She told her brother that the family was insisting Shkliarevskii was a Pole and he was hiding it from her. In broad terms, Russians had held xenophobic attitudes towards Poles ever since the medieval wars between Poland and Muscovy. The repeated partitions of Poland meant that large portions of Polish territory were under the Russian Empire's rule by the nineteenth century. This did not sit well with Poles, leading to the November Uprising in 1830-1831 and the January Uprising of 1863-1865. Thus, fears of Poles' attempts to destroy the Empire were still quite fresh in memory. Polenova pleaded with Vasilii Dmitrievich for sympathy, insisting that Shkliarevskii was a "Little Russian," had Russian sympathies, and dreamed of settling in Moscow. She begged her brother

⁵⁰ V. D. Khrushcheva to V. D. Polenov, June 2, 1874, 132-133.

to meet the family in Baden-Baden and to help her defend herself and Shkliarevskii.⁵¹ Unfortunately, Vasilii Dmitrievich was not entirely on her side, but tried to remain open to evidence. He turned to Chizhov, who promised to investigate Shkliarevskii.⁵²

As of late August, the “scandal” still had the family in turmoil. Polenova stubbornly refused to believe anything the family said against Shkliarevskii. For her part, Vera Dmitrievna continued to be the most vocally opposed to the marriage—all the while denying charges of “aristocratism”—especially after she learned of rumors supposedly circulating in Kiev that the wedding was imminent. Such rumors only reinforced her suspicions that Shkliarevskii was pursuing gentry membership, not Polenova’s love. Meanwhile, Polenova’s mother wrote to Shkliarevskii forbidding him to write directly to Polenova until she had a chance to consider the situation. Shkliarevskii did not take kindly to this treatment. Insisted that his motives were pure, he demanded a definite date for Mariia Alekseevna’s decision, which further scandalized this well bred member of the older generation.⁵³

Polenova had hoped that things were changing after her brother Aleksei Dmitrievich and Vera Dmitrievna began to relent a little, especially after receiving a thirty-two page letter Shkliarevskii wrote about his love for Polenova, which further cemented her affections for the ardent professor.⁵⁴ In late August, Chizhov reported to Vasilii Dmitrievich that his investigations revealed that Shkliarevskii was indeed “Little Russian” and from a poor gentry family.⁵⁵ He had learned that Shkliarevskii had a large medical practice, which brought him a good income, so it

⁵¹ As cited in V. D. Polenov to F. V. Chizhov, June 29, 1874, 138.

⁵² F. V. Chizhov to V. D. Polenov, June 30, 1874, 139.

⁵³ V. D. Polenov to F. V. Chizhov, August 21, 1874, 144-145.

⁵⁴ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, August 7/19, 1874, 145.

⁵⁵ Being a hereditary member of the gentry did not automatically indicate wealth in Imperial Russia. Many people who legally belonged to the gentry estate due to heredity were not of the fabulously wealthy elite, especially after the Emancipation. For a study of the gentry in the time period of this dissertation see Seymour Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985).

was not likely he was not courting Polenova for money or gentry status. Moreover, his sources uniformly confirmed that Shkliarevskii was well educated and well informed about art.⁵⁶

The battle continued, however, with Polenova's mother finally extending an invitation to Shkliarevskii to spend the winter holidays with the family so they could get to know him.⁵⁷ I do not know whether Shkliarevskii ever came to Petersburg, but by early February 1875, it was all over. What happened remains unclear, but Polenova's letters to Chizhov and Polenov indicate that Shkliarevskii ultimately capitulated to the family's pressure and decided against the marriage. Polenova was devastated, still suffering the effects nearly a decade later.⁵⁸ Ultimately, however, she took the advice of Chizhov and her brother Aleksei and threw herself into work.⁵⁹

Chizhov later wrote to Dmitrii Vasilievich that while he felt sorry for Polenova,

Nevertheless I am happy from the bottom of my heart that Lilia is preparing for a full life, that this meeting excited her nature, which had always been mysterious to me. She has plenty of brains. Her soul is visible everywhere, but somehow everything is fettered by such an armor of wisdom that you can never get to the essence of the matter. And it is well known and recognized that wisdom is the father of all human dirty tricks. Please tell Lilin'ka this.⁶⁰

Chizhov was evidently glad to see in Polenova the emergence of more suitable feminine desires and actions through this episode. Nonetheless, he maintained that too much wisdom was to be avoided, especially for women as it "feters" their nature.

⁵⁶ F. V. Chizhov to V. D. Polenov, August 27, 1874, 147.

⁵⁷ D. V. Polenov to F. V. Chizhov, November 24, 1874, 152.

⁵⁸ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 24, 1885, 353. Oddly, Ivan Petrovich Khrushchev, Vera Dmitrievna's husband, claimed that Polenova was indifferent to the marriage when writing his memoirs after her death. V. V. Stasov, "Elena Dmitrievna Polenova, biograficheskii ocherk," *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'*, no. 13 (1899): 7.

⁵⁹ E. D. Polenova to F. V. Chizhov, February 10, 1875, 158-159 and E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 22, 1875, 159-160.

⁶⁰ "А все-таки я от души рад, что Лиле готовится полнота жизни, что эта встреча взбудоражила ее природу, для меня бывшую всегда загадочною. Ума у нее очень довольно; душа проглядывает везде, но как-то все сковано такой броней благоразумия, что никак не доберешься до сути. А известно и ведомо, что благоразумие есть родной отец всех пакостей человеческих. Передай-ка ты это Лилиньке." F. V. Chizhov to V. D. Polenov, June 23, 1874, 135.

In addition to their active work in education, Polenova and Vera Dmitrievna took medical courses and served in Kiev during the Russo-Turkish War (known in Russian history as the Turko-Bulgarian War) of April 24, 1877 – March 3, 1878.⁶¹ In October 1877, Vera Dmitrievna was made responsible for a large war hospital in Kiev and asked Polenova to join her. The opportunity to help in the war effort likely became even more pressing for the sisters after Tsarevich Alexander (the future Alexander III) asked Vasilii Dmitrievich to be part of his war headquarters.⁶² Ultimately, Vasilii Dmitrievich was sent to Bulgaria to serve in Tsarevich Alexander's unit as an artist/war correspondent.⁶³

Immediately after her arrival in Kiev on October 19, Polenova began serving at the Hospital of the Round Tower (Госпиталь круглой башни).⁶⁴ She nursed soldiers, sewed clothing for the troops, and engaged in fundraising for the hospital.⁶⁵ Horrified at the lack of clothing available for the troops, she begged her mother to send anything she could gather.⁶⁶ By February 1878, their initial patriotic enthusiasm had worn off, but Vera Dmitrievna and Polenova continued to serve, complaining of the burden placed on them by others who had lost interest in the hospital and quit.⁶⁷ Polenova and Vera Dmitrievna served to the bitter end, finishing up their duties in early summer 1878.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 25; Sakharova, *Khronika*, 253-268; and Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 5.

⁶² In spite of the fact that he had served in Serbia in 1876 and had been awarded two medals for bravery, Vasilii Dmitrievich did not exactly welcome the invitation. He considered it impossible to decline, however. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 213-226, 252.

⁶³ V. D. Polenov to M. N. Klimentova, November 5, 1877, 254. The Tsarevich commissioned a series of battle scenes from Polenov, which he struggled with, not completing them until 1883. Fortunately the by then Tsar Alexander III was quite pleased with the results. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 734 n 7.

⁶⁴ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, October 21, 1877, 253.

⁶⁵ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, November 6, 1877, 255-256.

⁶⁶ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, November 7, 1877, 256.

⁶⁷ V. D. Khrushcheva to V. D. Polenov, February 3, 1878, 262-263.

⁶⁸ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, May 13, 1878, 268.

After the war, Vera Dmitrievna and Polenova headed north, to Imochentsy, where they set up a medical clinic for the local population.⁶⁹ Polenova later recalled these years as the time she understood the strength of her desire to serve society. “For the first time I was able to experience the enormous delight a person derives from the awareness of having directly alleviated the suffering of another. After that winter I understood that for me to return to my prior life, i.e., to deprive myself of social work in one or another area, would be the same as depriving myself of the healthiest and most fortifying food.”⁷⁰ In many ways, these sentiments marked Polenova as a member of her generation and class. While she remained dedicated to socially oriented projects well into her forties, her interests did not lead her to the radicalism many slightly younger educated women pursued in the 1870s and 1880s.⁷¹

Upon her return to Petersburg in 1879, Polenova volunteered as a teacher in a girls’ school set up by the Liteiny-Tauride Circle of the Society for the Relief of Needy Women (Литейно-Таврический кружок Общества вспомоществования бедным женщинам).⁷² At this time she became acquainted with Nadezhda Vasil’evna Stasova (1822-1895), a strong advocate for women’s education and the sister of the prominent art critic Stasov. Stasova was one of the giants of the early Russian women’s movement. Philanthropic activities had long been a respectable activity for gentry women, and expected of the women in the tsar’s family. Until the 1860s, however, it had been more of a social grace than a genuine effort to relieve suffering. The “women of the sixties” took a different tack. “Taking their cue from Clara

⁶⁹ V. D. Polenov to M. A. Polenova, September 11, 1878, 269.

⁷⁰ “В первый раз мне пришлось вкусить все то громадное наслаждение, которое дает человеку сознание приносимой им непосредственно помощи страданию другого. После этой зимы я поняла, что для меня вернуться к прежней жизни, т.е., лишить себя общественной деятельности в той или другой области, все равно, что лишить себя самой здоровой и подкрепляющей пищи.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, October 1, 1895, 536-537; Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 25; and Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 5.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement* and Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1983).

⁷² Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 216; Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 5-6.

Balfour and other English feminists, these women believed first of all that the improvement of woman's lot was the mission of women themselves, not of men."⁷³ Among Stasova's activities, which she shared with other luminaries of the women's movement such as Anna Pavlovna Filosofova and Mariia Vasil'evna Trubnikova, were opening dressmaking workshops, communal kitchens, women's hospitals (especially for infected prostitutes), a school for working mothers, the Women's Publishing Cooperative, and the Society for Cheap Lodgings. These efforts were made particularly urgent by the increasing migration of women to urban areas in search of work, which created many new social problems and drew attention to the plight of poor women in the Empire.⁷⁴ Education was one of Stasova's major concerns, and she founded a women's Sunday School in 1860.⁷⁵

Polenova later recalled that Stasova had a major influence on her world view. She wrote to Stasov,

I profoundly respected her, loved and held dear your sister with all my soul and always genuinely sympathized with her convictions and principles, which she was able to bring to life with such inexhaustible energy. ... I went there [the Liteiny-Tauride Circle] and asked to be allowed to teach drawing and drafting. They accepted my offer, but under the condition that before they confirm it, I give a sample lesson in the presence of one of the members directing the schooling section: Nadezhda Vasil'evna Stasova. Terribly worried and feeling uneasy at the thought of such an authoritative judge, I gathered all my courage and, when the three-quarters-of-an-hour lesson ended, to my great surprise I received not only Nadezhda Vasil'evna's agreement to allow me to teach, but also her approval and gratitude.⁷⁶

⁷³ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 64-65.

⁷⁴ See Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ The Sunday School movement was officially sanctioned, though short-lived (1859-1862), attempt to provide education to working adults. There were over 500 schools in operation by the time the government shut them down out of fears of radical activity. Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 69-72.

⁷⁶ "Я глубоко уважала, от всей души любила и ценила Вашу сестру и всегда искренне сочувствовала ее убеждениям и принципам, которые она с такой неутомимой энергией умела проводить в жизнь. ... обратилась туда с просьбой допустить меня преподавать там рисование и черчение. Мое предложение было принято, но под условием, что прежде чем меня утвердить, я должна буду дать пробный урок в присутствии

Soon after she was accepted as a teacher at the Liteiny-Tauride Circle school, Polenova and Stasova worked out plans to expand the circle's activities from basic literacy to professional training. Polenova proposed to teach various forms of traditional women's crafts and the basic skills women would need to make a living at their new trade after acquiring training. Stasova was excited by Polenova's suggestions and the plan was put into action.⁷⁷ Creating art continued to be a significant focus of Polenova's life, however, and ultimately she had to leave the school as her career grew.

1.3 ART AND THE "FEMALE ESTATE"

During the period of her socially oriented work, Polenova did not cease to pursue art. In 1870 she went abroad with Vera Dmitrievna. While her early pursuits were more for pleasure than for establishing a career, by the end of the 1870s, this had all changed. Her early experiences with art provide a glimpse into the formation of her opinions about art and the possibilities open to her as a woman of the elite.

In Dresden, she visited exhibitions and was not impressed. She wrote home to Vasiliï Dmitrievich, providing a glimpse of her strong opinions about contemporary art at this early stage,

Here in Dresden Makart's *Pest in Florenz* is being exhibited. He is hauling them around Germany now and collecting money. This business is how the Germans

члена комитета заведующего учебной частью—Надежды Васильевны Стасовой. Страшно волнуюсь и стесняюсь при мысли о таком авторитетном судье, я собрала всю свою храбрость и, когда кончились мои три четверти часа урока, к великому моему удивлению, я не только получила согласие Надежды Васильевны оставить за мною преподавание, но даже одобрение ее е благодарность." E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, October 1, 1895, 536-537.

⁷⁷ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 537.

pay for their large pictures. I doubt anyone will buy them. He is selling them for ten thousand thalers. That is not a joke. He will probably remove them from exhibition and then lower the price. I was there today How can I put it, these three pictures of Makart are not at all what I imagined, not what you can imagine from photographs. First of all, they are much smaller than you imagine. They are no larger than 3 x 1 ½ each, and then they are painted awfully sketchily, to create an effect, and totally not in the German manner. It is clear that it has created a sensation here. There are advertisements about it hung everywhere and all types of photographs from it are exhibited, very expensive ones, I might add. But then, Vasia, if you could see what the Germans here exhibit in their Saxon Kunst Verein ... Oh my God, our Krasnosel'skiis and company would pale before it! For example, *Hochzeitsreize nach Italien*. The background is a blue sky at top and the rest is some kind of sea (it is possible to say that the German did not spare any blue paint), and against that ground is a cliff. Yellow with raspberry tones. On the cliff is a German, but what an ugly mug! In a dark gray, quilted suit, next to him a German woman in yellow dress, also quilted and embroidered with dark and white cords. They stand embracing and gazing at the sky. And everything is like this, and moreover painted so horribly, horribly⁷⁸

It is likely that Polenova objected to the theatricality of Makart's *Plague in Florence* triptych and the hubbub that surrounded it. Her reference to Aleksandr Andreevich Krasnosel'skii, a second-rate genre painter, and the honeymoon painting indicates a contempt for sentimental genre paintings. This anti-sentimental attitude was typical of the early feminists in Russia, who prided themselves on being practical and rational. In reply, Vasilii Dmitrievich told Polenova, "It is

⁷⁸ "Здесь в Дрездене выставлены «Pest in Florenz» Makart'a, он катает их теперь по Германии и набирает денег. На этом промысле немцам и окупаются их большие картины. Вряд ли их у него кто-нибудь купит. Он продает их за десять тысяч талеров. Это не шутка. Разве что он наберет за выставку их и тогда спустит цену. Сегодня я была там Как тебе сказать, эти три картины Makart'a совсем не то, что я воображала, не то, что можно вообразить по фотографиям Во первых, они гораздо меньше, чем себе представишь. Не больше как 3 x 1 ½ в каждой, потом написаны страшно условно, бьет на эффект, и совсем не по-немецки. А видно, что она здесь произвела сенсацию. Везде вывешены об ней объявления и выставлены с нее фотографии во всез видах и очень дорогие, надо прибавить. Но зато, Вася, если бы ты видел, что здешние немцы выставляют в своем Саксонском «Kunst Verein» ... О боже мой, наши красносельские и компания совсем перед ними бледнеют. Например: «Hochzeitsreize nach Italien». Фон—наверху синее небо, продолжение—такое же море (можно сказать, что не пожалел немец синей краски), на этом фоне скала. Желтая с малиновыми тенями. На скале—немец—но эта рожа! В темно-сером подваченном костюме, подле него немка, в желтом, тоже ватном платье, вышитом черными и белыми шнурками. Они стоят обнявшись и устремивши взоры на небо. И все в таком же роде, и еще как написаны—ужас, ужас" E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 19/March 2, 1870, 62-63. Ellipses in the original. Since Russia followed the Julian calendar until 1918, when writing from abroad or to friends abroad Russians most often wrote dates with the Julian date, a slash and then the Gregorian date. I will follow this convention when found in the original. Polenova does not indicate the unit of measure of Makart's works, but she most likely meant 3 x 1 ½ arshins. An arshin is an old Russian unit of measure equal to 71 centimeters (approximately 28 inches).

true that the first time he stuns you with innovation, originality, unprecedentedness, but the more you look at him, the more you understand and are drawn to him.”⁷⁹ Apparently he felt Makart’s art was a departure from that taught in the Imperial Academy and worth more than just a glance in spite of the drama.⁸⁰

In the summer of 1870 Polenova settled in Paris with Vera Dmitrievna, where she studied with Charles Chaplin (1825-1891). She wrote an enthusiastic letter to her brother in which she fairly bubbled,

Vas’ka! Hooray! I’m a student of Mr. Charles Chaplin! This is not an artist, but a delight. He’s a most interesting type. ... When we came to him to discuss the conditions he said, “Mais pourquoi donc perdre ainsi son temps, mettez vous à travailler.” ... “Du courage, du courage,” he said at first, but now, “C’est bon, c’est très bon, trop d’aplomb peut être. Vous ne respectez pas assez votre peinture.” I have “trop d’aplomb.” Do you think Kramskoi would say that?⁸¹

Chaplin was an academic painter who began as a realist, but soon settled into fame as a genre painter and society portraitist. He had some notoriety for his slightly erotic images, for example, *Girl with a Nest* (1869). Polenova apparently did not object to his status as a genre painter as she did in the case of Krasnosel’skii and the German artists. Perhaps the opportunity to study with an artist who had a successful career overruled any prejudices in this instance.

⁷⁹ “Действительно, в первый раз он вас ошеломит новизной, оригинальностью, небывалостью, но чем больше на него смотришь, тем больше понимаешь и втягиваешься.” V. D. Polenov to E. D. Polenova, 1870, 63.

⁸⁰ In the 1890s, Polenova would find herself in a similar situation and giving corresponding advice to a younger generation of artists.

⁸¹ “Васька! Ура! Я ученица Mr Charles Chaplin! Это не художник, а прелесть. Преинтересный тип. ... Мы к нему приехали переговорить об условиях, а он: «Mais pourquoi donc perdre ainsi son temps, mettez vous à travailler». ... «Du courage, du courage»,—говорил он сначала, а теперь: «C’est bon, c’est très bon, trop d’aplomb peut être. Vous ne respectez pas assez votre peinture». У меня «trop d’aplomb». Это бы сказал Крамской?” E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, June 2/14, 1870, 64-65. Given that the mixing of languages was common to educated Russians, and at times indicates a clear stylistic choice, I have decided to leave standard research languages (e.g., French and German) in the original when quoting from primary sources. I have also left spelling errors as they appear in the original. It is especially significant that at this point French was no longer the primary language of the gentry, but still a language all educated Russians were expected to be fluent in, so the choice to use it is often more a matter of expedience than a matter of taste or snobbery.

The experience with Chaplin boosted Polenova's confidence in her artistic talent. Unfortunately the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war on July 19, 1870 meant that they had to return home. Vera Dmitrievna reported to Vasilii Dmitrievich that Polenova was extremely disappointed in this turn of events. She also wrote that Chaplin "told me, 'Elle est très bien douée. Vous avez du fond; ce qui est plus, mais vous ne possédez pas votre métier et voilà à quoi il faut parvenir.'"⁸² Clearly, Chaplin recognized Polenova's talent, but was troubled by her lack of knowledge of the technical aspects of painting. At this point Polenova had received little formal training beyond the private lessons that were a common part of gentry education. After leaving Paris, Vera Dmitrievna and Polenova managed to take a short trip to Normandy, thinking they would be safe there, but they had to flee to Belgium and then to Kiev.⁸³

In 1872, Polenova traveled to Imochentsy from Kiev. She stopped in Moscow, where she visited exhibitions, including the Polytechnic Exposition, about which she wrote, "It is stupidly put together, but interesting, there is a lot there that you would never even suspect."⁸⁴ While her comments are vague, it might have been the combination of Russian revival style architecture and modern technology that she found "stupid." This exhibition is interesting because it provides an early example of contemporary attempts to foreground Russian identity in the context of modernity.

The Polytechnic Exposition was held right next to the Kremlin in the Alexander Gardens, which "were transformed into a wonderful town, with all sorts of houses, galleries, pavilions, all

⁸² "ко мне: «Elle est très bien douée. Vous avez du fond; ce qui est plus, mais vous ne possédez pas votre métier et voilà à quoi il faut parvenir.»" V. D. Khrushcheva to V. D. Polenov, June 29, 1870, 65.

⁸³ V. D. Khrushcheva to V. D. Polenov, October 16, 1870, 66-67.

⁸⁴ "Глупо составлена, но интересна, много такого, о чем и не подозреваешь." E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, July 12, 1872, 77.

draped in green, and all built in the Russian style.”⁸⁵ The Moscow Architectural Society had held a competition for pavilion designs. Initiators of the Russian revival style such as the architect Viktor Aleksandrovich Gartman (1834-1873) were selected to construct pavilions for the exhibition. While the pavilions were built in imitation of medieval Russian architecture, their interiors were outfitted with the latest in Russian and Western technology. As a result, the exhibition “created an architectural and aesthetic theme park that put pre-Petrine folk motifs in service to the needs of modern urban culture.” At the same time, these structures helped familiarize visitors with technology since the “wooden structures with elaborate decorative carving in the Russian folk style enclosed exhibits of applied science and modern empire that were, quite literally, ‘at home’ in Russia.” This mixture of Russian and Western was a nod to Peter the Great, whose bicentennial was celebrated in that year. It was also intended to reinforce the fact that Russia could compete with the West and that the adoption of existing technologies did not indicate any inferiority in Russian products.⁸⁶

In addition to technology, Russian folk art was also carefully placed “at home.” The model landowner’s house, for example, was outfitted with the latest domestic comforts and contained *kustar* objects, promoted as utilitarian and low cost.⁸⁷ Whatever Polenova might have thought of this exhibition, it contained the germ of her future work at Abramtsevo.

The other important event Polenova witnessed in Moscow was the Peredvizhniki’s first exhibition, which opened in Moscow on April 24.⁸⁸ An image she refers to as Kramskoi’s

⁸⁵ “Moskovskaia politekhnicheskaia vystavka s voennoi tochki zreniia,” *Oruzheinyi sbornik* nos. 3, 4 (1872): 4-5, as translated by and cited in Joseph Bradley, “Pictures at an Exhibition: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society in Imperial Russia,” *Slavic Review* (forthcoming).

⁸⁶ Joseph Bradley, “Pictures at an Exhibition: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society in Imperial Russia,” *Slavic Review* (forthcoming).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* The *kustar* industries were traditional peasant craft work that was under intense threat from industrialization.

⁸⁸ It had run in St. Petersburg from November 29, 1871 to January 23, 1872. Vasilii Dmitrievich was not a member until 1878.

Drowned Maidens made a strong impression on her. She noted that it differed from past Russian art, which, if it depicted peasants at all, did so in a sentimental and nostalgic way.⁸⁹ The painting, more commonly known as *Rusalki* (*Русалки*),⁹⁰ depicts a scene from Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol's fantastic story "A May Night, or The Drowned Maiden" (Майская ночь, или Утопленница) (1831). Gogol was revered as one of the first writers to portray Russian life, especially that of the lower classes, in all its detail, both pleasant and unpleasant, real and surreal. Kramskoi's work is an early example of artists' turn to Russian folklore for inspiration, although at this point still filtered through Russian literature.

Polenova likely wrote home about this image is likely due to her own and to her brother's personal relationship with Kramskoi, but her praise of its lack of sentimentality and nostalgia coincides with her rejection of the art she saw in Dresden in 1870. It also coincides with Stasov's opinion. Stasov's review of the exhibition was generally positive, proclaiming it the dawn of a new day for Russian art, "Not long ago, no one would have thought there would come, and come very soon, a time ... when [artists] would suddenly emerge from their artistic burrows and want to throw themselves into the ocean of real life, to join in its rushing and striving, to think about other people, their comrades!"⁹¹ In other words, artists had freed themselves from the ivory tower of the Academy and its classicism. Among other works in the Peredvizhniki's first exhibit, Stasov also singled out Kramskoi's *Drowned Maidens*. He praised Kramskoi for

⁸⁹ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, July 12, 1872, 77.

⁹⁰ *Rusalki* (singular = *rusalka*) are beautiful maidens who live underwater, emerging in late spring to dance and sing on the shores under the moonlight. *Rusalki* were thought to be the restless spirits of either drowned maidens or stillborn babies. They were known for luring young men with their beauty and laughter, sometimes becoming their lovers. They were also known for sneaking up on people and tickling them to death. Thus, the *rusalka* was a creature best avoided. See Linda J. Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1989).

⁹¹ "Кому еще недавно могло прийти в голову, что настанут ... такие времена ... что [художники] вдруг бросят свои художественные норы и захотят окунуться в океан действительной жизни, примкнуть к его порывам и стремлениям, задумаются о прочих людях, своих товарищах!" V. V. Stasov, "Peredvizhnaia vystavka," *Sobranie sochinenii* 1 (St. Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1894), 330.

faithfully capturing Gogol's provincial Ukraine, but criticized the work because "the drowned maidens are not quite Little Russian maidens."⁹² Setting aside the question of how Stasov would recognize a drowned "Little Russian maiden" if he saw one, his critique evidences his exacting requirements for authentic representations of life in the Empire. His insistence on "authenticity" would subsequently cause friction not only between him and the Peredvizhniki, but also between him and Polenova in later years.⁹³

Polenova spent the summer of 1875 at Imochentsy recovering from her failed romance. She tried to throw herself into perfecting watercolor studies from nature, but her depressed mood made it difficult to concentrate on anything.⁹⁴ Perhaps to distract her, Vera Dmitrievna took her to Paris, where Vasiliï Dmitrievich and Repin were spending the remainder of their Academy pensions. The sisters spent six weeks there and all three siblings began to work on an illustrated children's book, an activity that would become vital for Polenova in the late 1880s.⁹⁵

Polenova continued arts-related activities, such as sewing costumes and gathering antiquities from the Archaeological Society's stores for the models to employ in preparation for Vasiliï Dmitrievich's painting about the feast of the prodigal son.⁹⁶ In addition, she took the odd lesson from Chistiakov whenever she was in St. Petersburg. It was not until 1879, however, that she began serious study. In the autumn of that year she resumed taking classes at the school of

⁹² "Утопленницы не совсем малороссиянки." Ibid., 339.

⁹³ For example, in the same review Stasov singled out Ge's, *Peter the Great Interrogating His Son Aleksei at Peterhof* for criticism because it was a historical scene rather than one taken from contemporary, i.e., "real," life. Apparently Kramskoi's painting passed muster because the belief in *rusalki* was alive and well in the remote corners of "Little Russia."

⁹⁴ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, April 18, 1875, p. 178.

⁹⁵ Diary of F. V. Chizhov, *Khronika*, 194 and V. D. Polenov to E. D. Polenova, January 3, 1876, 195. The book was never issued due to Vera Dmitrievna's death. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 726 n 41.

⁹⁶ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 197-201, 203.

the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, where she studied watercolor and ceramics.⁹⁷ This marks the beginning of her career as an artist.

Wendy Salmond, Richard Stites and Rosalind Blakseley have pointed out that at this time women had few opportunities for education, let alone an arts education.⁹⁸ The situation of women and the Imperial Academy of Arts is somewhat peculiar in comparison to France's Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which was the model for Russia's academy and where women were not allowed to study until 1897.⁹⁹ In eighteenth-century Russia, a number of foreign women artists had successful careers in Russia or enjoyed patronage from Russia. These include Marie-Anne Collot, Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Angelica Kauffman. In 1767 Catherine the Great made Collot the first female member of the Imperial Academy of Arts. In contrast, Vigée-Lebrun was deemed a mere "honorary free associate" of the Academy,¹⁰⁰ a position of high esteem nevertheless.

Support of these women was due in part to Catherine the Great's patronage, but also to the artistic activities of the talented Princess Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg, who became Mariia Fedorovna, wife to Tsar Paul II (son of Catherine). Mariia Fedorovna was a painter, sculptor and engraver in her own right and a major patron of the arts in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.¹⁰¹ Though still forbidden from studying at the Academy, women were allowed to submit works to it in hopes of receiving the right to work as artists or art teachers. In addition, they could submit works for Academy competitions. The first woman to receive an

⁹⁷ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 6 and Sakharova, *Khronika*, 23, 736 n 2.

⁹⁸ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 25, 216; Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 22-88, and passim; and Rosalind P. Blakesley, "A Century of Women Painters, Sculptors, and Patrons from the time of Catherine the Great," in *An Imperial Collection: Women Artists from the State Hermitage Museum*, edited by Jordana Pomeroy, Rosalind P. Blakesley, Vladimir Yu. Matveyev and Elizaveta P. Renne (London: Merrell, 2003) 51-75.

⁹⁹ The authority on women's struggle to get into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts is Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ Blakesley, "Women Painters," 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

Academy medal was Marfa Dovgaleva in 1812. Thereafter, the number of women artists receiving recognition from the Academy gradually increased,¹⁰² but remained a tiny fraction compared to the number of male artists enrolled in the institution. By mid-century, women were allowed into the Academy as auditors and organizations such as the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts had set up special sections for women.¹⁰³ Again, part to the strong presence of a royal may account for this fact: Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna (eldest daughter of Nicholas I) was made president of both the Academy (the first woman to hold the post, even though the Academy was strictly under Romanov control) and the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in 1852.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, women had to wait until 1873 to be officially allowed into the Academy as full-time students, with all the rights the status provided. This victory was short-lived, however, because women were segregated in separate classes in 1876 due to women's increased involvement in political activity.¹⁰⁵ Following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, the Academy decided to limit the number of female students to twenty-two. In 1886, the Academy, along with all universities, closed admissions to women, "its suspicion of women's higher education fueled by the fact that the assassination had been coordinated by a woman."¹⁰⁶

Thus, though Polenova could have studied at the Academy as an auditor in her early years, in late fall 1879 she would have been twenty-nine and would likely have been deemed too old, even if she managed to pass the strict limitations placed on women's admission. Given the byzantine strictures of the Academy, many women found the offerings of the Society for the

¹⁰² Ibid., 63-65.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁵ Vera wrote to Polenova in February 1876, citing these events as evidence that the police were observing behavior everywhere and the need to be very careful. V. D. Khrushcheva to E. D. Polenova, February 1876, 201.

¹⁰⁶ Blakesley, "Women Painters," 74-75.

Encouragement of the Arts and other such institutions more attractive, even though women were often strongly encouraged to pursue decorative arts such as ceramics, which were thought more appropriate for them. Polenova later considered that her time at the school did not give her much in terms of artistic development, but it was vital for her decision to establish a career as an artist. She later said that, without the actions of Dmitrii Vasil'evich Grigorovich (1822-1899), the school's director, she would possibly have never begun exhibiting and taking her art seriously.¹⁰⁷

Polenova had concentrated on studying drawing and painting throughout the 1870s. After a short time at the Society school she found success in a new medium: ceramics. In late 1879 she wrote, "Last week I sold a little plate with the head of an ass (a copy) for fifteen rubles, which was extremely suitable to me, and I also received a commission for a large faience plaque to be copied from Shvarts's ink drawing of Ivan the Terrible's feast."¹⁰⁸ While fifteen rubles may not sound like a large amount, as late as 1900 teaching, one of the few accepted alternatives for upper-class women, was paying only 8-20 rubles per month.¹⁰⁹

Viacheslav Grigor'evich Shvarts (1838-1869) grew famous over his short career for his paintings and illustrations of Russian history, which were praised for their realism and subtle understanding of individual psychology. Stasov considered his painting *Ivan the Terrible beside the Body of the Son He Murdered* (Иван Грозный у тела убитого им сына; 1864) the first real Russian history painting. For him, Shvarts's images did not simply put Russian historical personages into French academic forms; rather, they conveyed Russian history through

¹⁰⁷ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 21, 1885, 349-350.

¹⁰⁸ "На прошлой неделе продала тарелочку с головой осла (копия) за пятнадцать р[ублей], что весьма мне кстати и еще получила заказ на большой фаянсовой пляке написать с рисунка пером Щванца—пир Грозного." E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, December 2, 1879, 277. It is common for Russians to abbreviate in personal correspondence. Here and throughout, unless otherwise noted, the letters added in brackets in the Russian text are by Sakharova.

¹⁰⁹ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 173.

recognizably Russian ones.¹¹⁰ His illustration, *The Feast of Ivan the Terrible* (*Пир у Грозного*; 1862), was the result of a commission of Empress Mariia Aleksandrovna to illustrate *Prince Serebrianyi* (1862), Aleksei Konstantinovich Tolstoy's historical novel about the time of Ivan the Terrible. In order to demonstrate his skill, Shvarts provided the Empress with five illustrations to Mikhail Lermontov's poem *The Song* (1840), which tells of the merchant Kalashnikov, an inhabitant of Ivan the Terrible's Oprichina.¹¹¹ That Shvart's *The Feast of Ivan the Terrible* was popular enough to be commissioned on a plaque is one example of the increasing interest in Russian history that spread through the arts starting in the 1860s.

A few months after entering the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Polenova was sent to Paris as its first pensioner. Vera Dmitrievna was delighted, writing to Polenov

Lil'ka's done well—she's earned more than 150 rubles since fall, but even more important than money is the position that she has created for herself where she works. In Grigorovich's school she is now in first place, and not only in terms of talent, but also as a person, as someone who gets things done. Grigorovich is delighted with her ... A few days ago he came to her as a representative of the Society [for the Encouragement of the Arts] and asked her to accept a trip abroad to study painting on porcelain and enamel. "The Society asks you to look at this trip not as a personal affair, but as a civic one. You have the opportunity to be useful to Russian art on a broad scale."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ A. Vereshchagina, *Viacheslav Grigor'evich Shvarts: 1838-1869* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1960) 8-9.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51-52. The Oprichina was an administrative territory set up by Ivan the Terrible that was centered around Moscow and included about 1/3 of the territory of the empire at the time. It became infamous for the oprichniks, the territory's administrators who mercilessly dealt out punishment to anyone who dared defame or defy the tsar's order.

¹¹² "Лилька молодец,—с осени заработала себе больше ста пятидесяти рубл[ей], но, что гораздо дороже денег, это то положение, которое она себе состваила там, где она работает. В школе Григоровича она теперь первая, и не только по таланту, а как человек, как деятель. Григорович от нее в восторге ... На днях от имени Общества обратился к ней с просьбой принять поручение за границу—поездку с целью изуч[ения] живописи на фарфоре и эмали. «Общество просит Вас смотреть на эту командировку, не как на личное дело, а как не дело общественное. Вы можете этим принести пользу русск[ому] искус[ству] в широких размерах.» V. D. Khrushchova to V. D. Polenov, December 21, 1879, 277. D. V. Grigorovich was the director of the St. Petersburg school of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. This letter is revealing in that Vera's praise for Polenova's earnings indicates that she finds it perfectly acceptable that Polenova is making money and establishing a career. While one would expect this from a "woman of the sixties" like Vera, society still disapproved of "well-born" women working and earning money. See, e.g., Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*.

Grigorovich's command came at a time when the Russian art scene had undergone massive changes. By this point the Peredvizhniki had been exhibiting for eight years and they were growing more popular as time passed.¹¹³ Their success lent credence to calls for reforms in the art world and inspired other independent projects. Moreover, Russia's efforts to modernize itself as rapidly as possible affected the spheres of the decorative and industrial arts, partly in reaction to the unimpressive displays Russia assembled for the first few world's fairs in the nineteenth century. Many progressive members of Russian society felt that the way to modernize Russian industries was to go to the West and study what Western industrialists had done, then return to Russia and improve upon their techniques.¹¹⁴ Thus, Polenova was commanded to go to Paris not just for her own self-improvement, but for the opportunity to improve Russian ceramic production as a whole, thereby elevating the status of Russian art.

Polenova herself was ambivalent about her capacity "to be useful to Russian art on a broad scale." She reported to her brother,

What a scandal, Vasia. They are sending me abroad on behalf of the Society. I think that this is the first example in history, at least Russian history, that somebody from our female estate received an order and was sent on a business trip for the purpose of studying, etc. When Grigorovich told me about it, I answered that in any case to take on this trip now, right now, would be silly at the very least and unconscionable at the worst, because to go with my current lack of knowledge would invariably accomplish nothing. But, they are sending me in May, and now I have to work hard to prepare myself, so I am setting aside many of my own projects, including the school¹¹⁵

¹¹³ For example, in their first year (1871-1872), when the exhibition traveled to only four cities, it had a total of 30,527 visitors, in 1874—27,752, and in 1877—41,646. S. N. Gol'dshtein, ed. *Tovarishchestvo peredvizhnykh khudozhestvennykh vystavok, pis'ma, dokumenty, 1869-1899* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987).

¹¹⁴ Bradley, "Pictures at an Exhibition," (forthcoming).

¹¹⁵ "Какой скандал, Вася, меня посылают в командировку за границу от Общества поощрения. Я думаю, это первый пример в истории, по крайней мере русской, чтобы особа нашего бабьего сословия получала поручение и отправляема была в командировку с целью изучения и т. д. Когда Григорович сообщил меня об этом, то я отвечала, что во всяком случае принять эту командировку теперь, сейчас, было бы по меньшей мере глупо и того больше—небодросовестно, потому что ехать с моим теперешним незнание, значит наверное ничего не сделать. Но они посылают меня в мае, а теперь я должна усиленно готовится и для этого

Polenova's language in this letter is interesting. She uses the phrase "*bab'e soslovie*," which I have translated as "female estate." The adjective *bab'e* is derived from *baba*, a colloquial, often derogatory, word for woman. In its most neutral usage it means a peasant woman; at its most offensive it may best be translated as "dumb broad." *Soslovie* refers to the estates, or legally mandated social classes, in Imperial Russia. In the nineteenth century these were gentry, clergy, merchants, petty townsmen (мещане), artisans and peasants. There was some mobility in the Russian Empire's social system, but it was difficult to rise above a particularly low station. In addition to the ranking system inherent in the estates, the civil service was also divided into fourteen ranks. Artists were also tied to the complex estate and rank system: those who graduated from the Academy with a gold medal were automatically awarded the title of Class Artist, receiving the fourteenth rank and the chance to advance through service to the state. Thus not only was Polenova communicating her surprise that the officials had deigned to select a woman—a separate estate entirely in Russian society according to her words—for such an important undertaking, but she also expressed it in a mix of high and low language that indicates her ambivalent attitude toward the situation and her unusual position.

In the same letter she also mentioned that she had received a medal for her copy of Shvarts's *The Feast of Ivan the Terrible*, but added she was dissatisfied with the results. "By the way, I think it was a political medal: the Society would be in an awkward position sending me to study porcelain production, passing over all those students who already have medals."¹¹⁶ In other

откладываю многие свои занятия, между прочим и гимназию" E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, January 16, 1880, 278. The school she refers to is that of the Liteiny-Tauride Circle. It appears she did not go in May as planned, as her earliest letters from Paris are dated September. As it happens, Polenova was mistaken about being the first: the first Russian woman artist to be sent abroad on an official pension was A. M. Bakunina in 1834. Blakseley, "Women Painters," 65.

¹¹⁶ "Впрочем, я думаю, это была медаль политическая: Обществу неловко было бы посылать меня изучать фарфоровое производство, обходя тех из учениц, которые имеют уже медали." She also reported that when it was exhibited someone wanted to purchase it. Learning that it was the school's property, the individual

words, she did not believe that she deserved a medal for the work, but understood that the Society could not send her abroad as a pensioner if she had not won any medals in ceramics. Nonetheless, Grigorovich thought so highly of her that he planned to make her the head of the ceramics section upon her return from Paris.¹¹⁷

Her Paris sojourn proved both enlightening and revitalizing. Polenova studied museum collections and worked in the studios of the Russian ceramic artist Evdokim Alekseevich Egorov (1832-1891). Egorov had studios in Paris from 1874 through the 1880s where he and his wife worked on perfecting the craft and studying French techniques. Various Russian artists spent time there, including Vasilii Dmitrievich and Il'ia Efimovich Repin (1844-1930), who painted tableware in 1876. Polenov and Repin had studied the works at the Deck factory store near the Grand Opera and were particularly taken by the ceramics painted by the Swiss artist Albert Anker (1831-1910). Anker was famous for genre scenes of Swiss village life and executed over 500 works for Deck during his career.¹¹⁸ Egorov was dedicated to fostering the ceramic arts, especially raising their prestige, and hoped to teach peasants the craft. That the Academy pensioners were dabbling in ceramics was well enough known that in June 1876 Grigorovich requested that the artists working with Egorov send examples of their work to him at the School.¹¹⁹ His request indicates a desire to improve Russian production existed before he sent Polenova abroad.

commissioned another one from Polenova. She agreed because she thought the experience working with the colors would be useful. E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, January 16, 1880, 278.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ For more on Anker and Deck, see Sandor Kuthy, *Albert Anker Fayencen in Zusammenarbeit mit Théodore Deck*. (Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1985).

¹¹⁹ Salmond, *Artists and Painters*, 26, 217. To satisfy Grigorovich's request, Vasilii Dmitrievich sent *A Russian Horseman from the Eighteenth Century*, Repin *Ivan the Fool*. The plates were priced at 100 rubles each. Sakharova, *Khronika* 728 n 57.

Polenova also studied at the Deck factories, where she gained the acquaintance of Joseph-Théodore Deck himself and was impressed with his kindness and willingness to show her all aspects of his enterprise. By this time Deck was famous for the quality of his ceramics. He had studied ancient and contemporary production techniques, taking the best from both worlds to create new products. He was also considered an innovator for employing well known artists to paint his wares, which were produced by skilled craftsmen. Polenova was amazed by the famous turquoise “bleu de Deck” as well as the ancient, Chinese, and Mauritanian ceramics in the Deck collection. She noted the presence of women artists among those employed by Deck, and stated, “when I went to his shop to ask permission to be at the factory and to introduce myself to his sister, she told me that in Paris, in addition to their hired craftspeople, they have twelve artists, among which is one woman, who receive his dishes and paints, work at home and do what they like. The pieces are fired at the factory and are sold at his store with a stated percentage [going to the artists]. That is how Anker, Collin, et al. work.”¹²⁰ This revelation likely planted one of the seeds for her future work at Abramtsevo.

By October, Polenova felt she had learned all she could from Egorov and had written to Grigorovich asking permission to study Limoges enamel techniques. She was clearly excited by her work, noting that Paris was the best place in the world to study. She commented, however, that Imochentsy and Voeikovo were the best places to work and Moscow the best to live, making it clear that she was not becoming a complete Francophile.¹²¹ Her attitude was typical of many of the Russian elite in this period—devoted to Russia, but not adverse to learning from the West.

¹²⁰ “когда я была в его магазине, чтобы попросить позволения быть на фабрике и познакомиться с его сестрой, то она мне рассказала, что у них, кроме своих наемных декораторов, есть в Париже двенадцать художников, между ними одна барыня, которые получают его посуду и его краски, работают у себя и делают что им вздумается, у него обжигают и продают за известный процент в его магазине. Так работает Анкер, Collin и др.” E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, September 12/24, 1880, 282.

¹²¹ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, October 12/24, 1880, 284.

To wit, Polenova made a point of going to as many museums, including the Palais de l'Industrie, exhibitions, studios and factories as she could before returning to Russia in November.¹²²

Shortly after her return, Vera Dmitrievna fell ill with pleurisy. Polenova was so involved with her care that she was unable to accept commissions or do any work.¹²³ Despite the attention of doctors and Polenova's devotion, Vera Dmitrievna died on March 7, 1881. While this was a loss for the entire family, for Polenova it was particularly traumatizing; they had grown very close again after the pain of the Shkliarevskii scandal had dulled and they served together in the hospital during the war.¹²⁴ After she had lost her father in the fall of 1879, Polenova remained alone in Petersburg with her mother.

In addition to Polenova's personal trauma, Russia was in turmoil because Alexander II had been assassinated on March 1 in a plot organized by a woman, Sofiia L'vovna Perovskaia (1853-1881). Perovskaia would subsequently become the first woman executed for political crimes against the Russian state.¹²⁵ As noted above, Perovskaia's and other women's involvement in the crime led to women's exclusion from institutions of higher education and subjection to increased police surveillance. These distressing events may have provided further impetus for Polenova's decision to move to Moscow the following year.

¹²² V. D. Khrushcheva to V. D. Polenov, November 5, 1880, 284-285.

¹²³ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, December 23, 1880, 286.

¹²⁴ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 26.

¹²⁵ Interestingly, in 1876 the increasingly progressive, anti-Russian Empire views Vasilii Dmitrievich was acquiring in Paris distressed his parents. Polenova warned him not to write about such things in letters sent to be read to the family and Vera Dmitrievna was upset at his perceived lack of national pride. In addition, Polenova was worried about the presence of the Tsar's Secret Police in Paris and feared that Vasilii Dmitrievich would be arrested if he was not careful. In response, Vasilii Dmitrievich cast aside their fears and then cited Perovskaia as "one of the most dependable activists for the future of laboring Russia" (один из самых надежных деятелей для будущей трудовой России) V. D. Polenov to V. D. Khrushcheva, February 5, 1876, 201.

1.4 POLENOVA SHAPES HER STYLE AND CAREER

Polenova's watercolors of the early 1880s speak to her development as an artist and provide insight into gender relations among artists. Of particular interest is her sketch *The Old Mill* (*Старая мельница*), completed during a drawing expedition with her brother in Orlov province. Polenov later turned his sketches into his oil painting *The Old Mill* (1880; *Старая мельница*). Comparing her sketch with Polenov's painting shows a facet of Polenova's landscapes that remained a feature of her oeuvre throughout her career. Polenova tended to notice small details and preferred to be close to her subjects, producing scenes that differed from the broad, sweeping landscapes produced by many of the male artists of the Peredvizhniki.¹²⁶ She later explained this tendency in a letter to a friend from the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts,

Views, especially grandiose ones, of nature are not for my temperament. I can derive pleasure, be enthralled by its [nature's] colors, but in conveying them I remain too calm and cold. I cannot settle on them [grandiose views], like I sometimes can on some kind of trifle, but a familiar one. Only my own, completely familiar, northern or central Russian nature captures my soul, especially when it is expressed in tiny, almost insignificant, but deeply poetic corners. That is close and dear to me, and that is what I am good at.¹²⁷

In addition, she bristled at her uncle's suggestion that her watercolors were boring and that she should paint more like Arkhip Ivanovich Kuindzhi (1842-1910).¹²⁸ Kuindzhi, a landscape artist famous for his moonlight effects, burst onto the scene in 1880 with his famous *Night on the Dnepr*. Polenova complained about her uncle to her sister-in-law, "I ... derive great

¹²⁶ This is not to say that no Russian woman artist ever produced a sweeping vista. Mariia Alekseevna Fedorova's *Approaching Bad Weather* (1891, К ненастью) in the Tretyakov Gallery's collection is an example. The image is reproduced in *Femme Art*.

¹²⁷ "Виды, а уж особенно грандиозные, природы—мне не по натуре. Любоваться, восторгаться ее красотами—могу, но, передавая их, остаюсь чересчур [sic] спокойна и холодна. Не могу так облюбовать их, как иногда мелочь какую-нибудь, но родную. За душу захватывает одна лишь своя хорошо знакомая природа северная или среднерусская, особенно тогда, когда она выражена в маленьких, ничтожных, как будто, но глубоко-поэтических уголках. Это мне близко и дорого—это мне и удается." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 21, 1885, 349.

¹²⁸ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 9-10.

satisfaction from little corners and do not seek, like Kuindzhi, to depict *les grandes scènes de la nature*.”¹²⁹

The Old Mill is clearly one of Polenova’s “insignificant, but deeply poetic corners.” Her vision of the mill is much more tumbledown and forlorn than her brother’s. Where he emphasizes the machinery and the imposing nature of the old hulk—made even more so by the contrasting presence of the small child—Polenova’s angle minimizes the structure, placing it on a more human scale. In Polenova’s version, the mill almost seems to be collapsing back into nature, whereas Polenov has portrayed the same structure as a building that will endure for decades to come.

While a preference for poetic, intimate scenes has often been ascribed to the supposedly delicate constitutions of women, women artists also often turned to such imagery as a strategy to make their work viable in the face of the training in monumental painting denied to them.¹³⁰ In Polenova’s case I agree with Christopher Ely, who has argued that her impetus has more to do with a desire to portray the intimate, “indigenous Russian relationship to the landscape”—an attitude particularly attributed to the *narod*, but held dear by Russians of all classes as a specifically Russian trait.¹³¹ The native landscape was a relatively new subject for Russian painters and a major part of the Peredvizhnik output. The concept of the native land (родина) has always been a significant factor in Russian conceptions of identity, but with rare exception it

¹²⁹ “Я ... довольствуюсь маленькими уголками и не ищу, как Куинджи, изображать *les grandes scènes de la nature*.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, September 1, 1883, 318. It is possible that the material cited by Sakharova in *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 13 is an excerpt of this letter not printed in *Khronika* as Polenova complains quite a bit about her uncle’s demands. She was visiting his house at the time and he was insisting she paint frescoes and create other works for him.

¹³⁰ Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971) in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1988) 145-178; Tamar Garb, *Women Impressionists* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988) 6; and Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: World of Art, 1996) 232.

¹³¹ Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 218-219.

was long absent from the visual arts. While Russian artists had been producing academic landscapes of sunny Italy for a long time, the Russian land itself did not begin to trickle into Russian visual art until after Napoleon was expelled from Russia, which caused a surge in national pride, and did not become common until the 1850s.¹³²

By the time the Peredvizhniki had risen to prominence, Russian audiences were used to seeing paintings of their own landscape. The Peredvizhniki struggled with critics' charges that landscape was not conducive to advancing progressive political agendas and even that it was an elitist form of art for a leisured class. Critics such as Stasov demanded that landscapes include social commentary and put on view the hardships of country life.¹³³ In spite of this demand for social content, the most famous of the landscape painters among the Peredvizhniki—Alexei Kondrat'evich Savrasov (1830-1897), Ivan Ivanovich Shishkin (1832-1898), Isaac Il'ich Levitan (1860-1900), Kuindzhi—created a popular and diverse genre that was interpreted as nationalistic and celebratory, even in its most contemplative aspects. Not all landscape was without political commentary. Levitan's *Vladimirka Road* (Владимирка; 1892) is one example. This seemingly unassuming landscape would have been recognized by the majority of Russian viewers, for the Vladimirka Road was the “route by which convicts were forcibly marched to Siberian exile.”¹³⁴

Thus, while Polenova clearly had a strong personal attachment to the landscape as a subject, it cannot be denied that painting landscapes was a practical choice. On the Russian art market in the second half of the nineteenth-century monumental landscapes commanded a maximum of 1000 rubles at major exhibitions (in contrast to history paintings, which could

¹³² Ibid., 60-61, 163.

¹³³ Ibid., 173, 178.

¹³⁴ Jackson, *Wanderers*, 128.

command 10,000 rubles or more depending on the buyer),¹³⁵ but they were the most popular genre among the contemporary art-buying public, which included the great merchant patrons such as Tretyakov.¹³⁶ Indeed, Jackson argues that it was landscape that “carried the [Peredvizhniki] forward and motivated it aesthetically when the edifice of a national school threatened to be lost entirely under the weight of political expediency.”¹³⁷

The fact that studying the landscape intently in preparation for even a history painting was important for the Peredvizhniki is exemplified Vasilii Dmitrievich’s trip to Egypt and Palestine in November of 1881 to study the land and people in preparation for planned Biblical paintings. That he supported his sister’s artistic development is evident from a letter he wrote home to his mother: “I’m glad Lil’ka is busy. How are her watercolors coming along? Did she do some for exhibition as she proposed? They have been very strongly etched in my memory. I happily remember them and the times we painted together. In general I remember [the villages of] Ol’shanka and Anaskha as the happiest episodes of recent times. I myself even want to try to learn to paint in watercolors.”¹³⁸ That Polenov was not proficient in watercolors should not be a surprise given that he was trained in the Imperial Academy of Arts. Watercolors were not considered a suitable medium for an Academy student for anything other than quick sketches. Moreover, as Salmond has pointed out, Polenova worked mostly in watercolors because she

¹³⁵ Vladimir Lapshin, “Khudozhestvennyi ryok v Rossii kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka,” *Voprosy iskusstvovedeniia* 8, no. 1 (1996): 576. For comparison, in 1879, Vasilii Dmitrievich—already an established and well known artist—was selling his smaller genre paintings and landscapes for 500-800 rubles. V. D. Polenov to I. N. Kramskoi, February 12, 1879, 271. In 1891 Alexander III caused a scandal when he paid 35,000 rubles for Repin’s *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, then the highest price ever paid for a Russian painting. Nicholas II later bested him by paying 40,000 rubles for Surikov’s *The Conquest of Siberia by Ermak*. Lapshin, *Ibid.*, 578.

¹³⁶ Ely, *Meager Nature*, 168-169 and Jackson, *Wanderers*, 122.

¹³⁷ Jackson, *Wanderers*, 132.

¹³⁸ “Очень рад, что Лилька занята. Что ее акварели? Сделала ли она [на] выставку, как предполагала? Ужасно сильно они врезались мне в память. С наслаждением вспоминаю об них и о том времени, когда мы вместе с ней писали. Вообще Ольшанка и Анашка вспоминаются мне самым радостным эпизодом за последнее время. Даже самому хочется попробовать учиться акварельному искусству.” V. D. Polenov to M. A. Polenova, January 12, 1882, 301.

lacked “a formal education in oil painting and life drawing.”¹³⁹ In addition, watercolors were often considered an appropriate medium for the gentlewoman artist or amateur.

In her correspondence, Polenova rarely mentioned any experience of discrimination. Nevertheless, the fact that her male colleagues still regarded artistic talent in a woman with some surprise is indicated by Chistiakov’s comment to Repin that Polenova’s watercolors—the ones she first sketched in 1881 in Ol’shanka and Anashka and exhibited in 1882 at the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts—“would be the honor of any famous male artist.”¹⁴⁰ Moreover, there is Repin’s gallant request to Polenov to “kiss both of Elena Dmitrievna’s little hands for her watercolor studies.”¹⁴¹ Undoubtedly Polenova was not unaware of the status of women artists in Russia given the caricatures by such artists as Petr Mikhailovich Shmel’kov, and some of her decisions regarding her career were likely influenced by this situation. She seems not to have felt restricted by the fact of her gender, however, perhaps due to her social class. Moreover, the praise of such prominent art-world figures as Repin and Chistiakov was not insignificant, especially given her perpetual doubts about her talent.

In the fall of 1882 Polenova decided that she and her mother should move to Moscow to live with Polenov and his new bride, Natal’ia Vasil’evna Iakunchikova, sister of Mariia Vasil’evna. The decision to leave the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts did not come easily, and financial considerations weighed heavily. She was also concerned about being seen merely as Vasilii Dmitrievich’s younger sister rather than as an artist in her own right. But the opportunity to work with the group of artists forming in Moscow around the Mamontovs

¹³⁹ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ “они сделали бы честь самому пресловутому мужчине-художнику” I. E. Repin to V. D. Polenov, November 1882, as cited in Sakharova, *Khronika*, 24 and E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 7, 1882, 311.

¹⁴¹ “поцелуй обе ручки у Ел[ены] Дм[итриевны] за ее акверельные этюды.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, *Ibid.*

and their estate, Abramtsevo, was alluring. So, she and her mother moved to Moscow in October, settling into the house the newly married Polenovs were renting on an old estate on what was then the northern edge of Moscow.¹⁴² The move proved beneficial and only a year later Polenova noted, “Vasilii Dmitrievich absolutely does not have the overwhelming influence on me in art like I was afraid he would. ... On the contrary, associations with him and his artist friends have been useful and I now see that I have made a stride forward.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 10-11. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 23-24. The estate was owned by Petr Ivanovich Tolstoi.

¹⁴³ “То, чего я боялась, совсем было неосновательно. ... Василий совсем не имел на меня того подавляющего влияния в искусстве как я боялась. Напротив, столкновение с ним и с его друзьями-художниками отозвались положительно и пользою, и я теперь вижу, что в этот год я сделала шаг вперед.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 27, 1883, 320. Ellipsis in the original.

2.0 MOSCOW, ABRAMTSEVO AND A NEW GENERATION OF RUSSIAN ARTISTS

In the 1880s, while living in Moscow and at Abramtsevo, Polenova came into her own as an artist.¹⁴⁴ Iakunchikova and Polenova also cemented their friendship during this period. Wendy Salmond, Alison Hilton and others have written in detail about Polenova's contribution to the Abramtsevo workshops and my dissertation is deeply indebted to their research.¹⁴⁵ Polenova's activities in the Abramtsevo workshops garnered her a reputation in the art world, and it was vital to her artistic development. A close examination of the works she produced during this period alongside the Abramtsevo designs gives a much clearer picture of Polenova's contribution to Russian art. It also provides a broader picture of the shifts that were occurring in the Russian art world. During this time, the Peredvizhniki gradually lost their status as a progressive opposition group and younger Russian artists turned to both indigenous art traditions and contemporary Western art practice to forge what they believed to be a better path for modern Russian art. In this chapter, I will examine how Polenova's work was instrumental in the development of Russian art in the context of social change and increasing interest in Russia's modern identity. In addition, I will consider how her close bond with Iakunchikova and the

¹⁴⁴ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ See Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*; Alison Hilton, *Russian Folk Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Eleonora V. Paston, *Abramtsevo: Iskusstvo i zhizn* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 2003).

emerging younger generation of artists would prove an important factor in their future impact on Russian modernism.

2.1 MERCHANT MOSCOW AND RUSSIAN IDENTITY

During the second half of the nineteenth century many Moscow-based merchant patrons consciously adopted the goal of collecting and fostering a Russian national art. The neo-Russian style in architecture emerged after the 1858 repeal of the law requiring that all buildings in Moscow's center be built in one of the officially approved European styles. The expansion of the neo-Russian (or Russian revival) style was heavily subsidized by merchants.¹⁴⁶ The trends in architecture soon spread to the other arts. P. M. Tretyakov was the first merchant patron dedicated to the collection and promotion of an emerging art that addressed Russian life as Russians recognized it. He began collecting in the 1850s with the express goal of promoting Russia's unique artistic heritage to the Russian people, ultimately bequeathing his collection to the public in a neo-Russian style museum.¹⁴⁷ The collection has subsequently become world famous, but Tretyakov's initial vision for it was to instill pride in Russian artists in their accomplishments and to educate a broad Russian public about the arts in their native realm.

Other merchants followed suit, exhibiting the tensions and contradictions present in contemporary Russian society in their drive to collect and establish a modern Russian art in spite

¹⁴⁶ Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Picador, 2003) 174.

¹⁴⁷ John O. Norman, "Pavel Tretiakov and Merchant Art Patronage," in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, edited by Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 95-96. For a detailed study of Tretyakov's life and collecting activities, see Irina Sergeevna Nenarkomova, *Pavel Tret'iakov i ego gallereia* (Moscow: Art-Rodnik, 1998).

of their deeply felt interest in Russia's past.¹⁴⁸ Many of the merchants favored easel art. In the 1870s, however, the development of applied arts as a significant force and subject of patronage led to much experimentation in the arts, the foundation of art colonies outside urban centers and a simultaneous expansion of the art market to the provinces.¹⁴⁹ The contemporary revival of folk arts in Europe is commonly attributed to anti-urban and anti-modernist impulses. The origins of the Russian variant are similar, especially considering the numbers of Slavophiles among the ranks of art patrons and the concurrent romanticization of certain aspects of peasant life. The increasing social strife toward the end of the nineteenth century led many to reject contemporary life and to seek alternative realities, especially writers and artists, some of whom began to express nostalgia for a lost golden age or an as-yet-unrealized utopia in their art.

The context of the revival of folk arts in Russia is, however, distinctive in several ways.¹⁵⁰ First, the majority of the supporters of the folk-art revival in Russia were merchants and industrialists, not the gentry—Princess Tenisheva was the major exception and she came to the revival movement relatively late in 1893. The fact that these supporters were actively engaged in modern technologies in mostly urban settings, the Moscow region in particular, makes a conscious rejection of technology and urbanism unlikely. Some may nonetheless have felt a need to “atone” for their connection to industry and thus pursued art objects that seemed nonurban and antimodern to compensate for their involvement in a modernization based on urban industrialism, which was causing radical disruptions in the peasant way of life.

¹⁴⁸ John E. Bowlt, “The Moscow Art Market,” in *Between Tsar and People*, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Norman, “Pavel Tretiakov,” 105.

¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Nina Lübbren considered Abramtsevo (and other estate-based colonies) enough of an anomaly that she specifically excluded it from her study *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe 1870-1910* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

Second, the merchant-industrial class was not a cohesive entity, yet it was a group treated with disdain and suspicion by the elite. Merchants and industrialists were perceived as occupying the fringes of society and, due to the presence of Germans and Jews among their ranks, they were often viewed as foreigners no matter what their status.¹⁵¹ Their precarious social position required a certain degree of assimilation and a strong will to persevere. A possible explanation for the founding of country art colonies by the merchants and industrialists is the practice among the gentry who could afford it to spend summers at their country estates and the winter season in the city. A merchant's purchase of an estate could therefore be an attempt at social legitimation, rather than a rejection of the urban environment. The combination of estate ownership philanthropic activity would further ally the merchant with the traditional activities of the gentry elite.¹⁵²

Third, the subordinate position of Russia *vis-à-vis* Europe was acutely felt by many merchants and industrialists, who wanted their technology and goods to be able to compete on the European market. Indeed, as Rosalind Gray has noted, "the Abramtsevo artists shared neither the anti-industrial impetus of the British Arts and Crafts Movement, nor Marx's notions of the alienated worker which flavoured the rhetoric of William Morris."¹⁵³ Like many Russian intellectuals, however, the merchant elite was also concerned that European influence would result in Russia losing her unique status as an exotic empire hovering between East and West. The presence of large numbers of Slavophiles among the merchants and industrialists heightened

¹⁵¹ Abbott Gleason, "The Terms of Russian Social History," in *Between Tsar and People*, 18. As a matter of fact, ethnic Russians were by far the majority among all merchants, although it is the case that foreigners did dominate some of the wealthiest industries in the Moscow region. Jo Ann Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite: A Social and Cultural Portrait of Two Generations, 1840-1905* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, 1984), 22-25.

¹⁵² For more on the history of the estate and its significance in Russian society, see Priscilla Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate: A Social and Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹⁵³ Rosalind Polly Gray, "Questions of Identity at Abramtsevo," in *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan (London: Ashgate, 2000) 103.

this suspicion of European influence. Therefore, while it is likely that some of the interest in reviving folk art forms among patrons stemmed from anti-urban and anti-modern impulses, in the case of Russia, I believe it more likely derived from an acute need to establish and maintain a specific Russian identity. It is my contention that this need built upon increasingly escapist tendencies among art producers, resulting in, among other things, a wholesale revival of indigenous motifs in the arts.

The question of Russian identity is further complicated by the question of nationalism. In the 1870s, Russian intellectuals began to question the state's hegemonic role in creating Russian history and turned towards socioeconomic questions. This incipient populism resulted in increasing political activity and a sense of uncertainty as to what Russia was exactly and its place in the history of the world.¹⁵⁴ These questions, especially in a country where the gulf between the tiny educated elite and the peasant masses was so broad, led many, including those working in the arts, to ask where the "authentic" Russian nation could be located. Was it among the Europeanized elite, or among the masses? Could the two somehow be reconciled? If so, how?¹⁵⁵

For both Russia and Europe, questions of national identity became urgent in the nineteenth century, and ethnography and archaeology were employed to help define those identities.¹⁵⁶ The situation of Russia was, however, unique for various reasons: (1) Russia was an enormous contiguous empire (7000 miles west to east, 3000 miles north to south at the broadest points in the mid-nineteenth century); (2) Russia was a multiethnic empire; (3) Russia had a

¹⁵⁴ Terence Emmons, "The Problem of 'Russia and the West' in Russian Historiography (with special reference to M. I. Rostovtsev and P. N. Miliukov)," in *The Cultural Gradient: The Transmission of Ideas in Europe, 1789-1991*, edited by Catherine Evtuhov and Stephen Kotkin (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) 99.

¹⁵⁵ Sternin, *70-80e gody*, 11, 145-168.

¹⁵⁶ On nationalism see, e.g., Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev.ed. (New York: Verso, 2006); and E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). On archaeology, see Malina and Vašíček, *Archaeology*.

complex social structure that precluded the emergence of a cohesive “imagined community” of the type theorized by Anderson;¹⁵⁷ and (4) a capitalist economy did not emerge in Russia until the late-nineteenth century.

I have already argued that Nicholas I’s Official Nationalism policy produced more of an Official Imperialism policy than a cohesive sense of Russian nationalism. In light of this and the points just noted, I also argue that, while the agenda of many art critics in Russia was to form a recognizably Russian art (rather than one that continued the imitation of European academic traditions), much of this project was focused on the formation of a social/cultural identity that was in line with and at the same time distinct from the Russian identity imposed by the Empire. Artists and critics sought to achieve this identity through ethnographic and archaeological activity fostered by the patronage of merchant elites like Savva Mamontov. Thus, in the context of this thesis, I use the word nation and its derivatives somewhat loosely.¹⁵⁸ I do not argue that the merchant patrons drove the search for a recognizably Russian art. The interest in such a project emerged before their collecting activities, as early as the 1840s. Instead, artists and merchants came together due to joint interests, which was a fact of the Moscow art world by the time Polenova entered it in 1882.

¹⁵⁷ In legal terms, four estates (soslovie) existed from the late eighteenth century until the emancipation of the serfs in 1861: the nobility, the clergy, the merchantry and the peasantry. These estates emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the tsarist government made them juridical categories to facilitate administrative control of the population. Population-wise, according to the 1897 census the peasantry still accounted for nearly 80%, the merchantry had risen to approximately 10% and the clergy and nobility made up the remaining 10%.

¹⁵⁸ For more on the thorny question of nation and national identity in Russia, see Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, eds. *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

2.2 POLENOVA'S INTRODUCTION TO THE MOSCOW ART WORLD

After his return from the Middle East in April 1882, Vasilii Dmitrievich became a faculty member at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture¹⁵⁹ (Московское училище живописи, ваяния и зодчества, hereafter “Moscow School”), a position he held for the next twelve years. Through Vasilii Dmitrievich’s teaching activities and his relationships with former classmates and other artists, Polenova was quickly immersed in an active artistic sphere. On October 20, 1882, she reported to her school friend Praskov’ia Dmitrievna Antipova that her brother was introducing her to the art world—she had already been to Abramtsevo to look at the church—and that she and her mother liked Natal’ia Vasil’evna, “who was in fact very successfully chosen, if it is possible to judge a person after a one-and-one-half week acquaintanceship.”¹⁶⁰ Polenova’s integration into the Abramtsevo group would have a significant impact on her exhibition work and general artistic interests. In this section I will examine her early activities at Abramtsevo and her forays into the Moscow exhibition scene, which will provide a background for my examination of Polenova’s work in the fine arts in subsequent sections of this chapter.

¹⁵⁹ This school was supported by the Moscow Arts Society, which was under the “protection” of the Imperial Court from 1843, but the school remained fairly independent as it did not receive regular government support until 1898. Vladimir Lapshin, “Poslednii imperator Rossii i otechestvennaia khudozhestvennaia zhizn’ kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka,” *Iskusstvoznanie*, no. 1 (2004): 540.

¹⁶⁰ “которая в самом деле очень удачно выбрана, если можно судить о человеке в полторы недели знакомства.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 20, 1882, 311. It appears from this comment that Polenova and her mother were not present at the wedding or had met Natal’ia prior to their move to Moscow. I have not discovered any documents to indicate otherwise. This is interesting in light of the fact that the primary reason her mother objected to Polenova’s marrying the doctor from Kiev is that they did not know him. In addition, the Iakunchikovs were a merchant family, not gentry. (They did become gentry, but it is not clear at what point. They had attained heredity nobility status by at least the early 1900s.) Perhaps the fact that the Mamontovs and other well-known Moscow families could vouch for Natal’ia helped in this case. Or it may simply be the case that Vasilii Dmitrievich was an independent, adult male.

Savva Ivanovich and Elizaveta Grigor'evna Mamontov had purchased Abramtsevo in 1870 from the daughter of the previous owner, Sergei Timofeevich Aksakov (1791-1859). Aksakov was a well known writer who hosted many of Russia's famous writers and thinkers, such as Nikolai Gogol, on his estate. His son, Konstantin, became famous in Slavophile circles, so the house was often the site of Slavophile activity. Thus, by the time the Mamontovs purchased the estate, it was already recognized in intellectual circles as a haven for artistic and social activity. As intellectuals who had passed through the rapid changes of the 1860s, the Mamontovs wanted to preserve Abramtsevo's reputation as a locus of intellectual ferment, but Elizaveta focused on social programs to improve local peasants' standard of living. For example, in 1873 she had a medical clinic built on the estate and a doctor was engaged to hold regular visiting hours. In the fall of 1874 the Mamontovs opened a school for peasant children and soon built an attendant carpenter's training workshop.

The artistic life of Abramtsevo developed rapidly. In 1872 the Mamontovs spent the winter in Rome for the sake of their youngest son's health. They met the art historian Adrian Viktorovich Prakhov (1846-1916), Vasilii Dmitrievich, who was there on pension from the Imperial Academy of Arts, the sculptor Mark Matveevich Antokol'skii (1843-1902)¹⁶¹ and other Russian intellectuals. Mamontov commissioned Gartman to create a large Russian Revival studio on his estate in 1873 and enthusiastically invited all the artists he had met to visit them at Abramtsevo.¹⁶² In the spring of 1874 the Mamontovs were in Paris, where they met Valentina Semenovna Serova and her son, the future famous artist, Valentin Aleksandrovich Serov. They also met Il'ia Efimovich Repin, who, along with Vasilii Dmitrievich, was a pensioner of the

¹⁶¹ Natal'ia Vasil'evna Polenova, *Abramtsevo: Vospominaniia* (Moscow: M and S Sabashnikov, 1922) 22.

¹⁶² For more on Mamontov's patronage activities, see Stuart Grover, "Savva Mamontov and the Mamontov Circle 1870-1905: Art Patronage and the Rise of Nationalism in Russian Art," PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971.

Imperial Academy. It was not until 1877, when Vasilii Dmitrievich and Repin moved to Moscow, however, that the Abramtsevo colony began to gain its reputation as a crucible for the arts.

The first major project that cemented the relationship between the newly formed colony of artists and Abramtsevo was the construction of the Church of the Savior Not Made By Human Hands. In the spring of 1880 the Voria, the river that flows past the estate, flooded and the road to the local churches became impassible. As a result, the Mamontovs and local residents had to celebrate Easter in the estate manor and the idea of building a chapel on the estate was born. The project was truly a communal one: Vasilii Dmitrievich, Viktor Vasnetsov, and Repin designed the building and the interior décor. Mamontova and Natal'ia Vasil'evna painted some of the interior ornaments and sewed the vestments.¹⁶³ The formation of collectives in the name of art was a practice that began in earnest with the Peredvizhniki and carried over into Abramtsevo and subsequent arts circles. The orientation towards communal projects and collective cooperation to better Russian art for all was one of the hallmarks of the 1870s and 1880s¹⁶⁴ and strongly influenced Polenova's work ethic throughout her early years.

The church was also an example of the Abramtsevo group's synthesis of historical source material into a unique design. Rather than merely copying a medieval model, the artists studied various medieval Russian churches in the region and used them as inspiration for the final project. Rosalind Gray has argued, "Their projection of a national style filtered by medieval practice reflected the way in which culture was being invested with nationalistic meanings in

¹⁶³ Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 30-38, 40-42.

¹⁶⁴ Sternin, *70-80e gody*, 12-13. Sternin points out that this does not mean that questions of artistic individuality were set aside or ignored. In fact, much of what underlay the Peredvizhniki's initial formation was a desire to shield individual artistic creativity from the rigid conformist ethos of the Imperial Academy. This stance is complicated, however, by the continued propagation in the Academy of the artistic genius model for great art. *Ibid.*, 13-16, 37.

numerous other European countries,”¹⁶⁵ which was a specific agenda of William Morris. I have found no evidence, however, that the Abramtsevo circle was aware of Morris’s writings and arts activities at this point.¹⁶⁶ What is significant for Polenova’s future development is the way the group’s arts practice reinforced the historical focus of the atmosphere in which she had been raised.

After moving to Moscow, Polenova was absorbed into the Mamontov circle,¹⁶⁷ although the introduction was not without some tension. Natal’ia Vasil’evna recalled, “At first El. Dm. shied away from social interaction and did not immediately find common ground with her new Moscow acquaintances.”¹⁶⁸ Nonetheless, by December Polenova was integrated into the group and had become the primary costumer for their domestic theatrical events.¹⁶⁹ The first event she participated in as costumer was held on January 16, 1883 in the Mamontovs’ Moscow home. The play, *The Scarlet Rose* (Алая роза), was Mamontov’s version of the Russian fairy tale *Alen’ka’s Little Flower* (Аленькой цветочек).

¹⁶⁵ Rosalind Polly Gray, “Questions of Identity at Abramtsevo,” in *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan (London: Ashgate, 2000) 115.

¹⁶⁶ The earliest reference to Morris I have been able to find is in Salmond, *Arts & Crafts*, 213 n 2, which indicates that a summary of his ideas was published in the journal *Architectural Museum* (Архитектурный музей) 1903.

¹⁶⁷ Polenova first met the Mamontovs at Vera’s funeral. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 744.

¹⁶⁸ “В начале Ел. Дм. еще дичилась и не сразу сошлась со своими новыми московскими знакомыми.” Natal’ia Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 46. M. V. Astaf’eva quotes a long, interesting letter from Mamontov to Natal’ia Vasil’evna written on this point in February 1883. The letter provides some evidence that Natal’ia Vasil’evna had complained to Mamontova about Mamontov’s actions towards Polenova. Mamontov essentially calls Natal’ia Vasil’evna ungrateful for their kindness to her, especially since, “We wanted to draw her [Natal’ia Vasil’evna] close to us, to distract her from that mercantile atmosphere where everything hangs on the ruble, away from the influence of people for whom poetry, art, ideals are merely empty sounds that bring forth a smile” (Мы хотели привязать ее к себе, отвлекая ее от меркантильной среды, где все вывешивается на рубли, из под влияния людей, для которых поэзия, искусство, идеал — пустой звук, вызывающий улыбку) In addition, he and Mamontova had helped her, after a long period of lovesick suffering, finally to attract the attentions of Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich. In essence, Mamontov accuses Natal’ia Vasil’evna of abandoning Mamontova in favor of Polenova and her new family, causing Mamontova no end of pain. “N. V. Polenova i Mamontovy (1870-e – nachalo 1880-x godov),” in *Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich Polenov i russkaia khudozhestvennaia kul’tura vtoroi poloviny XIX – pervoi chetverti XX veka. Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Letnii sad 2001), 105-106.

¹⁶⁹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 25, 1882, 312. Salmond, *Arts & Crafts*, 26. The Mamontovs were not unique in putting on amateur theatrical events in nineteenth-century Russia. In contrast, their increasing focus on producing Russian folk tales, stories, plays—eventually forming a Private Opera company—over the course of the 1880s was unique.

While Polenova had been exposed to Russian fairy tales and legends through her nannies and grandmothers, her active involvement in the Mamontov circle's theatre productions immersed her in their particular take on Russian folklore. Another significant moment of the winter of 1882-1883 was that the circle studied *byliny* (singular = *bylina*) with the intent of developing plays from them,¹⁷⁰ further exposing Polenova to the atmosphere of Russian revivalism. As Rosalind Gray has written, these performances were “a key transitional moment in the group's development from a traditional literary circle to the first, estate-based, cultural community in Russia that focused on the plastic arts rather than literature.” The plays allowed the group to explore Russian subjects to the point that the artists were immersed in them since they were not only set designers and costumers, but also actors.¹⁷¹ In other words, these activities forced the members of the Abramtsevo circle to inhabit and perform Russianness in a way many of them never had before. While Polenova had had little to say about the production of *The Scarlet Rose* beyond the fact that the play went well and everything was “endearing, exquisite and artistic,”¹⁷² it was the beginning of much of her work to come.

At the same time Polenova continued working on her own art, reporting to Antipova that she planned to exhibit watercolors composed from several of the studies she had done over the summer in the Periodic Exhibition, which would open in December 1882.¹⁷³ The Periodic Exhibitions were held by the Moscow Society of Lovers of Art (Московское общество любители художеств, hereafter “Moscow Society”) beginning in 1861. The Moscow Society was founded in 1860 with the goal of broadening knowledge of the arts throughout Russia,

¹⁷⁰ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, January 14, 1884, 334, 746 n 15. Bylinas are epic folk tales that are normally sung and tell of the exploits of larger-than-life heroes.

¹⁷¹ Gray, “Identity,” 113. See also Sternin, *70-80e gody*, 67.

¹⁷² E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 17, 1883, 313.

¹⁷³ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 28, 1882, 312.

helping young artists and bringing together artists and their admirers.¹⁷⁴ Like almost all arts organizations in Imperial Russia, the group was connected to the imperial family: from 1867 onwards Grand Duchess Mariia Fedorovna (after 1881, Tsarina) was its official patron. Their Periodic Exhibitions were the first such events open to the public in Moscow.¹⁷⁵ Participating in this exhibition turned out to be a very positive experience for Polenova: she sold all six of the works she entered.¹⁷⁶ Her choice of watercolors was partly due to her training, but watercolors had also been popular among the Russian art-buying public since the early nineteenth-century. The medium was so highly valued that well known artists even produced works for albums. Watercolor portraits were popular, not only among those who could not afford to commission a portrait in oils, but also among those who could.¹⁷⁷ By the time Polenova was producing her images, the status of watercolors had shifted somewhat, but they still enjoyed popularity, especially among a newly emergent urban group who could afford such luxuries.

Nikolai Sergeevich Tretyakov (1857-1896) purchased two of her watercolors, *The Old Woman* (Старушка) and *White Flowers* (Белые Цветы).¹⁷⁸ N. S. Tretyakov was Vasiliï Dmitrievich's student and a nephew of P. M. Tretyakov. Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov (1834-1892), was an avid collector of contemporary European art and served as the chairman (председатель) of the Moscow Society from 1890 to 1892. While it is possible that Nikolai Sergeevich purchased Polenova's watercolors to curry favor with his teacher, the fact that he subsequently became close to her and often worked with her argues against making this assumption. In any case, making these connections was vital for any artist hoping to make a

¹⁷⁴ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 743.

¹⁷⁵ Severiukhin and Leikind, *Zolotoi vek*, 130-131.

¹⁷⁶ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 3, 1883, 313.

¹⁷⁷ Yevgenia Petrova, *Drawing and Watercolours in Russian Culture: The First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2005) 11-12, 121.

¹⁷⁸ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 24, 1882, 312 and Sakharova, *Khronika*, 830.

career in Russia and helped spur Polenova into action. The realization that her art had a place on the market contributed to her self-confidence and her shrewd observations of the art market would cause both success and grief in later years. In sum, her success at the Periodic Exhibition reenergized her and motivated her to prepare works for an upcoming watercolor exhibition in St. Petersburg at the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts.¹⁷⁹

At these exhibitions Polenova occasionally found herself in the company of other female watercolorists, whose numbers had slowly, but steadily, been increasing since the beginning of the century. Nonetheless, the number of women participating in exhibitions remained small into the twentieth century.¹⁸⁰ The Moscow School was unique in that it began admitting women fairly early in its existence¹⁸¹ and there were several women among Vasilii Dmitrievich's students, of whom more will be said below. While Polenova certainly faced her share of gender-based discrimination, she also had considerable encouragement from more liberal members of the Russian art world.

Polenova's works at the St. Petersburg exhibition were received favorably.¹⁸² Konstantin Apollonovich Savitskii (1844-1905), a member of the Peredvizhniki, reported that her *Suburban Village* (*Прозородок*) was the most remarkable of the entire exhibition.¹⁸³ In addition, Repin told her that her works "were a giant step forward from last year's" and scolded her for not signing them. Repin singled out *Suburban Village*, *Birches* (*Березы*) and *Crows in the Snow* (*Вороны на снегу*) for praise, telling her that her works were better than those of Ivan Ivanovich

¹⁷⁹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 3, 1883, 313.

¹⁸⁰ Blakesley, "Women Painters," 51 and passim.

¹⁸¹ The Moscow School was founded in 1843. In 1855 Anna Glebova graduated and received the title of non-class artist for her *Portrait of a Boy*. Svetlana Stepanovna, *Moskovskoe uchilishche zhivopisi i vaianii. Gody stanovleniia* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2005) 260.

¹⁸² Letters of E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, May 13 and May 24, 1883, 314-315.

¹⁸³ I have not been able to trace this work's current location. E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, May 13, 1883, 314.

Shishkin (1832-1898),¹⁸⁴ a prominent member of the Peredvizhniki known primarily for landscapes that featured the Russian forest. It is entirely possible that Polenova neglected to sign her works out of concern for making her gender known. Her name appeared in the exhibition catalog, but unsigned works on a wall would prevent any automatic bias on the part of the viewer upon seeing a woman's name on the canvas. While later she signed her works regularly, Polenova often used only a stylized monogram.

Crows in the Snow was painted from a window of the house in which Polenova resided in Moscow.¹⁸⁵ In comparison with *The Old Mill*, it shows a greater confidence in handling color and a keen observation of the crows' behavior and movements. It sold at exhibition in early 1884.¹⁸⁶ She often received praise for *Crows in the Snow* and made several copies of it over the course of her career.¹⁸⁷ Two episodes surrounding a copy she gave to Repin illustrate both the high praise this work earned and the continuing gender bias that Polenova faced.

In July 1886 Aleksei Petrovich Bogoliubov (1824-1896) came to the Polenovs' house for dinner.¹⁸⁸ During the meal he praised Vasilii Dmitrievich for the winter scene with crows he saw at Repin's house. Vasilii Dmitrievich corrected him, whereupon a surprised Bogoliubov congratulated Polenova for her success.¹⁸⁹ She was more seriously affected by Antokol'skii's attention in the same year, however. She wrote to Antipova,

Antokol'skii came and said to me: "I saw one of your pieces, which I liked so much, that I asked them to let me have it." Until now Antokol'skii has not paid

¹⁸⁴ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 14, 1883, 314.

¹⁸⁵ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 744.

¹⁸⁶ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 20/March 3, 1884, 338.

¹⁸⁷ See, e.g., E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 22, 1886, 367.

¹⁸⁸ Bogoliubov was primarily a marine painter. He lived mostly in Paris and had been charged by the Academy in the 1870s with looking after pensioners there. For more on Bogoliubov's activities in Russia and Paris, see Rosalind Blakseley, "Promoting a Pan-European Art: Aleksei Bogoliubov as Artistic Mediator between East and West," in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts*, edited by Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007) 21-44.

¹⁸⁹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, July 2, 1886, 369.

even the smallest attention to my smearings. He considered them an indulgence and childish pranks. Thus, I was surprised and even perplexed. “In that piece,” he said, “there is style, mood, and a moment is expressed.” What do you think it is? The same crows on the snow. “Elegiac twilight” as Kovalevskii called them [the crows] in his review. He saw them at Repin’s, but Repin did not agree to give them up. He says, “I myself really like them.”¹⁹⁰

This letter also reveals Polenova’s constant struggle with her self confidence. Her reference to her own works as “smearings” signifies both what she assumes Antokol’skii’s attitude towards them was and also her own lack of faith in her work’s artistic merit.

The review she recalls in this letter is one the critic Pavel Mikhailovich Kovalevskii (1823-1907) wrote in *Russian Thought* (Русская мысль) in 1886. His review covered that year’s watercolor exhibition at the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. In it Kovalevskii mistakenly attributed Polenova’s watercolors to her brother. The review provides an interesting picture of the status of watercolors in the Russian art world. Kovalevskii begins with a note that a well executed watercolor is much better than a mediocre oil painting,¹⁹¹ suggesting a continued hierarchy of media. Throughout the review he rebukes watercolorists who try to imitate oil painters rather than using the properties of their chosen medium to best effect.¹⁹² Progressive in his tastes, Kovalevskii criticized the old-fashioned and dull watercolor paintings of Italy as the “Egyptian mummies” of the watercolor world.¹⁹³ Curiously, he singles out Repin’s *Portrait of Mendeleev* as the best work in the show, which does not seem to be

¹⁹⁰ “Приехал Антокольский и говорит мне: «Видел одну Вашу вещь, до того мне понравилась, что я упрашивать стал, чтобы мне ее уступили». До сих пор Антокольский не обращал ни малейшего внимания на мою мазню. Относился к этому, как к баловству и шалости. Поэтому я совсем удивилась и даже сконфузилась. В вещи этой есть, говорит, стиль, настроение, момент выражен. Как ты думаешь, что это? Все те же вороны на снегу. «Элегические сумерки», как их называл Ковалевский в своей рецензии. Видел он их у Репина, но Репин не соглашался (уступить их).—«Самому, говорит, очень уж нравится».” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, June 16, 1886, 368.

¹⁹¹ P. Kovalevskii, “Akvarel’naia vystavka v obshchestve pooshchreniia khudozhnikov,” *Russkaia mysl’* 5 (1886): 184.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 187 and passim

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

particularly innovative. About Polenova's works, Kovalevskii wrote that the hues in *Garden* (Огород) and *Bogbean* (Водяной лопушник) were remarkably true to life, especially those in the sunflowers.¹⁹⁴ In spite of his assumption that the painter was male, the positive review did much to bolster Polenova's self-esteem and her reputation among those close to her.

At this time Polenova found great inspiration in working from nature, especially that found around Abramtsevo. She spent as much time as possible there working on various sketches, especially appreciating winter in the countryside.¹⁹⁵ In the summer of 1883, she reported to Antipova,

In general I am very taken with working from nature. Our garden is very good for that, but it has a terrible effect on commissioned work. I have already done eleven studies and started two. Several are fairly large. I keep meaning to quit this sweet work and give myself over to the other, more boring, but necessary, work [a ceramics commission]. It is difficult to do them at the same time; my interest is very unequally distributed. ... There are more difficult aspects to doing landscapes rather than still-lives, on which you work in your studio, but then there is so much poetry, you are much more alive when you are having that fascinating conversation with nature.¹⁹⁶

Her romantic view of nature was one common to landscape painters at the time. As Christopher Ely has argued, artists of the 1870s and 1880s often sought "a landscape that would be equally familiar and beloved to all Russians."¹⁹⁷ Polenova's communion with nature, however, is more strongly tinged with romanticism than that of her male colleagues. As I noted in the prior chapter, the majority of the Peredvizhniki produced depictions of the vastness of the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁹⁵ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 24-25.

¹⁹⁶ "Вообще страшно увлекаюсь работой с натуры. Сад наш очень для этого хорош, но это ужасно дурно отзывается на заказной работе. Я сделала уже одиннадцать этюдов, два начала. Некоторые в довольно крупном размере. Все собираюсь бросить это милое занятие и предаться той более скучной, но необходимой работе. Трудно их вести одновременно, очень уж интерес неравномерно распределен ... С натурой пейзажной, конечно, есть стороны более трудные чем с натурой живой или мертвой, которую работаешь в своей мастерской, но зато сколько поэзии, насколько сильнее живется в то время, когда ведешь эту увлекательную беседу с природой." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, June 22, 1883, 315. Ellipsis in the original.

¹⁹⁷ Ely, *Meager Nature*, 218.

Russian land. Polenova, in contrast, repeatedly chose small, intimate studies of particular subjects. Part of this is likely due to the fact that she lacked the training necessary to complete massive oil paintings, but she repeatedly confirmed her preference for the “poetic corners” of Russia. One of the works she completed while at Abramtsevo in 1883 is *Road to Bykovo* (Дорога в Быково). This image in particular shows Polenova’s love for focusing on the small details of the foreground.¹⁹⁸ The stalks of rye and the cornflowers distract the viewer at first, and then seem to part like a curtain to reveal the picturesque village below. The gray sky makes the golden rye stand out that much more.

2.3 THE PROBLEM OF COMMISSIONS

As her letter to Antipova indicates, Polenova was also working on commissions. Although she had to give up her appointment as the head of the ceramics department at the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts upon her move to Moscow, Polenova continued to be interested in ceramics, but primarily as a steady source of income. While she was sometimes excited by commissions and absorbed by the work, she often chafed under their requirements and the time they took from her other creative activities.

She received commissions for ceramic icons: for her uncle, Leonid Alekseevich Voeikov, she created icons for the exterior of the church at Ol’shanka (a family estate), and for Mamontov’s railroad construction business partner, Valer’ian Aleksanrovich Titov, she made icons for the exterior of the train station in Ekaterinoslav.¹⁹⁹ For these commissions she began to

¹⁹⁸ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 15. Bykovo was a small village not far from Abramtsevo.

¹⁹⁹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 7, 1883, 313, 744 n 7.

sketch in oils, displaying the desire to broaden her skills that was a constant motivating force in her career. She was unsure of her technique though, commenting to Antipova, “Vasilii Dmitrievich’s experience will come in handy. I’ve already sketched out one work on the canvas. I have to remember the ancient past in how to handle a palette, mahlstick and the other accessories of oil painting.”²⁰⁰ She planned to copy some icons directly and create others by borrowing elements from various sources.²⁰¹

In general Polenova struggled with these commissions, finding them less interesting than landscape painting. She complained to Antipova, “What an unimaginably difficult thing a commission is. You torture yourself. Most importantly, you think, you rethink, you do, you redo with all your strength, to the best of your ability, and suddenly it’s not what the patron expected.”²⁰² She also worried whether her French faience would survive Russian winters²⁰³ and chafed under the restriction the commission placed on her time to work from nature, especially as the weather turned warmer.²⁰⁴

In spite of her complaints, Polenova took the commissions seriously. In response to Antipova’s apparent query about the poor location in which the works would be hung, she wrote, “you’re giving this circumstance too much significance. The actual merit of the piece is much more important than the place designated for it. ... Hang a Fortuny even under a table and it

²⁰⁰ “В этом деле опытность Вас[илия] Дмитр[иевича] мне будет очень кстати. Один такой эскиз я уже набросила на холсте. Придется вспомнить стародавнюю старину в виде палитры, муштабеля и пр. принадлежностей масл[яных] красок.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, February 28, 1883, 313.

²⁰¹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 7, 1883, 313.

²⁰² “Какая невообразимо тяжелая вещь заказ. Вот намучаешься-то. Главное, думаешь, передумаешь, делаешь, переделываешь изо всех сил, как только умешь и, вдруг, не того ожидал заказчик.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, August 1, 1883, 317.

²⁰³ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 27, 1883, 321.

²⁰⁴ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, May 21, 1883, 314.

will shine like a flame.”²⁰⁵ She was pleased to receive Natal’ia Vasil’evna’s words that, “Savva returned from the south and reported to me that your icon created a furor. Titov oh-ed and ah-ed. It turns out that it will be placed at the main station in Ekaterinoslav.”²⁰⁶ Polenova was relieved and admitted that “This work could have a future and could be beneficial to me and others.”²⁰⁷ This statement suggests that Polenova had in mind projects that would benefit many artists, a stance harking back to her days of active social engagement and foreshadowing her work at Abramtsevo. Nevertheless, she resolved to take commissions only in the wintertime in the future, so she could devote summers to her own work.²⁰⁸

Polenova’s frustration with commissions and gender bias is illustrated by her interactions with her uncle, Leonid Alekseevich Voeikov. She spent a portion of September 1883 at Voeikov’s estate, Ol’shanka, in Tambov Province. During this period a new house was being built on the estate in the Russian Revival style Gartman and Ropet (pseudonym of Ivan Pavlovich Petrov, 1845-1908), among others, had made popular in the 1870s.²⁰⁹ This experience was rather disheartening as her uncle asked her to paint frescoes in his living room and complete two panels that Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich had started for him a couple of years prior. In addition, he asked her to redo the wood carvings Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich had created for the dining room. It was during this visit that her uncle told her that she should paint like Kuindzhi.

²⁰⁵ “ты придаешь этому обстоятельству слишком много значения. Еще гораздо важнее само вещи, чем отведенное ей место. ... Повесть Фортуни хоть под столом, он и оттуда огоньком засветит.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 24, 1883, 314. Fortuny was a favorite among Russian artists in the 1870s and 1880s.

²⁰⁶ “Савва вернулся с юга и сообщил мне, что образ твой произвел фурор. Титов ахнул. Оказывается, что он будет находиться в самом Екатеринославе на главной станции.” N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, September 26, 1883, 319. The icon in question was Polenova’s *Intercession of the Virgin* [Покров].

²⁰⁷ “это дело может иметь будущее и принести выгоды и для меня и для других.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 27, 1883, 321.

²⁰⁸ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, October 4, 1883, 319.

²⁰⁹ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 733 n 4.

She was despondent, complaining to Natal'ia Vasil'evna that Leonid Alekseevich had no clue about art. He believed that since she had studied drawing she should have no problem doing frescoes for him, which infuriated her. "I did the frescoes, finished them to Leonid Alekseevich's great satisfaction. They are big—one is two by three arshins and the other is three by four arshins—and, of course, for me to do this kind of painting is the same as putting Viktor Mikhailovich [Vasnetsov] to work on a miniature portrait on ivory."²¹⁰ In other words, unlike Vasnetsov, who had been trained in monumental painting at the Academy, Polenova's training was exclusively in small works and miniatures, considered more suitable for women. She was only too happy to escape to Anashka, owned by her brother, Konstantin Dmitrievich, where she was able to work freely. Her spirits rose significantly, especially after she reported to Antipova that over the past three summers she had averaged fifty works but still felt she needed to work harder.²¹¹

2.4 ALONE IN MOSCOW

Vasilii Dmitrievich and his wife spent the winter of 1883-1884 in Rome so he could start work on his monumental painting *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (Христос и грешница), which left Polenova feeling dejected and missing her Petersburg colleagues.²¹² She recognized that this mood was partly due to her difficult personality. She wrote to Vasilii Dmitrievich, "In

²¹⁰ "Фрески я сделала, кончила к большому удовольствию Л[еонида] А[лексеевича]. Размер их большой, в одной 2-3 аршина, в другой 3-4 аршина, и, конечно, мне делать такую картину то же, что Виктора Мих[айловича] Васнецова] засадить за миниатюрный портрет на кости." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, September 21, 1883, 318.

²¹¹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 18, 1883, 320.

²¹² E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 27, 1883, 320 and E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, January 14, 1884, 334.

general, you know that I don't easily grow close to other people, and right now there's no one here that I feel drawn to. But, it's boring and harmful to live without people."²¹³ During this time Polenova began to grow close to the Mamontovs and other artists in Moscow. In addition, she had successes on the exhibition circuit that greatly bolstered her self-confidence.

Polenova sold a total of nine watercolors during that winter.²¹⁴ While the Moscow Society did not hold its usual Periodic Exhibition, it did hold another exhibition featuring Konstantin Egorovich Makovskii's (1839-1915) latest work, at which Polenova was able to show twelve pieces that she had completed since the summer. Makovskii was a member of the *Peredvizhniki* known for his idealized representations of Russian life in earlier eras. One work that may have been shown at this exhibition was his *Wedding Feast in a Seventeenth-Century Boyar's Family* (Свадебный пир в боярской семье XVII столетия) of 1883, which is typical of his work. For her part, Polenova exhibited *At the Stream* (У ручья), *Foggy Day* (Туманный день), *Late Autumn* (Поздней осенью), *Winter* (Зима), *Poppy* (Мак), *Swamp* (Болото), *Wild Mallows* (Полевые мальвы), *Fall Leaves* (Осенние листья), *Road through the Steppe* (Степная дорога), *By the Wall* (У стены), and *In the Meadow* (На лугу). These works remain untraced, but, as their titles indicate, Polenova was still concentrating on landscapes and nature studies.

She was pleased that Nikolai Sergeevich Tretyakov purchased *Fall Leaves* and another collector acquired *Cloudy Day* and *Wild Mallows*. Due to her exhibition success, she gave *At the Stream* to the Moscow Society, which made her a lifetime member. She was heartened that “in

²¹³ “Вообще, ты знаешь, я с людьми сближаюсь не легко, а в настоящую минуту здесь и нет никого, с кем тянуло бы сблизиться. А без людей жить—тоскливо и вредно.” E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 19, 1884, 336.

²¹⁴ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 20/March 3, 1884, 338.

Moscow they react kindly to my watercolors.”²¹⁵ It is not entirely clear what she meant by this, for her watercolors had also been favorably received in St. Petersburg. Perhaps she was unsure she would be able to have the same success in Moscow or thought the Moscow audience to be less sophisticated. Evidence of the latter is provided in a letter of a year later. She wrote to Antipova, “We again delighted in Surikov’s watercolors. I begged him to finish and work through four or five pieces for the Periodic exhibition. It is time to disabuse the Moscow public of the notion that Strelkovskii is the final word in watercolor art.”²¹⁶ She appears to have found the Moscow art-buying public’s tastes suspect at the very least.

In early 1884, Polenova placed six watercolors in the Society of Lovers of Art’s permanent exhibition and three sold within days. The images were of oak trees at Abramtsevo, which she had sketched with Apolonarii Mikhailovich Vasnetsov in the summer, and various fall images completed after Vasilii Dmitrievich’s departure.²¹⁷ In spite of these successes, she still struggled with her self-confidence, writing to Natal’ia Vasil’evna,

It seemed to me that if I’d moved forward and done interesting and strong pieces, then it was during the first part of the season, in the Moscow garden and at Abramtsevo. Then I went to the countryside, and when I worked there, more than once while working I broke out in a cold sweat from the realization that I am not only not getting better, but also it’s a disgrace that ten years ago I wouldn’t have done such shameful works. After arriving in Moscow, I mixed them together and began to show them. Imagine: both people who understand and those who are unable to reason liked the ones from the second series more.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ “В Москве к моим акварелям так любезно относятся.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, December 24, 1883, 327-328.

²¹⁶ “Снова наслаждались суриковскими акварелями. Ужасно упрашивала его закончить и разработать штуки четыре-пять для Периодической выставки. Пора отучать моск[овскую] публику от того мнения, что Стрелковский есть последнее слово аквар[ельного] искусства.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 22, 1884, 347. Vasilii Ivanovich Surikov (1848-1916) was a member of the Peredvizhniki who gained fame for his depictions of Peter the Great’s reign. Aleksei Ivanovich Strelkovskii (1819 – c. 1891) was known primarily for his watercolor portraits of society ladies and sweet genre scenes, e.g., *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* (Портрет неизвестной), 1858 and *At the Well* (У колодца), 1878.

²¹⁷ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 19, 1884, 336.

²¹⁸ “Мне казалось, что если я двинулась и сделала вещи интересные и крупные, то это в первую половину сезона, в московском саду и в Абрамцево. Потом поехала я в деревню, и когда там работала, у меня во время

Participating in as many exhibitions as possible was the best way for an artist to sell works in late-nineteenth-century Russia. Russia had no art market system founded on the institutions of dealership and galleries like those established in European countries. Until the Peredvizhniki's break with the Academy, the state, the church and the gentry were virtually the only patrons of the arts. Artists outside the Academy system were forced to seek patrons directly. Moreover, as Stites has noted and Jackson has pointedly written, "[A] curiosity of the Russian scene is that until the serfs were emancipated in 1861 there was almost no labour market for free artists. Why buy paintings when one could own a painter?"²¹⁹ While art supply stores cum galleries began to spring up all over St. Petersburg and Moscow in the second half of the nineteenth century and the occasional art auction was held, exhibitions continued to be the primary venue for sales.²²⁰ Following the Peredvizhniki's example, many arts societies began holding independent exhibitions.²²¹ These received coverage in the massive number of *feuilletons* that began to appear in Russian newspapers, putting art events into the realm of a much broader public than ever before.²²²

While Vasilii Dmitrievich and Natal'ia Vasil'evna were away, Polenova continued to socialize with the Mamontovs, helping them with costumes for their production of *The Scarlet Rose* on January 7, 1884 and their reprise of the opera *The Snow Maiden* on December 29,

работы не раз вдруг начинал выступать холодный пот от сознания, что не только не делаю лучше, но что это позор, что десять лет тому назад я бы не сделала таких стыдных произведений. Приехав в Москву, смешала их и стала показывать. Вообрази, понимающим и ничего не смыслящим больше нравились те, которые относились ко второй серии." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 20/March 3, 1884, 338.

²¹⁹ Jackson, *Wanderers*, 13 and Richard Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

²²⁰ Lapshin, "Khudozhestvennyi rynek," 574-575.

²²¹ This included the Academy, which created its own traveling exhibiting society in 1874 after noting the success of the Peredvizhniki and fearing the loss of its preeminence both within Russia and without. It, however, did not have quite the same success and folded in 1883 after only seven exhibitions. Sternin, *70e-80e gody*, 42-43.

²²² See Katia Dianina, "The Feuilleton: An Everyday Guide to Public Culture in the Age of the Great Reforms," *Slavic and East European Journal* 47, no. 2 (2003): 187-210. Dianina points out that from 1860 the number of newspapers published in Russia nearly quintupled to 79 by 1870. *Ibid.*, 188.

1883.²²³ During this time Polenova grew close to Elizaveta Mamontova, as well as to the rest of the family. She continued to visit the Mamontovs after Mamontova left to join the Polenovs in Rome, even participating in the perspective drawing lessons given by Nikolai Avenirovich Martynov (1842-1913) at the Mamontovs' Moscow house.²²⁴ To this period dates Polenova's image of the Mamontovs' dining room and a group portrait of one of Martynov's drawing lessons; both works are now housed at Abramtsevo. The strong orthogonals in *Dining Room of S. I. Mamontov's House in Moscow* make it clear that it is an exercise in rendering perspective, but the deft handling of the windows, the mirror and the details in the carved wooden chairs show that Polenova's technical skills had advanced considerably since *The Old Mill*.²²⁵ She herself felt so, writing to Natal'ia in February,

In the fall, for example, it seemed to me that in general, well, I'd completely lost my talent in the landscape sketches I had done after Moscow, and then, when I looked at them after some time and showed them to others, I found that in certain points (for example, in observing the general) I have moved forward. I need only one thing: to work with all my might, with all the strength I have, to exert myself and spend [my energy].²²⁶

Another indicator of Polenova's strong work ethic and desire to challenge herself is that during this time she also learned pen and ink work in order to give herself "greater definition and confidence in drawing."²²⁷

She was also growing more confident in her opinions about art. In April she visited Vasnetsov and saw the frescoes he was preparing for the Moscow History Museum. She

²²³ E. G. Mamontova to V. D. Polenov, December 28, 1883/January 9, 1884, 328, 745 n 4, 746 n 10. Polenova continued to help with costumes through the opening of Mamontov's Private Opera company in 1885.

²²⁴ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, January 18/30, 1884, 334.

²²⁵ On the left wall beyond the fireplace hangs Vasnetsov's famous picture, *The Flying Carpet*, 1880.

²²⁶ "Мне казалось, напр[имер], осенью, что я вовсе, ну, окончательно обездарела в теч пейзажных этюдах, которые работала после Москвы, а потом, когда взглянула на них через несколько времени и другим показала, нашла, что в некоторых пунктах (напр[имер] в соблюдении общего) двинулась вперед. Нужно одно: работать во всю мощь, сколько есть сил, все их напрягать и расходовать." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 3/15, 1884, 335.

²²⁷ "более определенности и верности в рисунке" Ibid.

reported to Mamontova that they were amazingly well planned and sketched out, but then failed in execution. She wrote that Vasnetsov always seemed to start new projects with vigor and then lost his enthusiasm somewhere along the way. This resulted in final works that were much less engaging than his initial sketches.²²⁸

The fact that Polenova felt brave enough to critique one of the giants of Russian art and the Abramtsevo circle points not only to her own confidence in her artistic judgment, but perhaps also to the strength of her relationship with Elizaveta Grigor'evna. This is not to say that their relationship was always harmonious. Indeed, a letter of 1885 indicates otherwise. It is not clear what happened between her and Elizaveta Grigor'evna, but Polenova was apologetic, explaining

[W]e are complete opposites. Over the past few years, for about ten or so, I know that one particular characteristic, a very bad one, developed and was brought about by circumstances, so to say, and, as far as I can tell, it is one that you have a great antipathy for, though you never directly expressed this to me. This characteristic is that I see in people, and expect from them, more harm than good. At the root of this is an event that I survived with great difficulty because I had to come face to face with the negative sides of people who were close and dear to me at that time, when I least of all expected it. ... [I]t is likely that I will never fully cure myself of this.²²⁹

In this passage Polenova refers to her family's rejection of Shkliarevskii and the possible end of her chances at marriage. She obviously recognized that the incident had caused her mistrust of people, but was unable to shake it, even in the presence of kind souls such as Elizaveta Grigor'evna. This particular characteristic would cause friction in a great number of relationships throughout her life.

²²⁸ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, March 4/16, 1884, 341-342.

²²⁹ “[M]ы с Вами совсем противоположные люди. У меня за последние годы, лет за десять, должно быть, развилось и воспиталось, так сказать, обстоятельствами одно свойство очень нехорошее, сама знаю, и сколько я могла подметить, очень Вам антипатичное, хотя Вы прямо никогда не высказывали мне этого. Свойство это состоит в том, что я вижу в людях и жду от них больше дурного, чем хорошего. Корень этому лежит в одном событии, которое мне было очень трудно пережить, потому что как-то сразу пришлось столкнуться с отрицательными сторонами в людях дорогих и близких, в такое время, когда всего меньше я могла этого ожидать. ... [В]ероятно, вполне мне никогда не удастся вылечить себя от этого.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 24, 1885, 353.

The fall months of 1884 brought an experience that had important repercussions for Polenova's future artistic endeavors. From August to early October, she took a trip with the Antipov family, first along the Volga River to Astrakhan and then over land to the Black Sea resort town of Yalta. In November she showed a number of her sketches to Chistiakov, Kiselev and Surikov and was pleased that they approved of them.²³⁰ While she felt that the trip had given her a lot of artistic inspiration and had revitalized her,²³¹ she struggled with this series. She told Antipova that it was easier for her to work on the Volga scenes than those from the Caucasus or Crimea because the region was closer in appearance to her beloved northern and central Russian nature.²³² She wanted to create twenty completed paintings, but noted, "It is a lot faster to work from nature than to work things out in silence in the studio."²³³ Nevertheless, from the numerous sketches she made during this trip, she created several works for the Periodic Exhibition. On December 27, 1884, the second day of the exhibition, she received thrilling news, which she promptly reported to Antipova,

I got a transfer of sorts into the higher class for self-respect. ... The thing is that yesterday the Periodic Exhibition opened, and today they reported to me that two of my watercolors were purchased. By whom? What do you think?! Tretyakov—the big gallery owner Tretyakov! What about that?! ... Tretyakov bought your favorite *Kazan* and Natal'ia's favorite tower, both of which I enlarged.²³⁴

This event had an incalculably positive effect on Polenova's work and self-confidence. She declared that at last she felt that she was "a real artist."

²³⁰ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 10 and November 11, 1884, 346.

²³¹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 23, 1884, 347.

²³² E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 21, 1885, 349.

²³³ "Насколько быстрее работать с натуры, чем разрабатывать на спокойе в мастерской." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 15, 1884, p. 347.

²³⁴ "Получила ... своего рода перевод в старший класс для самолюбия Дело в том, что вчера открылась Переодическая выставка, а сегодня мне сообщено, что две мои акварели куплены. Как ты думаешь кем?! Самым большим галерейным Третьяковым! Каково! ... Третьяков купил твою любимую «Казань» и Натальину любимую башню, и то и другое увеличенное." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 27, 1884, 348. Ellipses in the original. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 24.

After Polenova's success at having a painting purchased by Tretyakov, Chistiakov encouraged her to work on developing a more spontaneous manner, an opinion with which she agreed. He also urged her to submit works to Academy exhibitions. She categorically refused the latter suggestion, stating that the Academy was simply too unpleasant. She found it unfortunate that Chistiakov was trapped in its "quagmire."²³⁵ Clearly Polenova felt no need to associate herself with the Academy in order to further her career. She even looked upon it as a possible detriment to her continued success, which indicates how tarnished the Academy's reputation had become. Her triumph so buoyed her that she was even able to overlook the fact that the critics still praised Strelkovskii over her.²³⁶

2.5 THE POLENOV CIRCLE EMERGES

Perhaps the most important event for Polenova's artistic development was the regular gathering of a group of artists in the Polenov home starting in 1884. In fall of that year, she and her brother organized twice-a-week working sessions that were attended by established artists such as Repin, V. Vasnetsov and Surikov, as well as Vasilii Dmitrievich's students and other representatives of the emerging generation of Russian artists such as Iakunchikova, Levitan, Konstantin Alekseevich Korovin (1861-1939), Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel (1856-1910), and Aleksandr Iakovlevich Golovin (1863-1930). These gatherings continued to 1890, with occasional changes in format. For example, in 1889, for awhile their "drawing Thursdays"

²³⁵ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 27, 1885, 350. For the Peredvizhniki and many artists closely allied with them, the Imperial Academy represented dead traditions that were inextricably entangled in the bureaucratic red tape of the Empire.

²³⁶ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 5, 1885, 349.

became “ceramic Thursdays,” attesting to the diverse artistic interests of the group. The sessions were genuinely popular and produced a familial atmosphere for both established and up-and-coming artists. Natal’ia Vasil’evna wrote to her husband, “The role that you have taken on among these young people makes me very happy. For them you and our house are the center of the artistic world. They are drawn to us and, it appears, it’s useful for them.”²³⁷

N. N. Mamontova has argued that the Polenov circle and the Abramtsevo group were the closest that Russian artistic circles came to reproducing the ideals of brotherhood found among Western nineteenth-century groups such as the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites.²³⁸ I would argue that Polenova’s and Natal’ia Vasil’evna’s active participation in the group, as well as the later addition of Iakunchikova and the Shanks sisters,²³⁹ made this less of a “brotherhood” than an inclusive, progressive artistic community. Moreover, in 1886 several of the participants joined Polenova in forming an “archaeological circle” devoted to the study of the Moscow region.²⁴⁰ This development furthered her already considerable interest in imperial Russia’s history and placed Polenova in a leadership position. In addition, in later years while Polenov was in Paris for medical treatment, Polenova and Natal’ia Vasil’evna ran the drawing evenings without him.

²³⁷ “Меня очень радует та роль, которая тебе сложилась среди этой молодежи. Ты и наш дом—для них центр света художественного, их тянет к нам, да, по-видимому, им это полезно.” N. V. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 24, 1889, 415-416.

²³⁸ N. N. Mamontova, “Polenov i molodaia moskovskaia shkola zhivopisi,” in *Vasilii Dmitrievich Polenov i russkaia khudozhestvennaia kul’tura vtoroi poloviny XIX – pervoi chetverti XX veka. Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Letnii sad, 2001), 90.

²³⁹ Emeliia (Emily) and Mariia (Mary) Shanks were daughters of an English merchant who had settled in Moscow. They were students of Vasilii Dmitrievich at the Moscow School. Emily would have a successful career as an artist, becoming the first woman granted membership in the Peredvizhniki (in 1894), and returned to England some time in the early twentieth century. Their sister Louise would become famous as an early translator of Tolstoy. Iakunchikova and the Shanks sisters were frequent companions of Polenova, especially during the winter of 1891-1892. E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 5/17, 1891, 468.

²⁴⁰ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 747-748 n 1 and E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 15, 1886, 374-375.

That the Polenovs were dedicated to their colleagues and Vasilii Dmitrievich's students is further attested to by the fact that in 1888, they moved to be closer to the Moscow School and to have more space for entertaining. It was here that the family entertained Vasilii Dmitrievich's students as they nervously awaited the Peredvizhnik jury results.²⁴¹ Also, when they began building their estate/retreat, Borok, to the south of Moscow in 1889, Natal'ia Vasil'evna wrote to Vasilii Dmitrievich how glad she was they would have a place to house all their young artist friends.²⁴²

Polenova was energized by these sessions and the company, for she often preferred to work with another artist rather than alone. She noted that for her the most important aspect of these events was not the works produced, but the exchange of ideas among artists.²⁴³ The artists worked from hired models and still lifes, created architectural projects, and sometimes posed for one another. They also exchanged works, learning from each other. Polenova wrote to Antipova, "Our Thursdays are becoming more and more lively. The last two times a group of three Italian boys posed. These little ones are cheerful organ-grinders, terribly picturesque and lively. During the breaks, they play and sing their folk songs, and in this way enliven the gathered society."²⁴⁴

These events were not limited to traditional fine arts activities. At one meeting in the spring of 1885, the artists grabbed a table with a cabinet (стол-шкафик) from the kitchen and

²⁴¹ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 29, 757 n 3.

²⁴² N. V. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 24, 1889, 416. Polenov purchased the estate Bekhovo from the Sablukov family in January 1890 for 7500 rubles. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 764 n 14.

²⁴³ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, February 17, 1885, 351.

²⁴⁴ "Четверги идут все более и более оживленно. Последние два раза позировала группа из трех мальчиков итальянцев. Ободренные шарманщики, ужасно живописные и веселые ребяташки. В промежутках они играют и поют свои народные песни, и этим еще придают оживление собравшемуся обществу." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 23, 1884, as cited in Sakharova, *Khronika*, 25.

decorated it in their interpretation of an ancient-Russian style.²⁴⁵ This would not be the first foray into furniture decoration for some members of the group, as Vasnetsov and the others had painted some furnishings for the chapel at Abramtsevo. It was, however, an example of their willingness to pursue a wide range of media.

In addition, Polenova had not forgotten her training in ceramics and she shared her knowledge with the other artists.²⁴⁶ The fact that they were willing to try their hand at ceramics and to learn from a woman attests to the group's relatively liberal attitudes. These forays into ceramics eventually led to Mamontov's interest in the craft and his construction of a ceramics workshop at Abramtsevo that later became famous for its innovative pieces.²⁴⁷

These investigations into other media proved particularly fruitful for Polenova because she was wearying of the same old exhibition scene. She wrote to Antipova about the 1885 Peredvizhniki exhibition, "We expected great things from Repin, but only Vasiliï is delighted and amazed by the painting of this thing. It left everyone else cold. In general, the current exhibition left me with a sorrowful impression, and all these Shishkins, Volkovs, Kiselevs, etc. give off a musty odor."²⁴⁸ Clearly, the Peredvizhniki were already on the wane, at least for Polenova. This would prove a significant factor in her career by the end of the decade.

Her reaction to Repin's submission is interesting, for the painting she refers to is his *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1531* (Иван Грозный и сын его Иван 16 ноября 1581 года), which depicted Ivan the Terrible cradling the body of his son, whom he had just killed. This enormous (199.5 x 254 cm) painting created a sensation in the press and made

²⁴⁵ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 16, 1885, 352.

²⁴⁶ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 20/December 2, 1888, 402.

²⁴⁷ In the fall of 1890 A. S. Mamontov and M. A. Vrubel founded a pottery studio at Abramtsevo. E. G. Mamontova to E. D. Polenova, September 20, 1890, 458, 762 n 19 and Sakharova, *Khronika*, 26.

²⁴⁸ "Ждали большего от Репина, одни Василий в восторге и изумлении от живописи этой вещи. Остальные холодны. Вообще нынешняя выставка оставила грустное впечатление, и затхолью несет от всех этих Шишкиных, Волковых, Киселевых, и пр." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 26, 1885, 352.

Alexander III so furious that he ordered it removed from the exhibition, likely because the memory of his father's assassination was too fresh.²⁴⁹ It also hinted at the anti-tsarist sentiment that became an increasing part of Russian thought during the reactionary period that followed the assassination. While Polenova continued to respect Repin as an artist in most cases, she ceased to trust his opinion of her work. She noted to Antipova, "Repin praised my works, but they say he praises everything now. It's become a habit for him. Why be offended? So it is. Better just not to believe him anymore."²⁵⁰

2.6 THE FORMATION OF THE ABRAMTSEVO WORKSHOP

It was during this period of increasing interest in craft and uncertainty about the future direction of Russian art that the Abramtsevo group began to investigate peasant crafts in earnest. Late spring 1885 saw the beginnings of serious collecting of folk art at Abramtsevo,²⁵¹ as well as planning for the carpentry workshop. In the tradition of female philanthropy, Mamontova had established a school on the estate for local peasant children a few years earlier. After mastering the rudiments of literacy, the boys were trained in carpentry. Mamontova hoped this would allow the peasants to find work locally rather than having to go off to work in the urban

²⁴⁹ Lapshin, "Poslednii imperator," 547.

²⁵⁰ "Репин хвалил мои работы, но, говорят, он все теперь хвалит, это вошло у него в привычку:—зачем обижать; стало быть, и верить ему больше не приходится." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 25, 1885, 362.

²⁵¹ According to Natal'ia Vasil'evna, the group began collecting folk art in the summer of 1881 when Repin and Vasiliu Dmitrievich returned from a walk with an intricately carved wooden board from a peasant's home for which they had traded a brand new board. She stated that this activity was inspired by the church project. *Abramtsevo*, 39.

factories.²⁵² Polenova began designing works to be executed by the students that same spring.

She was inspired by this work, reporting to Natal'ia Vasil'evna,

During the walk Sergei and Driushka [Mamontov] gathered flowers for me to use for the cabinet. We're planning for it to look like this: the doors will have stylized flowers and fruit, the upper and lower drawers will have ornaments on a gold background, and on the upper cornice we'll depict the gathered spring flowers. ... After an hour's lunch three of us set out for the monastery: Elizaveta Grigor'evna, Driushka and I. It was a wonderful day, we had a glorious walk and bought a paneva and a sleeveless jacket from one peasant woman and a little purse from another. All of this will go into our costume museum, which we are reopening.²⁵³

This new design work was often a joyful experience for Polenova, allowing the more playful side of her personality to emerge. In another letter to Natal'ia Vasil'evna she wrote humorously, "Today I took a walk with the girls and we gathered little frogs. They are my new models for the cabinet."²⁵⁴ As is evident, Polenova actively engaged the Mamontov children in the activities at Abramtsevo, and Andrei Mamontov in particular became an enthusiastic participant in the workshop until his early death.

The plans for revitalizing the workshop continued into May when Polenova proposed a more socially expansive project in line with the lessons learned at Vera Dmitrievna's side. She thought that they should produce furniture at the Abramtsevo workshop and then have local peasant artists paint it under the direction of fine artists. Polenova felt strongly about this

²⁵² Ibid., 46.

²⁵³ "Во время прогулки Сергей и Дрюшка собирали мне цветы, которыми я пользуюсь для шкафчика. Мы проектируем его так: дверцы—стилизованные цветы и фрукты; верхний и нижний ящики—орнаменты на золотом фоне, а верхний карниз—будем по мере набирания весенних цветов их изображать на нем. ... После часового обеда мы отправились в монастырь втроем: Ел[изавета] Гр[игорьевна], Дрюшка и я. Чудный был день, славно прогулялись и купили у одной бабы паневу и безрукавку, а у другой сумочку. Все это пойдет во вновь открывающийся костюмный музей—наш." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, April 29, 1885, 354. A paneva is a wraparound skirt made of wool or linen and worn by married peasant women. The Mamontovs had acquired a vast collection of Russian peasant garments in their attempts to provide authentic costumes for their theatrical productions based on Russian folk tales. They had briefly put them into a costume museum on the estate. It was due to Polenova's efforts that the museum was reopened and expanded with other folk objects.

²⁵⁴ "Сегодня гуляли мы с девочками, подбирали лягушат—это мои новые натурщики для шапчика." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, May 2, 1885, 355.

arrangement, especially after learning that the peasant artists, who worked painting clayware and other objects, were barely able to survive on their income. She believed that if she and Mamontova then exhibited the wares for sale and distributed the income to the artists it would be beneficial for all involved. Mamontova was heartened by Polenova's concern for the welfare of the local population, and Mamontov also heartily approved.²⁵⁵

As women began to participate more actively in public life and question the existing social order in Russia, the revival of folk art traditions became a focus of activity for wealthy women and for female artists, challenging the male domination of cultural production. These upper-class women were concerned with the dramatic changes in social conditions following the liberation of the serfs in 1861 and they worked to develop a folk art industry in order to provide employment for displaced peasants, especially women skilled in traditional feminine modes of creative production such as embroidery. Women artists actively participated in arts colonies, producing fairy-tale illustrations and designs for folk art production. The combination of increased social agitation by upper-class women, female philanthropists' engagement in the arts, and the presence of women artists at the colonies caused male anxiety about gender roles on many levels.

The dominance of women in the *kustar* revival stems in part from traditions of female philanthropy in Russian elite culture and in part from the changing roles of women in the second half of the nineteenth century, as noted in the prior chapter. Another factor contributing to the involvement of women in the *kustar* revival is the lack of formal opportunities in the arts. In spite of their successes in public life by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, women still had only limited access to arts training and those who showed talent were strongly advised to

²⁵⁵ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, May 2, 1885, 354-355.

pursue applied arts over the fine arts. Stasov, for example, championed women's work in craft arts. He did so specifically for its association with tradition and its relation to the development of a Russian national art.²⁵⁶ While many women chafed under these strictures, others found new avenues of inspiration and expression through traditional folk crafts and combined them with their pursuits in the fine arts.

Two of the most famous *kustar* workshops, Abramtsevo and Solomenko (set up by Mariia Fedorovna Iakunchikova and her husband, Iakunchikova's brother, Vladimir Vasil'evich, in 1891), are examples of the ways women found to work within the opportunities afforded them in late nineteenth-century Russia. As Alison Hilton has noted, women involved in the *kustar* revival "were motivated by both philanthropic and artistic concerns; they wanted to nurture the creative impulses of the peasants and they hoped that revitalized folk arts would help to reinvigorate national art in the broadest sense."²⁵⁷ Rosalind Gray concurs, noting that the Abramtsevo workshop project is "an example of traditional gender divides, with the women of the community undertaking a form of artistic enterprise in keeping with a caring, nurturing role."²⁵⁸

While it is true that women were active in charitable organizations that supported the decorative arts and crafts, especially in Russia, England, Ireland and the United States,²⁵⁹ how Polenova fits into this traditional scheme is somewhat unusual. She had long been involved in charitable activities. But since she was an artist in her own right, her participation in the project was only part of her artistic output rather than her sole focus. This distinguished her from many

²⁵⁶ Alison Hilton, "Domestic Crafts and Creative Freedom: Russian Women's Art," in *Russia. Women. Culture*, edited by Helena I. Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 354.

²⁵⁷ Hilton, *Folk Art*, 226.

²⁵⁸ Gray, "Identity," 116.

²⁵⁹ For more on this, see Anthea Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts & Crafts Movement: 1870-1914* (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

women in the arts and crafts movements across Europe who tended to confine their creative work to the decorative arts. Indeed, over the course of her career, her desire to work independently grew, ultimately leading her to cease working with the Abramtsevo workshop.²⁶⁰

In her quest to fulfill this new social project, Polenova actively began to seek peasant painters and woodcarvers soon after the establishment of the Abramtsevo workshop. She learned from a number of them and through these studies greatly expanded and perfected the workshop's production.²⁶¹ By late May Polenova had hired at least one peasant painter, Semen from Komiagino. When she visited Abramtsevo in September, she went to see him. Her report of this visit shows both her longstanding social concerns and a bit of the paternalistic attitude common among gentry intelligentsia. She was relieved to find that Semen's work was much improved from the previous visit and attributed a certain carelessness she had observed then to impending religious holidays. Polenova was also captivated by his workshop, where he sat in a traditional sheepskin jacket, with his materials spread around, and with two young students working nearby. She was concerned about his lack of artistic imagination, but resolved to stay with him because she thought some of his products were excellent. She was also worried about the possible use of old methods of "breaking" a peasant's will (i.e., through physical force or other methods of coercion), thinking it much better to accustom Semen slowly to the workshop's artistic requirements, since he was talented.²⁶² She was insistent that artists not merely copy extant objects, but that they be free to use their own talent and imagination to devise new variations.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Gray, "Identity," 116-117

²⁶¹ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 26.

²⁶² E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, September 21, 1885, 362.

²⁶³ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, May 25, 1885, 355.

Ultimately the relationship with Semen did not work because he was not interested in new designs, preferring to merely copy time-tested objects.²⁶⁴ This episode points to some of the conflicts present in Russian society and art. Russian peasants were notoriously suspicious of innovation and, while peasant artisans wanted commissions and an income,²⁶⁵ especially after emancipation, they were resistant to direction from above. In Polenova's case the fact of her sex likely caused additional problems since peasant culture was strictly patriarchal. Ultimately, the failure to form a working relationship with Semen caused Polenova to concentrate on educating boys instead of trying to hire adults. She thought that boys would be less attached to tradition and more open to experimentation.²⁶⁶

The Abramtsevo workshop took students for a three-year course. Upon completing the course students had the option of a year-long paid internship at either Abramtsevo or at nearby Sergiev Posad. They were provided with tools and commissions and sent home to work. The works they produced were sold in Moscow, with a percentage of the profit going to the carpenters.²⁶⁷ This arrangement is reminiscent of what Polenova observed at the Deck Factories, but it also replicates some of the practices long in place in the *kustar* industries. In those cases, however, peasants were largely exploited by the middlemen, receiving pitiful remuneration for their work. Polenova and Mamontova hoped to bring about a more equitable situation.

Polenova's collecting and designing activities continued outside of Abramtsevo. In the summers of 1885 and 1886, the Polenovs rented a home on Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Lopukhin's

²⁶⁴ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 35.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90. Salmond argues that it was more economic concerns than adherence to tradition that made the peasants resistant to change. *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶⁷ Hilton, *Folk Art*, 233.

family estate, Men'shovo, in Moscow province near Podol'sk.²⁶⁸ In 1885 they purchased wood carvings from the nearby villages. In fact, they purchased so many objects that word got around and the peasants began bringing things to them.²⁶⁹ Polenova joined them in July and August, excitedly partaking in the “archaeological expeditions,” paying special attention to unusual artifacts.²⁷⁰ She was inspired, writing to Antipova, “Russian folk art is, it turns out, a completely untouched area, and, it appears, there's no Russian village in which you can't find something interesting.”²⁷¹ For Polenova this experience was akin to having the scales drop from her eyes. She really felt that she was discovering a completely new way to advance Russian art both in the realm of *kustar* industries and in the fine arts.

Adamant about finding “living folk art”²⁷² rather than turning to museums and books, Polenova considered working from living examples to be the only way for folk art to continue its existence. Once a work appeared in a book or was placed in a museum it was “dead and forgotten.” Therefore, to ask a peasant artist to copy or get inspiration from such things would be the same thing as asking him “to copy a Mauritanian or ancient Greek monument.”²⁷³ It was necessary, in her thinking, to seek out objects in peasants' homes to understand how the art had continued to develop and live over time.²⁷⁴ This does not mean that she and the Abramtsevo artists never took inspiration from museum objects—after all, they were in the process of creating their own museum—or books, but they set themselves the goal of doing so only as a last

²⁶⁸ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 28.

²⁶⁹ N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, July 7 and 11, 1885, 357-358.

²⁷⁰ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, July 31, 1885, 358 and E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, July 31, 1885, 358-359.

²⁷¹ “Русское народное творчество это, оказывается, совсем нетронутая сторона, и, кажется, нет русской деревни, из которой нельзя было бы вывезти чего-нибудь интересного.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, August 9, 1885, 360.

²⁷² “еще живущее народное творчество” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 8, 1885, 362.

²⁷³ “коипровать мавританский или древнегреческий памятник” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 8, 1885, 363.

²⁷⁴ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 8, 1885, 363.

resort.²⁷⁵ For Polenova and the Abramtsevo group, modernization and innovation needed to occur organically rather than being forced *ex nihilo*. For them, continuity went hand in hand with change.

Sternin argues that this focus differentiates the Abramtsevo group from William Morris and the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Whereas William Morris was trying to resurrect the long dead traditions of the middle ages, Polenova and her colleagues were seeking a still living, but endangered, tradition and attempting to reinvigorate it.²⁷⁶ This is, however, true only in respect to the Abramtsevo workshop project. As I mentioned, the artists of the Abramtsevo and Polenov circles were quite interested in the arts and crafts of medieval Russia and although they were not trying to resurrect the period as a working model, aspects of its art showed up in a number of their works.

Ultimately, Polenova's time in Men'shovo provided her with a lot of inspiration for the Abramtsevo workshop. She wrote to Mamontova,

You know, it would be good if Ivan Antonovich [an Abramtsevo carpenter] would make two small cabinets and copied the large one ... only with a double folding door. So more things will be done by the beginning of September. It would be good if at that time the following were copied: the little chest and our two cabinets. Then we could start on new things. We could begin a folding table, shelves, a corner cabinet, carved salt cellars, and boxes, using museum materials.

²⁷⁵ “умершее и забытое” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 8, 1885, 362. Curiously, Natal'ia Vasil'evna recalled that for one of the earliest cabinets produced by the workshop Polenova used “a stylized flower, taken from Viollet le Duc's book (стилизованный цветок, взяты из книги Viollet le Duc).” *Abramtsevo*, 49. Natal'ia Vasil'evna does not indicate which book of le Duc's this was. It may have been his *L'art russe: ses origines, ses éléments constructifs, son apogée, son avenir* (1877), which was translated into Russian in 1879 and provoked a broad spectrum of reactions from high praise to furious condemnation. Sternin, *70e-80e gody*, 156-157. While *L'art russe* is not mentioned in the published correspondence, in 1883 Natal'ia Vasil'evna wrote to Polenova that she and Vasilii Dmitrievich were reading Viollet le Duc's *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, September 26, 1883, 319), so it is likely they also knew it.

²⁷⁶ Sternin, *70e-80e gody*, 71. He also argues that for the Abramtsevo artists these objects represented a type of universal beauty that stood outside the demands of changing artistic tastes due to their utilitarian function and provided them an example of how to unite beauty and function, which is very similar to the ideals English Arts and Crafts movement. *Ibid.*, 71-73.

This will be so much fun, that it's simply a delight. I have so many ideas coming to mind, I'll just draw them for now.²⁷⁷

Rather than simply copying existing objects, Polenova worked hard to find the unusual. She was happiest when she produced a design that she considered unique.²⁷⁸ In addition, while she photographed and sketched whatever she could not convince the peasants to sell to her, she made a point of synthesizing design features to create something distinctive.²⁷⁹ This is evident in a small table with a rosette motif she found on a chest in a peasant home.

Abramtsevo's most famous piece was Polenova's Cabinet with a Column, which illustrates how she combined motifs from a number of folk art objects.²⁸⁰ According to Natal'ia Vasil'evna, the lower portion of the cabinet was inspired by a shelf from the village of Komiagino, the handle from the painted base of a distaff from the village of Valishchevo, the top portion from the front boards of a cart, and the column itself was found in the village of Bogoslov.²⁸¹ This ability to synthesize motifs, styles and themes from a variety of sources would prove to be a significant part of Polenova's own art as she developed her personal style.

Polenova's work for Abramtsevo reinvigorated her interest in the art world, spurring her to sketch nature intensively while at Men'shovo. In August she worked on a variety of paintings,

²⁷⁷ “А знаете что, хорошо бы было, если бы Ив[ан] Антонов[ич] теперь же сделал бы два шкапика маленьких и повторил тоже большой ... только с двухстворчатой дверкой. Чтобы побольше вещей было наработано к началу сентября. Хорошо, если бы к тому времени были скопированы: укладка и наши два шкапика, тогда мы бы приступили к новым вещам. Стали бы делать складень, полочки, угловой шкапик, резные солонки, ящички, пользуясь музейным материалом. Это так будет весело, что просто прелесть. У меня всякие мысли в голову приходят, я их буду пока только зарисовывать.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 21, 1885, 360-361. Ellipsis in the original. Ivan Antonovich was the head carpenter at the Abramtsevo workshop. The museum Polenova has in mind is the Abramtsevo museum, which was outside her definition of museums as repositories of dead and forgotten objects. The word *skladen'* poses some problems. It usually means an icon diptych or triptych that is hinged to fold shut. (The word derives from the Russian root meaning “to fold.”) According to Vladimir Dal', however, the word was also used in Iaroslavl' Province to mean a type of folding table. *Tol'kovyi slovar' zhivogo veliko-russkogo iazyka*. Vol. 4. 1882. (Reprint, Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1991), 198. Since I have found no evidence that the Abramtsevo workshop produced icons, I have here translated *skladen'* as folding table.

²⁷⁸ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 29, 1885, 361.

²⁷⁹ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 28-31; Hilton, *Folk Art*, 235-239.

²⁸⁰ This cabinet became so popular and well known that Elizaveta Grigor'evna joked that they ought to rename the Abramtsevo workshop “The Workshop of the Cabinet with a Column.” As cited in Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 57.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

reporting to Antipova that she was sketching everything from “the white water flowers” in the swamp to a little peasant hut, birches, roads, cattails in the evening, peasants’ gardens, sunflowers and poppies.²⁸² It is likely that *Sunflowers* of 1885, which may have been sketched during this trip, was one of the works present at the exhibition Kovalevskii reviewed. It is also possible that these sketches were in part inspired by the floral and other motifs she found in the folk art she was collecting. In spite of these joys, the consciousness of the need to make money and continue working for exhibition never left her.²⁸³

Two decisions she made upon her return to Moscow reinforce this need. In August Mamontov asked her to take on the costumes for a new production of *The Snow Maiden* by Rimsky-Korsakov. Her family was not pleased that she accepted this project, thinking it would tear her away from her exhibition work. She went ahead with the plans anyway, which were to use as many “authentic” Russian costumes as possible from the Abramtsevo collection and from other areas.²⁸⁴ Mamontov had dictated this approach to costumes since the first time he put on *The Snow Maiden*, and it caused a sensation in the Moscow theater world. The original production had sets by Vasnetsov, which, in addition to the use of the Russian costumes, were hailed for their unprecedented authentic presentation of a Russian fairy tale. The audience for once felt completely immersed in the realm depicted on stage rather than at a remove from it.²⁸⁵ The reprisal production garnered similar praise and Polenova was happy with the review, writing to Antipova, “Finally taste and the search for truth are beginning to rise above routine and

²⁸² E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, August 9 and 18, 1885, 360 and E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 21, 1885, 360.

²⁸³ Polenova’s work for Abramtsevo was philanthropic. I have uncovered no evidence to indicate she was paid, nor has Wendy Salmond (E-mail February 18, 2009). If she was, her continual money worries suggest that she was not paid much.

²⁸⁴ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 6, 1885, 359.

²⁸⁵ Hilton, *Folk Art*, 230-231.

tawdry luxury.²⁸⁶ It appeared that Polenova's search for authentic artistic expression was finally coming to fruition.

Vasnetsov also asked her to make costumes for the models for his frescoes at St. Vladimir's Cathedral in Kiev. She did not want to do so, but felt she could not refuse a friend.²⁸⁷ Wives of artists were often charged with such work, but in this case Polenova's experience as a costumer may have attracted Vasnetsov. Her reluctance to make the costumes might have stemmed from the fact that he wanted early Christian costumes, rather than Russian ones. She had created such costumes before to help Vasilii Dmitrievich, but now this type of work was far from her artistic interests. In addition, she may have feared being restricted to a typical female role if she consistently took on such work. Whatever her reasons for being annoyed with the request, her sense of duty prevailed.

In spite of these distractions, Polenova continued to work at Abramtsevo and on her own art when she could. The goods produced by the Abramtsevo workshop proved popular and it received many commissions.²⁸⁸ By March 1886, Polenova's confidence in the young boys working in the workshop was increasing, although she noted that they were still weak in certain areas. Nevertheless, their products were selling rapidly to upper-class patrons, she believed, "due to their innovation, originality and style"²⁸⁹—elements that she sought in her own works. The success of the Abramtsevo goods led Polenova and Mamontova to seek space for an outlet in Moscow, which they planned to open on December 2, 1886. They were also working on expanding the offerings and their social project by training women and girls in needlework,

²⁸⁶ "Наконец-то вкус и искание истины начинают брать верх над рутинной и мишурной роскошью." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 18, 1885, 362.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 14, 1886, 363.

²⁸⁹ "благодаря новизне, оригинальности и стильности модели" E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 3, 1886, 366.

including lace making.²⁹⁰ The expansion into training for girls and women may have been spurred by the increasing numbers of women seeking factory work.²⁹¹ In addition, since the women's movement had first begun, creating sewing workshops to provide both training and income in a "healthy" environment was one of the most common forms of philanthropic activity.²⁹² Though it took a lot of her time, at this point Polenova found the work for Abramtsevo interesting and it no doubt gratified her sense of social duty.²⁹³

2.7 IAKUNCHIKOVA JOINS THE POLENOV CIRCLE

As an expansion of her investigations into folk art, in 1886 Polenova created a group for studying the history and archaeology of Moscow. Iakunchikova joined this group and also participated in their collection of historical objects.²⁹⁴ More significantly, in 1886 Iakunchikova was invited to participate in the Polenovs' drawing evenings²⁹⁵ and by early 1888 was attending them with unfailing regularity.²⁹⁶ These evenings cemented Polenova and Iakunchikova's relationship. They were already acquaintances due to their family connections (see Appendix B), but these evenings drew them closer and allowed Polenova to encourage Iakunchikova's precocious talent. Their familial and professional relationship is an illustration of the vast changes that Russian society underwent in the mid-nineteenth century. The development of a

²⁹⁰ N. V. Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 60. They had tried some other sales venues in Moscow, but with unsatisfactory results, so they decided to open their own store.

²⁹¹ See, e.g., Engel, *Between the Fields and the City*.

²⁹² Stites, *Women's Movement*, 69.

²⁹³ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, October 24, 1886, 374; E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 15, 1886, 374-375; and E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, October 24, 1886, 374.

²⁹⁴ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 8.

²⁹⁵ M. F. Kiselev, "M. V. Iakunchikova: k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia," *Iskusstvo* 10 (1970): 57.

²⁹⁶ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 4, 1888, 394.

close bond between a gentry woman (Polenova) and a woman of the merchant estate (Iakunchikova), to say nothing of the marriage of a gentry man (Vasilii Dmitrievich) to a merchant woman (Natal'ia Vasil'evna), attests to these social changes.

Until the 1870s, merchants had a precarious position in Russian society. This changed as some among the merchant elite began to prosper and recognize the benefits of providing a broad education for their sons. As the latter gained more education, they were more likely to cast off old merchant identities and to become members of the intelligentsia, which had been forming since the 1840s. In addition, younger generations of the progressive nobility had been allying themselves with the intelligentsia rather than with their estate, which meant that the Moscow merchant elite and progressive nobles found themselves in the same social circles.²⁹⁷

Iakunchikova's father, Vasilii Ivanovich, had spent considerable time in England as a young man, mastering the art of the textile industry there in order to improve the family's textile business. This experience left him a staunch Anglophile, but one who remained patriotically dedicated to Russia, an attitude not uncommon among second- and third-generation merchants. Their exposure to European culture, plus their desire to overcome stubborn stereotypes about merchants, led many who had accumulated wealth to become dedicated patrons of the arts and philanthropists.²⁹⁸ Such was the path of luminaries like the Tretyakovs, the Morozovs and the Shchukins.

²⁹⁷ Jo Ann Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite: A Social and Cultural Portrait of Two Generations, 1840-1905* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, 1984) 103-104. This is not to say there were no tensions in these relationships. For more information on the merchant-industrial estate see Thomas C. Owen, *Capitalism and Politics in Russia: A Social History of the Moscow Merchants 1855-1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981); James L. West and Iurii A. Petrov, eds. *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1998); Alfred J. Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982); and Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, 1997).

²⁹⁸ Ruckman, *Business Elite*, 128.

Iakunchikova's childhood was full of advantages due to the family's wealth and their progressive attitudes regarding their daughters' education. The family nonetheless had its share of strained relationships. The Iakunchikov marriage was not a happy one, particularly after Vasiliĭ Ivanovich decided to sell the family estate, Vvedenskoe, an eighteenth century neoclassical grande dame, in a fit of rage over his wife's role in one of their daughters' elopement. Zinaida Nikolaevna had helped their daughter Zinaida marry the man she had fallen in love with, Emil' Morits. Vasiliĭ had been against the marriage due to Morits's Jewish heritage.²⁹⁹ Iakunchikova experienced this series of events as her first life tragedy, the shattering of the illusions of an idyllic youth spent in the countryside. This had such an impact that Vvedenskoe and the surrounding countryside figure prominently in her most poignant works of the 1890s.³⁰⁰ After this event, Vasiliĭ took the three youngest children (they had nine, plus the three Vasiliĭ had with his first wife) to live at the estate he purchased at Cheremushki (southwest of Moscow). Zinaida Nikolaevna lived with the older children, of which Iakunchikova was the youngest, in Moscow. They began living together again after 1887, but the household was always tense.³⁰¹

As was common for wealthy families, in 1883 the Iakunchikovs hired the watercolorist Nikolai Avenirovich Martynov (1842-1913) to tutor their children in art. Martynov had the

²⁹⁹ Weber wrote, "[Vvedenskoe] was the home of Macha's spirit, and she could never forgive her father for having sold the estate in a fit of ill-temper, because his wife, Zinaĭda Nikolaĭevna, had secretly married the loveliest of his daughters to one of the girls' tutors—a Jew, but for that matter a very charming and intelligent person." *Orient to Occident*, 188. Vvedenskoe still exists. It survived the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet period because it was first turned into an orphanage and then a sanatorium for high-ranking Party officials. It has recently undergone a major restoration.

³⁰⁰ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 7. Also, Peter Stupples, "Letters of Mariya Iakunchikova: 1888," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1987, 107. Weber wrote, "Our brief honeymoon journey was a pilgrimage to Vedenskoye, that royal estate upon which Macha was born, which her father had sold, and to which she was still attached by all the memories of her childhood. ... Vedenskoye still uplifted its classic façade on the hilltop; but indoors, what dilapidation! The people who had bought the estate had abandoned it, and the house had suffered the fate of all old things: decrepitude and destruction." *Orient to Occident*, 203.

³⁰¹ Dubina, "Iz lichnoi zhizni."

children work *en plain air* at Vvedenskoe and the nearby town of Zvenigorod, which is home to the fifteenth-century Savvino-Storozhevskii Monastery, another theme of Iakunchikova's later works. Undoubtedly this early experience, combined with the painful loss of the estate, influenced Iakunchikova's future interest in landscape, especially those tinged with nostalgia.³⁰² Iakunchikova displayed a precocious talent for drawing, which developed quickly in the supportive family atmosphere.

In 1885 Iakunchikova entered the Moscow School as an auditor, where she studied with Polenov and the school's other well-known instructors. The Moscow School was officially a subsidiary of the Academy. Nonetheless, it had a reputation for being more liberal and encouraging, especially towards women, and by the 1880s it had become a viable alternative to the Academy.³⁰³ Iakunchikova received private lessons from the art critic Sergei Sergeevich Goloushev (1855-1920), an admirer of landscapes, especially those of Isaac Levitan. He undoubtedly furthered Iakunchikova's interest in the genre.³⁰⁴ Thus, Iakunchikova participated in the Polenovs' drawing evenings not as a dilettante, but as a young woman intent on developing her considerable talents.

The works Iakunchikova produced in this period display an interest in the historical subjects that engrossed contemporary Russian artists, such as Russian life in pre-Petrine Rus. Such themes were explored by Polenova's archaeological study group. Two small images of 1886, *The Tsar in the Prayer Room* (Царь в молельне) and *The Tsar Visiting Prisoners* (Царь посещает заключенных) demonstrate Iakunchikova's interest in Russian history, along with her

³⁰² Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 7. Zvenigorod is located approximately 30 miles west of Moscow.

³⁰³ Jackson, *Wanderers*, 12; Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 7-8.

³⁰⁴ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 7.

attraction to the decorative elements of old Russian art and architecture. While an interest in the decorative is often ascribed to women, another influence is likely in this case: her teacher.

A decade earlier, Polenov had made his own studies of old Russian architecture. Of particular interest in this case are his studies of buildings in the Moscow Kremlin. Polenov painted *Terem Palace* (Теремной дворец),³⁰⁵ *Terem Palace: Exit from the Chambers onto the Golden Porch* (Теремной дворец. Выход из покоев на Золотое крыльцо.) and *Cathedral of the Assumption: South Gates* (Успенский собор. Южные врата.) in 1877. Each of these images reveals the interest in Old Russian architectural detail also present in Iakunchikova's works.

Both of Iakunchikova's paintings recreate the time of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (r. 1645-1676). *The Tsar in the Prayer Room* is notable for the attention Iakunchikova gave to the floral motifs on the wall in the right foreground, and for the embroidery at the base of the tsar's robe. While no specific critical response to this painting survives, Iakunchikova received a first-place prize for it at the Moscow School, suggesting that both the subject and its treatment met with approval. *The Tsar Visiting Prisoners*, the companion piece to *The Tsar in the Prayer Room*, is an early example of Iakunchikova's fascination with the effects of light. The dim light coming through the window contrasts sharply with the bright yellow light emitted by the lanterns held by two of the prisoners. Kiselev attributes her interest in the period to its rich decorative elements,³⁰⁶ but I contend that her attachment to Zvenigorod also played a role. The lavishly decorated Savvino-Storozhevskii monastery served as Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich's country retreat and many of the buildings and more opulent artworks there date to his reign. In addition,

³⁰⁵ The terem was the women's quarters in pre-Petrine Russia. In that era men and women were segregated socially, especially among the elites.

³⁰⁶ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 8.

the monastery appears in one of her most famous works of the 1890s, which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

2.8 POLENOVA IN 1886: SUCCESS, GRIEF AND REVELATION

While Iakunchikova's artistic talent flourished through her studies with Vasilii Dmitrievich, Polenova continued to work on her own paintings. As she noted frequently in her letters, fall and winter seemed to be the best times for her to work on her own paintings.³⁰⁷ The winter of 1885-1886 was no exception. In January, "Tretyakov le grand" purchased another of her watercolors, *Winter* (Зима), from an exhibition and came to tell her about it himself, which filled Polenova with joy and spurred her to work harder on her paintings for exhibition in St. Petersburg.³⁰⁸ The painting in the Tretyakov Gallery collection is titled *In the Courtyard in Winter* (На дворе зимой) and shows a portion of a Russian wooden house, a dog house with a dog sitting outside, a gate and another house in the distance in the waning winter sunlight. Polenova mentions that it was an image she had sketched out the prior winter, which means it could have been based on *Winter Landscape: Forest Edge* (Зимний пейзаж. Опушка леса.). This watercolor sketch is in the collection of the Polenovo Estate Museum and dated February 5, 1885. Her success with *Crows in the Snow* might have been another impetus to produce winter images. She created a number of winter landscapes in the mid-1880s, including another *Winter Landscape* (Зимний

³⁰⁷ See e.g., E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 3, 1887, 390.

³⁰⁸ "Tretyakov le grand" is Polenova's phrase. (Tretyakov is written in Russian in the original.) She does not say what exhibition, but likely the annual watercolor exhibition at the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, January 14, 1886, 363.

пейзаж) also in the Polenovo collection. Winter landscapes would also become an iconic part of many of her later fairy-tale images.

February found Polenova again struggling with the need to make money. She spent a week at Abramtsevo, where she made five sketches outside, two of which she decided to send for exhibition. She had twelve works to exhibit, and hoped that at least some of them would sell, because she had recently taken on a debt, which worried her greatly. I have not been able to determine why she took on this debt, from whom she borrowed money or how much, but it is clear that the need to pay it back was the impetus behind a number of her artistic decisions over the next year.

An examination of the prices she was able to get for her works is significant, especially for comparison with what her brother's works could command. She wrote to Antipova, "Here is what I am exhibiting: 1. *In Autumn* (girls by a fence), price 25 rubles, 2. *Garden with Sunflowers*, 25 rubles, 3. *Over the Dam*, 25 rubles, 4. *Bogbean* [*Menyanthes trifoliata*], 25 rubles, 5. *Twilight*, 20 rubles, 6. *Barrel*, 15 rubles, 7. *A Study*, 15 rubles, 8. *Little River*, 15 rubles, 9. *In Winter*, 10 rubles, 10. *Boy with a Monkey*, 10 rubles, 11. *For Housing*, 10 rubles, 12. *Road*, 10 rubles."³⁰⁹ For comparison, in 1879 Polenov—by then an established and well known artist—was selling his smaller genre paintings and landscapes for 500-800 rubles.³¹⁰ Part of the discrepancy is due to the fact that Polenov was working in oils, whereas Polenova's paintings were small (rarely exceeding 50 centimeters on a side) watercolors. It is also the case, however, that works by women artists were much less valued on the art market.

³⁰⁹ "Вот что выставляю: 1. «Осенью» (девчонки у забора)—Ц[ена]—25 р. 2. «Огород с подсолнухами»—25 р. 3. «За плотной»—25 р. 4. «Водяной лопушник»—25 р. 5. «Сумерки»—20 р. 6. «Бочка»—15 р. 7. «Этюд»—15 р. 8. «Речка»—15 р. 9. «Зимой»—10 р. 10. «Мальчик с обезьяной»—10 р. 11. «К жилью»—10 р. 12. «Дорога»—10 р." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 3, 1886, 366.

³¹⁰ V. D. Polenov to I. N. Kramskoi, February 12, 1879, 271.

Polenova's money worries continued. Towards the end of March 1886 she returned to ceramics in hopes of increasing her income. She decided to paint some small ceramic pieces and put them on display at the Moscow Society's permanent exhibition, hoping this would result in commissions or requests to give lessons.³¹¹ An extant series of her plates from the 1880s in the Polenovo Museum are likely typical of what was reasonably quick to produce and market. The series, *Months of the Year* (Времена года), are small plates (about 17 cm diameter) with different seasonal motifs for each month. April, for example, portrays a scene with a hunter out in the early spring woods with his hounds. This scene is placed over a budding branch. February is a scene of snow-covered wooden houses against a dormant branch, whereas September illustrates the glory of a Russian "golden autumn."

She was relieved when in April Surikov came to her with a ceramics commission. He had been asked by his patrons for a porcelain icon for their young son's grave. Polenova took on the commission, but told Surikov it would be much better to do it on faience than on porcelain.³¹² The patrons—the Kuznetsov gold manufacturing family—agreed, but Polenova was panicked because she could not find the necessary blanks and the icon was requested for the middle of May.³¹³ She finally found the materials and decided on an image of Christ with Saints Peter and Paul for the commission. In contrast to her work with folk art, she made use of available literature on the subject for these icons. She was concerned with making sure that "the real, the comprehensible" did not overshadow "the stylized and mystical" in the icon. She also hoped that if this icon went well she could make copies of her other icons and attract further commissions.³¹⁴

³¹¹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 30, 1886, 367.

³¹² E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 10, 1886, 367.

³¹³ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 22, 1886, 367.

³¹⁴ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 26, 1886, 368.

The pressure of financial obligations led her to reply angrily to Antipova's reproach for exhibiting paintings unworthy of her,

You write that there is no point in exhibiting things that will damage my reputation. Well, let it be, right now that's not what's important to me, but rather money. It is important to me to live not at someone else's expense, and how to do that is a less worrisome question. Here (not a commission) I don't oblige anyone to anything, if you want, take it, if not, don't. That this year's buying public liked my works is proven by the fact that all of my works to the last one (there were fourteen) sold. There are circumstances under which the material side of life suppresses the moral. Such are my current circumstances. It's important right now for me to make a few dozen extra rubles because they make me independent.³¹⁵

As this passage demonstrates, Polenova's fierce independence drove her to make difficult career decisions. While she clearly cared about the quality of her production, in spite of whatever fury drove her to write in the letter, she also recognized that as an unmarried woman she had to create works for the market to survive. It is true that her family was comfortable financially and they would undoubtedly have supported her, but Polenova evidently wanted to answer to no one. This may have stemmed from her continuing inability to trust others, but her history suggests a strongly independent character even before the Shkliarevskii scandal.

The strain at times made Polenova strive for excellence and at others it drove her to despair. She reported to Antipova that she was working diligently on keeping up her skills through figure drawing and giving herself specific assignments when going out sketching, such as studying how branches look against the sky.³¹⁶ To Natal'ia Vasil'evna she complained,

³¹⁵ “Ты пишешь, что я напрасно выставляю вещи, которые вредят моей репутации. Да бог с ней совсем, мне теперь важна не она, а деньги. Мне важно жить не на чужой счет, а чем этого достичь, это вопрос меньшей важности. Тут (не заказ) я никому ничего не навязываю, хочешь бери, не хочешь нет. А что покупающей публике нынешнего года вещи нравились, это мне показывает то, что все до одной (их было четырнадцать) подались. Есть обстоятельства, в которых материальная сторона жизни задевает нравственную. Таковы мои теперешние обстоятельства. Мне важно именно теперь выручить несколько лишних десятков рублей, потому что они ставят меня независимо.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 4, 1887, 382.

³¹⁶ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, March 18 and June 24, 1886, 366, 368.

I've been working for three days already and, frankly, it seems to me that I'm doing everything shamefully and scandalously foully, to such a degree it is like I've absolutely forgotten everything that I knew previously. I'm working on a large study. I wipe it clean, repaint it, scrape it, and redo it twenty times. I really want to get as close to the truth as possible and what results is dirty, crusty soot, and Semenych [Il'ia Semenovich Ostroukhov], the fool, praises it.³¹⁷

Compounding Polenova's depression was the death of her two-year-old nephew, Fedya (Fedor), in early August after a short, sudden illness while the family was at Men'shovo. She and Vasilii Dmitrievich were present at the time of Fedya's death. While the service in the local church and his subsequent burial next to Vera Dmitrievna in Moscow's Vaganovskoe cemetery left her with a momentary sense of peace, the family's grief made working difficult for a long time afterward.³¹⁸

Nonetheless, September found Polenova in Abramtsevo again, attempting to press onwards as best she could. She confided in Antipova, "I myself am completely healthy and, it is strange to say, in those, unfortunately rare, moments when my heart is calmer, I suddenly feel a strong urge to work—so many thoughts and a kind of confidence in the possibility of expressing them on paper, which I never experienced before." At these moments she worked on some large paintings she intended to exhibit at the Periodic in December and others for the watercolor exhibition organized by the St. Petersburg-based Association of Russian Watercolorists to be held in October at the Moscow Society.³¹⁹ Indeed, art proved a healing force for all members of

³¹⁷ "Вот уж третий день работаю, и мне искренно кажется, что я делаю до такой степени позорно, мерзопакостно, точно и абсолютно все забыла, что знала прежде. Работаю я этюд большой; я его мою, перекрашиваю, скоблю, переделываю по двадцать раз — все хочется добиться наибольшей возможной близости к правде, в результате грязная черствая сажа, а Семеныч, чудак,—хвалит." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, June 1886, 368 The noun Polenova uses for Ostroukhov, *chudak*, cannot be adequately translated into English. It describes a person who is quite intelligent, but lacking common sense.

³¹⁸ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, August 7, 1886, 371; V. D. Polenov to M. A. Polenova, August 10, 1886, 371-372; and E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, September 2, 1886, 372.

³¹⁹ "Сама я совсем здорова и, странно сказать, что в те, к сожалению, редкие минуты, когда сердце попокойнее, то в себе вдруг почувствуешь такой сильный порыв к работе, столько мыслей и такую какую-то уверенность в возможность выразить их на бумаге, какой прежде совсем в себе не знала." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, September 20, 1886, 373.

the family: Natal'ia Vasil'evna enrolled in the Moscow School and found herself soothed and reenergized by her new classmates, which helped her overcome her grief and enlivened Vasilii Dmitrievich as well.³²⁰

Polenova thought the watercolor exhibition was quite interesting, especially the works of Al'bert Nikolaevich Benua (1852-1937), an academic watercolorist and brother of Aleksandr Nikolaevich Benua (1870-1959), who would become a leader of the World of Art group. She was particularly taken with Surikov's style. Surikov first gained fame for his 1881 *Morning of the Execution of the Streltsy* (Утро стрелецкой казни), which depicted the execution of mutineers in Peter the Great's Russia. Unlike many of the Peredvizhniki, Surikov was interested in the light and color experiments of contemporary French artists and sixteenth-century Venetian painters.³²¹ In 1884 he traveled to Italy and made a number of watercolor studies and it is likely these that Polenova saw. Their lightness provides a contrast to his monumental paintings. Polenova herself exhibited sixteen sketches and "traded rather successfully," as she put it, which resulted in the sale of eleven of them.³²²

In the midst of struggling with grief and finding the motivation to work, Polenova had a major artistic breakthrough that would define her art for future generations. Antipova had asked her what she was planning to show next and Polenova replied,

I'm not sure if I'll be able to tell you what it will be or what I would like for it to be. The thought that came to me ... is very daring, but terribly alluring. In a whole series of watercolor pictures I want to express the Russian people's poetic view of Russian nature, i.e., to clarify for myself and others how the Russian landscape influenced and is expressed in Russian folk poetry, both epic and lyric. In a word, to express the link between the soil and the works that grew from it. ... For this I'll take subjects from fairy tales, songs, various poetic superstitions, etc.

³²⁰ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 14, 1886, 376.

³²¹ Jackson, *Wanderers*, 109-113.

³²² "наторговала довольно успешно" E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 25, 1886, 376.

I want to discern and express those artistic, imaginary images by which the native Russian person lives and breathes.³²³

This letter makes clear just how much her work at Abramtsevo and elsewhere collecting folk objects, working with peasant artists, traveling in the Russian countryside, participating in the Mamontovs' theatrical productions and working with other Russian artists had influenced her personal artistic goals. From this point forward, while landscapes and nature continue to be an important part of her work, elements of Russian history and folk culture dominate.

2.9 NEW MEDIA, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Polenova began working on her first Russian "history painting" in early 1887. As far as the canon goes, it is more properly a genre painting, but *Icon Painting Workshop* (Иконописная) was her first attempt at creating an oil painting for exhibition. It also allowed her to draw on her knowledge of Russian folk art and pre-Petrine architecture. The image depicts five young boys working with an icon master in the sixteenth century. One boy grinds pigment, two work preparing the wood support, one sits before three small icons and another peers over the master's shoulder. In the foreground is a large, cylindrical container with traditional carvings and painted decorations of the type Polenova would have found in the Moscow region.³²⁴ There are other

³²³ "Уж не знаю, сумею ли я рассказать, что это будет или что бы я желала, чтобы это было. Мысль, которой я задалась, ... очень дерзкая, но страшно заманчивая. Хочется в целом ряде акварельных картин выразить поэтический взгляд русского народа на русскую природу, т.е. выяснить себе и другим, каким образом влиял и выражался русский пейзаж на русской народной поэзии эпической и лирической. Словом сказать, выразить связь почвы с выросшими на ней произведениями. ... Сюжеты для этого буду брать сказки, песни, различные поэтические поверья и пр. Хочется подметить и выразить те художественно-вымышленные образы, которыми живет и питается воображение русского народного человека." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 25, 1886, 373. First ellipsis in the original.

³²⁴ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 25.

vessels and wooden cabinets in the room of the types that Polenova would likely have studied as well.

Natal'ia Vasil'evna suggested that *Icon Painting Workshop* was also inspired by Polenova's close work with the young boys at Abramtsevo.³²⁵ Sternin notes that in the late-nineteenth century domestic theatrical performances, including *tableaux vivants* of the type the Abramtsevo circle regularly produced, had a major effect on how artists composed their genre pictures.³²⁶ It is possible that the theatrical productions Polenova witnessed and participated in also contributed to her choice of subject and/or the frozen action of the composition. Given the works Iakunchikova had produced from Aleksei Mikhailovich's time and their concurrent studies in the archaeological circle, this painting may provide early evidence of their mutual artistic influence. Polenova seems to have again synthesized a number of sources into a coherent whole.

Polenova frequently consulted with her artist friends about the work, but took their commentary with a grain of salt. For example, she told Mamontova that Antokol'skii said he liked the preparatory version of *Icon Painting Workshop* he saw, but was concerned that the master's and his apprentices' "work is not shown anywhere and [I] need to show a saint against a gold background,"³²⁷ apparently to ensure that the icons appear truly Russian rather than simply Western depictions of saints. The final version demonstrates that she adopted his recommendation about showing their work, but seems to have ignored the "requirement" for a saint on a gold background; the only icons on display are the one in the top right corner and the partial image of one on the back wall. Neither provides a clear rendering of a "saint against a

³²⁵ Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 77.

³²⁶ Sternin, *70e-80e gody*, 68.

³²⁷ "нигде не показана их работа, что нужно показать святого на золотом фоне." E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 18, 1887, 376.

gold background,” but Russian viewers knew icons well and would understand what the sketchy depictions here represented. Thus, perhaps Polenova felt that merely an indication of their presence would be sufficient for a Russian audience.

In March she considered submitting the painting for a competition at the School for the Encouragement of the Arts, but worried because of her friends’ reactions to the final version: “Apollinariii [Vasnetsov] approves, Semenykh [Ostroukhov] is critical and the others are undecided, they don’t dare to praise or condemn it.”³²⁸ In the end she asked A. M. Vasnetsov to help her compose the proper documents and sent it off. Two weeks later she was pleased to report to Antipova that she had received a letter informing her that *Icon Painting Workshop* was awarded second place. “Of course, this was a great joy for me and strongly encourages me to paint in oils. Thus, canvasses and easels have appeared in my room, which has generally become a real studio.”³²⁹

That spring Vasilii Dmitrievich’s *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (Христос и грешница) was exhibited publicly for the first time at that year’s Peredvizhnik exhibition, the group’s fifteenth. Its fate illustrates both the strong hand the tsar and his censors still had in the art world, and why Polenova might have wanted to exhibit oil paintings. When they first began their exhibitions, the Peredvizhniki were compelled to allow the tsar the first viewing each year. In February 1887, Polenov reported to his family that the censor had been to the exhibition and wanted *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* removed. The censor reported his findings to the mayor, who sent over a member of his staff to examine the painting. The latter told the

³²⁸ “Аполлонарый одобряет, Семеныч критикует, остальные так смотрят, не смеют ни звалить, не бранить.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontovs, March 13, 1887, 382.

³²⁹ “Конечно, это было для меня большой радостью и очень поощряет меня писать масляными красками. Поэтому у меня в комнате появились холсты, мольберты и вообще стала настоящая мастерская.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, April 4, 1887, 382.

mayor that he did not find anything “impermissible” in the work. A couple of days later, Grand Duke Vladimir Aleksandrovich (brother of Alexander III) came to look at Polenov’s painting. Polenov reported, “[He] stood in front of my picture for a long time and found that it was badly exhibited, but it was a wonderful thing, and for us educated people, it is very interesting in its historical character, but for the masses it is still beyond reach and may perhaps provoke reactions.”³³⁰ The reason the Grand Duke felt the painting would be negatively received by “the masses,” was the representation of Christ as entirely human, without any hint of his divinity. The vast majority of images of religious figures in Imperial Russia were icons and church frescoes, which adhered strictly to the Orthodox Church’s prescriptions until well into the nineteenth century. Traditions inherited from Byzantium, combined with fears of idolatry, caused the Church to demand that all religious images clearly indicate that the personages in them did not inhabit this profane world. Ivanov’s *The Appearance of Christ to the People* (1837-1857), which was much admired by Vasilii Dmitrievich and his family, was one of the first Russian paintings to approach Christ’s human aspect.

Two days after the Grand Duke’s visit, the mayor himself came to look at the painting and forbade it to be listed in the catalogue. That afternoon, however, the President of the Imperial Academy of the Arts came to the exhibit hall with Alexander III (r. 1881-1894), the Tsarina and other members of the imperial family. When at last Alexander III reached Polenov’s painting, he looked and said, “How interesting, but it is a pity it is so poorly lit.” He then began to quiz Polenov about the image. As he left, he commented that it would be very interesting to see the painting in good light. A few minutes later Alexander returned and asked, “Has your

³³⁰ “[Он] долго стоял перед моей картиной, нашел, что она плохо поставлена, но что вещь чудесна и для нас, образованных людей, очень интересна своим историческим характером, но что для толпы это еще недоступно и может возбудить толки.” V. D. Polenov to M. A. Polenova, February 24, 1887, 379-380.

painting been purchased by anyone?” Polenov replied that it had not, and Alexander said, “I will take it for myself.” Thus, the painting was allowed to remain in the exhibition, much to the censor’s and mayor’s dismay.³³¹

Part of Vasilii Dmitrievich’s success in escaping censorship at this stage is likely due to the length of his relationship with Alexander III and the latter’s longstanding patronage of the arts. Like his father, Alexander III became interested in art at a young age. By the time he ascended the throne, he had commissioned Bogoliubov to send him catalogues of all the major exhibitions in Paris and to purchase contemporary artworks. He was so taken with the visual arts that he personally took part in the restoration of works in the Hermitage’s collection. His arts activities were no doubt partly influenced by his wife, Maria Fedorovna (the former Princess Dagmar of Denmark), who was a talented artist in her own right and led an active life in Russia as an arts patron and “protectress” (покровительница). Alexander III also regularly lent works from his private collection for public exhibition and instigated discussions about opening a museum of Russian art in St. Petersburg. To this end he even attempted to purchase Tretyakov’s collection.

Although he was supportive of the Peredvizhniki, Alexander III tended to prefer history paintings and those that were more academic in style to those that showed the influence of Impressionism and other modernist trends. Alexander III commissioned artworks from the Peredvizhniki, including Vasilii Dmitrievich, Repin and V. Vasnetsov. His private viewings of the Peredvizhniki’s exhibitions were often led by Kramskoi, one of the Peredvizhniki’s founding

³³¹ “«Как интересно, но жаль, что так плохо освещена.» «Ваша картина никем не заказана? Я ее оставляю за собой.»” V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, February 23, 1887, 379 and V. D. Polenov to M. A. Polenova, February 24, 1887, 379-380.

members. In addition to *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, he purchased eleven other works immediately after viewing the 1887 exhibition.

While his acquisitions and patronage extended beyond the purview of the Academy, Alexander III was not at all averse to censorship when outraged by a painting's content or style. As mentioned above, he ordered Repin's *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1531*, removed from the 1885 exhibition. That Vasilii Dmitrievich's depiction of the human Christ was acceptable, but still a controversial subject, is illustrated by the fact that in 1890 Alexander III forbade a series of paintings by N. N. Ge, *What is Truth? (Christ and Pilate)* («Что есть истина?». Христос и Пилат), *The Sanhedrin Trial (Condemned to Death)* (Суд Синедриона (Повинен смерти)), and *The Crucifixion (Распятие)* from being shown in any government-sponsored space, which essentially meant anywhere in public.³³²

Thus, while the Peredvizhniki had acquired the support of the imperial family, exhibiting with them was still risky for a young artist. Nevertheless, having access to an elite market was attractive to many among the younger generation and spurred them to submit works for exhibition. Polenova's foray into oil painting was in part motivated by this issue. Continuing to work in watercolors would mean that she would be limited to smaller exhibitions under the auspices of groups like the Moscow Society. Given Polenova's constant financial concerns, that oil paintings simply commanded greater prices on the art market was also probably no small motivating factor.

In late 1888 Polenova began another oil painting specifically for exhibition. She showed her sketches to the Thursday crowd and, after all reacted positively, she planned to try to finish it

³³² Lapshin, "Poslednii imperator," 545-549. Ge made three versions of *The Crucifixion*. The 1894 version was exhibited with the Peredvizhniki.

for the upcoming Periodic Exhibition.³³³ Polenova fretted that the Abramtsevo workshop was taking up too much of her time and she would not finish it by the deadline.³³⁴ In addition, her colleagues cautioned her not to be in a hurry with oil painting, for it would be much better not to exhibit that year than to show poor works.³³⁵ She still worried about not participating in the exhibition, but it all turned out in her favor.

In February 1889, Polenova decided to send the work, entitled *The Organ Grinder* (Шарманщик), to the Peredvizhnik jury.³³⁶ Artists who were not members of the Peredvizhniki were allowed to submit works for inclusion in the annual exhibitions. If accepted, they were listed as “exponents” in the catalogue. After participating as exponents for a number of years, artists were eligible for election to membership. Membership in the organization provided an artist with considerable status in the Russian art world³³⁷ and subsequently increased their works’ value on the art market.

I have been unable to trace *The Organ Grinder*, but Polenova described it to Mamontova in a letter: “My picture presents a street, that is, not a street but rather an alleyway. It had snowed, then thawed. There is slop, puddles; in the distance dark clouds have formed (it is near evening); in the sky there’s some golden light and clouds are passing over. In the foreground a family of Italian organ grinders are walking: father, mother and three little ones.”³³⁸ In other words, it was a genre picture of street life in Moscow. Polenova’s choice of genre subjects for

³³³ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 20/December 2, 1888, 401.

³³⁴ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 7/19, 1888, 404.

³³⁵ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 11, 1888, 405.

³³⁶ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 12/24, 1889, 412. In the exhibition catalog the painting was entitled *Wandering Musicians: Organ Grinders* (Странствующие музыканты. Шарманщики.), Sakharova, *Khronika*, 758 n 11.

³³⁷ Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 130.

³³⁸ “Картинка моя предствалает улицу, т.е. не улицу, а переулок — был снег, потом оттепель, стоит месиво, лужи, вдали разорвались тучи (дело под вечер), на небе желтый просвет и несутся облака, а на первом плане идет семья итальянцев-шарманщиков: отец, мать и трое ребятишек.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 7/19, 1888, 403.

her oil paintings may have arisen from genuine interest, but it is also the case that genre paintings were considered more suitable subjects for women, a fact that women artists often exploited to their benefit.³³⁹ In addition, since she had not been trained in monumental painting, it was practical to concentrate on smaller images.

Polenova was so nervous about the jury results that she was unable to work for the entire week after sending *The Organ Grinder* off. On the day of the decisions, she and a group of young Moscow artists decided to go to a street fair to sketch and to try to keep their minds off the jury deliberations. She was thrilled when she received a telegram from Vasilii Dmitrievich informing her that *The Organ Grinder* had been accepted.³⁴⁰ The jury, which consisted of Peredvizhnik members, voted fifteen to one to accept her work.³⁴¹ Afterwards she wrote Mamontova, “I’m so glad this stupid state of anticipation has ended. Now I can work again with new strength, for I was simply stupefied by that uncertain state. There is no comparing it—I worried more about this little painting than when I sent my *Icon Painting Workshop* for the contest.”³⁴²

In another letter to Mamontova, she noted her surprise at Repin’s response (as reported by Vasilii Dmitrievich) to her work,

Just imagine what he writes: “Among the exponents Repin likes Konstantin Korovin and Elena Polenova most of all. About the latter’s picture he says that ‘this is such an excellent piece, so strong, truthful, that, if you will, there is no

³³⁹ Nochlin, “Why Have There Been,” 159-160; Garb, *Women Impressionists*, 6; and Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, 232.

³⁴⁰ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 20/March 4, 1889, 413.

³⁴¹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 23, 1889, 417.

³⁴² “Я очень рада, что кончилось это глупое состояние ожидания. Теперь опять с новыми силами примусь за дело, а то просто я поглупела от этого нерешительного положения. Никакого сравнения, как я больше волновалась из-за этой картинки, чем, когда я послала на конкурс свою «Иконописную».” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 20/March 4, 1889, 414. I have been unable to determine if the jury selections were blind. That seems to have been standard practice for organizations like the Moscow Society, so it is likely the Peredvizhniki followed the practice. There is, however, the possibility that her work was chosen because of her brother’s status.

other like it in the exhibition. (!?) It is a pity only that there is no Russian peasant woman on the path on the right side, so it would be clearer that this is Russia, which is necessary, otherwise the subject does not come out right.” That’s how Repin showered praise on your Alena.³⁴³

Clearly she remained suspicious of any praise coming from Repin, but was still pleased to receive it. His reaction also indicates a concern common to the Peredvizhniki and other artists of the period: that scenes from Russian life be clearly indicated as such. In his view, this street scene is not marked with Russianness, of which the supreme emblem would be a Russian peasant woman in folk costume! This gendering of national identity has long been a part of Russian culture. The word Russia is itself grammatically feminine and the most common term for “homeland” in Russian is *rodina* (родина), which is also feminine, hence the common epithet Mother Russia.³⁴⁴

Interestingly, Polenova put a price of 250 rubles on *The Organ Grinder*,³⁴⁵ which is far above the prices she had commanded in the past, but not very high for a work at a Peredvizhnik exhibition. I have no evidence to indicate the painting sold, but her acceptance impelled her to send works to the Peredvizhnik jury each year through 1895. In spite of her initial excitement, the sheen of the Peredvizhniki quickly wore off. Indeed, in just a few short years Polenova found herself embroiled in a battle between the old guard of the Peredvizhniki and the younger

³⁴³ “Представь, что он пишет, «Репину из экспонентов более всего нравится Константин Коровин и Елена Поленова, про картину последней он говорит, что «это такая превосходная вещь, такая сильная, правдивая, что, пожалуй, второй такой на выставке нет. (!?) Одно жаль, что нет на правом тротуаре русской бабы, чтобы было яснее видно, что это в России, что необходимо, иначе не выходит сюжет.» Каково, как твою Алену—Репин расхвалил.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 23, 1889, 417. The (!?) is Polenova's addition. Alena or Alenushka is a nickname Mamontova gave to Polenova. Alena is a traditional Russian name, whereas Elena (Helena) became a popular name from Russia's Byzantine associations.

³⁴⁴ For more on the feminine aspects of the Russian land and identity in the nineteenth century and before, see Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) and Ivanits, *Folk Belief*, esp. 3-37.

³⁴⁵ E. D. Polenova to I. S. Ostroukhov, February 1889, 412.

generation of artists. I will speak more of this controversy and its significance for Russian artists, women in particular, in the next chapter.

2.10 THE PHANTOM MAKES HIS APPEARANCE

In the summers of 1887-1889, the Polenovs spent time at Zhukovka, a dacha settlement along the Kliaz'ma river. While suburban dachas first appeared in eighteenth-century Russia, they became a distinct cultural phenomenon in the nineteenth century. By mid-century, as the urban middle classes and transportation networks expanded, spending summers outside the city ceased to be a gentry privilege. Many estate owners in need of extra income divided their properties into dacha plots and rented them out to this new group of consumers, especially the intelligentsia. By the 1860s, dacha settlements had become fixed in Russian culture as a space of healthy retreat from the artifices and hazards of urban life. For artists, the dacha provided an opportunity to enjoy a low-maintenance lifestyle that allowed them to concentrate on their work, especially plein air painting.³⁴⁶

As in Moscow, the Polenovs gathered a group of younger artists around them at their dacha, where summers were spent on sketching exhibitions, critique sessions and preparing works for exhibition.³⁴⁷ Works created at Zhukovka show the increasing interest among Russian artists in Impressionism and plein air painting. It was also there that Polenova's relationship with Iakunchikova began to flourish based on their shared artistic interests. Iakunchikova was still a teenager, but one who had already proven herself talented in the arts and astutely

³⁴⁶ For an in-depth study of the dacha in Russian culture, see Steven Cornell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha 1710-2000* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

³⁴⁷ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 28-29.

perceptive of the world around her. Natal'ia Vasil'evna's description of the seventeen-year-old Iakunchikova provides insight into what attracted Polenova to her. "This is truly a type of girl rarely found in our times. On the one hand, she's very mature and, on the other, childishly naïve. It's so interesting to read with her. ... With her you can talk and analyze, just as with a big girl, and a rare type of big girl at that."³⁴⁸

Like Polenova, Iakunchikova was also immersed in collecting folk objects. In a letter to Natal'ia Vasil'evna of June 24, 1887, she wrote:

[D]on't think that it's boring here. On the contrary it's even very merry, there are all kinds of things to do, but the most interesting is to seek out wood carvings. I already traveled and walked around seven villages and found thirteen objects, not a brilliant success, as you see, but I really like it and if I find something my joy is boundless. I regret that I can't drag you to see my little wooden things.³⁴⁹

She illustrated some of her "little wooden things" in the margins of this letter, demonstrating a keen eye for observation and capturing detail, even in a little sketch. She also noted that the local peasant women did not wear the printed calicoes common in most of the Central Industrial Region around Moscow, but rather a type of linen fabric that was dyed without being bleached first,³⁵⁰ which indicates she was also paying attention to costume.

She seemed to be as accepting of country life, however, than Polenova. In a letter to Natal'ia Vasil'evna the next summer Iakunchikova complained, "As I see, you're living as

³⁴⁸ "Это, право, редкая в наше время девушка. Так она уже зредо развита, с одной стороны, и детски наивна—с другой. Как интересны с ней чтения. ... С ней можно говорить и судить, как с большой, да и редкой большой." N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, June 15, 1887, 383.

³⁴⁹ "[Н]е думай что здесь скучно, напротив очень даже весело, занятя самый разнообразные, но самое интересное—это разыскивать резные вещи; я уж объезжала и обошла семь деревень и нашла 13 предметов, успех как видишь не блестящий, но это-то мне и нравится потому что если уж нахожу что-нибудь, то радости моей нет конца. Жалею что нельзя будет тащить показывать тебе мои деревяшки." M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, June 24, 1887, 383 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12202, sheet 1. The Russian is a bit unclear. The last sentence could also be translated, "I regret that I cannot drag my little wooden things [with me] to show you." The "here" in this excerpt is the Iakunchikovs' dacha at Morevo, 50 miles west of Moscow, a region that figures prominently in her work and in her nostalgic longings for Russia while abroad.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 383-384 and Ibid., sheet 2.

before, but it's a completely different story here. Everything is terribly primitive and patriarchal, even kind of monastic. ... The whole day we're in the company of all kinds of Petruskhas, Aleshkas, Vasilisas, Matreshkas, Grushas, Nikitas, etc., so that I'm afraid for my language, of completely unlearning how to talk as educated people should."³⁵¹ Although Iakunchikova was independent and had little use for old-fashioned mores, her use of the terms "primitive" and "patriarchal" indicates less of a feminist outlook than a political stance common among the merchant elite. The gentry and intelligentsia had consistently condemned the Russian merchant estate for its adherence to traditional, strongly patriarchal, ways of life. These stereotypes were so strong that the gentry and intelligentsia referred to the world of the merchant estate as the "kingdom of darkness." Thus, there was considerable anxiety among the Moscow merchant elite about anything that would give others cause to condemn them for backwardness. This was compounded by the fact that many of the elite merchants were but a couple of generations removed from their peasant forebears.³⁵² Iakunchikova's comments about the way of life and concerns about her language skills point to elite merchants' fear of being perceived as uneducated inhabitants of the "kingdom of darkness."

That Polenova's and Iakunchikova's friendship had become quite strong by this point is indicated by the fact that, when Polenova arrived at Zhukovka in July 1888, Iakunchikova was impatiently waiting for them to go out sketching together. Earlier in the day she had canvassed the area and had picked out a number of spots for them to work. Polenova reported that upon her

³⁵¹ "Как вижу живете по прежнему а у нас здесь совсем другая песня, все как то ужасно примитивно и патриархально, даже как то по монашески. ... Целый день находимся в компании всяких Петрушек Алёшек Василис Матрешек Груш Никиток и т.п. так что боюсь за свой язык, как бы совсем не разучиться говорить как следует благовоспитным людям." M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, August 23, 1888, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12211, sheet 1. The names Iakunchikova lists are traditional Russian names typical of the peasantry.

³⁵² Ruckman, *Business Elite*, 6-14, 51-52; Joseph Bradley, "Merchant Moscow After Hours: Voluntary Associations and Leisure," in *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*, ed. James L. West and Iurii A. Petrov (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 133-143; and Owen, *Capitalism*, 10-12.

arrival at five in the afternoon, the group of artists hurriedly drank tea and then they all—Vasilii Dmitrievich, Korovin, Ostroukhov, Iakunchikova and Polenova—set off to the right bank of the Kliaz'ma river and sketched until sunset, which at that time of year in Russia is 11:00 or so, making for a lengthy session.³⁵³

In 1888 Korovin was at Zhukovka as well. This friendly group of artists appears in a number of Korovin's better known works. He painted *At the Tea Table* (Чайный стол) there, which shows Polenova with her back to the viewer, Natal'ia Vasil'evna next to the samovar, and Iakunchikova in profile in her sailor suit.³⁵⁴ For this work, Korovin won second place in the genre category at the Society of Lovers of Art's contest the same year.³⁵⁵ Korovin also created *In the Boat* at Zhukovka, which shows Iakunchikova at the rudder and a male member of the group reading.³⁵⁶

These works demonstrate the increasing interest in Impressionism that the younger generation of Russian artists displayed, especially those associated with the Abramtsevo circle, whose members had long advocated plein-air painting.³⁵⁷ Korovin in particular was recognized for this,³⁵⁸ but he was not alone. Serov's 1888 *Girl With Peaches* (Девочка с персиками) had startled the Russian public with its light and color. In addition, among the elder generation, Repin had experimented with Impressionist light effects in works such as *They Did Not Expect Him* (Не ждали, 1884) and Vasilii Dmitrievich was known for concentrating on the effects of

³⁵³ N. V. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, July 12, 1888, 396-397.

³⁵⁴ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 29.

³⁵⁵ E.D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 8/20, 1888, 404.

³⁵⁶ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 29. Sakharova states that the man is Vasilii Dmitrievich, but the figure in the painting appears to be much younger than he would be at this time. It is possible that it was Korovin himself, for the figure has a resemblance to his self-portraits. In addition, Korovin had a crush on Iakunchikova, which became evident in the early 1890s.

³⁵⁷ Gray, "Identity," 118.

³⁵⁸ Korovin soon became known for infusing his Impressionism with lyricism, which is also present in Iakunchikova's works. Grigorii Iur'evich Sternin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Rossii na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970) 139-140.

light as far back as his *Moscow Courtyard* (Московский дворик) of 1878. As a result of an educational system in which students learned by studying the works of their teachers, it is not surprising that Polenov's students would be interested in similar uses of light and color.³⁵⁹

Polenova found the group that gathered at Zhukovka inspiring, telling Antipova, "I have fallen into a company of rare artistic talent [I]n a word, there are people here to learn from and I need to make use of that."³⁶⁰ At the same time, she confessed about her work, "Unfortunately, it sometimes turns out that you work and it seems to be terrible, and then you look and you've done something. The next time you do a lot and are satisfied at that moment, then you look and in the end you've barely advanced. Our craft is so capricious in this way."³⁶¹ This statement underscores the elusive quality of artistic creation Polenova experienced.

It was here at Zhukovka that the phantom made his first appearance. References to inspiration first occur in a letter Polenova wrote to Mamontova. She stated that Iakunchikova was impatiently waiting for her arrival so she could get a full dose of artistic inspiration.³⁶² This comment shows how much Iakunchikova valued Polenova's presence and knowledge and that Polenova recognized this aspect of their relationship. Later that summer, Iakunchikova wrote to her sister, saying, "Please give my most heartfelt greetings to Elena Dmitrievna and wish that *it* does not abandon her. As far as I'm concerned, tell her that *it* is already encircling me. If I stay here a long time and conditions do not change then *it* will enter me, but if I plan on leaving then

³⁵⁹ Mamontova, "Polenov i molodaia," 87.

³⁶⁰ "[Я] попала в компанию на редкость художественную [С]ловом, есть у кого поучиться и нужно пользоваться этим." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, July 25, 1888, 397.

³⁶¹ "К сожалению, бывает и так: работаешь, кажется, отвратительно, а поглядишь—и сделал кое что. А в другой раз—и много, и в данную минуту удовлетворен, а смотришь: в итоге очень мало двинул дело. Такое уж это наше ремесло капризное." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, August 22, 1888, 398.

³⁶² E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 12, 1888, 396.

it will go away. Therefore, I don't want to get my things together—I'm afraid of scaring *it*.³⁶³ At this point, the neuter gender of the Russian pronoun makes it clear that Iakunchikova is avoiding saying the word “inspiration” rather than the masculine noun “phantom” that she and Polenova would soon begin to use instead. While it would be a few more months before the phantom proper appeared in their correspondence, it is evident at this point that inspiration already had attained a mystical aura, at least for Iakunchikova, and merely pronouncing the word might scare it away.

2.11 IAKUNCHIKOVA'S TRAVEL ADVENTURES AND THE POWER OF OBSERVATION

In 1887 Iakunchikova traveled south to Yalta and then abroad for the first time. Her observations during her travels show how she perceived the world and that her skills of observation were already highly developed. They also indicate her early opinions about art and interests that would be a significant part of her oeuvre. Thus, in this section I examine her travel writings in detail.

The Iakunchikovs' trip to Yalta in the fall of 1887 provided further stimulus to her developing observational skills. Vasilii Dmitrievich joined them in Yalta after being diagnosed

³⁶³ “Самый сердечный привет Елене Дмитриевне желай чтобы *оно* не покидало ее, что же касается до меня, то скажи ей что *оно* уже ходит вокруг меня и если я здесь долго останусь, и обстоятельства не изменятся, то войдет в меня и если соберусь уезжать, то уйдет, потому то я еще не хочу собираться боюсь *его* испугать.” M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, August 11, 1888, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Section, fond 54, no. 12209, sheets 1-2. Emphasis in the original.

with an alarming combination of neurasthenia, hysteria and hypochondria.³⁶⁴ He reported on Iakunchikova's *joie de vivre*, "Masha is in ecstasy over nature and bathing and is wearing the same sailor suit as with us in Zhukovka."³⁶⁵

Iakunchikova, meanwhile, wrote to her sister that she was not able to paint much and missed her drawing classes and Zhukovka, though they were able to make photographs, which was a consolation.³⁶⁶ The Yalta trip was rich with experiences, including a visit to a mosque to observe services, which "had a special effect on us. The event was towards evening and when all the candles had been lit and this gave the entire ceremony a kind of solemn and reverent character."³⁶⁷

That autumn Iakunchikova made her first trip abroad. While she was initially hesitant about taking the trip due to family tensions,³⁶⁸ she soon began to make preparations with the help of Natal'ia Vasil'evna. Like most upper-class nineteenth-century travelers, Iakunchikova read various Baedeker guides in preparation for the trip, which was planned for Abbazia, Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples, Marseilles, and Paris.³⁶⁹ During this journey Iakunchikova kept a diary in the form of letters to her mother and Natal'ia Vasil'evna, and made many sketches. Both

³⁶⁴ V. D. Polenova to V. M. Vasnetsov, January 8, 1888, 392. Vasilii Dmitrievich managed to keep his sense of humor about it, joking to Vasnetsov that his diagnosis was "a nice fur overcoat" (шуба хорошая).

³⁶⁵ "Маша в упоении от природы и куания и отчета таким же матросом, как у нас в Жуковке." V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, September 1, 1887, 386.

³⁶⁶ M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, September 9, 1887, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Section, fond 54, no. 12205, sheet 1 and M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, September 9, 1887, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Section, fond 54, no. 12206, sheet 1.

³⁶⁷ "она произвела на нас какое то особенное впечатлени, дело было к вечеру были зажжены свечи и это придавало всей церемонии какой то торжественный и благоговейный характер." M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, September 3-4, 1887, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12203, sheet 1.

³⁶⁸ M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, August 23, 1888, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12211, sheet 3.

³⁶⁹ N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, September 29, 1888, 400.

reveal the interesting combination of naïveté and maturing artistic talent that characterize the eighteen-year-old Iakunchikova.³⁷⁰

The notebook she used was a gift from a fellow traveler, an Englishman. She was fascinated by it because it came with a carbon sheet, “An amazingly practical invention—it’s a whole booklet, and while I write, a copy of my letter is made on the next page so I can keep it for myself.”³⁷¹ She made a point of noting both the date and the time for each entry. Her first day on the train is marked by observations of the landscape and people she sees, highlighting her attentiveness to details. “At the stations I’ve noticed one thing I have never paid attention to: all the people who are visible on the platform, i.e., gendarmes, conductors, other kinds of men, etc., have a kind of distracted and indifferent expression. They all stand either with their hands in their pockets or clasped behind their backs and somehow look through all objects into the distance.”³⁷² In this entry she also characterizes the landscape: “The landscape in the window is unchanging: field, yellow grass, lilac distance, scattered clumps of juniper, swamp, bare forest, etc. ... We don’t stop at the little stations. How sad it is to look at them: bare poplars, starling houses, and unlit lamps.”³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Kislev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 8-10.

³⁷¹ “Удивительно практичное изобретение-это целая книжка, и во то время как я пишу на другой бумажке отпечатывается копия с моею письма которую я могу остваить себе.” *Diary of M. V. Iakunchikova*, October 4, 1887, Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12212, sheet 1; Stupples, “Letters 1888,” 115. When in Moscow for dissertation research I found this diary at the Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division. Upon returning to the US, I discovered that it had been published (in Russian) twenty years prior by Dr. Peter Stupples. I am citing both versions for completeness, especially since the Stupples publication is more accessible to researchers. Whereas Stupples cleaned up Iakunchikova’s punctuation, or, more accurately, the relative lack thereof, I have left it as it appears in the original to better give a flavor of her rush to record everything.

³⁷² “На станциях я заметила одну вещь на которую прежде не обращала внимания: у всех людей которых бывает видно на платформе т.е. жандармов, кондукторов мужиков каких то и т.д., какое то разсеяннo равнодушноe выражение все стоят или руки во кармане или заложив за спину и смотрят как то через все предметы вдаль.” *Ibid.*, sheets 1-2; *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁷³ “В окошке пейзаж не изменяется: поле, желтая трава лиловая даль, разбросанные клочки жежевельника болотце голый лес и т.п. ... На маленьких полустанках не останавливаемся; как грустно на них смотреть голые тополя, свкоречники, незажженные фонари.” *Ibid.*, sheets 2-4; *Ibid.*, 116.

The next day the landscape proved even worse, “What unattractive nature: flat, flat field, gray grass, pure pine forest in which the pines look more like long needles with a bunch of gray moss on top. It’s terribly lifeless and colorless.”³⁷⁴ Things improved as they approached Vienna, [I]n the distance the hills are covered with golden trees, little white houses, white churches with steep red roofs. Green grass, pathways, a gray sky and damp air, it is terribly good. ... Two soldiers completely in black except for orange stripes on their collars passed by, they look a lot like conductors, but it is handsome, what thin shoes and without spurs. I have the exact same feeling that I had when I saw the wooden church this summer, everything in a picture is suddenly before my eyes.³⁷⁵

In other words, everything was abruptly made tangible because she could really see it.

As soon as they arrived in Vienna they threw themselves into the music and arts scene. On their first night they saw Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado*, which Iakunchikova characterized as “banal, but amazingly staged.”³⁷⁶ On their second day they visited St. Stephen’s Cathedral. Iakunchikova was disappointed by the linearity of its stained-glass windows, but was impressed overall. She was particularly pleasantly surprised by the hymns. “Suddenly the organ began to play and all those present began to sing. What a wonderful custom!”³⁷⁷ From there they went to the Hofburg, arriving just in time to witness the Kaiser’s departure, accompanied by much fanfare. The rest of the day was a disappointment: more churches and the exhibition at the Rotunda in the Prater (a remnant of the 1873 World’s Fair), which irritatingly lacked art. In the evening, after a performance of *Die Fledermaus*, Iakunchikova made an interesting observation about being abroad:

³⁷⁴ “Какая непривлекательная природа ровное, ровное поле серая трава чистый сосновой лес у которого сосны больше похожи на длинные иголки с пучечкаму серого моза на верхушке—ужасно безжизненно и не колоритно.” Ibid., October 5, sheet 5; Ibid., 117.

³⁷⁵ “[В]дали холмы покрытыми желтым лесом, белые домики, белые церкви с острыми красными крышами. Зеленая трава тропинки серое небо и сырой воздух, ужасно хорошо. ... Вот прошли два военных совсем в черном только нашивки оранжевые на воротнике; очень похожи на кондукторов, но это красиво, какие тонкие башмаки и без шпор. Совсем такое же чувство у меня, как когда я увидела летом деревянную церков, все на картинке, а тут вдруг на яву.” Ibid., October 6, sheet 15; Ibid., 120.

³⁷⁶ “довольно плоская вещь, но удивительно поставлена” Ibid., sheet 16; Ibid.

³⁷⁷ “Вот заиграл орган и все присутствующие запели, какой чудный обычай!” Ibid., October 7, sheet 20; Ibid., 122. The parishioners do not sing in Orthodox Churches. The service is sung by the officiating clergyman and the choir.

By the way, I have the strange feeling that all the people I see here don't have the usual human aspects: loves, families, children, grandmothers, classes, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, tea at home in the evenings, their own horses, their own houses, etc., but everything is wonderful, wonderful streets, luxurious carriages, hotels, restaurants, theaters, galleries, etc. This is precisely all done so that foreigners can delight in it all and then go to their homelands to set up something like it.³⁷⁸

Here we see a moment where Iakunchikova analyzes her perceptions and concludes with a view of the tourist industry that is unusually cynical for someone of her age. It is notable that Russians abroad tended to perceive non-Russians as lacking “soul,” as devoid of the human aspects, especially emotion, that Russians perceive in themselves.³⁷⁹ In spite of feeling particularly Russian at times, however, Iakunchikova reported that everyone thought they were English, perhaps because of her father's anglophilia.³⁸⁰ At the very least, it indicates that this group did not meet Europeans' stereotypes about Russians.

In Vienna they took a trip around the recently finished Ringstrasse. “My God what a heavy impression it made! Dozens of buildings, one more luxurious and enormous than the other ... in a word, unimaginable luxury. ... My soul lightened when, via various alleyways in the Hofburg, we returned to my beloved Kärnthner-Strasse with its side streets and old houses. What a sweet roof Michaelerkirche has—red tiles with white crosses.”³⁸¹ Clearly, Iakunchikova felt more at home among less monumental structures, which perhaps reminded her of the architecture of Moscow. The rest of the Vienna trip was filled with musical events and a trip to

³⁷⁸ “Между прочим, странное чувство будто у всех людей который видно здесь, нет обыкновенных человеческих сторон, любви, семьи, детей, бабушек, сословий мужа жены отца матери домашнюю вечернюю чаю своих лошадей своего дома и т. п. а все только чудные чудные улицы роскошные извозчики hotel'и рестораны театры галлерей и т.д. Точно это все сделано для того чтобы иностранцам можно было восторгаться всем этим и ехать на родину учреждать что нибудь вроде этого.” Ibid., sheets 23-24; Ibid., 123.

³⁷⁹ For more on this phenomenon see Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions in Classical Russian Travel Writing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

³⁸⁰ Iakunchikova, “Diary,” October 9, sheet 27; Stupples, “Letters 1888,” 124.

³⁸¹ “Боже какое тягостное вынесла впечатление! Десятки строения одно роскошнее и громаднее другого ... словом роскошь невообразимая. ... На душе стало легче когда мы через разные переходы Hofburg вернулись на мною возлюбленную Kärnthner-Strasse с ее переулками и старыми домами. Какая милая крыша у Michaelerkirche, красная черпичная с белыми крестами.” Ibid., sheets 28-29; Ibid., 124-125.

the Academy and the Lichtenstein Gallerie, where Iakunchikova was especially impressed by Tintoretto, Chardin and works of the Northern Renaissance.³⁸² Tintoretto continued to be a point of fascination for Iakunchikova throughout the trip.

Next was Abbazia (now Opatija, Croatia), with which she was not terribly impressed. When they reached Venice, however, she was stunned. The interior of San Marco left her speechless, “I simply don’t know what to say. The amazing, dim gold tone of the mosaics and the vaults that are so familiar, like ours. Here and there the sun comes in through windows and a blue fog slips through the air. Most of the church is in half light and the little lamps illuminate amazing, textured walls here and there with red light.”³⁸³ Her observations make clear her keen eye for color and light effects, something that would be a constant presence in her art work in later years.

Iakunchikova paid special attention to Tintoretto when visiting museums and galleries, especially the Palazzo Ducale. While she did not name any specific works, she noted that the latter had “an incredible number of ceilings by Veronese and my beloved Tintoretto.”³⁸⁴ About her visit to the Academy di Belle Arti, however, she wrote, “[I]t was interesting, Titian’s painting *L’assomption de la Vierge* and Tintoretto’s *Le miracle de S. Marc* are especially good. In the rest of the things they repeat themselves. I don’t know, Tintoretto has an inexplicable attraction for me. There’s something terribly original in him, one can say partly wild, powerful, it doesn’t suit him to paint sickly sweet Virgins with tender babes, he certainly needs a drama

³⁸² Ibid., October 10, sheets 32, 36; Ibid., 126, 127.

³⁸³ “Просто не знаю что сказать; чудный тусклый тон золота мозаики, а наши такие близкие знакомые своды. Солнце кое где проникает в окна и каким то голубым туманом скользит в воздухе; большая же часть церкви в полумраке и лампадки кое где красным светом овсецают помятые чудные стены.” Ibid., October 24, sheet 46; Ibid., 134.

³⁸⁴ “страшное количество плафонов Веронеза и моего возлюбленного Tintoretto.” Ibid., October 25, sheet 48; Ibid., 135.

taken from life or a portrait.”³⁸⁵ This observation evidences her interest in not only the formal aspects of painting, but also paintings that show “dramas taken from life.” While few of her works may be characterized as “dramatic,” they are all taken from her experience of life and its dramas, especially internal ones.

That Iakunchikova continued to be concerned with light and color is evident in her description of Venice itself: “The weather is very cold. The rain is not letting up and the water in the canals is an amazing soapy blue tone. In general, the streets and canals here are so indescribably beautiful that you simply get a lump in your throat. The tones are absolutely specific and exactly the same color as the word Venice. The predominant tones are green-blue, green-yellow, red and pink-pêche.”³⁸⁶ She frequently mentions sketching from the window of their hotel, even though, “From our window we do not have a view of the kind of charming street like in other places.”³⁸⁷ A sketch she made in Venice shows the influence of Impressionism in its brushwork,³⁸⁸ though the slightly muddy colors indicate she had not quite yet mastered Impressionist light effects. This would come soon enough.

Iakunchikova’s notes from Florence do not mention much in the way of particular artists. They visited the Uffizi and all the significant sites, but, as Iakunchikova wrote Natal’ia Vasil’evna, “I’m drinking up everything that I stumble upon and cannot cool down for a minute,

³⁸⁵ “[О]чень интересно, особенно хороша картина Titian L’assomption de la Vierge и Tintoretto le miracle de S. Maria в остальных вещах они повторяются. Я не знаю Tintoretto имеет для меня необъяснимую привлекательность в нем есть что то ужасно оригинальное, можно сказать отчасти дикое могучее, ему не идет писать слащавых Б. Матерей с нежными младенцами, ему надо непременно драму, или жизни портреты.” Ibid., sheets 51-52; Ibid., 136.

³⁸⁶ “Погода стоит очень холодная дождь не перестает и вода в каналах совсем голубовато мыльня чудная тона. Вообще улицы и каналы тут такой красоты неописанной что просто горячо в горле делается. Краски совсем особенные именно такие цвета как слово Венеция. Преобладающие тон зеленый голубоватый зеленый желтоватый рыжий и розовый pêche.” Ibid., October 26, sheet 56; Ibid., 136.

³⁸⁷ “Из окна у нас в номере видно не такую очаровательной улицу как в других местах.” Ibid., sheet 54; Ibid., 136.

³⁸⁸ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 12.

even at night I seem to see frescoes, vaults, streets and green shutters.”³⁸⁹ Her experiences in Rome were colored by a particular incident in the Baths of Caracalla, which, unfortunately, was not uncommon in the nineteenth century.

When you read about it in a book or see it in drawings it is difficult to believe that there could be that kind of luxury during those times, but here all your doubts are destroyed by the indisputable reality. But it makes a horribly strange impression that all the ancient mosaic floors are not particularly cared for and everybody calmly walks on them. One of the guards walked with us and, near the entrance, oh horror, he started to chip up pieces of the mosaic for our pleasure, we of course happily put them in our pockets, but really it’s barbarism, if he does this for all foreigners, what will be left in the end?³⁹⁰

This reaction provides an interesting contrast: while she felt no pangs of guilt about, and even enjoyed, collecting Russian folk art, which often involved removing decorative portions of peasant cottages, taking a piece of ancient Roman mosaic did produce guilt. Perhaps this is because Russian folk art seemed present and ubiquitous, though endangered, whereas the Roman mosaics were singular works of art in need of careful preservation. It may also point to a traditionally hierarchical conception of ancient decorative art versus living folk art.

The party continued on, visiting the catacombs, the Colloseum, and the Palatine Hill. Interestingly, she reported that St. Peter’s left her cold,³⁹¹ suggesting that, as in Vienna, it was not the monumental that attracted her, but the picturesque. This is further suggested by a letter she wrote to Natal’ia Vasil’evna, “On the first day I not only didn’t like [Rome], but it repelled me.

³⁸⁹ “Впитываю в себя все на что натыкаюсь и не минуты не могу охладиться даже ночью, чудятся мне какие то фрески своды улицы зеленые ставни.” Iakunchikova, “Diary,” October 3, sheets 66-67; Stupples, “Letters 1888,” 140-141. Though Iakunchikova’s letter is dated October 3, the actual date they would have been in Florence was November 3.

³⁹⁰ “Вот когда читаешь в книжке или видишь на рисунках с трудом веришь что могла быть в то время такая роскошь, а тут все сомнения унечтожаются, несомненною действительностью. Но ужасно странное впечатление производит то, что все древние мозаичные полы не особенно охраняются и каждый преспокойно ходит по ним. С нами пошел один из швейцаров находящего у входа и о ужас для нашего удовольствия начал отбивать кусочки мозаики; мы то конечно рады положили в карман, но ведь это варварство, если он для всех иностранцев будет это делать что же останется в конце концов?” Ibid., November 10, sheets 75-76; Ibid., 144.

³⁹¹ Ibid., November 11, sheet 85; Ibid., 147.

Gray weather, dirty, not particularly well planned out and, moreover, insufficiently picturesque. But now, when the sun is out and the sky is blue and we feel at home, it seems to me that I could even live here, more so than in Venice or Florence.”³⁹² The fact that Iakunchikova was initially disappointed in Rome’s lack of “picturesqueness” indicates her attraction to visual detail, but it can also be attributed to an expectation of encounters with the picturesque typical of nineteenth-century travelers. The Iakunchikovs had planned to visit Naples, Marseilles and Paris as well, but their trip was cut short by business troubles requiring Vasilii Ivanovich’s return to Moscow. The death of Elena Vasil’evna, Iakunchikova’s youngest sister, who had fallen ill and remained in Abbazia while the others continued on, also required an immediate return to Abbazia for burial and then on to Moscow for memorial services.³⁹³

Iakunchikova returned from abroad exhausted and grieving, but full of impressions. The trip contributed to her already strongly developed tendency to see the world as composed of specific lines and tones, as Natal’ia Vasil’evna characterized her.³⁹⁴ Polenova was shocked upon seeing Iakunchikova. She fretted to Antipova, “A few days ago Masha Iakunchikova returned from abroad. I am horribly worried about Masha—she’s so thin, nervous, pale, and has back pain.”³⁹⁵ These symptoms may be attributed to the grief of losing a sister, but it is tempting for the researcher with the benefit of hindsight to think that perhaps Polenova had a premonition of Iakunchikova’s fate before anyone else.

³⁹² “Первы день он мне не только не понравился, а показался отвретительным. Серая погода грязно, не особенно акуратно и вместе с тем не достаточно живописно. А теперь когда солнце и голубое небо и мы как то совсем дома, мне кажется, что я бы здесь даже жить могла, скорее чем в Вереции и во Флоренции.” Ibid., November 11, sheets 84-85; Ibid., 146-147.

³⁹³ Stupples, “Letters 1888,” 108.

³⁹⁴ Natal’ia Vasil’evna Polenova, *Mariia Vasil’evna Iakunchikova. 1870-1902*. (Moscow: A. I. Mamontov, 1905), 9.

³⁹⁵ “На днях возвратилась из-за границы Маша Якунчикова. За Машу очень страшно, такая она худая, нервная, бледная, со спинными болями.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 11, 1888, 405.

2.12 FORAYS INTO THE FAIRY TALE WORLD AND CONTINUED SUCCESS AT ABRAMTSEVO

Polenova began to work on her “daring” and “alluring” project, Russian fairy tales, in late 1886. She started with “The Little White Duck” (Белая уточка), which she sketched near the ponds of their first Moscow home. The next three stories she tackled, the “War of the Mushrooms,” “Morozko,” and the “Wolf and the Fox,” were based on sketches made at Abramtsevo.³⁹⁶ Though not the first to work on illustrating fairy tales in Russia,³⁹⁷ Polenova was the first to synthesize folk art, oral folklore, manuscript illumination, medieval architecture and recognizably Russian—at least to a Russian audience—landscapes into a coherent whole that worked to provide a comprehensive atmosphere for a particular tale.³⁹⁸

Letters indicate that Polenova had made considerable progress on the “War of the Mushrooms” and other fairy-tale works by December 1887, for she told Mamontova that she showed them to P. M. Tretyakov during a visit he paid to their house. He was impressed, but commented, “the Vasnetsov school is perceptible.”³⁹⁹ Polenova did not provide her reaction to his observation. In later years she considered V. M. Vasnetsov a great mentor to her, but it is curious that Tretyakov thought her works were so like Vasnetsov’s. Vasnetsov created a number of monumental paintings on Russian folk themes (e.g., *The Flying Carpet* [Ковер самолет; 1880] and *Knight at the Crossroads* [Витязь на распутьи; 1882]), but his painting style differed considerably from Polenova’s. This recalls her complaints that her uncle forced her to make

³⁹⁶ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 756 n 6.

³⁹⁷ For example, Nesterov had been working on illustrating Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin’s retelling of folk tales, which were published in 1888-1889. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 756 n 7.

³⁹⁸ Sternin refers to Polenova’s illustrative work as “a laboratory of style” in which she worked out all the concerns facing Russian artists in the 1890s. *Na rubezhe*, 142.

³⁹⁹ “чувствуется васнецовская школа” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 27, 1887, 391.

frescoes, which would be like putting Vasnetsov to work at ivory miniatures. While Vasnetsov's images are very large, Polenova's are small and show specific moments in a tale rather than creating an epic atmosphere. This is partly due to her purpose of publishing books, but also a fact of her interests and training. Perhaps Tretyakov saw a resemblance in Vasnetsov's set designs, especially those for *The Snow Maiden*, which were considered revolutionary in the world of Russian stage design when the production first debuted.

Meanwhile Polenova continued to work on landscape and folk literature whenever she could, writing to Mamontova from Zhukovka,

Not long ago I began to go to the village with this goal. At first I made the kids talk, but now I've latched myself onto an old man who asked me to paint his portrait. I agreed. During the sittings, he's still like a mannequin, he tries so hard, but during the breaks I make him tell stories and write them down. This is very captivating. The old man is so delighted with his portrait that after the first session suddenly—boom!—he fell at my feet ...⁴⁰⁰

Polenova's language here suggests that she was sensitive to the imposition she made on the peasants. The verb she used, *zastavliat'*, means to make someone do something, to force someone. Although this is twenty years after Emancipation, Polenova's status as a gentry woman would automatically make the peasants assume that she wanted something from them.

Polenova's hopes for her work on folk literature led her to Kostroma in the fall of 1888, where she believed Antipova would be able to help her. The Antipovs had an estate in the deep countryside of Kostroma Province, at Kologrivskii uezd. There Polenova and Antipova sought out locals who could recall folk tales from their childhoods. The wealth of literary and artistic material she and Antipova uncovered caused Polenova to expand her earlier ideas for a series of

⁴⁰⁰ “Недавно стала ходить в деревню с этой целью. Сначала заставила болтать ребят, а теперь попала на старика, который упросил меня написать его портрет. Я согласилась. Во время сеанса он сидит, как манекен, так старается, а во время отдыха я заставляю его сказывать сказки, я сама записываю. Очень это увлекательно. Старик в таком восторге от своего портрета, что после первого сеанса вдруг—бух—мне в ноги ...” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 22, 1888, 397. Ellipsis in the original.

paintings. She also planned to publish a series of illustrated children's books. Unfortunately, only few of these were issued by a German publishing house after Polenova's death.⁴⁰¹

This project and her work at Abramtsevo were not without struggles. The work at Abramtsevo certainly provided her with a lot of material for her illustrations, but it was also an imposition. In December she reported to Mamontova that she had ceased work on her fairy tales because she simply did not have the money for publication and had no desire to work for no reason. Moreover, she did not have the time since the workshop store was doing reasonably well, selling nearly 210 rubles worth of goods in a single week.⁴⁰² During this time Polenova was also concerned that the Abramtsevo peasants worked diligently, but without independence and resourcefulness. Her desire to have the Abramtsevo workshop manufacture innovative products caused her to worry about the carpenters' lack of creativity.⁴⁰³ While she wanted to maintain a certain amount of creative control, she also hoped that the students would eventually learn to create their own designs rather than rotely copying her designs and the designs of others. She and Mamontova believed this would increase their chances of making a decent living in the area rather than having to go to the factories. The production was going well enough that Polenova had to travel to Abramtsevo at least once a week in the winter.⁴⁰⁴

One particular event illustrates the increasing popularity of the Abramtsevo goods, the potential influence of the court nobility, Polenova's skills as a businesswoman, and the synergy between the Abramtsevo products and Polenova's own work. In early December 1886 Natal'ia

⁴⁰¹ The Grossman and Knebel' Publishing House released them in 1906. The publications included *Synko Filipko*, *How the Bear Lost His Tail*, *The Cunning Peasant Man*, *The Kozlikhin Family*, *The Greedy Man*, *The Wicked Step-Mother*, and *The Cat and the Rooster*. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 33. Some of the originals remain in Russian museums.

⁴⁰² E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 30/December 12, 1888, 402 and E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 8/20, 888, 404.

⁴⁰³ E.D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, March 13/25, 1889, 419.

⁴⁰⁴ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 11, 1888, 405.

Nikolaevna Naryshkina, a member of the imperial court, came to the Moscow outlet.⁴⁰⁵ Naryshkina ordered eighty rubles worth of goods and asked Polenova to make thirty mirror frames of about four vershoks⁴⁰⁶ in length, with a handle, for the annual ball she hosted in St. Petersburg. She specifically asked for five to be very ornamental for women of the court and the others to be a bit simpler.⁴⁰⁷

Polenova was not sure what to do. Abramtsevo needed the money, but she feared they might not be able to meet Naryshkina's requirements. In the end, she proposed to Mamontova that she show drawings to Naryshkina and see if the designs suited her.⁴⁰⁸ Naryshkina agreed to Polenova's terms and ordered the mirrors. Polenova hoped to be able to get 130 rubles from Naryshkina for the mirrors, thinking the material costs to Abramtsevo would be approximately thirty rubles. If they managed this sum, it would cover their debts.⁴⁰⁹ This makes one wonder whether Polenova was trying to exploit an incredibly wealthy member of the aristocracy for Abramtsevo's gain. I have no statistics regarding the usual markup for such goods at the time, but 100 rubles profit was no mean sum.

The mirror frames produced at Abramtsevo draw on traditional wood carving styles that were widespread throughout Russia. Ornamental wood carving was part of peasants' everyday lives and was found especially on implements women used for processing flax into linen and washing clothing. It was not uncommon for a young man to spend hours carving a battledore or spindle for his betrothed. By this time the collection of folk objects at Abramtsevo had grown quite large and Polenova had a wealth of materials to study for her designs. In the end, Polenova

⁴⁰⁵ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 3/15, 1888, 403.

⁴⁰⁶ A vershok is an old Russian measurement equal to 4.4 cm (1.7 in.).

⁴⁰⁷ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 3/15, 1888, 403.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 18/30, 1888, 405-406.

produced thirty different designs and Iakunchikova helped her paint the frames once they were finished, an early example of their artistic collaboration. The mirror frames were sent to Petersburg in time for Naryshkina's ball and they were a huge success, producing many new orders for the Abramtsevo workshop.⁴¹⁰

In spite of the time taken up by the Abramtsevo work and Polenova's continuing concern about not being able to publish her works, by the end of December Polenova had returned to folk tales. She also told Mamontova that if by March she received the income Konstantin Dmitrievich anticipated from the family estate for that year, she would be able to start publication.⁴¹¹ As she had written to Antipova, fairy tales and folk tales were important to her because of their connection to a living Russian heritage, something she also sought for the Abramtsevo goods.

By January 1889 Polenova was working almost exclusively on fairy tales, writing the texts and illustrating them. She was using the version of "Morozko" she had heard in Kostroma, and changed her illustrations accordingly. For "Ivan the Fool" (Иванушка дурачок) she decided to use the version she heard near Abramtsevo rather than Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanans'ev's text, because it was condensed and easier to put together with illustrations.⁴¹² This process demonstrates that Polenova was concerned with how her books would work as coherent wholes, rather than just providing illustrations to stories, of which more will be said below.

⁴¹⁰ Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 87-88.

⁴¹¹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, December 26, 1888, 406. In Russia many of the gentry lived mostly by the income their estates produced. Her brother was managing one of the family estates and would distribute the income among his siblings.

⁴¹² E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, January 8, 1889, 409. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanas'ev (1826-1871) was a significant contributor to the development of archaeology and ethnography in Russia. Inspired by the Brothers Grimm, he published a three-volume annotated collection of Russian folk and fairy tales from 1857 to 1862 and a three-volume study of Slavic folk belief between 1865 and 1869. Both of these collections were well known in their time and remain invaluable resources. They furthered the interest in Russian identity among intellectuals.

Her investigations of printing processes, including typography and lithography, indicated that it would not be terribly expensive to publish her works, so she decided to move forward with “War of the Mushrooms.”⁴¹³ Her Moscow friends provided her with inspiration and encouragement. She wrote to Mamontova, “Tomorrow we, in the same artistic company, plan to go to the mushroom market. I am going to take in the Russian spirit for [my] fairy tales, the others, the genre painters, are going to observe types.”⁴¹⁴ She was happy with the outing. She made sketches at the market and purchased a few clay toy animals, which she thought would be good for her fairy-tale work.⁴¹⁵ By March, Polenova was relieved to have finally paid off her debts and had 1000 rubles to put towards publishing “War of the Mushrooms.”⁴¹⁶

In December 1889 her edition of “War of the Mushrooms” finally came out, but Polenova was disappointed in it. She sent a copy to Antipova, commenting,

I can’t say that I’m completely satisfied with it. I myself made a lot of mistakes due to my lack of experience, the thing is completely new. It’s unavoidable—lessons are always learned the hard way. I started too late, too close to the holidays, so I terribly hurried the publication, and this rush, it seems, was to the detriment of the whole affair. In spite of everything, I’m happy that I took it on, because if I hadn’t started now, perhaps these things would have never seen the light of day. And now two publishers are proposing to buy future tales.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹³ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, January 15, 1889, 409.

⁴¹⁴ “Завтра мы в той же художественной компании собираемся на Грибной рынок. Я—набирать русского духа для сказок, другие—жанристы, наблюдать типы.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 20/March 4, 1889, 414.

⁴¹⁵ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 23, 1889, 417.

⁴¹⁶ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, March 13/25, 1889, 419.

⁴¹⁷ “Я не могу сказать, чтобы я была им вполне довольна. Много по неопытности сделала я сама ошибок, дело совсем новое, без этого невозможно—уроки всегда обходятся недешево. Начала слишком поздно, слишком близко к праздникам, поэтому страшно гнала издание, и спешка эта, разумеется, была в ущерб делу. Несмотря на все это, я рада, что принялась за него потому что не начала бы теперь, может быть, и никогда бы вещи эти не увидали света божьего. А уж теперь два издателя предполагают купить дальнейшие сказки.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, December 23, 1889, 446.

She sent another copy to V. M. Vasnetsov, who was delighted with it and hoped it would get wide distribution.⁴¹⁸ Unfortunately, this little book proved to be such a disappointment that it put her off publishing for a number of years. When a copy fell into Stasov's hands a few years later and he inquired about it, Polenova replied that it should not surprise him that he had not heard of her publication, for "it had no success whatsoever and remained very narrowly distributed."⁴¹⁹ She regretted undertaking the publication herself, blaming the poor quality of the final illustrations on her insufficient knowledge of the publishing industry. In fact, it was so bad in her view that "I had to burn half of the phototypes because they were worthless"⁴²⁰ The remainder had to be colored by hand, which was expensive and poorly done.⁴²¹ Consequently, she told very few people about the book when it was published. Though she had wanted to publish an entire series of illustrated folk tales, after the disaster of the "War of the Mushrooms" she "swore to never again try the publishing business."⁴²²

A comparison of the sketch for the Tsar Mushroom with the published page demonstrates the great color reduction and loss of detail. This sketch also shows how much Abramtsevo figured in Polenova's work. The Tsar Mushroom's gazebo has the same bat ornament as on the playhouse V. M. Vasnetsov designed at Abramtsevo based on the hut of the fairy tale witch Baba Iaga. At the same time, the page as published does show Polenova's attempt to make it an integrated whole in the manner of Russian medieval manuscripts. The use of the decorative band

⁴¹⁸ V. M. Vasnetsov to E. D. Polenova, December 28, 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 7449, sheet 1.

⁴¹⁹ "не имело никакого успеха и осталось очень мало распространенным." E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 497.

⁴²⁰ "половину фототипий я должна была сжечь за негодностью." E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 497.

⁴²¹ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, September 30, 1894, 503.

⁴²² "я дала себе слово никогда больше не пробовать издательской деятельности." E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 497.

of mushrooms down the left side of the left page and across the top of the right page helps link the image and the attendant text.

The all over decoration and writing style also call to mind *lubok* (plural = *lubki*). *Lubki* were popular prints usually made from woodblock and hand colored. Many *lubki* were religious pictures, often purchased by people who could not afford icons for their homes. By the early eighteenth century politically themed and other secular prints had appeared. In the nineteenth century many of the *lubki* offered for sale by itinerant peddlers illustrated popular folk tales.⁴²³ That Polenova knew *lubok* intimately is attested in Natal'ia Vasil'evna's memoirs. She recalled that Polenova and Mamontova collected various *lubki* for the library at the Abramtsevo workshop's dormitory. In general, Polenova and Mamontova were disappointed in the poor quality of most of them, and this also inspired Polenova to consider trying her hand at book illustration.⁴²⁴

Although the members of the English Arts and Crafts movement were also heavily invested in book illustration on the medieval model, I have no evidence that Polenova was aware of their efforts until the mid-1890s. It is likely safe to assume, therefore, that at this point she was drawing solely on the indigenous models of *lubki*, illuminated manuscripts and folk art. This was soon to change. The next decade would prove a turning point for both Iakunchikova and Polenova in terms of their interest in all things Russian and in their understanding of how to forge a modern, yet still recognizably Russian, art.

⁴²³ For more information about *lubki* and their place in popular Russian culture, see Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press: 2003) and Stephen M. Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity 1812-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

⁴²⁴ Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 75.

3.0 INTO THE ARTISTIC WHIRLWIND

An atmosphere of increasing social turmoil prevailed in Russia in the 1880s. This resulted in ideological disputes ranging from populism and Marxism to an escapist trend that emphasized mysticism. There was a concurrent dissatisfaction with the art world, especially the Russian arts, that facilitated shifts in alliances across the board.⁴²⁵ This was felt especially among the younger generation of artists, and their attempts to transcend it is one focal point of this chapter. In this context, Polenova found herself in a peculiar position: her age placed her within the older generation, but her artistic allegiances placed her firmly within the younger one. While she continued to ally herself with established arts organizations, she showed an increasing interest in artistic developments in the West. For Iakunchikova's part, life events thrust her into the Western art world and she became Polenova's link between East and West. This link and their close friendship proved vital to both women's artistic evolution in the 1890s, which is the main subject of this chapter.

The disillusionment with the state of art was felt even by Russians abroad. Mamontova wrote to Polenova from Rome, "Yesterday I was at an exhibition at the artists' society. There is almost nothing worth stopping to look at, nothing to be said about content, everything is the

⁴²⁵ Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 13-14.

same thing as fifteen years ago and even with technique nothing is happening.”⁴²⁶ She expanded on these sentiments in a letter of a few days later after seeing a performance by Sarah Bernhardt. “The more I look at life and art here, the more and more agreeable our Russian art becomes to me. Solov’ev and his company are not right in their conviction that Russia has already said everything [it has to say]. No, we have a lot more material in our deposits than they do, we are much closer to the truth than they are.”⁴²⁷ Mamontova’s sentiments would be echoed throughout the 1890s by various artists, including Iakunchikova and Polenova.

This general sense of malaise even affected the Polenovs’ health. Vasilii Dmitrievich spent a good portion of 1889 and 1890 in Paris receiving treatment for neurasthenia. In a letter to Antipova, Polenova ascribed her irritability, “which I know and hate and which is directed not only towards you, but towards all people” in part to her personality and in part to a physical disorder. “It is only the external form of, as I suppose, some physical problem. ... I spoke with Natasha about it, but she reassured me that according to her observations, we all have something wrong with our livers. I will work on myself, but I cannot answer for myself.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ “Вчера я была в обществе художников на выставке. Почти что не на чем остановиться, про содержание и говорить нечего, все то же, что пятнадцать лет назад было, да и по технике ничего не выдается.” E. G. Mamontova to E. D. Polenova, January 6/18 1889, 407. I have not been able to find out what artists’ society she was speaking about. There was a colony of Russian artists in Rome, so it is possible it was an exhibition held by those artists. The remainder of the letter talks about different Russian artists she visited and works she saw that were largely similarly uninspiring, which suggests it was an exhibition by Russian academic artists in Rome.

⁴²⁷ “Чем ближе всматриваюсь я в жизнь и искусство здесь, мне наше русское все симпатичнее и симпатичнее становится. Не правы Соловьев и компан[ия], утверждающие, что Россия уже все сказала. Нет, у нас еще гораздо больше материала в задатках, чем у них, мы еще ближе к истине, чем они.” E. G. Mamontova to E. D. Polenova, January 11/23, 1889, 408. The Solov’ev Mamontova refers to is Mikhail Aleksandrovich Solov’ev (1842-?) a literary critic and journalist.

⁴²⁸ “[М]оя раздражительность, которую в себе знаю и ненавижу и которая проявляется не относительно только тебя одной, а решительно всех людей,— это только внешняя форма, имеющая, как я предполагаю, физическую причину. ... Говорила я об этом с Наташей, но она уверяла меня, что по ее наблюдениям у нас у всех есть что-то с печенью. Работать я буду над собой, но отвечать за себя не могу.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 23, 1889, 445. Ellipsis in original.

An additional point of tension was the stagnation of the Peredvizhniki. This was in part because the longstanding antagonism between the St. Petersburg and Moscow art worlds⁴²⁹ continued while at the same time the art world itself was contracting. St. Petersburg artists began to exhibit in Moscow and vice versa. The antagonism between the art worlds of the two cities replicated that present in Russian educated society since Peter the Great established the new capital. St. Petersburg was viewed as gloriously Imperial and Western, whereas Moscow was seen as authentically Russian, but provincial. For artists, this meant that St. Petersburg was the locus of the stultifying traditions of the Imperial Academy, whereas Moscow was the center of artistic freedom and the continued development of truly Russian art.

In the early 1890s, however, the Imperial Academy recognized the need for reform and called upon several high-status members of the Peredvizhniki to take part, including Vasiliï Dmitrievich. This signaled both the acceptance of the Peredvizhniki as members of the official art world and, ultimately, their status as a staid institution. This, however, did not mean the end of conflict in the group. Upon his return from St. Petersburg in 1889 after the annual Peredvizhnik jury session, Vasiliï Dmitrievich reported his frustration that the St. Petersburg artists were more concerned with petty personal and social interactions than artistic matters.⁴³⁰ These myriad frustrations in the art world later developed into a full-blown scandal with Polenova at the center, a role she repeated a few years later with the Moscow Society. Meanwhile, significant changes in Iakunchikova's life led to a move that would have a great effect on both her and Polenova's artistic development.

⁴²⁹ Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 131-132.

⁴³⁰ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, March 6/18, 1889, 418.

3.1 IAKUNCHIKOVA GOES WEST

In March 1889, the family doctor diagnosed Iakunchikova with tuberculosis and recommended that she seek treatment in Biarritz and winter in a milder climate.⁴³¹ The family chose to settle in Paris, partly due the 1889 Exposition Universelle, and rented a house there for 1889-1890. It eventually became clear, however, that Iakunchikova would need to spend every winter away from Russia's harsh climate. So, from 1889 until the end of her life, Iakunchikova spent most of her time in Paris, coming to Russia only in the summer and fall months. At the time Iakunchikova settled in Paris, a Russian arts community had long been present,⁴³² so an instant group based on national bonds already existed should she desire one. Iakunchikova, however, seemed not to immerse herself deeply in this community for she was very active in artistic circles in Paris and avidly sought information on new artists and schools. She regularly visited galleries and exhibitions and attended all the Salons. At the same time, however, she also kept abreast of artistic developments in Russia and never lost her attachment to the Russian land, which figures again and again in her diaries and letters. In this section I will consider Iakunchikova's earliest artistic observations and experiments after moving West.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Russian artists began looking more intently at artistic developments in Paris. As noted, Vasilii Dmitrievich was one of the founders of Russian Impressionism in the late 1870s, but Impressionism did not become a strong artistic trend until the 1880s.⁴³³ Indeed, Kira Dolinina has demonstrated that while many Russian artists went to France, studied and lived there, their relationship to French art was “one of non-encounters,

⁴³¹ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 19. Iakunchikova had two siblings die of tuberculosis, so it is likely that she contracted it from a family member.

⁴³² Gray, “Identity,” 108.

⁴³³ V. Kruglov, “Impressionizm v Rossii,” in *Russkii impressionizm* (St. Petersburg: State Russian Museum, 2000) 12 and Mamontova, “Polenov i molodaia,” 88.

blinker views and biased indifference.”⁴³⁴ Part of this was due to the tense political relationship that prevailed between Russia and France after the Napoleonic wars, but even as late as the 1880s, Russian artists still paid little attention to contemporary French art.⁴³⁵ It was not until c. 1890 that these attitudes began to change, so when Russian artists’ attention to French art became focused on Paris, Russian artists viewed Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Symbolism almost as a single category: French modern art.⁴³⁶ This in part explains Iakunchikova’s reactions to art in Paris as well as her almost simultaneous assimilation of Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Symbolism and Art Nouveau, turning to one or another of these styles, or a combination of them, depending upon what she wished to express.⁴³⁷

Iakunchikova first visited the Paris Salon⁴³⁸ on her way to Biarritz in 1889. The nineteen-year-old’s impressions of her inaugural visit to the Salon indicate that it was an overwhelming experience. She wrote to Natal’ia Vasil’evna, “after having seen one Salon, the dead would rise.”⁴³⁹ In response to Polenova’s request that she write something about the Salon, Iakunchikova replied,

You cannot know how much I want to fulfill your wish regarding the Salon, but I am afraid I cannot satisfy it. I stupidly did not buy a catalogue and do not remember a single name, but maybe if I point out certain paintings you can find them yourself. By the way, I cannot say that one specific painting attracted my attention [like each of the ones at the pastel exhibition]. The impression given by the entire *ensemble* is something huge—huge, powerful, heated competition. It

⁴³⁴ Kira Dolinina, “‘Eyes Wide Shut’: Landscape Painting in Nineteenth Century Russia and France,” in *Russian Landscape*, edited by David Jackson and Patty Wageman (Schoten, Belgium: BAI, 2003), 107.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

⁴³⁶ Kruglov, “Impressionizm,” 20

⁴³⁷ Kiselev, “Rozhdeniia,” 58 and Kruglov, “Impressionizm,” 22

⁴³⁸ There is some confusion in Iakunchikova’s letters and diaries about the Salons. She refers at times generically to “the Salon,” but at other times specifically separates out the Salon Champs-Élysées from the Salon Champ-de-Mars after the 1890 split. She is more consistently impressed with what she sees at Champ-de-Mars. Where she has indicated which venue she visited or where my research has uncovered the venue, I indicate it in the text. When I refer to “the Salon” it is ambiguous in the original sources and could be either venue or possibly the Salon des indépendents.

⁴³⁹ “при виде одного Салона мертвый воскреснет.” As cited in N. Borok [N. V. Polenova], “M. V. Iakunchikova.” *Mir iskusstva* 3 (1904): 112.

seems that all the artists worked with all their might, by the sweat of their brows, rather than stroking their brushes in blissful calm, sipping from a cup of coffee or tea in lazy pauses. Of course, it is possible that it was like that and it only seems as if everything was made with one sweep.⁴⁴⁰

Clearly she was impressed by the grand expressions of the art in the Salon and her first glimpse of the fervor of the Parisian art world left an indelible impression. In the remainder of the letter she noted bits and pieces that impressed her from paintings. Perhaps significantly, she also betrays a skeptical attitude towards French artists, writing about one *Place de la Concorde*, “it seems it was not a Frenchman who painted it, which is why, most likely, it is so good. A Frenchman needs only to try to paint his own Parisian street to completely ruin it.”⁴⁴¹ It is also significant that she was more attentive at the pastel exhibition for pastels would become a medium she worked in frequently.

Iakunchikova was not the only Russian artist to be astonished by the art on display in Paris in 1889. Many of Polenov’s young students were startled by the use of light and color and the style propagated for so long by the Peredvizhniki suddenly seemed rather stodgy. Konstantin Korovin, student of Polenov and mutual acquaintance of Iakunchikova’s and Polenova’s, was particularly distressed. Polenova reported to Iakunchikova that he “is in a dark mood for unknown reasons. He says that he is not pulled to work. ... And he cannot find the strength in

⁴⁴⁰ “Вы не поверите, как мне страстно хочется исполнить Ваше желание насчет Салона, но я боюсь, что не смогу удовлетворить его. Я по своей глупости не купила каталога и ни одного имени не помню, но, может быть, если я намечу Вам некоторые картины, Вы найдете сами. Впрочем, вот что: ведь я не могу сказать, чтобы какая-нибудь картина отдельно обращала на себя внимание[, как каждая из тех на пастельной выставке]. Впечатление получается от всего ensembl’я чего-то громадного, громадного, могучего горячего соревнования. Так что, кажется, точно все художники работали сверх сил, в поте лица, а не мазали кисточки в балженном спокойстве, прихлебывая из стакана кофе или чай с ленивыми промежутками; конечно, очень может быть, что это все было, только кажется-то так, точно все сработано с одного рахмаху.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 9/21, 1889, 421 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9683, sheet 3. The portion in square brackets is omitted from the text published in Sakharova.

⁴⁴¹ “писал это, кажется, не француз, и оттого, вероятно, так хорошо. Французу только стоит попробовать написать свою парижскую улицу, чтобы ее совсем исковеркать.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 9/21, 1889, 421 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9683, sheet 4. According to the *Salon de 1889 Catalogue Illustré* this work was produced by J-A Marty. I have been unable to find out anything about this artist or his painting.

himself to paint like he wants to, i.e., so that what he creates is not a painting, but music.”⁴⁴²

Polenova herself was having a difficult time finding her creative impulse, “when the time comes to work I begin to grow cold and my thoughts scatter.”⁴⁴³

In this same letter, the phantom is finally named when Polenova scolds Iakunchikova for having doubts that she will recover:

I am surprised that you even pose the question whether it is comforting to think that it is possible for you to recover your health, if ahead is only vegetation. It seems to me that it is an absolute sin to think that way, such beyond exquisite minutes still await you, especially since fate has given you such a positively enormous dose of creativity. And in general you cannot, even in the darkest moments, deny the fact that you are able to live a completely full inner life, the kind that can be attained by a human being only in moments of interaction with the “phantom,” as we called it last summer in order to express the well known spiritual state. And having improved your health, you can undoubtedly count upon the fact that these moments will repeat more often and the results will be stronger.⁴⁴⁴

Polenova was trying to cheer up Iakunchikova, but she truly believed in Iakunchikova’s talent. Their link to the creative impulse the presence of the phantom brings had cemented their bonds and their further correspondence would only reinforce them.

⁴⁴² “Сам он говорит, что не работает, находится в очень беспричинно тяжелом настроении. Говорит, что совсем не тянет работать А писать так, как хочется, т.е. чтобы выходила не живопись, а музыка он сейчас не может, не находит в себе сил.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 1889, 423 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 7347, sheet 2.

⁴⁴³ “как подходит время работать начинаю остывать и выветриваться” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 7347, sheet 2. This text is missing from the published version.

⁴⁴⁴ “Удивляюсь только тому, что Вы ставите вопрос—отрадно ли думать, что для Вас возможно поправиться с здоровьем, если впереди лишь прозябанье. Мне кажется, Вам совсем грешно так думать, Вас ждут такие заоблачно-восхитительные минуты, раз что Вам творчество судьбою отпущено в такой положительно огромной дозе. Да и вообще Вы не можете даже в самые мрачные минуты отрицать того, что Вы способны жить самой полной внутренней жизнью, какая только доступна человеку в моменты общения с «призраком», как мы выражались прошлым летом, чтобы выразить известное духовное состояние. А ведь улушая свое здоровье, Вы с уверенностью можете рассчитывать, что эти минуты будут повтвояться чаще и результаты будут крупнее.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 1889, 423 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 7347, sheet 6.

In response to Iakunchikova's request for news "of our sleepy, sweet Russia,"⁴⁴⁵ Polenova indicated her discontent with the current state of Russian art and the growing tension between Moscow and St. Petersburg. "About sleepy Russia I will write that at the Peredvizhniki's exhibition it actually appeared sleepy, especially among the Petersburgers. Only the Muscovites showed something fresh." She begged Iakunchikova to tell her something about the current year's Salon, for she had seen the illustrated catalogue from it.⁴⁴⁶ While Polenova certainly was well educated in the history of art, the evidence indicates that her knowledge of contemporary European trends was somewhat weak. This fact is exemplified by her reaction to seeing S. M. Tretyakov's collection in November 1888. She wrote to Mamontova, "What wonderful things he has, both old and new. In his gallery you really understand how strongly Anton has been influenced by the French."⁴⁴⁷ Anton is the nickname of Valentin Aleksandrovich Serov (1865-1911), who startled the Russian art world with his strongly Impressionist influenced portrait of one of the Mamontovs' daughters, *Girl with Peaches* (Девочка с персиками, 1887), widely considered one of the early landmarks of Russian modernism. Polenova's comments make it clear that only after viewing the work in Tretyakov's collection was she able to understand how French modernism had affected Serov's work. She had heard of the Impressionists, but this incident and her continued pressure on Iakunchikova to tell her all about current art exhibitions indicate a thirst for knowledge that was not being satisfied in Russia.

Polenova urged Iakunchikova to write letters often even though she did not like to. Polenova joked that then Iakunchikova would have biographical material "in case you become

⁴⁴⁵ "О нашей сонной милой России" M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, April 27/May 9, 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9682, sheet 1.

⁴⁴⁶ "Об сонной России напишу, что на Передвижной она с художественной стороны в самом деле явилась сонною, особенно Питер. Свежими выступили только москвичи." E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 3/15, 1889, 420.

⁴⁴⁷ "Какие у него есть хорошие вещи из новых и старых, но до чего в его галерее понимаешь, под каким сильным влиянием французов работает Антон." E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 13, 1888, 401.

famous.”⁴⁴⁸ Polenova had great faith in Iakunchikova’s talent, as exemplified by a sketch Iakunchikova made on a letter to her. This masterful sketch was made from the window of the Hotel Continental in Biarritz, where the Iakunchikovs were residing. What is particularly curious about this image is the text penciled in on the Avenue du Palais sign. It is difficult to decipher, but seems to read: “At the [Renan?] boarding house it is worse and more hopeless.” Understandably, Iakunchikova was terribly depressed. She noted in this letter that after looking at the view she depicted for five days it became quite uninspiring. Moreover, the people there were so uninteresting that Iakunchikova remarked that they presented direct evidence of Darwin’s theories,⁴⁴⁹ meaning that Biarritz was full of weak people who were dying, leaving only the fit to survive.

In response to Iakunchikova’s sketch, Polenova’s letter contains a sketch of a young boy and musicians as shown through a window and she joked, “Just as [Sergei Vasil’evich] Ivanov cannot part with his migrants, so I cannot with my organ grinders.”⁴⁵⁰ Iakunchikova was delighted with the sketch and shows keen analytical skills in her response. She wrote to Polenova that it really reminded her of a Russian morning when suddenly an organ grinder starts playing outside and you go to look. Iakunchikova thought Polenova’s decision to have the boy watching without acknowledging the viewer’s presence was best, otherwise the viewer would

⁴⁴⁸ “если вы будете знаменитой” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 3/15, 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 7346, sheet 3. This portion is omitted from the published version.

⁴⁴⁹ “в нату [Редана?] хуже и безнадежнее” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, April 27/May 9, 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9682, sheet 1. It was not unusual for Iakunchikova to include watercolors and drawings in her letters. See, e.g., M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, August 11, 1888, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12208, sheet 1; M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, August 11, 1888, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12209, sheet 1; and M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, August 16, 1888, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12210, sheets 1-2.

⁴⁵⁰ “Как Иванов не может расстаться с переселенцами, так я с шарманщиками.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 3/15, 1889, 420 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 7346, sheet 1.

become part of the scene “and ruin the whole thing.”⁴⁵¹ Iakunchikova’s response is indicative of a stance she herself often took, and preferred, at that time—that of detached observer. It also, however, indicates her interest in musicality and the nostalgic associations images could produce.

Meanwhile, Iakunchikova was struggling with her own artistic inspiration in Biarritz. She wrote to Polenova complaining of the battle in her between the “pastry chef” and the “shoemaker.” The pastry chef was her metaphor for someone who does things well and elegantly, whereas a shoemaker is a Russian metaphor for someone who often bungles things. She was especially irritated with this in terms of her art.

It is strange, the stronger and more passionate the desire, the less the result. This is some kind of contradiction. For example, if you are inspired by something and race to get it out, sure of your [illegible], nothing will come of it. In such situations it is incredibly useful, as if by accident, to splash cold water on yourself, because if you plan to jump up, suddenly it will disappear and you will consider it gone, then as if from nowhere, after a certain amount of time this something begins to crawl out as if completely out of nowhere and without any evident stimulus. What an empty word talent is, at least I do not understand it, you think it means something important, something permanent that is given to a person like arms and legs so it is easier to live in this world ...⁴⁵²

For Iakunchikova, talent seems to be almost as phantasmal as inspiration. It comes and goes, often remaining frustratingly just out of reach. In spite of her general irritation, this letter does reveal the lure of observation—and tendency to philosophize, something she and Polenova liked to do together—in its concluding sentences:

⁴⁵¹ “и что испортило бы все дело” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 9/21, 1889, fond 54, no. 9683, sheets 1-2. This portion of the letter is not published in Sakharova.

⁴⁵² “Это странно, чем сильнее и горячее желать, тем меньше результата. Это какое то противоречие. Наприм. воодушевившись чем нибудь спешишь вырезать уверенный в [??] и не выходит ничего. В таких случаях удивительно полезно случайно быть облитесь холодной водой, то что собиралась выскочить, вдруг исчезает, и считаешь его погибшим, как откуда не возмись, через несколько времени это что то начинает выползть и как будь совсем на пустом месте без видимого толчка. Какое ничего незначущее слово талант, по крайней мере я его не понимаю, под нем подразумеваешь что то важное, непроходимое данное человеку как руки, ноги, чтобы легче жилось на свете ...” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 31/June 11, 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9684, sheets 1-2.

If only it were possible to somehow escape fate and justice, to cut all the threads with which you are tied to life and stand completely to the side and be forever an observer and not an actor. What? I think that this is more or less possible, but oh how difficult! I think about this constantly when I take the lift up after dinner. The door to the lift is open, and I, not climbing the stairs, go past all the floors and see what is happening on them. At the beginning of the stairway the gas has not been lit and it is practically dark. On the second floor the lamps have not all been lit. Through the glass, near the exit doors the black back of the clerk's head is visible. He is sitting by the window, yawning and waiting for it to grow completely dark. Louis (the boy in [illegible]) stands on the threshold of the porch, hands in his pocket, looking into the courtyard and whistling. He is also waiting for evening and rest. A boring twilight picture. On the third floor the lamp on the wall is glowing and Thérèse sits below it, reading, holding the book up high, near her face. And here is ours, the fourth floor. Is it really not possible to always be in the lift and not on some floor?⁴⁵³

In spite of Iakunchikova's fears of living in a state of permanent physical incapacitation, it appears from this passage that being placed in the position of perpetual outside observer had a certain appeal. Indeed, Iakunchikova's position as observer would cause her to pay close attention not only to formal aspects of light and color in her art, but also to emotional states. The latter was a departure from Peredvizhnik practice and would influence other Russian artists of the younger generation.

⁴⁵³ “Если бы можно было обойти какнибудь судьбу и справедливость отрезать все ниточки которыми связан сам с жизнью стать совсем в сторону и быть навеки зрителем а не участвующим. Что? Я думаю, что это более или менее возможная вещь хотя ух! какая трудная. Я постоянно об этом думаю, когда иду после обеда вверх на lift'e. Дверь lift'a отворена, я не идя по лестнице проезжаю все этажи и вижу что в них происходит. Вначале лестницы газ еще не разгорелся и почти темно. Во втором этаже лампы еще совсем не зажжены; сквозь стекло у двери выхода виден чернвый затылок конторщика, он сидит к окна, зеваает, и ждет когда совсем стемнеет. Louis (мальчик на [??]) стоит на пороге крыльца руки в кармане смотрит на двор и насвистывает. Он тоже ждет вечера и отдыха. Скучная сумерачная картина. В третьем горит лампа на стене, под ней сидит Thérèse и читает, держа книжку высоко около лица. Но вот и наш червертый этаж. Неужели нельзя какнибудь сделать, чтобы все быть на lift'e, а не в какомнибудь этаже?” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 31/June 11, 1889, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9684, sheets 2-3.

3.2 POLENOVA GOES NORTH

Meanwhile, back in Russia Polenova was continuing to exhibit watercolors. In light of her new success with oil painting, however, Polenova started sketches for two new pictures. One, *The Dancing Bear*, she planned to set in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, in the courtyard of a *votchinnik* (a type of landowner in medieval Russia). The other, *Nursery*, was inspired by the presence of her niece and the niece's nanny. Polenova remembered her own childhood with a Russian peasant nanny and wanted to "transmit, as far as possible, the character of a Russian nanny and the atmosphere of the Russian nursery of the past." She was more attracted to the subject of the nursery, but her artist friends liked the sketch for *The Dancing Bear* much more.⁴⁵⁴

Though Polenova preferred the childhood genre scene to the historical scene, she recognized the potential problems of working with such a subject. Indeed, she worried that if she took on *Nursery* she would have nowhere to exhibit it, "For some reason it seems to me that one should not show such intimate things to the public."⁴⁵⁵ While she does not say so, it is likely that she was also worried about the public reaction to a woman artist taking on domestic subjects and whether she would be expected to adhere to the feminine realm if she did. In the end, she took the subject on anyway as an exercise in mastering evening light.⁴⁵⁶ *The Dancing Bear* remained a sketch in the Abramtsevo collection, whereas *Nursery* was ultimately selected for the 1892 Peredvizhnik exhibition.⁴⁵⁷ It is possible that Polenova's interest in folk tales and fairy tales prompted her interest in this subject since Russian nannies were often the transmitters of folk

⁴⁵⁴ "передать сколько возможно характер русской няни и атмосферу прежней русской детской." E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, March 13/25, 1889, 419.

⁴⁵⁵ "Мне почему-то кажется, что такие интимные вещи не следует показывать публике." E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, March 19/31, 1889, 419-420.

⁴⁵⁶ E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 3/15, 1889, 420.

⁴⁵⁷ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 758 n 12-13.

literature. It may also simply be that Polenova had grown tired of medieval subjects. Whatever the case, at this time Polenova, like Iakunchikova, was searching for something new.⁴⁵⁸

That Polenova had grown tired of the same old scene and was struggling with inspiration herself is indicated by her decision to go north again to gather more folk art and fairy tales. Specifically, she told Iakunchikova,

At the end of the month I am going to the Antipovs' in northern Kostroma Province, it is terribly remote. I am very happy. I am pleased by the thought that for two and a half months I will not see a single artist, I will not hear a single conversation with artists' jargon. It is not that I do not love artists. On the contrary, I love our Muscovites very much; to live without them, outside of their interests, to not know what they think, what they want, where they are scrambling to, would be sad.⁴⁵⁹

Nonetheless, she hoped this time away would help her break her inability to work and the feeling that she was not doing anything but standing in one place. In concert with her searches, her artistic energies shifted at this time toward urban scenes rather than nature. She noted to Iakunchikova that she had even begun to hate shades of green.⁴⁶⁰

Although Polenova does not indicate such, it is possible that the trip was in part motivated by the fact that her brother, Aleksei Dmitrievich, and Mamontov were involved in setting up trade schools in Chizhov's name in Kostroma Province. In fact, along the way she met a local official who was familiar with their work.⁴⁶¹ She may have been motivated by the talk of trade schools to seek out new inspiration both for herself and for the Abramtsevo

⁴⁵⁸ Salmond notes that *Nursery* received poor reviews because of its "disquieting lack of sentimentality," which is in line with Polenova's early expressions of distaste for the sentimental. *Arts and Crafts*, 41. This reaction was likely heightened because of Polenova's gender.

⁴⁵⁹ "В конце месяца поеду к Антиповым на север Костромской губернии, в ужасную глушь. Меня это радует. Меня радует мысль, что в течение двух с половиной месяцев я не увижу ни одного художника, не услышу ни одного разговора с словами художественного жаргона. И не то, чтобы я не любила художников. Напротив, наших москвичей я очень люблю, жить без них, не в их интересах, не знать, что они думают, чего хотят, куда карабкаются—было бы грустно." E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 1889, 422.

⁴⁶⁰ E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, May 1889, fond 54, no. 7347, sheet 6. These thoughts are not in the published text.

⁴⁶¹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, May 29, 1889, 424, 759 n 2.

workshop. Evidence of this is in a letter she wrote to Mamontova from Kostroma, “I am not forgetting our industry here and have even begun to pick out some things in the area of woodcarving. I do not know how I will transport all these carved goods, you will never fit them into a trunk, I will have to make a separate box.”⁴⁶²

The trip to the Antipovs estate, Nel’shevka, was an arduous five-day journey by steamer and then over two hours by carriage. It gave Polenova a lot of time to observe nature and the other passengers closely,⁴⁶³ a trait she shared with Iakunchikova. She was particularly enamored of an unusual general, who proved to be “a Tolstoyan”⁴⁶⁴ in many respects. This man traveled alone rather than with the pomp and circumstance that surrounded most high-ranking military officials in imperial Russia and took his duties very seriously. Polenova was impressed by his knowledge of the conditions of village inhabitants’ lives and by his appreciation for nature. What particularly startled her was a conversation they had one day in which he revealed an opinion about the contemporary “so-called Russian style” very similar to her own: that there was very little truly Russian in it.⁴⁶⁵ As it turned out, this general made a point of making quick sketches about architectural features he observed during his travels in the provinces and then used them to make changes to his country house. He told her a lot about the wooden church architecture he had seen. In the end, she was so taken with this man and their conversations about Russian art that she wrote Mamontova, “If he took an orderly with him on these trips, I would ask to be his orderly.”⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² “Производства нашего я здесь не забываю и даже кое-что уже начинаю набирать по части резьбы. Не знаю, как повезу весь этот щепной товар, в сундук никак его не втиснешь, придется делать отдельный ящик.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 15, 1889, 429.

⁴⁶³ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, May 29-June 1, 1889, 424-426.

⁴⁶⁴ “он во многом последователь Толстого” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, May 31, 1889, 425.

⁴⁶⁵ “в так называемом русском стиле” Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ “Если бы он в эти путешествия брал с собой денщика, то я бы к нему в денщики попросилась.” Ibid., 426.

In contrast, upon arriving at the Antipovs' estate Polenova was slightly disgruntled with the company. She wrote to Mamontova that Antipova's daughters were typical products of the Smolny Institute in that they behaved as if they "were born yesterday and do not understand a thing."⁴⁶⁷ The Smolny Institute was founded in 1764 by Catherine the Great for the education of young noblewomen. The original aim of the institution was to produce well educated wives and mothers who could raise sons fit to serve the empire. After Catherine's death, Tsarina Mariia Fedorovna took control of the school. She "constantly reiterated that a woman's place was in the home" and "a woman is a delicate creature ... her fate is to submit to her husband." Hence, in the end the school was notorious for producing young women who were not good for much more than being decorative.⁴⁶⁸ While Polenova thought Antipova to be a woman of good intentions and curious about the world, she, unfortunately, had few talents. Thus, she was greatly looking forward to the arrival of Ol'ga Iur'evna Kaminskaia, a woman doctor, for intelligent conversation.⁴⁶⁹ These sentiments underscore Polenova's emphasis on intellect and her impatience with conservative gender roles.

The Antipovs lived in a small contemporary house on the estate, which Polenova noted was much like those found in many contemporary dacha settlements. The actual estate manor was 100 versts from the house—which speaks to the amount of land held by the family (about 10,000 desiatinas⁴⁷⁰)—and, judging from Polenova's comments, was likely built in the grand neoclassical style preferred in the eighteenth century. Polenova commented that life there was

⁴⁶⁷ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, May 27, 1889, 424.

⁴⁶⁸ Engel, *Mothers*, 23-25.

⁴⁶⁹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 5, 1889, 427-428. I have not been able to discover anything about Kaminskaia other than she was a doctor. There was a Beta Kaminskaia in the Fritsche group in Switzerland, which was a radical socialist group that included among its members the future political assassin Vera Figner. I do not know if the two Kaminskaias were related.

⁴⁷⁰ A desiatina is an old Russian unit of measure equal to 2.7 acres.

“half-suburban, as in the capital ... and half-pioneer style, like Robinson Crusoe.” Nonetheless, it held a certain nostalgia for her because it reminded her of Imochentsy.⁴⁷¹

In spite of the “half-pioneer” conditions and her hosts’ lack of intellectual prowess, the trip proved interesting and restorative. As she did in and around Abramtsevo and the other estates she had visited, she spent a lot of time sketching and photographing. The peasants in the surrounding villages were much poorer and had fewer possessions than those near Moscow, and Polenova recognized that the wooden objects they possessed were different. Instead of the geometric type of carving found around Moscow, she characterized theirs as the “Vladimir-Suzdal sculptural relief type.”⁴⁷² This seemingly offhand comment indicates that Polenova was well versed in the different motifs and styles of wood carvings found in Central Russia.

She was disappointed in the storytelling style of the area though. While she initially thought there would be a lot of material to discover,⁴⁷³ she quickly learned otherwise. Early in her stay she wrote to Mamontova that so far there was nothing new. She was visiting one Babushka Fedos’ia, who told mostly humorous stories. Babushka Fedos’ia irritated Polenova because “She races past the fantastic elements and enjoys herself only when she gets to a funny part. I have not had the chance to torment the other old women.”⁴⁷⁴ Moreover, she was disillusioned that the nearby town of Parfen’tev, which she had hoped would be the kind of place her folk-tale mushrooms (i.e., those from *War of the Mushrooms*) would live in, turned out to be a typical northern district town.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷¹ “что-то среднее между подгородной, столичной ... и пионерски-робинзоновской” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 5, 1889, 427-428.

⁴⁷² “владими́ро-сузда́льского выпуклого скульптурного типа.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 9, 1889, 428.

⁴⁷³ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 12, 1889, 429.

⁴⁷⁴ “Фантастические она комкает и наслаждается только тогда, когда попадает на смешной элемент. Других старух еще не приходилось пытаться.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 20, 1889, 420.

⁴⁷⁵ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 15, 1889, 429.

In spite of these disappointments, she was able to gather some material for her work. She found a stove in one peasant home that she thought would be perfect for Baba Iaga's hut in "Synko-Filipko" (Little Son Philip),⁴⁷⁶ the story of an old, childless couple. One day the old man decides to carve a child from a log, which magically turns into a child whom they name Filip. Filip grows into a bright, healthy little boy. One day while they are out by the river, the witch Baba Iaga sees him and decides she wants to eat him. After one unsuccessful attempt she manages to capture him and brings him back to her hut. The image Polenova depicts is the point in the story where Baba Iaga is trying to convince Filip to sit on her spatula so she can shove him into the oven. He manages to outwit her by claiming he does not know how, and that she needs to show him. When she does, he shoves her into the oven and runs out of the hut. After more adventures, Filip is saved by passing geese and swans.

Polenova's picture is a departure in style from "War of the Mushrooms." Here the image is greatly flattened and reduced to suggestive outlines. This may be due to the disappointing results she had with the publication of "War of the Mushrooms,"⁴⁷⁷ but it is also reminiscent of the pictorial flattening present in *lubok*. As in *Icon Painting Workshop*, Polenova took care to show details of objects found in peasant homes, including the mortar and pestle Baba Iaga flies in. This was not a permanent shift in style. She continued to produce more naturalistic images over the course of her career. It does indicate her interest in artistic experimentation, even if it might have been motivated by publishing constraints.

In addition to finding objects of interest, Polenova collected folk sayings and observed half-Christian, half-pagan rituals. There has been much scholarly discussion about Russia's dual

⁴⁷⁶ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 22, 1889, 430.

⁴⁷⁷ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 19.

faith (двоеверие) in the nineteenth-century and before.⁴⁷⁸ While the peasantry identified themselves strictly as Russian Orthodox, in Russia, as in other realms where Christianity became the dominant religion, many of the pagan rituals became nominally Christian holidays. This is perhaps particularly true in Russia because it did not adopt Christianity until 988, hence pagan rituals were fresher in cultural memory than in the West, albeit still at a great remove. Polenova was particularly enamored of the little poem old women greeted her with when she visited, “Our country is the most backwoods, we are dim people/ in the forest we were born/ to the hemp we pray/ and we have not learned to speak the right way.”⁴⁷⁹ This poem indicates the peasants’ recognition of the pagan rituals still in practice and the attitude of the elite towards it. It also shows an adaptation of the elite’s attitude towards them, as if claiming ownership of it and thus diffusing it of its power.

Polenova attended the St. John’s Day (Ivanov den’) celebrations on June 23, which was a carryover of pagan summer solstice celebrations and involved a huge feast for the village. The local peasants donated an ox and the men cooked huge amounts of kasha for everyone. Then unmarried girls took bowls of kasha and walked around the fields, singing songs. They ate the kasha and tossed their spoons into the bushes. Polenova reported, “Although it was a rainy day, the sun came out from time to time, and then it was very appealing to look at that huge, colorful, happy crowd, in the middle of which they sat and ate that entirely unusual treat for them: meat.

⁴⁷⁸ For a discussion of the concept of dvoeverie and the controversy surrounding it, see Stella Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: “Double belief” and the Making of an Academic Myth* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁷⁹ “Наша сторона самая глухая, мы люди темные, / в лесу родились, / пеньку молились, / и говорить-то толком не научились.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 22, 1889, 430.

Six to ten ‘strangelanders,’ as they say here, built huts of branches with pretty wares and *prianiki*, and a few traders came on carts and simply set out their wares on the grass”⁴⁸⁰

Polenova also paid special attention to local costume. She was particularly interested in men’s headgear and the special “podnizka” headdress that young women put on at the moment of their betrothal and wore until the moment they were wed. Polenova noted that each family had its own and they were handed down from bride to bride. The podnizka was so important that if it happened that a family did not have one, they had to borrow from a neighbor. Polenova found these local costumes and the local “types” themselves inspiration for paintings on both folklore and historical themes.⁴⁸¹ For Polenova, encounters with the *narod* provided endless inspiration for her attempts to create a modern, living Russian art. While Russian history often gave her a particular subject, it was folk art and folk culture that motivated her to create an art that she felt was decidedly in the present.

Overall the trip to Kostroma, despite its bumpy beginning, proved fruitful in the end. Her frame of mind improved considerably over the two months, to the point of uncharacteristic optimism. Even rainy weather could not put her off—it merely meant there would be mushrooms to hunt.⁴⁸² By August, she was so deeply involved in her work that she did not want to leave it to go to Paris with her brother Konstantin Dmitrievich on their planned visit to the 1889 Exposition Universelle.⁴⁸³ She was attempting entirely new subjects, including a night scene. “Probably

⁴⁸⁰ “Хотя день был дождливый, но временами проглядывало солнце, и тогда очень красиво было смотреть на эту огромную, пеструю, веселую толпу, в середине которой сидят и едят весьма непривычную и лакомую для них мясную пищу. Человек шесть, десять «чужестранцев», как они здесь выражаются, вокруг построены шалаши с красным товаром, с пряниками, а некоторые торговцы приехали на телегах и попросту разложили товар на траве” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, July 4, 1889, 431 and E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 22, 1889, 430. Prianiki are spice cakes somewhat like gingerbread. They were usually made in special, decorative wooden molds like German springerle.

⁴⁸¹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, July 28, 1889, 432.

⁴⁸² E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, August 18, 1889, 435.

⁴⁸³ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, August 11, 1889, 433.

nothing will come of it, but I am already satisfied with the fact that I have to paint studies at night, to go to observe and make notes on a moonlit night, and this all makes me give myself over to it more completely, to study them more intensively and in more detail, and thus to get pleasure from them.”⁴⁸⁴

Interestingly, it is during this productive period that Natal’ia Vasil’evna wrote to Polenova, voicing some of the frustrations a woman artist faced.

From the bottom of my heart I am glad you are having such a successful summer, and attribute that mainly to the fact that you are far from your family and close friends, and you are not bothered and distracted by life’s troubles and petty squabbles. Although you love the Antipovs, you do not worry yourself sick over them, and you can paint only when painting is the main thing in life, not a side pursuit, when there is no husband, no children and no damned housework.⁴⁸⁵

Clearly Natal’ia Vasil’evna is envious of Polenova’s freedom to create as she wished. To date I have not found any direct evidence in her writings that Polenova felt constrained by her gender. She left behind no pronouncements like Natal’ia Vasil’evna’s. This may in part be due to the fact that she was raised in a progressive family that supported her artistic ambitions, so she did not feel restricted. As I have illustrated with the episodes with *Crows on the Snow*, she encountered gender bias during her life, but she seems to have been able either to ignore it or simply did not consider it offensive enough to make comment. Polenova certainly could be outspoken when provoked, so it appears that gender issues were not at the forefront of her artistic concerns. Whether Polenova would agree with Natal’ia Vasil’evna that her lack of husband and

⁴⁸⁴ “Вероятно, ничего этого не удастся сделать, но я уже тем довольна, что для нее приходится писать ночью этюды, ходит наблюдать и делать заметки в лунные ночи, и это все заставляет более всецело им отдаваться, подробнее и интенсивнее их изучать, а поэтому и наслаждаться ими.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 4, 1889, 433.

⁴⁸⁵ “От души радуюсь за тебя, такое удачное лето, и приписываю это главным образом тому, что ты вдали от семьи и близких, и никакие жизненные заботы и мелькие дрязги тебе не мешают и не отвлекают. Антиповых ты хотя и любишь, но за них не болеешь, а живописью можно заниматься только тогда, когда она есть главное в жизни, а не побочные занятия, когда нет ни мужа, ни детей, ни проклятого хозяйства.” N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, August 1889, 435.

children made for a better life is questionable, but at the very least she must have recognized that she did not have the same load of responsibilities keeping her from creative work.

3.3 THE 1889 EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE

Though she wavered about going to Paris with the rest of the family, Polenova ultimately decided, “For a long time I have not undertaken anything to refresh myself. It has been almost nine years since I have been abroad and, moreover, I have not seen anything uplifting and inspiring, especially in my specialty, for too long.”⁴⁸⁶ While she had clearly been inspired and energized by her trip to Kostroma, it was evidently not enough to sate Polenova’s thirst for inspiration in the realm of the fine arts.

Polenova found Paris little changed other than looking a bit older. On their first day in Paris she and her companions went immediately to the Eiffel Tower. On the way they ran into several Russian acquaintances, including Iakunchikova’s mother, which redoubled the feeling of being at home in the city. At first Polenova was not impressed with the Exposition, finding it crude, amateurish and much too large. As she continued to visit it over several days, however, she found a lot of things to report home about. She reported on Algerian dances, Chinese theater, Egyptian donkey races, and Turkish coffee in letters to her mother, but it is unclear if she herself was captivated by these particular things or merely thought her mother would be interested in hearing about them.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ “Очень давно я ничего не предпринимала для самоосвежения. Почти девять лет не была за границей и, кроме того, даже для специальности моей слишком давно не вижу ничего подымающего и вдохновляющего.” E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, August 24, 1889, 436.

⁴⁸⁷ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, September 26/October 8, 1889, 437-438.

Once she had a chance to get her bearings, Polenova found many interesting things in the art section. She was surprised to find a number of wooden items made by French peasants that had designs similar to Russian ones. She also noted that in the Spanish and Middle Eastern sections there were wood carvings similar to theirs, especially that found at Kostroma.⁴⁸⁸ This discovery, as well as her recognition of common motifs in other decorative arts at the Exposition, later led her to consider what particular features that made the Russian in the folk art she had seen and collected distinctive.⁴⁸⁹

In the realm of the fine arts, Mariia Bashkirtseva's (Marie Bashkirtseff) and Bastien Le Page's works particularly captivated Polenova. While in Kostroma Polenova had read Bashkirtseva's diaries, but had nothing to say about them.⁴⁹⁰ That she was reading them, indicates an interest in the first Russian woman artist to make a splash on the Parisian art scene. In Paris she finally had a chance to see Bashkirtseva's works at the retrospective exhibition held concurrently with the Exposition Universelle and noted to Mamontova that they are "unquestionably talented, but completely immature."⁴⁹¹ Nevertheless, in 1891 she started a painting, *Comrade* (Товарищ), which was inspired by Bashkirtseva's *The Meeting* (1884).⁴⁹²

Le Page was one of the few contemporary French artists whom Russians knew quite well. Polenova had seen works by him in S. M. Tretyakov's collection and was curious to see more at the Exposition. That summer, Mamontova made the curious comment to Polenova, "What a pity

⁴⁸⁸ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, September 27/October 9, 1889, 439.

⁴⁸⁹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, September 23/October 5, 1889, 438.

⁴⁹⁰ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 9, 1889, 428.

⁴⁹¹ "бесспорно талантливый, но совсем незрелый" E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, September 23/October 5, 1889, 438.

⁴⁹² E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, September 3, 1891, 466. It is not clear if she ever finished it. E. Ia. Shanks exhibited a painting called *Brand-New in School* (Новенька в школе) with the Peredvizhniki in 1892. It shows a young girl being assessed by her classmates on her first day. It is possible that Shanks and Polenova worked on this subject together. P. M. Tretyakov purchased Shanks's painting for his collection the same year.

that he cannot read Bashkirtseva's diaries.⁴⁹³ While Bashkirtseva does mention Le Page often, it is not clear what Mamontova thought Le Page would gain from the diaries, other than a sense that he was appreciated. When Polenova finally reached the exhibition of Le Page's works, she was quite impressed by his *Jeanne d'Arc*, but had little to say about it at the time other than the other artworks exhibited paled in comparison to his.⁴⁹⁴

While the Exposition Universelle provided a wealth of material for Polenova's consideration in both folk arts and the fine arts, ultimately she found it overwhelming: "It is good to live in Paris, but not when the exhibition is on, then it is terribly exhausting. I have seen so much and a lot that is very good that I just want to stop looking so that everything settled in my head, and then sort it all out and distribute it according to its merits."⁴⁹⁵

One of the results of her process of sorting out was her reaction to Stasov's article about the Exposition Universelle. While she thought the article good on a number of counts, she was shocked at his reaction to Le Page, writing Antipova, "He did not understand Bastien, he speaks especially crudely about his amazing Jeanne d'Arc."⁴⁹⁶ What Stasov had to say about it was this: "[H]is Joan of Arc is not the inspired future savior of the nation, but some kind of insane psychopath who [suffers] only from physical complaints, her eyes wander from fever, and her

⁴⁹³ "Как жаль, что он не может прочитать записок Башкирцевой." E. G. Mamontova to E. D. Polenova, August 9, 1889, 434.

⁴⁹⁴ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, September 23/October 5, 1889, 439.

⁴⁹⁵ "Жить в Париже хорошо, но не тогда, когда выставка, а то ужасно утомительно. Так много, много видела и много очень хорошего, хочется перестать смотреть, чтобы все это улеглось в голове, и тогда рассортировать все это и распределить по достоинству." E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, October 1889, 439.

⁴⁹⁶ "Bastien'a он не понял, особенно грубо говорит о его чудной Jeanne d'Arc." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 23, 1889, 446.

cheeks glow, and there is not one single trace in her entire face of a deep spiritual lift, of spiritual life.”⁴⁹⁷

The differences in Polenova’s and Stasov’s opinions about this work are indicative of a shift then occurring in Russian art. For years Russian critics had demanded that art be narrative and tied to ideas. This trend began in literature in the 1840s and reached its height in the 1860s-1870s with such literary giants as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. The Peredvizhniki carried this legacy in the visual arts. In the early 1890s, however, the younger generation of Russian artists began to examine metaphysical interests. Towards the end of the 1890s an “art for art’s sake” philosophy emerged. An example of this is the work of Mikhail Nesterov, who was a member of the Abramtsevo circle and heavily influenced by Bastien Le Page.⁴⁹⁸ His *Vision of the Youth Bartholomew* (Видение отроку Варфоломею) of 1889-1890, a scene from the life of the young St. Sergius of Radonezh set against the landscape around Abramtsevo, is indicative of the increasing interest in mysticism among younger Russian artists.

3.4 IAKUNCHIKOVA ENTERS THE PARISIAN ART WORLD

Iakunchikova’s career in the 1890s provides an example of the shift of interests and ideologies among Russian artists. She also helped feed Polenova’s increasing attention to developments in contemporary European art. At the same time, Iakunchikova’s activities demonstrate the

⁴⁹⁷ “его «Жанна д'Арк» не вдохновенная будущая спасительница отечества, а какая-то безумная психопатка, у которой только от физических причин, от лихорадки блуждают глаза, а щеки рдеют, и нет тут во всем лице ни единой черточки глубокого душевного подъема, душевной жизни.” Vladimir Stasov, “Po povody Vsemirnoi vystavki,” *Severnyi vestnik*, no. 10 (October), 1889, 215, as quoted in Sakharova, *Khronika*, 760 n 8.

⁴⁹⁸ Dolinina, “Eyes Wide Shut,” 113.

opportunities available for a woman—admittedly a woman of means—determined to have a career in the arts.

As she immersed herself in the Parisian art world her first winter in Paris (1889-1890), Iakunchikova began to redefine herself more concretely as an artist. She realized where she needed to direct her ambitions and recognized that she had much work before her. She entered the Académie Julian and studied under Tony Robert-Fleury and William-Adolphe Bouguereau. The Académie Julian had long been recognized as an institution where women could get excellent training, given that the French Academy was still closed to women.⁴⁹⁹ Iakunchikova seems to have used the Académie largely as a training ground and for access to models. She commented in one of her letters to Polenova and Natal'ia Vasil'evna that there was complete freedom in the studio to work as one pleased; she saw Bouguereau only once and, while Fleury was present more frequently, he hardly ever gave any useful comments but merely sniffed at works he considered substandard.⁵⁰⁰

While the Académie Julian served largely a mundane, practical purpose for Iakunchikova, what made a more concrete impression on her were her visits to pastel exhibitions. She was at first intoxicated by the medium itself, having never tried her hand at it. As she studied it further, however, she began to understand “that you can attain the same thing in any

⁴⁹⁹ In spite of this enormous barrier to women's professional activity in France and considerable gender bias among critics and the public, available statistics indicate that there were greater numbers of women active in the fine arts in France than in Russia in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For instance, Jane Mayo Roos indicates that at the 1869 Salon there were a total of 317 works exhibited by women artists. While this is a mere 12% of the total works exhibited (2262 works were exhibited by male artists), it is still a significant number. “Girls ‘n’ the ‘Hood: Female Artists in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan (London: Ashgate, 2000) 158 For more on women at the Académie Julian, see Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker, eds., *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian* (New York: The Dahesh Museum, 1999) and Catherine Fehrer, “Women at the Académie Julian in Paris,” *The Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1100 (November 1994): 752-757.

⁵⁰⁰ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 26-27; Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 18; and Borok, “Iakunchikova,” 113-114.

medium, you just have to approach your work as openly and fervently as these pastel artists.”⁵⁰¹ Iakunchikova clearly reevaluated her understanding of art and artists in her first winter in Paris. She avidly sought out all types of exhibitions—not just current art—and new modes of expression.⁵⁰²

By 1890, Iakunchikova had a firmer grasp on the ins and outs of the Paris art world and was looking more specifically at what was engaging contemporary artists. While she found the exhibition at Champs-Élysées “an utter bore,”⁵⁰³ she did find much of interest in the exhibitions of Japanese prints. She sent a catalog of the Salon to Polenova and commented, “The Japanese booklets I put in [the catalog] are much more interesting.”⁵⁰⁴ This is the earliest evidence we have that Iakunchikova was aware of the *japonisme* fad, which may have had an influence on her decision to take up aquatints in 1892.⁵⁰⁵ She also sent the catalogue from the Salon Messonier to Vasili Dmitrievich and noted that there were good works, but she could remember only bits and pieces. For her, what stood out was “the temperament of an artist’s direction rather than a particular picture.”⁵⁰⁶ “Temperament” is something with which she would infuse her own works in the coming years.

Iakunchikova was most impressed with a “discovery” she made at the 1890 Salon des indépendants: pointillism. She excitedly related to Polenova,

⁵⁰¹ “всякими способами можно достичь того же, стоит только так искренно и горячо отнестись к работе как эти пастелисты.” As cited in Borok, “Iakunchikova,” 112 and Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 23.

⁵⁰² Borok, “Iakunchikova,” 112.

⁵⁰³ “скука крошечная” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 453 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9685, sheet 1.

⁵⁰⁴ “Японские тетрадки, которые я туда вложила куда интереснее.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 453 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9685, sheet 1.

⁵⁰⁵ The first exhibition of Japanese art, including prints, in Russia was not until 1896. This exhibition would have a strong influence on the young Anna Petrovna Ostroumova-Lebedeva (1871-1955), who was one of the first women to enter the Academy after it readmitted women and who would establish herself as a printmaker at the fin-de-siècle. Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 119-120.

⁵⁰⁶ “темперамент направления художника, а не отдельная картина.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 453 and Tretyakov Manuscript Department, fond 54, no. 9685, sheets 1-2.

[T]heir search for theory has reached such an obvious stage that it was simply most interesting, even more so because there are many talented [artists] among them. Imagine what they invented: in an unexpected way they understood that the color of an object plus the color of the air or another object reflecting on it is equal to a new, complex color and for greater clarity they agreed not to mix tones on the palette, but on the canvas, that is, to place dots of different colors of an identical form and size separately from each other. For example, shade on the sand is brown dabs (the tone of unlit sand), lilac and blue (the tone of the sky). All of these schemas would be repugnant if the things lacked talent, but since there is something attractive in them, your attention is captivated against your will.⁵⁰⁷

This statement shows that while Iakunchikova was fascinated by formal experiment, she held “talent,” which seems to have been as phantasmal as inspiration, in high esteem as a criterion for judging art.

She was impressed by a couple of works at Champ-de-Mars: Albert Besnard’s *Une famille* and Anders Zorn’s *Reflexe*. Both works attracted her for their use of light and their composition. She found Zorn’s *Reflexe* particularly stunning for its representation of light on the water, sand and figure. She considered his “*franchise d’execution*” the most attractive element in his work, but commented to Polenova that “the French, apparently, do not approve of [it].”⁵⁰⁸ Zorn was very popular among Russian artists in particular for his use of light and his manner of

⁵⁰⁷ “[И]скание теорий живописи у них достигло такой явной степени, что это было просто преинтересно тем более что между ним много талантливых. Представьте что они выдумали: неожиданным образом они поняли, что цвет предмета плюсь цвет воздуха или другого предмета отращающегося на нем, равно новому сложному цвету, и для большей ясности условились они не смешивать мона на палитре, а на холсте т. е. класть отдельно друг от друга, крапинками одинаковой формы и величины мазкиразной цвета, например тень на песке—мазочки коричневые (тон неосвещенного песка) лиловые и синие (тон неба). Все эти схемы были бы противные и неинтересны если бы вещи были бездарными но так как в них есть что то привлекательное, то поневоле внимание задето.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 454 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9685, sheets 4-5. In addition, her very brief notes from 1890 also indicate an interest in pointillism and the following artists: “Besnard, Larsson, Harrisson, Zorn, Muenier.” Notes by Iakunchikova, Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 205, no. 10, sheet 1.

⁵⁰⁸ “французы кажется у него не одабривают.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 453 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9685, sheet 3. It is unclear why she thought the French did not approve since by this time the Impressionists had gained acceptance.

expression.⁵⁰⁹ Iakunchikova's interest in *Reflexe* marks the beginnings of her active concentration on light effects.

While Besnard was not particularly innovative or avant-garde, his art was valued by many Russian artists for its ability to capture a specific moment in time,⁵¹⁰ which seems to have attracted Iakunchikova in *Une famille*. She found it to be remarkably alive with movement, but she was not blindly enraptured by it. She told Polenova,

It is a pity that the French need to make up things [(a manner of specialization, etc.)] is so evident in it. Here he invented colors for himself, a known quantity of colors for each painting, and he paints particular objects with the colors he invented for them.

How strange that the French do not take to the desire of the system to limit itself with their perpetual striving for novelty. He had amazing things at the pastel exhibit, drawings in particular. In drawing he has something in common with Manet.⁵¹¹

Again, at this point, while Iakunchikova was interested in formal experiment, she did not support it merely for effect, especially when it strayed too far from naturalism.

Iakunchikova also found Jules-Alexis Meunier's works interesting, especially his picture of a village house at dusk, about which she wrote expressively: “[F]rom the door an old lady emerged and called to Jean or Vincent, who was passing by on the way back from work, and who turned his head and stopped to talk a bit. Their voices and steps on the roadway are

⁵⁰⁹ Kruglov, “Impressionizm,” 23. Zorn was so popular in Russia that there was a special ceremony in St. Petersburg honoring him on January 27, 1897. I. S. Zil'bershtein and V. A. Samkov, eds., *Konstantin Korovin vspominaet ...* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo, 1990), part 1, n 116. I have not yet determined who organized this ceremony.

⁵¹⁰ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 28

⁵¹¹ “Жаль зачем на нем так видно фра[н]цузскую необходимость выдумывать [(себе манеру специальность и т. п.)] негодные вещи. Вот он изобрел себе краски, известное количество цвети на каждую картину и красит особые предметы выдуманным для него цветом.

Как странно как не вяжется у французов это желание системы ограничить чем то себя с постоянным стремлением их к новизне. На пастельном выставке вещи у него были чудесные, главное рисунк; он имеет в рисунке что то общее с Manet.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 453 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9685, sheet 2. The portion in square brackets is omitted from the published text.

audible.”⁵¹² These notes make it clear that Iakunchikova was most attracted to the manner of expression in works of art rather than any particular ideology. This particular reaction also underscores the shift in interests that characterized the younger generation of Russian artists.

Polenova was very pleased to receive the catalogue and Iakunchikova’s exhibition notes. She noted that receiving information about the French art world was particularly inspiring especially since “Ours is so trifling and weak that if you know only it then the desire to paint will surely leave you.”⁵¹³ Polenova’s comments reflect the current struggles in Russia in the Peredvizhnik camp and elsewhere, of which I will write more below. Polenova’s letter also underscores that they shared a predisposition for depression, especially when inspiration, a being we have seen that they referred to as the “phantom” who comes to visit, leaves. Polenova hoped the phantom had been visiting Iakunchikova, for she herself was in its presence, “This is a senseless superstition, but you know, when I start to feel the first symptoms of the phantom’s absence, i.e., dryness in my throat, emptiness in my head, and then horrible ennui, then I become horribly sad at the thought that my inspiration is flying away”⁵¹⁴ Polenova clearly recognizes that belief in the phantom is a kind of irrational mysticism, but it expressed perfectly the sensation she and Iakunchikova felt in its grasp. It also, perhaps, further demonstrates the shift away from realist ideology and towards a symbolist conception of artistic processes.

⁵¹² “[И]з двери высунулась старушка и окликнула проходящего Jean или Vincent, который возвращаясь с работы, повернул голову и остановился чтобы поговорить. Слышатся и голоса их и шаги по мостовой.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1890, 454 and Tretyakov Manuscript Department, fond 54, no. 9685, sheet 4.

⁵¹³ “Наша так ничтожна, так слабостна, что если знаться с нею одной, то право охота пройдет заниматься живописью.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, June 1890, Tretyakov Manuscript Department, fond 54, no. 7348, sheet 1. This letter is published in Sakharova (455-456), but this portion of the text is missing.

⁵¹⁴ “[Э]то ... бессмысленное суеверие но знаете ли, что когда я начинаю чувствовать первые симптомы отсутствия призрака т.е. сухость в горле, пустота в голове, а потом ужасную тоскливость, то мне делается конечно ужасно грустно при мысли, что вдохновение мое отлетает” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, June 1890, Tretyakov Manuscript Department, fond 54, no. 7348, sheets 2-3. This letter is published in Sakharova (455-456), but this portion of the text is missing.

The following year, Iakunchikova again visited the Salon des indépendents, the Salon Champs Élysées and the Salon Champ-de-Mars. She had little comment, leaving only the following cryptic notes in her diary:

Salon Champs Élysées, Champs [sic] de Mars
Zorn
Gallen souffrance muette
Meunier – Barge hauler. Pine with sea in the background. Old woman leading away sheep.
Iarotskii – no.
Champs Elysees [sic]. Thorn – que reponra-t-elle.⁵¹⁵

In the *Catalogue Illustré* for each exhibition, the only works that merited reproduction were Zorn's *Dans l'atelier*, *Coucher de soleil*—both nudes—and *Portrait of M. Spuller*, an imposing man in a large wooden chair. At the very least, her notes indicate that Iakunchikova had a continued interest in Zorn's use of light and color, and was taking note of artists working in symbolist and the emerging Art Nouveau trends. She was not, however, one to reject a well executed academic painting. For example, Meunier was an academic artist who was a *sociétaire* of the Société nationale des beaux-arts and exhibited regularly with it through the early twentieth century.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ “Salon Champs Élysées, Champs [sic] de Mars

Zorn

Gallen souffrance muette

Meunier – бурлак. Сосна на фоне море. Убирает овец старуха.

Яроцкий – нет.

Champs Elysees [sic]. Thorn – que reponra-t-elle.” M. F. Kiselev and D. E. Iakovlev, “Dnevnik M. V.

Iakunchikovoï 1890-1892 gg.,” *Pamiatniki kul'tury, novye otkrytiia*, 1996 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1996) 478.

Neither Kiselev nor I have been able to determine who Iarotskii was. According to the exhibition catalogues, Zorn exhibited *Portrait of M. Spuller*, *Coucher de soleil*, *Brasserie (Stockholm)*, *Portrait de dame*, *Portrait de M. M...*, *M. F... chez soi*, and *La Valse*. Gallen exhibited two works: *Souffrance muette* and *Jeune fille a l'église*. Meunier showed *Le catéchisme*, *Le Jeteur d'épervier*, *Portrait de M. Coquelincadet*; — *Rôle de Thomas Diafoirus du Malade imaginaire*, *Sous les pins de Saint-Jean (Alpes-Maritimes)*, *Rue de village*, *La route*, *Vieux marin de Ville-franche*, *Le Palais de la marine à Villefranche* and *Le soir*.

⁵¹⁶ The Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela had studied in the Academie Julian in 1884-1889 and was well known to Russian artists, especially the generation immediately following Iakunchikova. Diaghilev's interest in him led him to arrange an exhibition of Russian and Finnish artists in 1898, which Iakunchikova participated in. Iakunchikova's

In 1891, Iakunchikova began to appropriate what she had seen in Paris and to develop her own artistic language. A free style of brushwork is apparent in *Versailles*. In contrast to the landscape style she would soon develop, here she is more clearly concerned with light and color effects of a particular moment—which is closer to strict Impressionism—rather than a psychological perception of a landscape.⁵¹⁷ *View from the Bell Tower of the Savvino-Storozhevskii Monastery near Zvenigorod* (С колокольни Саввино-Сторожевского монастыря близ Звенигорода) of the same year is more typical of Iakunchikova’s interest in lyrical landscape. The work exists in two variants, one from 1891 in pastels and one from 1898 in oils.⁵¹⁸ Both clearly show Iakunchikova’s interest in light effects and the presence of two compositional elements she used often: a portion of a large object in the foreground and a bird’s-eye view.⁵¹⁹ The 1898 variant, however, shows a flattening of color planes due to the increased influence of Post-Impressionism and her experience in printmaking. Here I will concentrate on the 1891 version, which P. M. Tretyakov purchased for his collection.

It is clear that she has mastered pastel by this point and is interested in its ability to create the soft, diffused light effects of an overcast day. In spite of Iakunchikova’s evident interest in the formal aspects of contemporary French art, the purely analytical side of art was not her primary interest.⁵²⁰ She imbued many of her works, especially her Russian landscapes, with her

and Gallen-Kallela’s similar trajectories from Impressionist styles through experiments with prints and national folk art would be an interesting investigation, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁵¹⁷ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979) 35-36 and Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 36.

⁵¹⁸ Iakunchikova sketched these works during a visit to Russia, but I do not know if she produced the final versions in Russia or Paris. She was known for painting scenes of Russia while in Paris. In his obituary, Diaghilev wrote, “For creative strength she came to Russia from time to time, gathered up the ‘Russian soul’ and had to fly back again. In Paris she worked on views of the St. Sergius-Trinity Monastery!” (За творческими силами она урывками приезжала в Россию, набиралась «русским духом» и должна была опять лететь назад. В Париже она работала над видами Троице-Сергиевской лавры!) *Mir iskusstva*, no. 12, 1902.

⁵¹⁹ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 22.

⁵²⁰ M. F. Kiselev, “Krug Polenova. Tvorchestvo M. V. Iakunchikova,” in *Vasilii Dmitrievich Polenov i russkaia khudozhestvennaia kul’tura vtoroi poloviny XIX – pervoi chetverti XX veka. Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Letnii sad, 2001) 95.

own moods and psychological states,⁵²¹ most often a type of wistful reverie.⁵²² This work contains a common compositional element in her landscapes: an enlarged object in the foreground is placed against the landscape, which is depicted from above. The landscape often extends far into the distance before meeting the horizon.⁵²³ Such a composition intensifies the feeling for the landscape and yet speaks of a certain remove from it. Interestingly, instead of the view from the bell tower that was commonly reproduced on period postcards, which showed the monastery grounds, Iakunchikova positioned herself to look out upon the surrounding landscape, further emphasizing the importance of the Russian land for her. The knowledge that the monastery was close to her beloved Vvedenskoe increases the feasibility of this interpretation. A note from her diary underscores this, “What does our Motherland mean to us? What does our beloved home, beloved corner of a garden mean if not, having understood them, to understand through them the general, the eternal.”⁵²⁴ Clearly, for Iakunchikova the Russian land was a key to comprehending the timeless mysteries of the universe. She would return to the monastery and its grounds, locale of some of her earliest works in the Moscow School, several times throughout her career during her brief sojourns in Russia.

As I noted above, Iakunchikova’s gifts for observation and description come through in all of her letters. They are perhaps most evident in a letter she wrote to Polenova on November 27/December 9, 1891 as she traveled back to Paris. Its insights make it worth quoting at length.

We arrived here only yesterday morning because we spent a whole week in Vienna. Imagine that already at the border the Moscow weight dropped off me and everything seemed full of the promises of life. Remember the first station in

⁵²¹ Kiselev, “Rozhdeniia,” 58.

⁵²² Octave Uzanne, “Modern Colour Engraving with Notes on Some Work by Marie Jacouchikoff,” *The Studio* 6 (1895): 152.

⁵²³ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 32

⁵²⁴ “К чему нам Родина! К чему нам любимый дом, любимый угол сада — как не для того, чтобы, поняв их, понять через них общее, вечное.” As quoted in Polenova, *Iakunchikova*, 27 and Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 30.

Austria, where the train stands for about an hour? It was still dark when we arrived there, then the stones on the platform began to turn blue and became completely cold, blue, and the cars were black against a red stripe of sky, and the white, whistling steam, and through the glass door are bits of sky, naked trees, rails disappearing into the distance, the station stalls, under the awnings are still unextinguished lamps, the train board, passengers running. Again everything is so familiar, everyday, alive.

Vienna was also good. Again poles with posters, lamps, omnibuses, endless stories, windows, pipes. [I have not painted it because I caught a cold and was completely useless after travel, but this is not bad, everything here is a delight and I need to do everything.

Since morning it has been raining, and] the fog and water and the smoke from the chimneys have all combined into a wonderful, gray dampness. One of my rooms looks out over the avenue, the other over the courtyard. From one side I can hear and see the omnibuses well, all the Parisian street bustle, and from the other roofs, roofs, chimneys, courtyards—it is a real insect nest—the back walls of buildings, in each window its own life, its own world. And very far off is forest and hills.

This gives me such agitation, an overwhelming feeling of the necessity (not merely the possibility) to paint, that I can hardly express it.⁵²⁵

This letter reveals that while Russia held a special emotional resonance for Iakunchikova, it was also a burdensome weight. Europe, in contrast, was alive and inspirational. Ultimately, this enthusiasm and *need* to paint, to capture all she observed, all the bits and pieces of life that

⁵²⁵ “Приехали мы сюда только вчера утром, так как целую неделю провели в Вене. Представьте уже на границе Московские пуды с меня свалились и все показалось полно обещающей жизни. Помните первую станции в Австрии где поезд стоит около часа? Еще было темно когда мы туда приехали потом камни платформы начали голубеть и стали совсем холодные, голубые, а вагоны черные на красной полосе неба и белый шипящий дым; сквозь стекланную дверь—кочки неба, голых деревьев, удаляющихся рельсы, станционные бутки под навесом еще не потушенные фонари, объявления поездов, бегущие пассажиры. Опять все такое знакомое будничоне живое.

В Вене тоже хорошо было, опять столбы с афишами фонари омнибусы нескончкемые этажи окна трубы. [Писать не пришлось совсем простудилась и никуда не годилась после дорога но это не беда здесь вся прелесть и все что нужно слделать.

С утра лил дождь и] туман и вода и дым из трубы, все смешалось в одну чудную серую мокроту. Одна комната моя выходит на авенуе другая на двор. С одной стороны слышно и видно омнибусы всю парижскую уличную тормошню с другой крыши крыши трубы дворы точно гнезда насекомых задняя стена дома и в каждом окне своя жизнь свой мир совсем далеко лес и холмы.

Делается такое волнение такое переполненное чувство, необходимость (не только возможность) писать, что просто выразить невохможно.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, November 27/December 9, 1891, 470-471 and Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9687, sheets 1-2. Emphasis in the original. The text in square brackets is not in the published version. In the Russian in this footnote, I have retained Iakunchikova’s punctuation, or, rather, the lack thereof, to illustrate her rush to put everything down on paper, rather than following Sakharova’s careful editing of the text.

rushed at her, resulted in her dissatisfaction with the Académie Julian. It may be that her illness created a sense of urgency that the Académie would not allow, but she also wrote to Polenova that she “noticed that the atmosphere of the studio makes me stupid.” She further said, “it may not be right to prefer a novel to the grammar I need so much, but I am utterly incapable of forcing myself to eat when I want to drink.”⁵²⁶

In spite of her strong independent streak, she was very interested in the opinions of people she admired about her work, Polenova in particular. In the same letter, she described starting a new work on a “musical theme” that she hoped Polenova would approve,

Evening, night, an opened window, near it the edge of a table, on the table a lamp with a simple shade that is faintly lit from the side, books, papers, a simple, rush chair. Leaning on his elbow on the window frame is a male figure, on him the light cast from the brightly lit table, beyond him is the dark sky with the “cauldron,” the edge of a tall building and, in it, and below, the entire mass of Paris housing with its window lights with their independent lives flickering in them. Well, I don’t know how to express myself well, but you understand. Nothing [is really defined], but there is a mass of different things. It is simply that a student studied very late, got bored, looked out the window and got lost in thought.⁵²⁷

This describes the sketches for what would ultimately become *Intimate Reflections* (Reflets intimes) in 1894, a work that made a strong impression on Polenova when she finally saw it.

⁵²⁶ “Я даже заметила, что атмосфера мастерской действует на меня отупляющим образом. and Не знаю правда ли—предпочесть роман грамматике, которая мне так необходима, но вполне не в состоянии себя пересилить и есть, когда хочется пить.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, January 6, 1892, 471 and Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9690, sheets 2, 4. In Sakharova this letter is listed as January 1. The first page of the letter is indeed marked January 1, but the remainder of the letter is marked January 6. Iakunchikova noted that she was interrupted while writing it and was just getting back to it. The text published in Sakharova is all from January 6. The January 1 text is primarily well wishes for the new year and Iakunchikova’s hopes to do a lot of work in the upcoming year.

⁵²⁷ “Вечер—ночь отворенное окно около ней край стола на столе лампа с простым немного подоженным с боку абажуром, книги, бумаги, простой соломенной стул. Облокотившись на перила окна—фигура мужчины, на нем отблеск света от ярко освещенного стола, за ним темное небо с кастрюлькой, край высокого дома, и в нем, и внизу, во всей массе парижского жилья огни окна с самостоятельными в них мелькающими жизньями. Ну я не умею хорошенько выразиться, но понимаете. Ничего [особенно опрелеленного] но масса всякой всячины. Просто—студент занимался до позднего вечера, соскучился выглянул в окно и задумался.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, January 6, 1892, 471 and Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9690, sheet 3. The text in square brackets is misquoted in the published version.

These sketches show how much the concept of expressing a variety of states, including being “lost in thought,” had intrigued Iakunchikova. While she had a clear predilection for observing minute details in the world around her, it was states of mind that would preoccupy her in coming years.

Ultimately, Iakunchikova decided to leave the Academie Julian and rent her own studio. She did study briefly with the American artist Julius Rolshoven (1858-1930) in the winter of 1892-1893,⁵²⁸ but otherwise she worked independently for the remainder of her career.

3.5 POLENOVA FORGES NEW PATHS IN MOSCOW

Meanwhile, Polenova was working hard in Moscow on her own art, developing a market for Abramtsevo goods and attempting to breathe new life into the Moscow arts scene. At the Abramtsevo workshop she had the students copy the wooden objects that she brought from her trip to Kostroma province and was pleased that they took to it quickly. They rapidly produced a bench and hoped to have several ready for an exhibition planned for December.⁵²⁹ She was especially taken with a hanging cupboard inspired by items from Kostroma province and was working on designs based on it.⁵³⁰ In St. Petersburg an exhibition was planned for all the “professional schools” and Abramtsevo was invited to participate.⁵³¹ These activities would be

⁵²⁸ Little is known about Rolshoven’s activities in Paris. In 1882 he went to study at the Academie Julian and then stayed in Paris teaching. There are a number works in the Smithsonian, but I have not seen them. After his return to the United States upon the outbreak of World War I, he gained some fame for his impressionistic depictions of the desert southwest. According to Kiselev, Iakunchikova’s aunt characterized Rolshoven as belonging to the school of art for art’s sake. Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 36.

⁵²⁹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 16, 1889, 439.

⁵³⁰ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, June 1890, 456-457.

⁵³¹ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 23, 1889, 445.

among the last major efforts that Polenova made for Abramtsevo; by mid-1893 she would cease associating with Mamontova altogether.⁵³²

At the same time Polenova made her first foray into the world of curatorship. With Natal'ia Vasil'evna's help, in 1889 she organized an exhibition of studies at the Moscow Society's space. Vasilii Dmitrievich was originally to take part in the planning, but he was still in Paris. Exhibiting studies was not a frequent activity in the Russian art world. This worried Polenova, who expressed her fears to Antipova: "this kind of thing is completely new for Moscow, this event we are all behind was not easy to make happen, so we really want to set it up on firm ground from the first, so it does not have a chance to fail."⁵³³ It may have helped matters that by this time S. M. Tretyakov was the president of the Society of Lovers of Art.⁵³⁴

The exhibition was held for a month (November 1 – December 1) and included works by well known artists, including Polenov and Surikov, along with students from the Moscow School.⁵³⁵ Polenova wanted to make the exhibition items not for sale, but all of the artists except her and Vasilii Dmitrievich decided they wanted sell their works, so she had to capitulate. Needless to say, Polenova was emotionally invested in the exhibition, wanting it to bring something new and fresh to the Russian art world, as she believed such experimental exhibitions had brought to the art world abroad.

⁵³² Her sudden break with Abramtsevo and Mamontova has left scholars puzzled. Dora Kogan suggests that Polenova found Abramtsevo an increasing distraction from her own work (*Mamontovskii kruzhok* [Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1970], 171-172), which seems the most likely explanation, but the sudden cessation of communication with Mamontova, a frequent recipient of letters from Polenova over the years, remains a mystery. Perhaps further archival research in the future will provide more insight.

⁵³³ "Это дело в Москве совсем новое, дело, за которое мы все стояли, кот[орое] провести было не легко, поэтому хочется с первого же раза поставить его на такую почву, которая не дала бы ему провалиться." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 16, 1889, 439-440.

⁵³⁴ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 760 n 6.

⁵³⁵ Natal'ia Vasil'evna planned on photographing the exhibit and sending the photographs to Vasilii Dmitrievich. N. V. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, October 20, 1889, 441. I do not know if these photographs still exist or if they were ever made.

For her part, the titles of the works she exhibited indicate that she was still relying on proven subjects. She wrote to Antipova that she was planning to exhibit “a knoll, a peasant hut, globeflowers [*Trollius europaeus*], swallows and mushrooms.”⁵³⁶ This exhibition attracted little interest, but in the autumn of 1890, Polenova and Vasilii Dmitrievich put together another exhibition of studies. She was pleased that Repin had agreed to participate and hoped that the presence of his works would increase the interest in the exhibition over that of the previous year.⁵³⁷

In addition to exhibiting landscape paintings on subjects that had brought her success in the past, Polenova began exploring new themes. In October 1889 she was working on *Laundress* (Прячка), which would eventually become known as *Guests* (Гости) and had started one called *Toy Shop* (Игрушечная лавка).⁵³⁸ The titles of these works suggest further forays into genre painting, a mode that had proven successful for her in the past. She worked diligently from models for *Laundress* alongside the Shanks sisters and was pleased that Sergei Timofeevich Morozov expressed his approval of the painting.⁵³⁹ Polenova also continued working on fairy tales with the hopes of publishing.⁵⁴⁰

In the absence of Polenov, Natal'ia Vasil'evna and Polenova continued having their Saturday drawing events, which were now attracting a large crowd of students from both the

⁵³⁶ “Я ставлю бугорок, избу, купавки, ласточек и грибок.” E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, October 16, 1889, 439. To date, I have not discovered any reactions to this exhibition.

⁵³⁷ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, October 26, 1890, 458. The Moscow Society continued to hold these exhibitions through 1892.

⁵³⁸ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, October 1889, 440. *Toy Shop* remained unfinished. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 759 n 4.

⁵³⁹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 22, 1890, 452. The Morozovs were extremely wealthy members of the Moscow merchant elite and patrons of the arts. In 1889 Sergei Timofeevich became president of the Moscow Zemstvo Kustar Museum, which to this point had refused to accept Abramtsevo goods. Polenova hoped that he would change this policy and give an even wider audience to their production and also facilitate the opening of new workshops on the Abramtsevo model. Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 93-96.

⁵⁴⁰ E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 15, 1889, 445 and E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 23, 1889, 445.

Moscow School and Moscow University. These newcomers included Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel (1856-1910), whom Natal'ia Vasil'evna characterized as "Very homely in appearance, but a very educated person and passionately loves to philosophize."⁵⁴¹ Vrubel would soon become one of Russia's chief avant-garde artists. The introduction of these younger artists into the drawing evenings had an impact on Polenova's future interests. In a way, in the absence of Vasilii Dmitrievich, she took on the role of mentor and protectress for a number of the younger artists.⁵⁴² She wrote to Antipova that she was very glad to have new artists in their circle, for "Refreshing a circle is always a good thing."⁵⁴³ Polenova's interests in continually revitalizing the circle led to continued attempts to expand the Moscow art world's activities. For example, in February 1890 she started a pastel club.⁵⁴⁴

Meanwhile, she was attempting to experiment in her own art. She wrote to Mamontova that she loved the beginning of a new picture because it was still fresh and imagination had free rein. It was only later that the work became difficult and the picture turned out not quite as she had imagined it.⁵⁴⁵ She described to Iakunchikova a painting she was working on in which three figures are present, but only one is completely in the picture. It is possible this is the same picture she described to Mamontova as having "a little kid and a shopkeeper's legs."⁵⁴⁶ She wrote that Korovin quipped, "When there are headless people in a picture that is fine; it is bad when the artist is headless." In other words, an artist must be cognizant at all times, even in the

⁵⁴¹ "Он на вид очень неказист, но очень образованный человек и страсть любит философствовать." N. V. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, November 1889, 442.

⁵⁴² Indeed, perhaps she took this a bit too far, for in his memoirs the artist Egishe Tatevosian wrote that she was like a nanny following after the children with them. Tatevosian had nothing but respect for Polenova's work, however, so it is most likely that this is an affectionate remark. As cited in Sakharova, *Khronika*, 777 n 18.

⁵⁴³ "Освежение кружка всегда хорошая вещь." E. D. Polenova to P. D. Antipova, November 15, 1889, 445.

⁵⁴⁴ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 12, 1890, 447.

⁵⁴⁵ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, May 31, 1890, 456.

⁵⁴⁶ "с детенышем и лавочниковыми ногами" E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, May 31, 1890, 456.

heat of inspiration. Polenova was silent about the specifics of this image, but promised to send Iakunchikova a photograph once she had it worked out enough for the subject to be apparent.⁵⁴⁷

In November 1891 she again was involved in organizing an exhibition. In this case it was the charity exhibition of the Society of Lovers of Art held due to widespread famine in that year.⁵⁴⁸ Polenova managed to get Serov, Korovin, Levitan, Vasilii Dmitrievich and Repin to donate pictures. She herself donated a pastel of the head of an old man, which sold for 90 rubles.⁵⁴⁹ In the end the event managed to bring in 14,000 rubles for the cause.⁵⁵⁰

This famine was so severe that it brought out a number of responses in the artistic community during 1891-1893, including a special event held at the Mamontovs' Moscow house with an exhibition and a presentation of tableaux vivants. Polenova contributed a small pastel, which sold, and persuaded other artists, including Serov, Repin, Makovskii and Vasilii Dmitrievich to donate pictures for the cause.⁵⁵¹ This would be one of her last activities with the Mamontovs. Perhaps the most significant event to come out of the famine, however, was the establishment of the women's *kustar* workshop at Solomenko. Mariia Fedorovna Iakunchikova, the young wife of Iakunchikova's brother Vladimir Vasil'evich, set up Solomenko on the model of Abramtsevo after the latter ceased its activity in women's *kustar* production. She gave work for women to do in their homes and collected antique embroideries.⁵⁵² This marked the expansion of the *kustar* revival, which continued into the early twentieth century.

⁵⁴⁷ “Когда в картине безголовые — это ничего, нехорошо, когда художник безголовый.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, June 1890, 456.

⁵⁴⁸ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, October 8/20, 1891, 466.

⁵⁴⁹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, November 20/December 1, 1891, 469.

⁵⁵⁰ E. D. Polenova to S. V. Ivanov, December 6, 1891, 472.

⁵⁵¹ E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 11, 1893, 489.

⁵⁵² N. V. Polenova, *Abramtsevo*, 69. For more on Solomenko, see Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 46-79.

3.6 THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE PEREDVIZHNIKI IN THE EYES OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

The most significant art-world event of 1890-1892 for Polenova and the Moscow artists was the turmoil that emerged within the Peredvizhnik realm.⁵⁵³ It started in 1890 with the reaction of the Moscow artists to the decisions of the Peredvizhnik jury. Polenova expressed her anger to Mamontova at the news from Petersburg:

Pasternak was not accepted, Serov, although accepted, did not please them. Our friends, that is, Nesterov, Arkhipov, Ivanov and Khruslov, were all accepted. I do not know about N. S. Tretyakov, but if they accepted him while rejecting Pasternak it will be the ultimate disgrace. Here all the young and fresh ones are indignant. ... Repin has exhibited as an "exponent," which is extremely unpleasant, what is this comedy about in actual fact?⁵⁵⁴

According to the official Protocol of February 5, 1890, Tretyakov was indeed accepted. Polenova appears to have received mistaken information about Repin, however. His name does not appear on the Protocol, nor in the catalogue for that year's exhibition.⁵⁵⁵ As a matter of fact, Repin (along with Viktor Vasnetsov) resigned from the group in 1890 in protest over changes in the governing structure and the treatment of younger artists.⁵⁵⁶

This event created quite a scandal in the Moscow art world. Even artists who had always passed the jury, such as Ivanov and Arkhipov, were angered by the results. The rejected artists were so upset that they came to Polenova to ask her advice about writing a formal protest, which

⁵⁵³ For more analysis of these events, see Alison Hilton, "The Exhibition of Experiments in St. Petersburg and the Independent Sketch," *The Art Bulletin* 70, no. 4 (1988): 677-698; Jackson, *Wanderers*; Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*; and Gol'dshtein, *Tovarishchestvo*.

⁵⁵⁴ "Пастернак не принят, Серов, хотя и принят, но не нравится. Наша приятели, то есть Нестеров, Архипов, Иванов, Хруслов — све приняты. Про Н. С. Третьякова не знаю, но, если его приняли, а отказали Пастернаку, то это позор из позоров. Здесь все молодое и свежее возмущено этим. ... Репин выставил «экспонентом», это тоже крайне неприятно; что за комедия, в самом деле?" E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, February 12, 1890, 447.

⁵⁵⁵ Gol'dshtein, *Tovarishchestvo*, 363-371.

⁵⁵⁶ Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 130-131 and Jackson, *Wanderers*, 156. Repin rejoined in 1897.

indicates the respect they had for her. In response, Polenova wrote to Vasilii Dmitrievich to ask his opinion on the matter. She told him that she felt strongly that the time had come to make such a declaration, but that a personal letter to Nikolai Aleksandrovich Iaroshenko (1846-1898), one of the founders and leaders of the Peredvizhniki, would be ineffective.⁵⁵⁷ A few days later, she found out from Ostroukhov that the organization of the Peredvizhniki had been changed so that a mere ten of its thirty-six members had been made responsible for the organization's affairs. She was disheartened to learn of this change, noting that it simply confirmed her suspicions that the group was becoming a typical organization of "generals" with committees and such.⁵⁵⁸

At the same time, she learned that Sergei Vasil'evich Ivanov had decided to leave Moscow. She wrote to him that his decision merely confirmed her feelings that

An unclear, perhaps still not often expressed, but already perceptible, consciousness of the necessity for something new, a demand to freshen the stuffy air, has awakened. Everyone feels that a time for change is approaching Note that at the present everyone everywhere has stopped to think: at the Academy, among the Peredvizhniki, and even at our deeply dreaming Dmitrovka [the Moscow Society]. Some are searching how to start from scratch, others, on the contrary, think only about how to purge the hated innovation that has stolen unnoticed into their world, and wall themselves in from it, in order to defend their traditional "healthy" views and principles from the new, senseless drivel that the upcoming generation of artists is bringing to art.⁵⁵⁹

It is clear that those who were walling themselves in were the Peredvizhniki and associated members of what was rapidly becoming an "old guard." This letter reveals that while the

⁵⁵⁷ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 21, 1890, 448.

⁵⁵⁸ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenov, February 23, 1890, 449. I arrived at the count of thirty-six members according to the chart in Gol'dshtein, *Tovarishchestvo*, 627.

⁵⁵⁹ "Точно пробудилось какое-то неясное, может быть, еще мало выраженное, но уже ощутительное сознание необходимости чего-то нового, потребности освежить затхлый воздух. Все чувствуют, что подходит время каких-то перемен Заметьте, в настоящее время везде попризадумались,— и в Академии, и у передвижников, и даже на нашей глубоко дремавшей Дмитровке. Одни ищут, как бы устроить дело на новый лад, другие, напротив, думают о том, как бы только изгнать ненавистные новшества, незаметным образом вкравшиеся в их среду, и огородить себя от них вперед, чтобы защитить свои традиционные «здоровые» взгляды и принципы от того нового, бессмысленного вздору, что вносит подрастающее поколение художников в искусство." E. D. Polenova to S. V. Ivanov, March 19, 1890, 450.

Moscow Society had been a useful organization for Polenova's career, she now viewed it as stagnant. She also was on the side of the new, the "senseless drive" and set to battle for its right to exist.

It is not clear who penned the final declaration sent to the Peredvizhniki, but Polenova and Ivanov played a key role in its composition. It proposed that exponents who had been repeatedly accepted for exhibition be on the selection jury in the interests of fairness and of continuing the Peredvizhniki's legacy of supporting emerging artists.⁵⁶⁰ This respectfully worded request created a scandal. Polenova reported that Ostroukhov was upset at her participation in the affair and "suddenly was penetrated with a burning sympathy for the Peredvizhniki and a few days ago came to declare war on me."⁵⁶¹ Ostroukhov went so far as to compose a document in opposition to the declaration and tried to twist the arms of the young artists who had signed it. Needless to say, everyone was shaken by Ostroukhov's fury.⁵⁶²

A few months later, Polenova wrote to Iakunchikova to tell her of the troubles in the Russian art world. At that point, due to Ostroukhov's rage, the young people had been split into two camps, with Serov, Korovin, Levitan, Arkhipov and Pasternak on "our side."⁵⁶³ She feared it would force them to part with the Peredvizhniki and to go to the Academy, where things were "freer, there is a more cosmopolitan character" and that artists would perhaps be able to get "out from under the very unpleasant yoke of the Peredvizhnik sectarianism and routine."⁵⁶⁴ These

⁵⁶⁰ "Open Letter to the General Assembly of the Association of Traveling [Peredvizhnye] Exhibits," Sakharova, *Khronika*, 450-451 and Gol'dshtein, *Tovarishchestvo*, 373.

⁵⁶¹ "вдруг проникся пылающим чувством к передвижникам и на днях приехал объявить на мне войну." E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 22, 1890, 452.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, June 1890, 456.

⁵⁶⁴ "там свободнее, там более космополитический характер; из под очень неприятного гнета передвижного сектантства и рутины." E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, June 1890, 456 and Tretyakov Manuscript Department, fond 54, no. 7348, sheet 6. In the published version only "freer" is there. The word cosmopolitan was

statements speak volumes about the changes the art world in Russia had undergone in the twenty years Polenova had been involved with it. Indeed, in the spring of 1890, Vasiliï Dmitrievich had been asked to sit on a commission examining the current workings of the Academy and potential reforms.⁵⁶⁵

This furor came to a head in spring 1891 at the annual meeting of the Peredvizhniki in St. Petersburg. By that time Vasiliï Dmitrievich had returned from abroad and had been in Petersburg participating in the review of the Imperial Academy. While there, he took an active role in the Peredvizhniki's meetings, reporting the events regularly to those back in Moscow. Early on he noted that among his acquaintances the declaration had been received without offense and even with some sympathy.⁵⁶⁶

On March 6 the Council of the Peredvizhnik Society was officially selected. At the meeting the Moscow declaration was read, and provoked an uproar, as expected. Vasiliï Dmitrievich reported, however, that the reaction of Nikolai Nikolaevich Ge's (1831-1894), one of the group's founders, was "amazingly intelligent and humane."⁵⁶⁷ Nonetheless, at the meeting later that night to discuss the points in the declaration, every point was rejected by all members except Ge and Briullov. Vasiliï Dmitrievich was not happy with the results, but wrote,

There was a lot of good in all this. First, I became convinced that I am not alone, and, second, it became clear to me what kind of people they are. They are truly afraid of the young people. ... In answer to Ge's words that the exponents are not strangers to us, but younger brothers, Miasoedov said that this was playing at liberalism, and Iaroshenko that the exponents, until we accept them as worthy of becoming members, are mere bystanders.⁵⁶⁸

extremely negative in Soviet parlance, which explains its absence. Also, the Peredvizhniki had been turned into early leftist radicals by Soviet art history, so criticizing them was dangerous business.

⁵⁶⁵ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 762 n 18.

⁵⁶⁶ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, February 13, 1891, 459.

⁵⁶⁷ "удивительно умное и человеческое" V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 6, 1891, 462.

⁵⁶⁸ "Во всем этом было много хорошего. Во-первых, я убедился, что я не одни, а второе—мне стало ясно, кто они такие. Они прямо боятся молодежи. ... На слова Ге, что экспоненты не чужие нам люди, а младшие

In spite of his disappointment, however, Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich decided to remain in the Peredvizhniki, where he felt he could better fight to return the organization to its original goals.⁵⁶⁹

In spite of the infighting, the jury results were somewhat different than the year prior: among the young Moscow artists, only Aleksandr Iaklovich Golovin (1863-1930) was refused. Polenova's *Guests*, originally titled *Laundress*, was accepted and Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich reported to Natal'ia Vasil'evna that everyone was thrilled with it. Another positive moment for women artists was that E. Ia. Shanks's painting *Older Brother* (Старший брат) was also accepted.⁵⁷⁰

Polenova's *Guests* depicts two poor young boys visiting a relative who has provided them with tea. They are drinking the tea out of saucers in the traditional Russian manner. Sakharova indicates that the image was inspired by the effects of light coming through a window seen in Dagnan-Bouveret's *Blessing of the Young Couple before Marriage, Custom of the Franche-Comté* (1881), which Polenova had seen in S. M. Tretyakov's collection.⁵⁷¹ A preparatory sketch indicates Polenova's interest in light effects in its treatment of the window and the highlights on the laundress herself. While the choice of a genre subject was not new for Polenova, the increased experimentation with light was, something else she shared with Iakunchikova.

In all, the 1891 exhibition itself was a positive experience for Polenova, and the reaction of the Tsar illustrates both the conservatism and change in the Russian art world at that moment. The awareness of Impressionism and its status as still unaccepted is reflected in Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich's report to Polenova of Alexander III's visit to the Peredvizhnik exhibition. Polenov

братья, Мясоедов сказал, что это игра в либерализм, а Ярошенко, что экспоненты, пока мы не признали их достойными быть членами, нам посторонние люди." V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 7, 1891, 463. Ellipsis in the original.

⁵⁶⁹ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 18, 1891, 464.

⁵⁷⁰ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 4, 1891, 460.

⁵⁷¹ Polenova herself had noted the influence of Dagnan-Bouveret's use of light in this painting on many of the young Muscovite artists, including Serov's *Girl with Peaches* and Korovin's *Tea Table*. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 762-763 n. 6.

wrote, “About Kosten’ka [Korovin]’s picture [*Autumn*] His Majesty said, ‘This is from the Impressionist school.’ To which Her Majesty answered, ‘Je ne suis pas le hauteur de cette peinture.’ And His Majesty said, ‘Mais ça laisse beaucoup à désirer.’ And it is true that in the exhibition this piece seems only to hint at talent. It would be very useful for Konstantin to see this picture as exhibited.”⁵⁷² In contrast, both the Tsar and Tsarina had kind words for Polenova’s *Guests*. Polenov reported, “About Lilia’s picture His Majesty said, ‘What a lively scene,’ and Her Majesty said, ‘Quelle grande peinture. Ils sont gentils ses mioches.’”⁵⁷³ In the end, however, the Tsar and his court purchased very few pictures that year.⁵⁷⁴ Nevertheless, upon leaving the exhibition, the Tsar said, “Your exhibition is very good, whereas the Academy’s is quite bad.”⁵⁷⁵ This was rather uplifting for Polenov and the rest of the Peredvizhniki, but many struggles within the organization remained.

In 1892 Polenova was still in agitation mode. At the annual meeting of the Peredvizhniki Polenov put forth a proposition that Polenova had initiated. It concerned the rights of successful exponents and advocated that they be permitted to exhibit two paintings per year without going through the jury process. The proposition was accepted 19-8 by the Peredvizhnik Council. Ge proposed to make Polenova a full member of the Peredvizhniki, but it was rejected. Vasiliï Dmitrievich reported that Makovskii in particular “revolted terribly” against the idea of women

⁵⁷² “Про Костеньку картину государь сказал: «Это из школы импрессионистов». На что государыня ответила: «Je ne suis pas le hauteur de cette peinture». А государь сказал: «Mais ça laisse beaucoup à désirer». И правда, на выставке эта вещь оказывается только талантливыми намеками. Очень было бы полезно Константину увидеть эту картину выставленной.” V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 7, 1891, 462-463. Kosten’ka is an endearing nickname for Konstantin.

⁵⁷³ “Про Лилину картину государь сказал: «Какая живая сцена», а государыня сказала: «Quelle grande peinture. Ils sont gentils ses mioches.»” V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 7, 1891, 463.

⁵⁷⁴ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 7, 1891, 462.

⁵⁷⁵ “выставка ваша очень хороша, а академическая совсем плоха” V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, March 7, 1891, 463.

as members, so the question was set aside for the next yearly meeting.⁵⁷⁶ That the Peredvizhniki were still conflicted about the presence of women and younger artists in their midst is evident in Polenov's comments about the speeches given at their annual dinner. Ge's speech indicated that he was pleased that the younger members were leading the group forward and giving it new life. Makovskii, on the other hand, noted that the presence of young artists was beneficial for the organization, but was most pleased that the group dynamics had not changed because of it.⁵⁷⁷

In spite of the continuing controversies, both Polenova and E. Ia. Shanks had been accepted again. Polenova had sent *Nursery*, to which her old teacher Chistiakov responded via Vasilii Dmitrievich, "Tell your sister that her picture is strong in color and powerfully painted, but the point of view is too close, which should not be done."⁵⁷⁸ I have not traced this picture, but Chistiakov's comment indicates that Polenova was still interested in very close examinations of her subject matter. In addition, the presence of the laundress nearly right up against the picture plane in *Guests* makes it likely that Polenova's *Nursery* had the same point of view. Again, this is a contrast to the broad vistas more characteristic of the older Peredvizhniki and the types of history painting that Chistiakov, as an Academy professor, likely preferred.

While Polenova continued to participate in Peredvizhnik exhibitions until 1895, her correspondence with Sergei Vasil'evich Ivanov (1864-1910) in the winter of 1891-1892 makes it clear that she viewed the Peredvizhniki as an organization past its prime.⁵⁷⁹ In December she wrote to him complaining that since successfully exhibiting *Guests*, she had started six works and had not finished any. Moreover, she had started a seventh and hoped to complete it so she

⁵⁷⁶ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, February 19, 1892, 480.

⁵⁷⁷ V. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 23, 1892, 481.

⁵⁷⁸ "Передайте Вашей сестре, что сильна по краскам ее картина и могуча по живописи, но точка взята близко, так не следует." V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, February 23, 1892, 481.

⁵⁷⁹ The publication in 1897 of A. N. Novitskii's book *The Peredvizhniki and Their Influence on Russian Art* (Передвижники и влияние их на русское искусство) may be taken as evidence that many others felt the same way. Sternin, *70se-80e gody*, 23. (I have not been able to access a copy of this book.)

would have something to exhibit. She was worried about this trend in herself, and did a little investigating. She concluded that it was not just she who was having trouble. The present generation of artists also found themselves in a different atmosphere than the Peredvizhniki and were struggling to find a new path. She wrote,

Upon examination, it turns out that among the majority of our current artists, as far as I know, this relationship [to their works] is about the same, but it did not exist among earlier artists. I think that the main reason for this is a lack of faith. There is no faith in us, we do not know sufficiently clearly what we are to do, what kind of pictures are needed and whether they are needed. Yes, and even if we, artists, are needed. Earlier this did not exist. ... At the time the current chief movers and shakers of the Peredvizhnik movement came out on the stage, each one knew firmly that since he is an artist, he should paint some kind of picture, the first that comes to mind, and he would immediately sit down and paint it and believed in the fact that he should, that he simply could not do otherwise than to paint and to complete it. But now it is not this way, they have already begun to think a lot, even to doubt, and undermine what they have already started. They have already started to relate to art in a complicated fashion and in this relationship a very bad, dangerous symptom is lurking.⁵⁸⁰

As mentioned above, Polenova herself was in somewhat of an odd position since she was older than the majority of the “younger generation,” but also outside the Peredvizhnik movement of her generation. Clearly she understood that the demands of art had changed and that the younger generation did not have the same impetus as the Peredvizhniki had in the 1870s. The rebellion against the Academy had been completed and since now there was no urgent political need to paint, artists were at loose ends, which could potentially lead to bad results for Russian art as a whole.

⁵⁸⁰ “На поверку оказывается, что у большинства наших *теперешних* художников, сколько мне известно, отношение это приблизительно такое же, но что у прежних этого не было. Думаю, что главная причина тут в общем безверии. Веры в нас нету—мы слишком нетвердо знаем, что нам делать, какие нужны картины и нужны ли? да и сами-то мы, художники,—точно ли мы нужны. Прежде этого не было. ... В те времена, когда выступали на сцену *теперешние* главные воротилы передвижничества, каждый из них знал твердо, что раз он художник, он должен писать картину какую-нибудь, какая первая вздумается, и он сейчас же немедленно принимался и писал и верил в то, что он должен—что он не может иначе, как писать и дописать ее. А вот теперь не так, уж очень стали думать много, да сомневаться, да подтачивать свои начатые задачи. Уж очень стали не просто относиться к искусству, и в этом отношении таится очень нехороший опасный симптом.” E. D. Polenova to S. I. Ivanov, December 6, 1891, 473. Ellipsis in the original.

In his response, Ivanov agreed with her that “there is some discord and turmoil in artistic creation,”⁵⁸¹ but felt that it was not the fault of the present generation of artists. In his opinion, it was simply “the times” that forced artists to produce for exhibitions rather than paint what and how they wanted, which resulted in the fact that “every year it [painting how and what the artist wants] is set aside, and every year you place newer and newer demands on yourself, and all the same you paint only in order to have painted something.”⁵⁸² Part of the problem was the lack of an art market in Russia, as I mentioned earlier. Even into the 1890s, exhibitions remained the primary way an artist had to make a living. This was even more so after the Peredvizhniki had set the example of their traveling exhibitions.

Ivanov continued his thoughts by asking, “Here’s the diamond Il’ia Efimovich Repin, what kind of man is he? Three hundred pieces. The devil knows what it is, he paints and paints for himself, and does not want to know anyone. Does he really never have disappointments and doubts? Well, and I, it seems, got too carried away and painted a lot about the same thing.”⁵⁸³ Ivanov was reacting in particular to the recently opened exhibition celebrating Repin’s twenty years of artistic activity and Shishkin’s forty years.⁵⁸⁴

In her response to Ivanov, Polenova continued to expand her ideas. Her words eloquently express how she felt about the current art world in Russia:

Faith in ideals and faith in the rightness of their activities is weak in today’s artists. We have strayed from the trodden path: we pretend that we believe in the path our forebears are showing us, but our conscience does not allow us to, but we

⁵⁸¹ “идет такая же разладица и такая же сумятица в художественном творчестве” S. I. Ivanov to E. D. Polenova, December 8, 1891, 474.

⁵⁸² “Это с каждым годом откладывается, с каждым годом предъявляются к себе все новые и новые требования, а ты тем временем пишешь для того, чтобы только написать что-либо.” Ibid.

⁵⁸³ “Нет, вот адамант Илья Еф[имович] Репин, каков? Триста штук. Черт знает, что такое, пишет себе да пишет, знать никого не хочет. Неужели у него не бывает разочарований и сомнений? Ну, да я, кажется, слишком увлекся и много написал все об одном и том же.” Ibid., 475.

⁵⁸⁴ The exhibition opened at the Academy of Arts on November 26, 1891. It traveled to the Historical Museum in Moscow in 1892. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 756 n 2.

have not found a new one and a lot of strength and time has been spent on searching for it. We are feeling around in all directions, everyone in his own way. This is, of course, difficult, sometimes ever so difficult, nevertheless, we cannot complain about it, it is the most correct, though very burdensome, method of seeking.

You are surprised by Repin and the number of his works. In my opinion, there is nothing surprising here. Although they consider Repin an ultrarealist and radical, he, in my opinion, is actually an idealist. In particular, because he believes in his mission of radicalism and artistic realism, he in essence was and remains an idealist, i.e., a person who believes in an idea and the path on which he can express it best and most strongly. Remember what time Repin is of. He graduated from the Academy and first entered the artistic arena at the end of the sixties. That means, the person and the artist were formed in that epoch when people easily and simply gathered in groups to work together, moving forward in a friendly crowd towards their goal with the shared strength they found. Imagine: he had before him a firmly designated goal, and note that it is the kind that no one doubts the worthiness of, he had the support of other workers in the same camp, and, moreover, a sense of his substantial talent. In such conditions how could he not paint three hundred works (over a more than twenty year period, I must add)? Even though I say that in those times it was a lot easier and simpler to work, all the same I do not want to say that it is impossible to work today. In contrast, a current artist can work more independently, and, if he is responsible for his work as a *personal* thing, and not a *group* creation, then he will look at his own work more seriously and strictly, and this, of course, does him good. I believe that the emptiness, the lack of content and even the decline of technical ability among artists of the Peredvizhnik circle, the very core of the Peredvizhniki, it seems, is largely due to, if I can say it this way, group politics, which came about involuntarily and spontaneously and which, protecting them from the attacks of their external enemies, facilitated their peacefully and calmly falling asleep.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁵ “Вера в идеалы и вера в правоту своего дела слаба у теперешних художников.— Сбились мы с проторенной дороги: притворяться, что мы верим в тот путь, на который нам указывают наши предшественники, совесть не позволяет, а новый не найден и на искание его уходит много сил и времени. Ищем ощупью, враспынную, всякий по-своему. Это, конечно, трудно, подчас—ух, как трудно, тем не менее на это нельзя сетовать, это все-таки самый верный, хотя и очень тягостный способ искания. Вы удивляетесь Репину и численности его произведений. По-моему, тут удивительного нет ничего. Хотя Репина считают ультрареалистом и радикалом, но, мне кажется, он все-таки идеалист. Именно в силу того, что он верит в свою миссию радикализма и художественного реализма, он по существу был и есть идеалист, т.е. человек, верующий в идею и в тот путь, которым он всего лучше и ярче выразит ее. Вспомните, какому времени принадлежит Репин. Он кончил Академию и впервые выступил на художественную арену в конце шестидесятых годов. Значит, человек и художник складывался в нем в ту эпоху, когда людям легко и просто было группироваться кучками и работать совместно, двигаясь дружной толпой к цели вперед и общими силами найденной. Представьте себе,—у него впереди твердо намеченная цель, и заметьте, такая, в достоинстве которой никто вокруг не сомневается, около него поддержка других работников того же лагеря, да еще, кроме того, чувство своей крупной талантливости, как же при таких условиях не написать трехсот номеров (в течение, надо прибавить, более чем двадцатилетнего срока). Хотя я и говорю, что в те времена было много проще и легче работать, я все-таки не хочу сказать, чтобы теперь нельзя было работать.

In other words, the tightly closed group of the Peredvizhniki had served them well, protecting them from the attacks of critics and the Academy. Since they felt insulated from these attacks, however, they felt no motivation to consider their merit or lack thereof, or the changing times, and slowly fell into an artistic coma. Polenova felt strongly that today's artists needed to guard against falling asleep, that they needed to constantly struggle with themselves to stay awake and to reawaken their faith in the power of art. It is clear from this passage that she saw herself as an advisor to, not a part of, the younger generation. She did not feel herself a part of the Peredvizhnik circle either. Thus, Polenova is positioned somewhat as an outsider, but her allegiances were with the younger generation. It was perhaps the convictions she presents in this letter in encouragement to Ivanov that led her to continue moving in her own direction, away from Abramtsevo.

3.7 IAKUNCHIKOVA: DECADENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Iakunchikova's longing for Russia and her interest in psychological states allied her with Symbolist trends, of which she was becoming more aware in 1892. While she was attracted to an emphasis on emotion over reason prevalent in Russian Symbolism,⁵⁸⁶ she was not impressed

Напротив того, художнику в настоящее время можно выработаться более самостоятельно и, если он один несет ответственность за свое произведение, как за вещь *личного*, а не *кружкового* творчества, то от этого он только серьезнее и строже будет относиться к своей работе, а это, конечно, поведет его к добру. Я уверена, что пустота, бессодержательность и даже упадок техники в художниках тесного кружка передвижников, самого *ядра* передвижничества, разумеется, во многом нужно отнести к той, если можно так выразиться, круговой поруке, которая невольно и непреднамеренно у них выработалась и которая, охраняя их от нападков внешних врагов, слишком способствовала их мирному и покойному засыпанию." E. D. Polenova to S. V. Ivanov, December 15, 1891, 476-477. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁸⁶ Kiselev indicates that Iakunchikova may have had direct links to Russian literary symbolism as there is anecdotal evidence that her husband was a close friend of the Symbolist poet and philosopher Viacheslav Ivanov. "Krug Polenova," 100.

by European Symbolism, most of which she considered decadence. She reacted particularly negatively to the Rose + Croix salon and to Odilon Redon. Russian symbolist artists were more interested in myth, legend, mysticism, folk motifs, the magic of fairy tales and in Russia itself than any type of overt sensuality.⁵⁸⁷ In this section I will consider Iakunchikova's continued investigations into the Parisian art world and the increased emphasis on emotional states in her own work.

Iakunchikova continued to visit exhibitions and explore everything the Parisian art world had to offer. She was not impressed by Pissaro, noting that he had a great feeling for nature, but expressed it poorly. She was very interested in Cheret's prints and purchased some for her collection.⁵⁸⁸ This is significant for her own interest in printmaking because many contemporaries considered Cheret the father of modern printmaking. Cheret's depictions of independent, modern women may have had a particular attraction for the independent, modern Iakunchikova. In addition, the 1892 Salon Champ-de-Mars provided her with two major sources of inspiration: Zorn's *Omnibus* and Eugene Carrière's *Maternité*, which she considered the best works in the Salon; she was surprised that they were not illustrated in the catalog.⁵⁸⁹

Zorn's *Omnibus*, which she considered the premier work in the Salon, attracted her much in the same way *Reflexe* had caught her attention in 1890—with light. She wrote to Polenova that the strong spots of sunlight on the figures and windows of the omnibus made it “rattle on the canvas.”⁵⁹⁰ The formal characteristics of Carrière's *Maternité* also attracted her. With a clear

⁵⁸⁷ This is not to say there were no Russian “decadent” Symbolists. There were, e.g., Konstantin Andreevich Somov (1869-1939) and Nikolai Konstantinovich Kalmakov (1873-1955), but the trend more clearly manifested itself among Russian writers than visual artists. For more on Russian Symbolism, see Yevgenia Petrova, ed., *Symbolism in Russia* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 1996).

⁵⁸⁸ Kiselev, “Dnevnik,” 490.

⁵⁸⁹ M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1892, 485 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9693, sheet 4.

⁵⁹⁰ “дребезжит омнибус на холсте” Ibid.

sense of awe, she told Polenova, “When you look at it from far away you see nothing but a green fog and light-colored spots. As you move closer you see that the spots are faces. ... The setting is typically prosaic, but nothing is painted completely, everything is unattainable, gray, covered in a layer of dust. But the illusion of reality is incredible.”

As mentioned, in 1892 Iakunchikova made strong strides toward establishing herself as an independent artist. Perhaps most significant is the fact that she submitted her painting of a student at a window, which she entitled simply *Window*, for the Salon Champ-de-Mars. It was a large painting—according to Iakunchikova it was two meters twenty-two centimeters with the frame—and she was very nervous about it. She wrote to Polenova,

It is a strange and stupid feeling, like something important has happened, but in essence nothing has. The piece came out terribly unfinished; there are neither the virtues of pedantic work nor a sufficiently competent transmission of impressions—shame and disgrace. They will not accept it, of course, but I do not know why I wanted to risk sending it. Maybe this is an irresponsible attitude to the business, frivolousness, but I will not repent. Is it not true that there is some sort of satisfaction in the *émotions* you experience in such situations?⁵⁹¹

She described the process of submitting the painting in detail, noting an incident that happened while she was waiting in line for her submission receipt.

Suddenly I see some artist in a beret stop before [my painting], then he went up to it, began to look at the signature, then called another over and they both began to discuss it. They were standing right next to me, but I could not hear what they were saying at all, but Aunt Sasha opened her ears wide and then told me exactly, “Dis donc, tu sais, c’est bien ça, cet arrangement, la lampe, tout ça, mais c’est bien, c’est très bien.” “Est ce qu’il ne le semble pas que la table culbute?” “Ah tiens, oui peut-être, mais non tu comprends c’est forcé, c’est la position.”⁵⁹²

⁵⁹¹ “Престранное и преглупое чувство, точно что то важное случилось а в сущности ничего и нет. Вещь вышла страшно не выработанная, нет ни достоинства педантической работы, ни достаточно умелой передачи впечатления—стыд и срам. Не примут разумеется, но не знаю почему захотела рискнуть ее послать; может быть это не серьезное отношение к делу, легкомысленность, но я не раскаиваюсь. Неправда ли есть какое то удовольствие в *émotions*, которые переживаешь в таких случаях.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, March 18/30, 1892, 481-482 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9692, sheets 1-2.

⁵⁹² “Вдруг вижу какой то художник в beret'e остановился перед ней потом подошел начал разглядывать подпись, потом подозвал другого и оба начали разсуждать. Они стоят плечо к плечу со мной но я

This event suggests that, even though her painting was ultimately rejected, as she had expected, her talent was not going unnoticed and she was inspired to continue work. Indeed, rather than being crushed by its rejection, she became more determined to pursue her artistic independence.⁵⁹³

Her own works of this year show the impact of her studies at the exhibitions she visited, especially in her pastels. *Dawn: A Study* (Рассвет. Этюд. 1892) is an example of her continued development in this medium. The unusual appearance of a figure enhances the emotional undertone for the viewer familiar with Iakunchikova's work. A small, anonymous figure in the corner of a cavernous room appears illuminated only by the emerging dawn rays and a candle behind a green paper shade. The figure seems to emerge from the darkness, perhaps as a metaphor for waking up. All of the elements in the room seem to support this because they are on the boundary between states: light and dark, clarity and blurriness, morning and night, dream and wakefulness, movement and stillness.⁵⁹⁴ The barely visible figure has an affinity with Carrière's work, while the reflections of light on the floor and wall evoke Zorn and Besnard.

In another pastel of the same year, *Meudon Cemetery near Paris* (Кладбище в Медоне под Парижем), Iakunchikova also emphasized light, especially as it plays off the blooming trees and crosses. She felt a strong psychological affinity with this place, which prompted her to

решительно не могла слышать что они говорили. Тетя Саша впила уши и потом передала мне в точности. «Dis donc, tu sais, c'est bien ça, cet arrangement, la lampe, tout ça, mais c'est bien, c'est très bien.» «Est ce qu'il ne le semble pas que la table culbute?» «Ah tiens, oui peut être, mais non tu comprends c'est forcé, c'est la position.» M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, March 18/30, 1892, 482 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9692, sheets 3-4. "Aunt Sasha" is Aleksandra Vasil'evna Gol'shtein, who was married to a cousin of the Iakunchikovs, Dr. Vladimir Avgustovich Gol'shtein. She was the mother of Lev Nikolaevich Veber (Weber), who would become Iakunchikova's husband. The Iakunchikovs and the Gol'shteins shared a large apartment on Avenue Wagram in Paris and the Gol'shteins played a large role in facilitating both Iakunchikova's artistic career and the musical career of her sister Vera, who became a concert pianist. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 766 n 11.

⁵⁹³ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 35.

⁵⁹⁴ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 43-45.

create the pastel, about which she felt “comme ci, comme ça.”⁵⁹⁵ She wrote to Polenova, “all the fruit orchards are in bloom, forests, quiet, old houses, provincial sleepiness, an old church, in the cemetery there are merry, playful lilacs, greenery, sun, sparkling, candylike branches. The contrast of this spring with the death they personified struck me.”⁵⁹⁶ In addition, cemeteries and crosses would appear frequently throughout her work, perhaps pointing to a preoccupation with death caused by her diagnosis, but a theme that also appears regularly in Symbolist art.

Meanwhile, Iakunchikova continued to report on the contemporary Parisian arts and literature scene, especially decadence, with which she struggled mightily over her career. On January 11, she wrote to Polenova, “Dear Elena Dmitrievna, I would like you to read this bit about Guy de Maupassant, maybe you have heard that he had a stroke and that he attempted, unsuccessfully, to shoot himself. All of this is terribly interesting to me as confirmation of the sick trends in contemporary art—the search to make all feelings more acute and complex, that which here they call *décadence* and toward which we are all inclined.”⁵⁹⁷ The same day she wrote in her diary, “No, I will never give myself over to decadence. I understand too well where it comes from,”⁵⁹⁸ indicating a strong psychological reaction to certain elements of European Symbolism and a desire to suppress that reaction.

⁵⁹⁵ M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1892, 484 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9693, sheet 3.

⁵⁹⁶ “все фруктовые сады в цвету, глушь, тишина, старые дома, провинциальная дремота, старая церковь—кладбище—веселое игривое, сирень, зелень, солнце блестящее конфетные венки. Контраст этой веселой весны со смертью, им олицетворенною, поразил.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1892, 484 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9693, sheet 3.

⁵⁹⁷ “Дорогая Елена Дмитриевна, хочется, чтобы Вы прочли этот клочок о Guy de Maupassant, Вы, может быть, слышали, что у него сделался паралич мозга и что он неудачно хотел застрелиться. Все это мне кажется очень интересно, как подтверждение болезненного направления современного искусства—искание утончения и усложнения всех чувств, то, что здесь называют *décaden'stвом* и к которому мы все склонны.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, January 11, 1892, 478 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9691, sheet 1. It is not uncommon for Russians to write foreign words and attach the grammatically correct Russian ending to them after an apostrophe, which Iakunchikova has done here with *décadence*.

⁵⁹⁸ “Нет, я никогда не поддамся декадентности, я слишком чувствую, где она начинается.” Kiselev, “Dnevnik,” 488.

Her remarks to Polenova on the topic varied. With a typical mix of humor and derision she described the recent exhibitions, “Our kind *incohérents* are very good this year. Among the known *blagueurs* with their dotted lines and nightmares are very genuine and simply young artists.”⁵⁹⁹ Iakunchikova wrote that she was taken with three studies by Spanish artists in particular. She had very few kind words about the Rose and Cross salon, however, describing it to Polenova as a

religious order having the goal of introducing an exclusively mystical element into art. *Une grosse blague cela par exemple*. Of course, in the pieces painted by the artists of this order, there is not a trace of authentic religiosity, the majority are symbolic representations of some kind of prophets, in a word, *décadence*. The first impression of the exhibition is quite strange, in essence there are no paintings, but something in between schematic plans, Chinese drawings, and impressionistic spots. I completely missed the meaning of many of them. ... There were masses of all kinds of sphinxes, etc. You cannot remember it all, and it is not worth it. This is not real art, but something sick, nightmarish.⁶⁰⁰

She did, however, recall two works, Jan Toorop’s *Génération nouvelle* and Charles Maurin’s *L’Aurore*, generously noting that the latter was well drawn.⁶⁰¹

At the same time, Iakunchikova continued to battle depression and the phantom’s caprices. She ended her letter by stating, “I do not dare confess it, but alienating ennui is horrible. I summon the phantom in vain; maybe he is with you, then I will resign myself to it, but otherwise it is awfully un[fair? illegible].”⁶⁰² Later that spring she wrote, “In general, recently all kinds of doubts and thoughts are wandering about in my mind. It seems to me that I

⁵⁹⁹ “Любезные наши *incohérents* очень хороши в этом году. Среди известных *blagueur’ov* [sic] с своими пунктирами и кошмарами есть очень правдивые и просто молодые художники.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, March 18/30, 1892, 483 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9692, sheets 4-5.

⁶⁰⁰ “религиозный орден “Rose + croix” имеющий целью ввести исключительный мистический элемент в живопись. *Une grosse blague cela par exemple*. Разумеется в вещах которые пишут художники этого ордена, нет и следа настоящей религиозности, большую частью символическое изображение каких то пророков, одним словом, *décadence*. ... Масса всяких сфинксов и т. п. Всего не припомнишь, да и не стоит. Это не настоящее искусство, а что-то нездоровое кошмарное.” Ibid. and Ibid., sheet 6.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² “Я не смею сознаться но тоска одалевает страшна. Напрасно вызываю к себе призрак может быт он у вас, тогда я смирюсь а то—скверно несп[?].” Ibid., sheet 7. This passage is not in the version published in Sakharova.

am on a false path, that I will never do anything worthwhile.”⁶⁰³ She begged Polenova to visit her in Paris so they could visit studios and exhibitions together.⁶⁰⁴

She had the opportunity to meet Carrière and was struck by his description of how he works. She wrote to Polenova, “He told me that his paintings come from inside, that he has internal *visions*, for example, when listening to music, he immediately has a *vision*, which he will later produce. Now that is real creative work, to create an image in your imagination that rises from the summation of received impressions.”⁶⁰⁵ She felt that her own creative process was similar, but stressed, “Moi aussi je rapporte tous mes sentiments toutes mes idées évoquées par des impressions antérieures, but I attach all of them to a visible image that I have met along my own path rather than created in my imagination.” This difference concerned her and she asked Polenova her opinion on the matter.⁶⁰⁶ She also reported that she gained the acquaintance of Besnard, who, she believed, worked exclusively “pour son plaisir” and produced works that were strong and full of life.⁶⁰⁷ While her interest in more explicitly experimental artists had increased, she continued her intense admiration for Besnard, finding particular solace in his frescoes in the Ecole de Pharmacie.⁶⁰⁸

As 1892 faded into 1893, Iakunchikova continued to strengthen her “painterly techniques to express subconscious fears and intuitive sensations, under the influence of Albert Besnard and

⁶⁰³ “Вообще много всяких сомнений и мыслей последнее время бродит у меня в голове. Мне кажется что я на ложной дороге, что никогда путного ничего не сделаю.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1892, 484 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9693, sheet 3.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., sheet 6. For unknown reasons, Iakunchikova’s request is omitted from the published version.

⁶⁰⁵ “Он сказал мне что картины у него создаются внутри его, у него «visions» внутренние, например, слушая музыку, у него сейчас же является «une vision», которую потом он производит. Вот это настоящее творчество—создать образ в воображении, восстающий из суммирования предшествующих впечатлений.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 28, 1892, 484 and Ibid., sheets 3-4.

⁶⁰⁶ “Moi aussi je rapporte tout mes sentiments toutes mes idées évoquées par des impressions antérieures но все это я прилепляю к образу видимому который я встречаю не пути своем, а не создаю воображением.” Ibid. and Ibid., sheet 4.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 484-485 and Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Kiselev, “Dnevnik,” 493.

Eugene Carrière.⁶⁰⁹ As she gained more confidence in her artistic abilities, she began to explore and develop different techniques to express the subconscious world through her art. She had confirmation of her artistic success in 1893 with the acceptance of *Meudon Cemetery* and two other works at the Salon Champ-de-Mars.

In 1894, Iakunchikova was still working and trying to absorb as much of the contemporary art world as she could. She was upset that Polenova could not manage to come to Paris, feeling that without Polenova's help she could not be sufficiently objective about what she saw.⁶¹⁰ As Polenova had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the Russian art world, so too Iakunchikova seems to have become increasingly disillusioned with the Paris art scene. In May 1894 she wrote,

This is such an interesting, such a complex moment in Parisian life. I do not know if I am right, but it seems to me that life and art here have reached a border that they cannot cross. The French have done their thing—a path to an end—a new, unbeaten path is opening, but it is not for them to go down it. They have to step aside for others who are younger, full of strength. ... In the Champ-de-Mars this year there is some amazing sculpture and a few drawings, but there is absolutely nothing good in painting. I want so much from painting now. I noticed that I want to see simplicity and unity so that the results are always justified. Two charcoal lines and a dirty streak on a piece of bad paper are better than five meters of canvas weighed down by two poods of gaudy paint. Why, why this quantity of everything, this undigested representation of everything that falls beneath their feet? ... [Who] needs this quantity, these millions of canvases and frames? Of course, this argument is possible only here. In Russia it is let's have more, it does not matter what, just to stir up art and a love for it.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Stupples, "Letters 1888," 109.

⁶¹⁰ M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 9, 1894, Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9697, sheets 1-2.

⁶¹¹ "Это такой интересный, такой сложный момент Парижской жизни... Не знаю права ли я, но мне кажется, что здешняя жизнь, а вместе с ней и искусство достигли рубежа дальше которого в том же направлении движение не может продолжаться. Французы сделали свое дело—путь к концу—открывается новая непроторенная дорога, но не им по ней идти, надо уступить другим, более модолоым, полным силам. ... В Champ de Mars в этом году есть дивна скульптура и несколько рисунков, но живописи нет хорошей совсем. Так много как что хочется от живописи теперь—я заметила что мне хочется видеть простоту и единство, чтобы результат всегда оправдывал. Два штриха угла и грязный мазок пальцем на плохом клочке бумаги, лучше чем 5 метров холста отягощенных 2 пудами пестрой краски. Зачем зачем это количество всего—это непереваренное изображение всего что под ноги не попадает. ... [К]ому нужно это количество эти

This letter also indicates her awareness of some of the sharp differences between the Russian and French art worlds. While there was an overabundance in the French art world, the Russian one was still suffering from a deficit.

She responded to Polenova's desire to know more about the Symbolists by stating that it was not even worth talking about what went on at the Rose and Cross Salon since it "had become the Symbolist's show-booth. There the empty-headed charlatans have gathered to shock the Parisian public with blood and debauchery." Among contemporary artists she found Redon's work to be full of interesting philosophical ideas, but "the form is so schematic, and if it is realistic, then so unconstructive that, truly, you remain cold to it." Nevertheless, in this letter she described and sketched three works she had seen at his 1894 retrospective exhibition at the Durand-Ruel galleries: a charcoal drawing, a pastel and his *Le chevalier mystique*. About the last she thought the subject to be interesting, but the form was just not right,⁶¹² indicating that she was still looking for the perfect unity of form and content.

In spite of her disappointment with the art exhibited at the Salon Champ-de-Mars and French art in general, Iakunchikova's own submissions to the Salon in 1894 are indicative of her continued interest in subjective psychological states as well as the need for "simplicity and unity" that she mentioned to Polenova. *Reflections of an Intimate World* is one of the only partly disguised self-portraits Iakunchikova exhibited in the 1894 Salon Champ-de-Mars. An interior view of a window is not unusual for Iakunchikova, but, as mentioned previously, the inclusion of

миллионы холстов и рам? Конечно разсуждение возможное только здесь. У нас же в России только давай больше, все равно что, только бы раскатать искусство и любовь к нему." M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 15, 1894, 500-501 and Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9697, sheets 3-4. A pood is an old Russian measure approximately equal to 36 pounds.

⁶¹² "Rose croix стала теперь балаганом символистов, там собрались пустоголовые шарлатаны эпатировать парижскую публику кровью и развратом. and но форма до того схематична, а если реальна, то так не конструктивна, что право холоден остаешься к нему." M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, May 15, 1894, 500 and Tretyakov Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9697, sheet 3.

a human figure is. Here she is clearly interested in associating the subjective world of human beings with mere reflections in the “real” world. The intangibility of the inner world is expressed through the soft brushwork and the reflections of light on the window pane, flowers and curtain, which make the painting shimmer slightly. The just barely visible view through the window of Paris on a rainy evening heightens the contrast and yet inseparable link between exterior and interior worlds.⁶¹³ The treatment of the reflection and exterior buildings suggests the Impressionist stylings of some of her favorite European artists, Anders Zorn in particular. In addition, the formal treatment of the figure indicates that Iakunchikova also had absorbed the work of Albert Besnard and Eugene Carrière, who often dealt with emotions that bubble just under a hazy surface, pointing to an uncertain discomfort.⁶¹⁴

If we consider the content of this painting, we can see Iakunchikova experimenting with developments in French Symbolism that foregrounded interiority, dreams, fantasy and anxiety. The title of the other painting she exhibited that year, *Le June Lune (Russie)*, underscores an interest in nostalgia and a longing for a place one is not. At the same time, the interior is the traditional realm of the feminine, which holds true for Iakunchikova’s art. As has been well documented by feminist scholars, women artists often turned to depicting intimate domestic scenes and explorations of the interior world because they were denied the possibility of studying subjects required of academic history painting.⁶¹⁵ As mentioned, much of her art is depopulated, but if there is a figure in her interior scenes, it is almost exclusively female, and most often contemplative (e.g., *Dawn [Рассвет]* and *By the Fireplace [У камина]*). *Reflections*, however,

⁶¹³ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 68-72 and M. N. Yablonskaya, *Women Artists of Russia’s New Age 1900-1935*, (New York: Rizzoli International, 1990), 16.

⁶¹⁴ Stupples, “Letters 1888,” 109.

⁶¹⁵ Nochlin, “Why Have There Been,” 159-160; Garb, *Women Impressionists*, 6; Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, 232.

places woman in an ambiguous space; logically we know she is inside, but the treatment of the reflection makes the figure appear at first glance to be a phantom floating in the rainy night.

In this instance we cannot rule out the influence of the autobiographical. Iakunchikova knew her tuberculosis would mean an early death, the question was only when. Needless to say, she was profoundly affected by this diagnosis and fought to keep from dissolving into hopelessness, often using her art as a motivating factor. At the same time, as we have seen, her letters and diaries reveal a particular urgency to become an accomplished artist. Her explorations of her psychological states are most obviously present in four self-portrait aquatints she produced between 1893 and 1895.

Iakunchikova began working with aquatints in the early 1890s.⁶¹⁶ According to the official catalogue, she exhibited three, *Quiétude*, *L'Irréparable* and *L'Effroi*, in the 1894 Salon Champ-de-Mars. All three concern psychological states, and two are self-portraits. *Quiétude* has affinities with her other landscapes in its evocation of contemplation and a wistful longing for something unattainable. Stronger emotional overtones are present in *Fright* and *Irreparable*, both of which are self-portraits.

An examination of these self-portrait prints shows that while Iakunchikova may have railed against decadence, she was concerned with exploring psychological states in her art, which coincided with the interests of contemporary French artists. As indicated above, this may have been a choice Iakunchikova made to facilitate her art world success. The self-portrait was a mode of inquiry and way to master technique for many modern artists, such as Vincent Van Gogh. It was also a genre that women artists had strategically employed since the days of the Italian

⁶¹⁶ It is not always possible to exactly date Iakunchikova's prints. Most can be dated to the early 1890s based on exhibition and publication dates. We do know from her letters that she did not begin experimenting in printmaking until 1892.

Renaissance artist Artemisia Gentileschi. The self-portrait functions as both introspection and display. For women artists, it provided ways of exteriorizing the interior (the socially coded realm of the feminine) while demonstrating technical mastery.

Fright immediately brings to mind Munch's *The Scream*, which was painted in 1893. Kiselev notes that Iakunchikova mentions Munch in some of her writings in a notebook of 1896 and made a small sketch of *The Scream* from the Salon des indépendants, so it is possible she was familiar with Munch's work prior to 1896.⁶¹⁷ According to Voloshin, however, Iakunchikova created this work based on a sudden feeling of terror she experienced once while in Meudon Cemetery at night.⁶¹⁸ Whatever the impetus behind the work, it is clearly the psychological state that Iakunchikova wished to communicate. *Fright* makes it clear that she was intimately acquainted with fear and anxiety. It is tempting to think that she may have wished to communicate an attempt to run from death, as it is a subject that appears in a number of her works of the period, such as *Skull and Flowers* (Череп и цветы) and *Death at the Piano* (Смерть за пианино). Although speculation about the content of these works cannot be conclusive, their form does indicate that Iakunchikova is well versed in contemporary and traditional printmaking. These prints show her appropriation of the sinuous lines of Art Nouveau as well as the use of heavy outlines and the flattening of space in Japanese prints popular with many post-Impressionists. We know she was familiar with Japanese prints. There is an extant photograph of her dressed *à la japonaise* and a sketch of her studio from the 1890s shows a Japanese lamp on top of a secretary, further evidence for her interest in *japonisme*.⁶¹⁹ As mentioned, flat space and heavy outlines are also prevalent in Russian *lubki*, which Iakunchikova

⁶¹⁷ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 63.

⁶¹⁸ Maks Voloshin, "Tvorchestvo M. V. Iakunchikova," *Vesy*, no. 1 (January 1905): 33.

⁶¹⁹ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 57.

knew well. These works may have been a kind of synthesis of Russian, European and Eastern traditions, much in the way Polenova was synthesizing various Russian traditions in her art at the time.

Smell (Запах) is another self-portrait, this time one that appears to have a rather prosaic subject. The disembodied head and daffodil against a solid background suggest, however, that this is no banal spring olfactory experience. Rather, it appears to suggest the magic of the human sensory experience of smell. The sense of smell itself may be a particular experience Iakunchikova treasured due to her health problems. At the same time, the appreciation of flowers is gender coded as feminine and women themselves are often compared to flowers. The presence of the female head and the flower in an indeterminate space reduces this traditional comparison to its barest points. In addition, Iakunchikova has emphasized the red hair that garnered her much admiration from both men and women. Red hair was also a favorite of the Pre-Raphaelites and French Symbolists. In Russia, however, red hair is associated with the devil in popular superstition, heightening the symbolic content of this seemingly innocuous print.

The two remaining self-portrait prints, *Irreparable* and *Rainbow* (Радуга), display a lighter handling of line, but delve even deeper into the psyche. In *Irreparable* Iakunchikova has portrayed herself having chopped down a wisteria vine. The position of her hands indicates that she has just dropped the hatchet. The wisteria vine appears to curl around her shoulders, suggesting an intimate relationship. The broken vine may refer to her health, or it may refer to an unfortunate love affair she had with a man who turned out to be after her money.⁶²⁰ Whatever

⁶²⁰ This affair has interesting parallels with Polenova's experience with Shkliarevskii and may be something else that drew the two women together. The young Englishman, Nigel, appears throughout Iakunchikova's diary of 1890-1891. Iakunchikova's family protested that he was only pursuing her for her money. When her mother and aunt explained to him that there would be no inheritance if they married, he disappeared. In contrast to Polenova, Iakunchikova, while understandably devastated, was not permanently scarred by the episode. Shortly thereafter, as a

it signifies, it is clear Iakunchikova somehow feels responsible for the damage, yet helpless to fix it.

Rainbow provides an interesting paradox. It exists in two versions, a black and white version entitled *Unattainable* (Недостажимое) and the color version entitled *Rainbow*.⁶²¹ The proverbial rainbow-chasing depicted in *Rainbow* again suggests feelings of helplessness. Removing the rainbow and color from the picture makes what is unattainable more mysterious and heightens the sense of the futility of the chase. Perhaps this print can be interpreted as Iakunchikova's continued attempts to chase down the phantom.

3.8 POLENOVA, RUSSIAN ART AND VLADMIR VASIL'IEVICH STASOV

As Iakunchikova was experimenting with new media in Paris, Polenova was experimenting with form in Moscow. In the spring of 1893, Vasilii Dmitrievich and Mamontov were working on a church for one of Chizhov's technical schools at Kologriv, Kostroma Province. While Vasilii Dmitrievich had enlisted the help of his students for much of the work, he also called on Polenova to return to her work in ceramic icons to help outfit the church properly. Polenova was rather excited by this opportunity because it meant she could create an image of Saint Prince Fedor, who was the patron saint of both Chizhov and the Polenovs' deceased son. Polenova remarked that she had sketches of Fedor from when he was alive and hoped they would be useful

matter of fact, it appears that Korovin began to court her at the same time she was developing feelings for Lev Veber. Unfortunately for Korovin, as she remarked, "I feel sorry for him, but I cannot feel anything for him except irritation." (Жаль его, а ничего не могу чувствовать, кроме раздражения.) It is also possible that this work references a loss of virginity, for in her diary she noted that Lev was disappointed to learn that she "had been very close to" Nigel (очень близка была с ним) because "des choses comme ca laissent des traces." February 4-5, 1892 Kiselev, "Dnevnik," 490-491.

⁶²¹ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 67.

for the icon. In addition to the icons, Polenova contributed some stylized floral ornament for the church, which marked her foray into decorative design elements.⁶²²

While Polenova had often produced stylized floral motifs in her work with the Abramtsevo workshop, her floral motifs of the 1890s show the increasing influence of both Art Nouveau and medieval Slavic interlocking motifs.⁶²³ It was this aspect that would initially attract Stasov's attention, but it would also ultimately cause him to become infuriated with her as she, in his opinion, took it too far and allied herself with the "decadents." Polenova's relationship with Stasov deserves attention because it demonstrates the gender biases held even by a self-proclaimed supporter of women artists and Polenova's determination to pursue Russian art on her own terms.

On December 6, 1893, Stasova, Polenova's mentor at the Liteiny-Tauride School, wrote to her asking her to participate in the committee organized to send a declaration of solidarity from Russian women to French women. This was a direct result of the Franco-Russian Alliance, initiated in 1891 and cemented in 1893. The committee was planning to have groups of women from every profession create a separate declaration and then combine the declarations into an album to be presented to French women. The album was to be quite large, seventy-two by fifty centimeters, each with ornaments and headers derived from old Russian designs as well as vignettes illustrating the history of Russian women. Stasova asked Polenova to create a view of the Kremlin "or whatever suits you more from Russian life."⁶²⁴ Oddly, while other Russian women artists had been commissioned to create vignettes and ornaments for the album, Ivan Pavlovich Ropet (1845-1908), a male artist, was asked to design the book's old-Russian style

⁶²² E. D. Polenova to E. G. Mamontova, April 27, 1893, 489-490, 768 n 28.

⁶²³ Sakharova, *Elena Dmitrievna Polenova*, 31.

⁶²⁴ N. V. Stasova to E. D. Polenova, December 6, 1893, 491

cover, which was then created by Russian craftswomen. This choice is particularly curious considering the presence of women artists in the Russian *kustar* movement and indicates that perhaps even for a project conceived by women and executed by women, only a male artist could be entrusted with the cover, the most outwardly visible portion of the album. In any case, Stasova indicated that she hoped to send the book in February, so Polenova had to act quickly.⁶²⁵

Over 5,000 women signed (in Russian and French) the sheets created for the album, which had twenty-five pages. Polenova provided a vignette representing a Russian woman holding hands with a Breton woman, which was ultimately selected to be the title page of the album. The album was exhibited at the gallery of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts and then at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.⁶²⁶ Polenova also supplied a vignette of the Kremlin, choosing to represent it on a sunny winter day. The vignette was reproduced in Stasov's article "Elena Dmitrievna Polenova" published after her death in *Fine Art and Industrial Art* (Искусство и художественная промышленность), which I will discuss in the final chapter. The Kremlin is surrounded, indeed almost engulfed, recognizably stylized Russian plants (such as berries and thistles), imaginary plant life, and birds.⁶²⁷ The choice of a winter day no doubt reinforced stereotypes of Russia, making for a comfortable image of the country rather than a radical innovation. But, it also recalls the punishing Moscow winter that ultimately vanquished Napoleon's troops. It is unlikely that Polenova intended the latter association, as winter was simply one of her favorite times of year, but it was probably not lost on members of the older generation.

⁶²⁵ N. V. Stasova to E. D. Polenova, December 6, 1893, 491-492.

⁶²⁶ Anonymous, "L'album des dames russes aux dames françaises," *Le Temps*, March 28, 1894, 3.

⁶²⁷ Stasov asked Polenova which plants in particular she intended to represent, but she replied that she let fantasy take over and did not have any particular plants in mind when she created the ornament. E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 498. I have not been able to see the album, which is housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, so I am presently unaware of the style and content of the other artists' contributions.

In early 1894 Stasova fell ill and asked her brother to take on her correspondence temporarily. Thus Stasov's correspondence with Polenova began. The discussion of her vignette of the Kremlin for the album provides an interesting insight into the gender politics of art in late-nineteenth-century Russia. The first letter, January 19, 1894 seems innocuous enough since it mostly concerned business, but Stasov praised Polenova's works, reminding her that he was "a fan of your miraculous and talented pictures, especially *Ironing Woman* [he meant *Guests*]" and stated that he was glad she had agreed to participate in the album project. Interestingly, he concluded by noting that the page produced by Elizaveta Merkur'evna Bem (1843-1914), another "highly respected" Russian woman artist, was "superb."⁶²⁸ While Stasov was given to extremes of both praise and condemnation, he was not above manipulating artists to perform as he wanted them to. This history dates back to Repin's early days in Paris when Stasov objected to his experimentation with French subjects and modern art styles. Stasov was so determined to make Repin a Russian nationalist artist that he published carefully selected excerpts from Repin's letters, practically turning him into a xenophobic Russian nationalist. While Repin was furious and castigated Stasov privately for this act, by the time he returned to Russia he had little choice but to play the role created for him.⁶²⁹ In light of this past episode, I cannot help but conclude that Stasov's mention of Bem's work was meant to spur Polenova on, especially since Bem was famous primarily for her work in silhouettes and saccharine images of children.

In his next letter, Stasov reported that he was very happy with Polenova's vignette, especially the ornament. He wrote that she was the absolute best "among women artists" at

⁶²⁸ "поклонник за Ваши чудесные и талантливые картины, особенно «Гладильщицу»" V. V. Stasov to E D. Polenova, January 19, 1894, 492-493. Stasov means Polenova's *Guests*, which was initially entitled *Laundress*.

⁶²⁹ David Jackson, "Western Art and Russian Ethics: Repin in Paris, 1873-1876," *Russian Review* 57, no. 3 (1998): 400-401.

Russian ornament; even Bem, whose “talent as a compositrix of Russian scenes” he “adored,” was not as good at ornament as Polenova. “And another thing, who of our women, even the most talented, understands the beauty of asymmetry, [the vignette] is laid out such that the right side is one thing and the left is another entirely! Not one woman would come up with that or dare to do it. Praise to you, Elena Dmitrievna, praise and hooray!!”⁶³⁰ He continued, telling her that Ropet also approved and both of them were especially pleased that there “is no overpolishing or sweet delicacy of any kind. Undoubtedly, many among the public, especially ladies, will not like this drawing as much. But I do not care.”⁶³¹ This is all backhanded praise, for, after all, Stasov saw her as a *woman* artist, not an *artist*. Likewise, the assumption that a female artist would not be capable of anything but straightforward symmetry and exacting harmony is startling.

In general, as I have noted, Polenova did not leave much of a record of her reactions to sexism, but that she was aware of her uniqueness among Russian women may be indicated by the following passage in her reply, “From the bottom of my heart, I am happy that you and Nadezhda Vasil’evna liked my drawing. I was very afraid that the insufficient delicacy and distinctness in my work would stand out against the others’ works.”⁶³² It is difficult to tell if this passage is saturated with irony. Nonetheless, it indicates Polenova’s awareness of the stereotypes regarding work produced by women artists and was conscious of not adhering to these expectations.

⁶³⁰ “И еще одно: кто у нас из женщин, даже самых талантливых, понимает красоту несимметричности, это расположение таким образом, что правая сторона—одно, а левая—совершенно другое! Ни одна женщина не вздумает и не посмеет это сделать. Исполать Вам, Елена Дмитриевна, исполать Вам и ура!!” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, February 2, 1894, 494.

⁶³¹ “нет никакой прилизанности и сладкой тонкости. Вероятно, многим из публики, особливо дамам, этот рисунок будет меньше нравиться. Но мне до этого никакого дела нет.” Ibid.

⁶³² “Я от души радуюсь, что мой рисунок понравился Надежде Васильевне и Вам. Очень боялась, что недостаточная тонкость и отчетливость моей работы будет идти вразрез с работами других.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, February 1894, 495.

Stasov's next letter reported the reactions of the St. Petersburg art world to her vignette. Stasov declared her album sheet to be "the most talented and the most Russian" of all the works submitted. As a matter of fact, he reported that it was so talented it was reproduced in the most recent issue of *St. Petersburg Life* (Петербургская жизнь).⁶³³ He claimed that all the artists and anyone who had an intelligent understanding of art liked her work, but "all those who are not artistic and dim in artistic affairs were dissatisfied with the sheet and complained about 'sketchiness' and 'unfinishedness'!! You will never escape this, those who have less of an understanding about art will first of all look for 'sleekness' and smoothness, all the rest—talent, imagination, fantasy, the delight and value of sketchiness—does not exist at all for them!"⁶³⁴ Evidently the Russian art public still expected academic precision and polish, especially from art intended to be presented in an official capacity. Significantly, however, Stasov reported that the Tsar liked her sheet immensely and apparently praised it at a state dinner, causing Grand Princess Evgeniia Maksimilianovna (granddaughter of Nicholas I, niece of Alexander II) to report the praise back to the committee. Again Stasov chose to comment about Bem: "Our talented Madame Bem, whose sheets with historical scenes, figures and portraits of famous Russian women was, of course, the premier of the entire collection, was very much delighted with your sheet."⁶³⁵

⁶³³ I have not been able to trace this reproduction.

⁶³⁴ "все, кто понехудожественнее и тупее в деле искусства, оставались недовольны листом и жаловались на «эскизность» и «недоконченность»!! Этого уж не избежишь никак: кто менее понимает в искусстве, ранее всего ищет «прилизанности» и «гладкости», все прочее, талант, воображение, фантазия, прелесть и драгоценность эскизности—для него вовсе не существует!» V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, March 16, 1894, 495.

⁶³⁵ "Много восхищалась этим Вашим листом и наша талантливая М-ме Бем, которой листы, [с] историческими сценами, фигурами и протретами знаменитых русских женщин были, конечно, первыми листами всей коллекции." Ibid., 496. A few days later, Stasov expressed his surprise that the Emperor liked Polenova's work, because Stasov did not think he had that much taste or understanding of art. V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, March 28, 1894, 497.

Stasov sent Polenova a photograph of her page in the album and photographs of other pages in it. She was happy to have them, but wrote to him, “I still do not understand one thing. Why did you choose my sheet for the address? In my opinion it is positively the most unassuming and unprepossessing. But that is, of course, none of my business, and, in any case, I was very pleased to be a participant in this project.”⁶³⁶ Polenova’s response to the photographs indicate that even at this date, at the age of forty-three and having attained a good measure of art world success, she still lacked confidence in her talents.

In his letter of March 16, 1894, Stasov brought up *Guests* again and urged Polenova to create other works of its quality. He noted that he was especially distressed at the change in the Peredvizhnik group’s status, complaining that “except for Iaroshenko, Dubovskii and Ge, the whole flock all went to the Academy (betrayed and puffed up by phantoms!) and forgot their tradition and their entire history. They have perished, or, more accurately, their song has been sung, their era has ended, and now all hope is on those who can start a new era, on new Peredvizhniki, and, above all, on fresh, new Muscovite and Southern Russian youth.”⁶³⁷ His statement underscores the tension between the St. Petersburg and Moscow art worlds that Polenova and others had perceived.

As noted above, the Imperial Academy of Arts underwent reforms starting in 1891. As a result, there were sweeping changes in the Academy’s staff and many of the original members of

⁶³⁶ “Одно для меня остается непонятным: почему Вы выбрали мой лист для адреса. По-моему, он положительно самый скромный и невзрачный. Но это, конечно, не мое дело, и мне во всяком случае очень приятно быть участницей этого дела.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 20, 1894, 499.

⁶³⁷ “кроме Ярошенко, Дубовского и Ге, гуртом все перешли в Академию (обманутые и надутые призраками!) и забыли все свои предания и всю свою историю. Они погибли или, точнее, их песенка спета, их период кончился, и теперь вся надежда только на новый имеющий начаться период, на новых передвижников, и, всего более, на свежую, новую московскую и южнорусскую молодежь.” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, March 16, 1894, 496. Stasov’s reference to phantoms here seems to mean delusions of grandeur from the Imperial Academy’s early days as the most important—and for all practical purposes the only—arts institution in the empire. It is certainly not meant in the private way Iakunchikova and Polenova used the word.

the Peredvizhniki became Academy professors, including Repin. Vasiliï Dmitrievich was offered a professorship, but he declined, telling Natal'ia Vasil'evna, "I would ... with pleasure try to teach for the Academy, for the young people, but as I recall the voice, mannerisms, and mainly the moral outlook and intellectual capacity of our president and his copies in different variants, it becomes unbearably foul."⁶³⁸ The Peredvizhniki's infiltration of the Academy elicited mixed reaction. The old guard tended to view it as the ultimate legitimation of their path in art, a hard fought battle gloriously won. The younger generation and those who adhered to the more radical tenets of the Peredvizhniki's early days viewed it as the ultimate evidence that the Peredvizhniki had ossified into a bureaucratic institution.⁶³⁹

Towards the end of March 1894, Bem brought Stasov a copy of Polenova's *War of the Mushrooms*, with which he was utterly smitten. He was surprised that he had never seen it (he was the chief bibliographer of the arts section in the Imperial Russian Public Library, which held copies of all books published in the Empire) and was "determined to immediately publish something about them, together with other good works." He asked Polenova to tell him whether she had published anything else or had plans to, and whether it was her idea to illustrate the story or someone else's.⁶⁴⁰

Polenova replied, telling him about the disaster with the publication process. She also recalled that she had started drawing fairy tale and folk tale scenes

because I liked the motifs in Russian fairy tales (I have always loved the past of Russian life). Some of my friends saw my drawings and began to talk about

⁶³⁸ "Я бы ... с удовольствием постарался бы для Академии, для молодежи принять участие в преподавании, но как вспомню голос, манеры, а главное нравственный облик и умственный склад нашего президента и повторения его в разных вариантах, так и станет до невозможности скверно." V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, February 4, 1891, 594. Ellipsis in the original.

⁶³⁹ Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 115-134; Jackson, *Wanderers*, 150-165.

⁶⁴⁰ "я намерен тотчас же напечатать о них кое-что, вместе с другими хорошими вещами." V. D. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, March 28, 1894, 496-497. I cannot help but wonder if he would have posed this question to a male artist.

publication. The thought pleased me and I began to illustrate Afanas'ev's "Little White Duck." Then, when scenes with human figures all began to look the same, I wanted to do something different and then I remembered the "War of the Mushrooms" in the version I had heard from my grandmother in early childhood, the version with the coral milky cap mushrooms' monastery, which I have never heard elsewhere.⁶⁴¹

She wrote that she tried to recall her childhood imaginings about the world of the mushrooms and represent it in her illustrations and was very pleased with the results. Then the publishing mishap killed the desire to proceed with the project.⁶⁴² Polenova told Stasov that she took most of her stories from Afanas'ev's volume at first, only condensing them and leaving out what she felt was "not suitable for children." She planned to create four pictures for each fairy tale. She then began collecting stories in the countryside, asking peasants to tell her tales. She said "The Hut on Chicken Legs" and "Grandfather Frost" came from these encounters and, while the basic plot was the same as in Afanas'ev, many of the more expressive uses of language she heard were not there.⁶⁴³

Stasov encouraged her to consider working on illustrations again because, as he wrote, "It seems to me this type [of art] is yours, your very own, and in it you will convey all your most notable [talents? word missing in original], more important and significant than even your paintings, which, by the way I love and respect (however, I will tell you frankly that *Cat Caught in an Attic* of this year I value much less: the subject is too insignificant!)." ⁶⁴⁴ He was concerned,

⁶⁴¹ "потому что мне нравились мотивы русских сказок (я всегда любила русскую жизнь в ее прошлом). Эти рисунки видены у меня кое-кто из приятелей, стали говорить об издании—мысль эта мне улынулась—я начала иллюстрировать афанасьевскую «Белую уточку». Потом, когда сцены с человеческими фигурами показались мне однообразными, мне захотелось другого и тогда я вспомнила «войну грибов» в той редакции, как я слышала ее от своей бабушки в очень раннем детстве, редакцию с вариантом об волнушечьем монастыре, которую я потом нигде не встречала." E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 498.

⁶⁴² E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 2, 1894, 498.

⁶⁴³ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, March 8, 1896, 548-549.

⁶⁴⁴ "Мне кажется, этот род—именно Ваш, Ваш собственный, и именно в нем Вы произведете все Ваши самые замечательные, важнее и значительнее даже Ваших картин, которые, впрочем, я так люблю и уважаю (однако ж, откровенно признаюсь Вам, что «Пойманную на чердаке кошку» нынешнего года я гораздо

however, that people were saying that she was strongly influenced by Fedor L'vovich Sollogub's illustrative work, which was published regularly in the journal *Artist* (Артист). He hoped it was not true, for he believed Sollogub's work was "not Russian, it is as if an Englishman or a German was illustrating Russian subjects."⁶⁴⁵ Polenova reassured him that Sollogub did not have the slightest influence on her. If anyone did it was V. M. Vasnetsov.⁶⁴⁶ Stasov's volley indicates in this case his hard-line adherence to particular ideas about what was Russian and what was not, together with opinions about the continued presence in Russian art of strongly European-influenced modes of representation.

Their continuing correspondence demonstrates the depth of Polenova's knowledge about Russian folk art and her ideas for possible pathways for Russian art, which differed from Stasov's. In the fall of 1894, at Stasov's request Polenova sent him her drawings for fairy tales and works at Abramtsevo because he had plans to publish something about her work. Stasov was thrilled with everything, showed them to Bem and Ropet who were also quite impressed with them. Stasov singled out "The Hut on Chicken Legs," particularly Baba Iaga's Cradle, the house with horse heads from "The Little White Duck," "Ded Moroz," and the Tsar Mushroom from the "War of the Mushrooms," especially the "gazebo" in which the Tsar Mushroom is depicted, among others, for specific praise.⁶⁴⁷

As noted above, the Tsar Mushroom's "gazebo" came directly from Polenova's life at Abramtsevo. While her other folk tale works were influenced by Abramtsevo and its environs, she also gathered much material from her sojourns in Kostroma and Tambov Provinces. In

меньше ценю: слишком ничтожный сюжет!)" V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, May 19, 1894, 501. The work Stasov refers to is *Found!* (Нашел!), which Polenova showed at that year's Peredvizhnik exhibition. I have been unable to trace this work.

⁶⁴⁵ "не русское, словно англичанин или немец иллюстрирует русские сюжеты" V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, May 19, 1894, 501.

⁶⁴⁶ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, May 1894, 502.

⁶⁴⁷ V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, October 6, 1894, 504-505.

particular, Polenova had singled out a stove in a peasant's home for Baba Iaga's hut in "Synko-Filipko." It is possible that this same hut and stove appear in "The Hut on Chicken Legs." This hut was the fairy tale home of the witch Baba Iaga. In *Mashen'ka Rocks Baba Iaga's Cradle*, Polenova shows Mashen'ka from behind as she rocks Baba Iaga to sleep in her cradle with the stove in the background. This image is more painterly than the flat, graphic style present in "Synko-Filipko." The formatting suggests that Polenova created it as she had "War of the Mushrooms" when she was still planning her series of folktale books. In contrast to the sketch for the image, the final work shows great attention to the detail of the wood carving in the hut. The rosette motif on the chest in the background looks very similar to the chest Polenova had photographed years before. It is undoubtedly Polenova's attention to the details of peasant clothing, implements, and household décor in this image that lend it the air of authenticity that delighted Stasov.

The tale's eponymous hut, characteristically roofed with a *blin* (plural = *bliny*; a traditional Russian food that is like a cross between an American pancake and a French crepe), also shows this attention to indigenous forms. In the pen and ink sketch, Polenova shows Mashen'ka peeking around a tree at the odd construction. In the unfinished watercolor sketch at Polenovo, the hut's chicken legs are no longer clutching what appears to be a log in the pen and ink sketch, but seem to be more firmly planted on the ground, clutching the soil with their enormous claws. The outside of the hut is decorated with floral motifs commonly found on peasant homes. Perhaps the most telling detail is the horse head on the ridge pole.⁶⁴⁸ Polenova

⁶⁴⁸ For more on these decorations, see Hilton, *Folk Art* p. 18-28.

had used this oft-found motif in the mirror frames she had designed and would use it repeatedly throughout her work.⁶⁴⁹

Although I have been unable to locate the finished version, the pen and ink sketch for the house in *The Little White Duck* shows Polenova returning to this motif and expanding on it. She used double-headed horses both on the roof and in the porch of the house, perhaps in imitation of the Russian imperial double-headed eagle. That the story's main characters are a prince and princess who have an unfortunate encounter with a witch reinforces this hypothesis. Her other sketches for this story also show her attention to the decorative wood carving that was considered an essential part of a peasant's home.

In response to his praise, Polenova told Stasov that when she began working on designs for Abramtsevo, she wanted to use things that had not become commonplace, that is, things published or in museum collections. She rarely departed from this goal, trying to use bits and pieces from collected folk art and her imagination. Her letter to Stasov illustrates her broad knowledge of the topic of peasant wood carving. She wrote that she was especially attracted to the type of wood carving where the ornament was set into the background, which was found widely in peasant homes, especially in Olonets, Vologod, Kostroma, Iaroslav, Moscow, Vladimir, Tula, Riazan, Tambov, Saratov and Voronezh Provinces. She informed him that her studies revealed that this type of carving could also be found in Norway and Germany. At the 1889 exhibition she had discovered similar types of carving from Auvergne, the Islamic world and the Sandwich Islands. Despite the broad range of this type of carving, she noted Russian carving was unique in its the combination of geometric motifs with stylized plants and animals. The relief type of carving was much rarer, though richer in motifs than the others, especially in

⁶⁴⁹ In her memoir, Natal'ia Vasil'evna notes that there were many of these horse decorations on the peasant homes in the Abramtsevo region. *Abramtsevo*, 44.

terms of animal and plant forms. She found this particular type of carving only in Moscow, Vladimir and Kostroma Provinces, where it was called “barge carving.” She noted that she saw many barges on the Oka and Volga with this type of carving and on carts, sleighs and shaft-bows (a special Russian harness for horses).⁶⁵⁰

Clearly Polenova had spent considerable time thinking about Russian folk art, especially wood carving, and had a broad knowledge base to draw upon for her designs. The fact that she emphasized the combination of geometric motifs with decoratively treated plants and animals as being uniquely Russian suggests that she was not well versed in the zoomorphic knotwork common to Celtic and Scandinavian art. Nevertheless, it does indicate that in her art she specifically concentrated on highlighting motifs that would be instantly recognizable to a Russian public as their own.

Stasov’s response to other works she sent is characteristically extreme in emotions and laced with sexism,

What talent!! What an unusual, what an original talent, what an uncommon ability for the Russian style, which no one among us understands and even will soon be despised and trampled in the dirt!! And all of this is done by a woman in whom suddenly was found an uncommon knowledge, an uncommon creative fantasy, an uncommon love, even passion for our national stores, forms and colors. All of this is so unexpected, unforeseen and strong, that it simply seems unbelievable to me. And all of this is done by a woman!!!!!!⁶⁵¹

In spite of Stasov’s surprise that a mere woman could accomplish so much in the realm of art, it is clear that Polenova’s works fit into his general scheme of what Russian art should be. There is, perhaps, even more sexism to be found in the fact that he singled out her use of stylized lilies

⁶⁵⁰ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, October 1894, 505-506.

⁶⁵¹ “Какой талант!! Какой необыкновенный, какой оригинальный талант, какая необычайная способность к рускому стилю, никем у нас не понимаемому и даже всего скорее презираемому и затапываемому в грязь!! И это все делает кто—женщина, у которой нашлось вдруг и необычайное знание, и необычайная творческая фантазия, и необычайная любовь, даже страсть к нашему национальному складу, формами и краскам. Все это до такой степени неожиданно, непредвиденно и вместе сильно, что просто кажется мне невероятным. И все это делает женщина!!!!!!” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, October 24, 1894, 507.

of the valley and dandelions for praise, noting, “For a long time I have reiterated to Ropet how good it would be to use that sweet little flower, the dandelion, in Russian ornamental work.”⁶⁵² It must be noted, however, that he had long been urging Ropet, a male architect, to take on these flowers, so the question is a bit fraught. (Whether Ropet considered these “sweet little flowers” beneath him is unknown.) In any case, while Stasov’s reactions are not unusual for a nineteenth-century man, it does appear that for him the expression of the national in art superceded whatever concerns he may have had with gender.

Stasov was amazed by Polenova’s *Cat and Owl Door*, calling it “an uninterrupted series of wonders” in which “ancient Russian fairy tales and poems are resurrected.”⁶⁵³ This work is a tour de force of design and wood carving that synthesizes many of the motifs Polenova had been working with for nearly a decade. The exterior of the door shows a cat seated in a nook surrounded by Russian tile work. It is possible that the cat is meant to be snuggling up near the stove, which was the main source of warmth in peasants’ homes and on top of which they themselves usually slept in the wintertime. Stylized plant motifs and geometric designs cover the remainder of the exterior and are repeated on the door’s frame. The interior side has a large owl with two smaller ones on either side perched on a ledge. That side of the door combines floral and geometric motifs, which Polenova had singled out as a uniquely Russian trait in woodcarving.⁶⁵⁴

Stasov continued to press her for information, wanting especially to know what she had learned from V. M. Vasnetsov and how much she knew about Gartman, Ropet, Bogomolov and

⁶⁵² “я давно твержу Ропету, как хорошо было бы употреблять в русской орнаментистике милый этот цветочек—одуванчик.” Ibid.

⁶⁵³ “непрерывный ряд чудес and древние русские сказки и поэмы воскресают” Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ My research reveals that the owl does not have a strong presence in Russian folklore. I am curious if the motif for this door was inspired by Edward Lear’s “The Owl and the Pussycat” (1871). I have yet to determine if the poem was translated into Russian or available in Russia at a time that Polenova could have known it.

other artists featured in the journals *Motifs in Russian Architecture* and *Architect*.⁶⁵⁵ It seems that he just could not quite believe that a woman artist could be so creative and independent. He was also intending to write an article on her, so he clearly wished to be thorough. Moreover, to reassure her that he did not mean to insinuate that she must have learned everything she knew from V. M. Vasnetsov, he commented, “(he himself, however, has never done anything like your work) I know many of his drawings: his menus for state lunches, dinners, etc. are magnificent, but not at all what you do.”⁶⁵⁶ Stasov wanted to present her with a copy of his multi-volume work on illustrated manuscripts, *Slavic and Eastern Ornament* (published from 1884-1887), so she would have it as a reference. He also urged her to visit Nataliia Leonidovna Shabel’skaia’s museum of Russian folk art and manuscripts in Moscow.⁶⁵⁷ Polenova followed up on this lead and Shabel’skaia allowed her to come with drawing materials in order to sketch items in the collection.⁶⁵⁸

Polenova was very pleased by Stasov’s praise, but cautioned, “it is very difficult to demarcate where the folk ends and my own begins.”⁶⁵⁹ In other words, Polenova strongly felt that she was so thoroughly permeated with folk culture that she could not tease out what she had absorbed from it and what was purely of her own invention. The *Cat and Owl Door* provides an example of this. While all of the elements come from folk culture, the way in which they have been integrated is due to Polenova’s creative skills.

⁶⁵⁵ *Motifs in Russian Architecture* (*Мотивы русской архитектуры*) was published 1873-1880. *Architect* (*Зодчий*) was the journal of the St. Petersburg Society of Architects (Общество архитекторов) and published 1872-1917. It is interesting to note that the latter journal uses the Russian word for architect (or builder) while the society’s name uses the calque.

⁶⁵⁶ “(сам, однако, ничего подобного не сделал), я знаю многие его рисунки. Меню царских обедов, ужинов и т.д.—прекрасно, но далеко не то, что у Вас.” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, October 24, 1894, 507.

⁶⁵⁷ V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, January 4, 1895, 517.

⁶⁵⁸ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, January 1895, 518.

⁶⁵⁹ “очень трудно разграничить, где кончается народное и начинается мое собственное.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, November 1, 1894, 508.

In this letter, Polenova also told Stasov, “In general, I should confess that I love Russian architecture and ornament very much, but I am almost completely unacquainted with the literature on the topic. I know little of Gartman’s, Ropet’s and Bogomolov’s works. I have not even held *Architect* or *Motifs in Russian Architecture* in my hands.”⁶⁶⁰ This confession is somewhat curious, since she had formed the archaeological circle years before and much of what they studied was architecture. One would think she would have more than a passing acquaintance with the Russian Revival architects, especially since she commented that she was quite pleased with the general she met on her way to Kostroma, who shared her opinions on the topic. Nevertheless, it is possible that she did not know much about contemporary architecture beyond what Ropet and Gartman had created at Abramtsevo, since her interests were in the ancient rather than the contemporary.

That Polenova was not at all cowed by Stasov’s inquiries is indicated in her reply to his complaint about some non-Russian ornament in her works. She admitted that there was a Norwegian influence on her bench with horse heads and that it was a mistake to produce it with objects that were of purely Russian extraction. She did, however, reject his assertion that some of the “garlands” she was using were not Russian, noting “they are characteristic of the wood carving that I called barge carving. They are taken practically unchanged from the motifs of a carved peasant table and a window frame, both from deep in Kostroma province.”⁶⁶¹ She did

⁶⁶⁰ “Вообще должна сознаться, что рус[скую] архитектуру и орнамент я очень люблю, но с литературой предмета почти не знакома. Работы Гартмана, Ропета и Богомолова мне очень мало известны. Ни «Зодчего», не «Мот[ивов] рус[ской] арх[итектуры]» я не имела в руках.” Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ “они составляют характерный рисунок той резьбы, которую я называю «барочной». Взяты они почти без изменений с орнаментов разного мужицкого стола и наличника оконного, то и другое в глуши Костромской губ[ернии].” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, November 12, 1894, 513.

acknowledge, however, “I think they have an undoubted similarity with Byzantine stone relief ornament,” which was probably not mere coincidence.⁶⁶²

Polenova also took the opportunity to disabuse Stasov of the notion that she had studied under V. M. Vasnetsov, saying, “I did not study with Vasnetsov literally, i.e., I did not take lessons from him, but somehow by being near him I acquired an understanding of the Russian national spirit.”⁶⁶³ About the church at Abramtsevo she specifically noted that “in Vasnetsov’s work and here, like almost everywhere, there are archaeological inaccuracies and anachronisms. It is a trait of his, but he makes up for these mistakes with such interesting artistic creativity that is full of content that I cannot help but love and take pleasure in the vast majority of his works.”⁶⁶⁴

In December 1894, Polenova traveled to Petersburg to meet with Stasov. While she recognized that a relationship with him could be beneficial, she also seemed to be somewhat exasperated with him. She wrote to Natal’ia, “Of course, there is no end to Vladimir Vasil’ievich’s zeal.”⁶⁶⁵ When Stasova died in September 1895, Polenova felt that Russia had lost an important figure, telling Stasov, “one can only envy her [energy] and wish for many other Russian women to follow her example.”⁶⁶⁶ Stasov asked her to write something for his memoirs about his sister, but Polenova declined, claiming she had no talent for writing.⁶⁶⁷ Nevertheless,

⁶⁶² “Мне кажется, что она имеет несомненное сходство с византийским рельефным каменным орнаментом.” Ibid.

⁶⁶³ “У Васнецова я не училась в прямом смысле слова, т.е. уроков у него не брала, но как-то набиралась около него понимания русского народного духа.” Ibid., 515.

⁶⁶⁴ “у Васнецова и тут, как почти везде встречаются археологические неточности и анахронизмы, это совершенно справедливо. Это ему свойственно, но эти ошибки он выкупает таким интересным полным содержанием художественным творчеством, что я не могу не любить и не наслаждаться огромным большинством его вещей.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, January 1895, 518.

⁶⁶⁵ “конечно, азарту Вл[адимира] Вас[ильевича] нет конца.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, December 12, 1894, 517.

⁶⁶⁶ “ей можно позавидовать и пожелать, чтобы многие русские женщины последовали ее примеру.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, October 1, 1895, 536.

⁶⁶⁷ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, January 29, 1896, 543.

their relationship had been cemented at this point; indeed, they continued much in the same vein as Polenova told Natal'ia Vasil'evna earlier, "From time to time I still get the same kind of ecstatic letters from Stasov, like earlier, if not worse."⁶⁶⁸ Over the next couple of years, Stasov continued to try to make her his very own and Polenova continued to resist.

3.9 IAKUNCHIKOVA AND WOMEN'S ART

While Polenova was involved in the women's album project and defining her art for Stasov, Iakunchikova was becoming increasingly active in the Parisian art world. She was particularly interested in promoting women artists and in seeking like-minded companions. Her activities in this realm indicate a desire to market and develop outlets for women's creative work. In addition, her reactions to art produced by women provide an interesting contrast to those produced by men, especially the "decadents."

To achieve the first goal, she helped organize an exhibit of women's applied arts in Paris in December 1894. The exhibit was held for one week in a large room at Lafayette House, the pension set up by the American dentist Dr. Thomas W. Evans in 1894 for young American women studying art in Paris.⁶⁶⁹ It appears that the exhibition was a last-minute project, for Iakunchikova wrote that they had so little time to set it up that she thought it wound up looking a

⁶⁶⁸ "Время от времени продолжаю получать от Стасова все такие же восторженные письма, как и прежде, если не хуже." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, January 14, 1895, 520.

⁶⁶⁹ *The Items of Interest: A Monthly Magazine of Dental Art, Science and Literature*, vol. XVI, 1894, p. 124. T. W. Evans was the dentist who helped Empress Eugénie escape to England in 1871 after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. See, e.g., Anonymous, "His Fortune for Charity," *New York Times*, October 10, 1897; Anonymous, "Thomas William Evans, MD, DDS," *Medical Record: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 52, no. 21 (November 20, 1897): 749; Anonymous, "Dr. Thomas W. Evans," *The Chataquan* 26, no. 4 (January 1898): 445; and Gerald Carson, *The Empress and the Dentist: The Adventures of Dr. Tom Evans in Gas Lit Paris* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

bit more like a bazaar than a proper exhibition. She told Polenova that it was a success, but was somewhat concerned that the Russian objects appeared to be a bit too much of the *kustar* realm than the Czech and French works with which they were exhibited. (In other words, they seemed crude.) Even so, she notes that they did sell well, which pleased her. She told Polenova that, if anything, the exhibit at least indicated what would sell well: certain ceramics from the Egorov studio, pokerwork and Abramtsevo furniture. In contrast, the Solomenko embroideries did not sell well, but Iakunchikova attributed that to their high price, which was increased by the large fee customs demanded in order to release them.⁶⁷⁰ This passage in her letter suggests that they were attempting to place Abramtsevo and Solomenko goods on the European market and expresses the same fears about inferiority that Russian manufacturers often had about their goods in relation to those produced abroad.

Iakunchikova referred to “our society” when talking about organizing the exhibition, but it is unclear who or what this society was.⁶⁷¹ She mentioned a Czech woman, Brounerova, who exhibited embroideries and toys, a French woman, Pailleron, who exhibited French embroideries, and one Madame Morsier, who gave the speech at the opening. The latter rather startled Iakunchikova since she opened her speech with the phrase, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” from Hamlet, Act 1, which did not seem very complimentary, but all turned out well in the end.⁶⁷² If the details of this

⁶⁷⁰ M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, December 4, 1894, 512-513 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9698, sheets 1-4.

⁶⁷¹ I wrote to Dr. M. F. Kiselev regarding this exhibition and he reported to me that he had not been able to determine anything about the society either over his many years of research. Personal communication, June 2008.

⁶⁷² M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, December 4, 1894, 512-513 and Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9698, sheets 1-4. I have not been able to determine the identity of these women. In 1879, John Singer Sargent painted a portrait of one Madame Edouard Pailleron. Her father was François Buloz, the editor of *Revue des deux mondes*. Edouard Pailleron was a poet and dramatist. Given these connections to the art world, it is possible she is the Madame Pailleron Iakunchikova mentions.

mystery society remain lost to history, I can at least conclude that Iakunchikova was actively involved in the Parisian arts scene and interested in promoting work by women.

In addition, Iakunchikova had made the acquaintance of many women artists from varied backgrounds. For example, in a letter of December 8, she reported to Polenova that she had met the Swedish artist Julia Beck (1853-1935), in whom she immediately recognized a like-minded person and they quickly became fast friends. On December 6 they went to the “exposition de femmes peintres,” the annual showing of the works of the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, which was founded in 1881 to support the work of female French artists and to campaign for their admission into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Large numbers of visitors attended their annual *Salon des femmes*, but by the time Iakunchikova was in Paris the *Union* was already riven by internal conflicts. The *Union* would soon be rendered obsolete when women were tentatively allowed into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1896.⁶⁷³ In addition, while Iakunchikova was making the acquaintance of other women artists and clearly interested in women’s organizations in Paris, the *Union* was open only to those who held French citizenship. This may be one of the reasons her correspondence rarely mentions French women.

Iakunchikova pronounced the exhibition “not bad,” and wrote to Polenova,

There is one who is impeccable. I say impeccable because she logically and wholly achieved her goal: to represent the character of plants, colors and a fantastical person from her own subjective point of view. For example, seaweed on the bottom of the sea, in the water are amazingly thin green tones, slippery, transparent leaves, cold, sticky, and among them is a pale, unreal face. It is a real chef d'oeuvre because she expressed what she wanted to express, but that already seems to be a *philosophie de l'art* ...⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷³ For a thorough study of the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, see Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁶⁷⁴ “Есть одна безукоризненная говорю безукоризненная, потому что она логично и цельно достигла своей цели, изобразить характера растений, цветов и фантастической личности с своей субъективной точки зрения. Наприм.: морское водяное растение на дне моря в воде дивные тонкие зеленые тона скользкие прозрачные листья холодные липкие и между ними бледное нереальное лицо. Настоящий chef d'oeuvre

Curiously, Iakunchikova's description of this work seems similar to those of the decadent works she railed against at other exhibitions. Perhaps what made this work appealing to Iakunchikova was its subjectivism, for that is something she dealt with often in her own work. Indeed, *Fright* is an example of a work that has fantastic elements, but expresses Iakunchikova's "own subjective point of view." It appears that what Iakunchikova objected to in decadence was not the expression of interiority or subjectivity, but rather attempts to represent ineffable mysticism or the imposition of a subjective viewpoint onto mythological personages such as Salome. This is conjecture on my part, but her different reactions to a fantastic work produced by a woman and to those produced by the men of the Salon Rose + Croix are perhaps indications of different standards she may have had for her fellow women artists and for men. If such is the case, then it implies that despite her own example of independence and dedication to art, she had absorbed the attitudes of her time about gender difference.

3.10 MORE STRUGGLES IN THE MOSCOW ART WORLD

Meanwhile, new associations were also forming in Moscow. After the scandals with the Peredvizhniki, the younger generation of Moscow artists decided to establish their own association. The relations of the Muscovites with the Peredvizhniki continued to decline, but Polenova considered it a normal process, "So far there's no declared war between the members of these sects, but they're barely refraining from mowing each other down. I think that there's nothing bad in this, on the contrary, where there's life, there's conflict, it's impossible to exist

потому что она выразила что хотела выразить но это уже кажется philosophie de l'art" M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, December 8, 1894, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9698, sheets 4-6.

without it.”⁶⁷⁵ As her exchange with Ivanov indicated, conflict could even be good for artists, for it could prevent them from “falling asleep.”

Polenova was actively involved creating the new society, which was officially registered as the Moscow Association of Artists (Московское Товарищество художников). Two years prior to their official founding, they had arranged exhibitions in Moscow and Tver. Polenova reported that they planned to expand operations to Iaroslavl’ and Saratov in 1894 and had great plans to organize an entire series of “people’s exhibitions” for which the members would create works on themes from the Bible and Russian history.⁶⁷⁶ They were so dedicated to this concept that wanted the entry fee to be very low and even have free days if possible.⁶⁷⁷

The interest in expanding the public’s opportunities for viewing art had begun in the 1870s with the Peredvizhniki and steadily increased to a concerted effort in the 1890s. In Moscow, Pavel M. Tretyakov donated his gallery to the city in 1892 and it opened to the broad public in 1893, creating one of the first museums in Russia dedicated to Russian art.⁶⁷⁸ At this time, there was a concentrated effort in Russia to increase the number of exhibition visitors, particularly among the lower estates. An early example is that of the artist Vasilii Vasil’ievich Vereshchagin (1842-1904). A favorite of the government for his history paintings, he insisted that the entry fee for his 1881 exhibition be no more than five kopecks. While this amount would not allow the poorest of urban inhabitants to afford to see the exhibition, it would allow a

⁶⁷⁵ “Открытой борьбы между членами этих сект хотя и нету, но нет-нет да и покосятся друг на друга. Я считаю, что тут дурного ничего нет, напротив, где жизнь, там и столкновения, без этого нельзя.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, January 24, 1895, 520.

⁶⁷⁶ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, November 8, 1894, 510-511.

⁶⁷⁷ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 29, 1896, 550.

⁶⁷⁸ V. P. Lapshin, “Iz istorii khudozhestvennoi zhizni Rossii kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka,” *Iskusstvoznanie*, no. 1 (2002): 607. Tretyakov had opened his gallery to the public in 1874, but the audience remained mostly the elite. The gallery did have some European art as it incorporated the collection of Pavel Mikhailovich’s brother Sergei Mikhailovich after the latter’s death in 1892. In fact, Sergei Mikhailovich’s death was the impetus for the donation of the gallery to the city.

fairly broad sector of the population to visit should they so desire. He insisted that in the final days of the exhibition soldiers and teachers with students be admitted for free and he had a catalog printed with explanatory texts so that “simple people” could understand his pictures. These efforts to educate a wider spectrum of the Russian public about the arts appears to have had some success, as attendance at the Wanderers exhibitions was always high⁶⁷⁹ and in 1890, two years before the donation to the city, the Tretyakov Gallery had 50,070 visitors.⁶⁸⁰

Polenova was taken with the idea of the people’s exhibitions. Early 1894 finds her working on new themes. One in particular that was a bit of a departure for her: the vision of the martyrs Boris and Gleb that one of the warriors in Aleksandr Nevskii’s army had on the eve of the great battle with the Swedes in 1240.⁶⁸¹ She wrote to Natal’ia, “it’s also not realistic, but fantastic and mystical in character. ... There’s a terrible lot of poetry and imagery in this simple, uncomplicated story.”⁶⁸² Her description of the image suggests that, like Iakunchikova, she was beginning to have a greater interest in the mystical and in the subjects explored by the French Symbolists. Another theme she chose for the exhibitions, however, was a bit more typical of her work. The painting *Maslenitsa* depicts a holiday that is literally translated as “Butter Holiday.”⁶⁸³ Like Mardi Gras, it has its origins in pagan beliefs and many of the celebrations relate to pre-Christian spring rituals. As Russian Orthodox believers abstain from all animal products during

⁶⁷⁹ For example, in their first year (1871-1872), when the exhibition traveled to only 4 cities, it had a total of 30,527 visitors, in 1874–27,752, in 1877–41,646, and for 1880-1881–28,292. Gol’dshstein, *Tovarishchestvo*.

⁶⁸⁰ Lapshin, “Iz istorii,” 618. Moscow’s population in 1890 was approximately one million, meaning at best only five percent of the population attended the gallery that year. It is impossible, of course, to know how many of these were repeat visitors or from elsewhere, so the percentage is likely lower. It should be noted that there was no entry fee for the Tretyakov Gallery and the primary visitors were university students, school pupils and members of the intelligentsia.

⁶⁸¹ Boris and Gleb were the first Russians to be canonized by the Orthodox Church. These young brothers were murdered c. 1015 by their brother Sviatopolk during a period of internecine war following the death of their father, Prince Vladimir, who had Christianized Rus. According to historical lore, prior to Prince Aleksandr Nevskii’s battle with the Swedes the saints appeared in a vision, spurring the Russians on to victory.

⁶⁸² “она тоже не реальная, а фантастически-мистическая по своему характеру. ... Ужасно много поэзии и образности в этом простом, несложном рассказе.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, January 4/16, 1895, 519.

⁶⁸³ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, November 8, 1894, 510-511.

Lent (known as the Great Fast), it is traditional to celebrate by eating *bliny* with copious amounts of butter and sour cream before the fasting begins. Maslenitsa was historically a time of public celebrations. Polenova's work shows a procession in a medieval Russian town filled with wooden architecture.

Throughout the mid-1890s Polenova put considerable effort into fostering interest in the idea of people's exhibitions. She was hoping to hold at least the Russian history portion if she could not arrange a space to exhibit it and the Biblical portion together. Uncharacteristically, she found that the project had a positive effect on her own psyche. She confided in Natal'ia Vasil'evna, "All of this takes a terrible lot of time and strength, already my own work is really falling behind due to these tasks. By the way, I think, that from time to time this is not only not harmful, but even good, because then you grow, and the socializing—oh! what a necessary element it is for sustaining and gathering spiritual strength."⁶⁸⁴ Unfortunately, in spite of Polenova's best efforts, these exhibitions never came to be due to the organization's lack of funds and organizational capacity.⁶⁸⁵

Nevertheless, her association with this group continued to provide positive experiences. As she wrote, "The more I get to know the contingent of our new society of Moscow artists, the more I like it."⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, she felt as if she had at last found her place in life. She told Natal'ia Vasil'evna that she finally realized that she had two quite useful traits in this respect: (1) "to help, to inspire, to serve as a support and a stimulus to work for other artists" and (2) "which,

⁶⁸⁴ "Но все это берет ужасно много времени и сил, уж своя работа сильно застаивается во время этих хлопот. Впрочем, я думаю, что время от времени это не только не вредно, но даже хорошо, потому что потом наверстешь, а общение—ох, какой нужный элемент для поддержания и набирания сил душевных." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, January 14, 1896, 519.

⁶⁸⁵ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 771-772 n 3.

⁶⁸⁶ "Чем больше я узнаю состав нашего нового общества Моск[овских] худ[ожников], тем более оно мне нравится." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 4, 1895, 521.

perhaps, I value even less than the other, is to love, and believe in and be carried away by my work. I don't need anything other than that."⁶⁸⁷ The honeymoon was not to last.

In February 1895, Polenova again found herself in the middle of a scandal. After the initial jury decisions were made for an upcoming exhibition, the jury determined there were too many works to display. It decided to reject works that were already accepted via a second jury. Polenova was furious about this when she learned of it and called for a special meeting. The jury members said they just wanted to ensure a quality exhibition, to which Polenova had no objections in principle, but strongly believed the way they went about it was unjust. There was talk of having a third jury and starting again with the judging. They held the special meeting, but Polenova was disappointed that all the artists “behaved like a flock of sheep” and stood behind the second jury.⁶⁸⁸ In response, Polenova demanded they remove her name from the list of members and she would remove her works from the exhibition. Golovin and Vasilii Nikolaevich Baksheev (1862-1958) followed suit. She was terribly disappointed in the young artists who “to a ludicrous degree are not controlled by their own brains.”⁶⁸⁹

As a result of her declaration of resignation there were protests from members, who insisted to the jury that it was not worth losing such eminent members in the name of a few paintings. On the following day, two of the group's officials came to visit Polenova to work out a compromise. In the end she wrote that she told them “in the future I am prepared to do

⁶⁸⁷ “помогать, воодушевлять, служить опорой и толчком к работе другим художникам. and которой, может быть, я даже меньше дорожу, чем этой—это любить, и верить, и увлекаться своей работой.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, February 1895, 522-523.

⁶⁸⁸ “как стадо баранов” Ibid., 524.

⁶⁸⁹ “до смешного не владеющего своими мозгами.” Ibid., 525.

everything I can for them in this work, to which I am very sympathetic, and we parted friends.” While she did not officially rejoin the group, she did remain a “consultant.”⁶⁹⁰

In spite of her increasing feminist views, Natal'ia Vasil'evna was horrified by Polenova's actions.⁶⁹¹ In her response she castigated Polenova for her actions, writing that Polenova had behaved like a despot. Moreover, she was surprised that Polenova did not understand that for the entire group to bend to the will of one person, especially a woman, would be a display of weakness, which they most certainly would not want.⁶⁹² Unfortunately, there is no response from Polenova to this letter, most likely because soon after receiving it she left to meet Natal'ia Vasil'evna and Vasilii Dmitrievich in Rome.

3.11 POLENOVA GOES ABROAD

In early April 1895, Polenova set off for Italy and Paris with Golovin, Elena Andreevna Karzinkina (1861-1943) and Aleksandr Andreevich Karzinkin (1863-1931).⁶⁹³ She created watercolors throughout the trip, often drawing rapid sketches of the passing landscape from the train. In Rome, where Vasilii Dmitrievich and family were spending the winter, they saw as many of the sights as possible, including the art galleries and museums. Polenova commented, “It's a strange thing. Nothing tires me like looking at pictures. Not sculpture, not frescoes, not

⁶⁹⁰ “дальше готова делать все, что могу для их в высшей степени симпатичного мне дела, и мы расстались друзьями.” Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ She had become acquainted with Olga Iur'evna Kaminskaia, the same doctor Polenova had met in Kostroma. Kaminskaia convinced Natal'ia Vasil'evna “that I as a woman have the right to my own I, that I should not become a slave to family life” (что я как женщина имею право на личное свое я, что я не должна делаться рабой семейной жизни). N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, February 6/18, 1895, 522. Natal'ia Vasil'evna did not become a radical feminist by any means, but she did begin to have less guilt about wanting to do her own work.

⁶⁹² N. V. Polenova to E. D. Polenova, March 6/18, 1895, 526-527.

⁶⁹³ Karzinkina was a student of Polenov. Karzinkin, her brother, was a factory owner, amateur archeologist and art lover.

relics of everyday life, perhaps because imperceptibly to myself I concentrate my attention most of all during that time.”⁶⁹⁴

She was particularly entranced by their trip to the catacombs of San Callisto, especially the breadth of the spaces and the light filtering in from outside through luminaria, which she contrasted with the caves in Kiev, “which strike us with their complete detachment from the external world, here, in contrast, is something joyful.”⁶⁹⁵ Polenova went to the Vatican and Lateran Museum twice, the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter’s three times and managed to gain access to the Sacristy there once.⁶⁹⁶ After spending ten days traveling around the city as a group, seeing as much as possible, the group spent some time apart. Polenova was particularly interested in mosaics and devoted her time to

seeking out churches where they have preserved the ancient Byzantine mosaics, I look at them, and today in one [church] I even made sketches with the permission of the guard there. To get his assent, on the day before I brought him a little present of one lira (35 kopecks), which is considered a huge sum here. Today, when I finished, a different guard brought me a piece of mosaic from the floor of the church and offered it to me for two lira, so for three lira I got the right to work in the church and a bit of mosaic to boot.⁶⁹⁷

In contrast with Iakunchikova’s reaction to her Roman experience, Polenova apparently felt no compunction about the destruction of the church’s floor by such purchases. This may be due to the fact that by this time she had been involved in acquiring bits and pieces of old Russian art

⁶⁹⁴ “Странное дело—ничего так не утомляет меня, как смотрит картины. Ни скульптура, ни фрески, ни памятники быта, может быть, оттого, что незаметно для себя я больше всего в это время напрягаю внимание.” E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, April 17/29, 1895, 529.

⁶⁹⁵ “Где нас поражает полный разрыв с миром внешним, здесь, напротив,—что-то радостное.” E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, April 19/May 1, 1895, 530.

⁶⁹⁶ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, April 28/May 10, 1895, 531-532.

⁶⁹⁷ “отыскиваю церкви, где уцелели древние византийские мозаики, смотрю их, а сегодня в одной даже делала зачертки с разрешения тамошнего хранителя. Чтобы получить его согласие, я ему преподнесла накануне подарочек в размере одной лиры (35 коп.), что здесь считается огромной суммой, а сегодня, когда я кончила, другой сторож принес мне кусок мозаики из пола этой церкви и предложил продать мне его за две лиры, так что за три лиры я получила право работать в церкви, да еще кусок мозаики впридачу.” E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, April 24/May 6, 1895, 531.

and folk art for the better part of a decade. For her, it seems to have been merely more collected material to serve as fodder for her work.

After Italy, Polenova headed to Paris. In contrast to her reaction in 1889, this time she was startled by how much Paris had changed in the five years since she had been there. Among other arts venues, Polenova visited the Académie Julian with Karzinkina, who planned to study there, and was captivated by what she observed.⁶⁹⁸ There is little documentation of what specifically attracted her attention at exhibitions, but, Vasiliï Dmitrievich reported to his wife that at the Salon Champs Elysées Polenova found Frank Brangwyn's *La pêche miraculeuse* remarkable and pointed it out to him, and he was also struck by it.⁶⁹⁹ Brangwyn was known as a colorist and it is likely this is what drew Polenova to his work since during the 1890s she exhibited a shift in color use in her own work, about which more will be said below.

Polenova wrote to her sister-in-law, Faina Aleksandrovna Polenova (wife of Aleksei Dmitrievich),

In my opinion, the Salons are terribly interesting this year; our Russian correspondents expressed their dissatisfaction with them, but this is incorrect in my view. People who come with old methods of valuation and want everything to be done according to old models should not look for this in Paris because they will not find anything good in this direction. Here in the world of art, more than in other fields, and in painting in particular, everything that is emerging around the world is mixing together little by little.⁷⁰⁰

She further expressed her opinion that any artist who rests on his laurels becomes weaker and weaker, citing Alfred Roll and Léon Lhermitte as examples. She thought viewers really had to

⁶⁹⁸ E. D. Polenova to M. A. Polenova, May 14/26, 1895, 533.

⁶⁹⁹ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, May 28, 1895, 534.

⁷⁰⁰ “По-моему, Салоны в этом году ужасно интересные, хотя наши русские корреспонденты и изъявили на них свое неудовольствие, но на мой взгляд это неверно. Люди, которые приходят со старыми мерками и хотят, чтобы новое делалось по старым образцам, не должны идти искать этого в Париже, потому что не найдут в этом направлении ничего хорошего. Здесь в мире искусства больше чем в других областях, и именно живописного искусства, свозиться все что производится мало-мальски выдающегося со всего света.” E. D. Polenova to F. A. Polenova, May 10/22, 1895, 535.

look at contemporary art as objectively as possible, casting aside old prejudices in order to evaluate it fairly. She admitted that this was not at all easy, but it had to be done “in order to understand those new elements that are currently emerging in painting and that, of course, are nowhere represented as fully as in the Parisian salons.”⁷⁰¹ Her open-mindedness towards French modernism is in stark contrast to many of Russia’s older generation of artists and critics and resonates with Vasilii Dmitrievich’s advice to her regarding Makart many years earlier. Her opinions once again place her squarely in the midst of the younger generation.

When she finally met up with Iakunchikova, Polenova was particularly struck by her *Reflections of an Intimate World*. She noticed that Iakunchikova had adopted Parisian art trends and made them part of her own artistic language. Polenova wrote to Natal’ia Vasil’evna, “I like it very much. It’s painted in a very Parisian manner, but only the external form is alien; the content is her own and strongly grasped and, in my opinion, it is seriously and diligently finished, which her prints lack.”⁷⁰² Polenova’s description of the form of the painting as Parisian and alien—in Russian the word she used is *chuzhaia*, which can mean strange, other, belonging to another, or foreign—is intriguing.⁷⁰³ Clearly it struck her as not evoking Russianness and formally lacking what she understood to be “Iakunchikovaness” in spite of the Iakunchikovaness of the content. Regarding the purely formal, however, Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid have pointed out that many Russian artists approached French modernism with ambivalence as did Stasov himself. Attracted to the formal experiments of French artists, they also felt the pressure of Russian critics’ demands that they devote themselves to creating a specifically

⁷⁰¹ “чтобы понять те новые элементы, которые возникают теперь в живописи и которые, конечно, нигде так полно не представлены, как в парижских Салонах.” Ibid.

⁷⁰² “мне очень нравится. Она написана очень по-парижски, но только внешняя форма чужая, содержание же свое и очень сильно взято и по-моему серьезно и трудолюбиво закончено, чего так не хватает ее офортам.” E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, May 1895, 533.

⁷⁰³ Vasilii also noted that Iakunchikova was “infected by the fumes of Paris” (заражена чадом Парижа). V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, May 19/31, 1895, 534.

Russian art. Many Russian artists experimented freely while working in Paris, but returned to more academic forms upon their return to Russia. Thus, although Polenova may have found it odd, Iakunchikova's experimentation with style is not particularly unusual for Russian artists of this period.⁷⁰⁴

However, it should be noted that in the next sentence, Polenova wrote, "I would really like for her to begin to work seriously in Russia. It would give her the ground she lacks here. She herself completely agrees with this."⁷⁰⁵ Thus, while Polenova remained fascinated by European modernism, in her view it was clearly Russia that the Russian artist needed for true artistic inspiration. It may also be the case that Polenova recognized that Iakunchikova could be a force among the younger generation working on modernizing Russian art and thus desired her presence in Moscow. Iakunchikova would indeed be recognized as the herald of a new direction in art by the World of Art and other groups in the near future.

Polenova was so impressed by Paris and her interactions with Iakunchikova that she told Vasili Dmitrievich that she would really like to stay and work in Paris for five to six months, but she felt that she could not leave their elderly mother for that long. Vasili Dmitrievich encouraged her to find some way to make it work and Iakunchikova was beside herself with delight at the prospect of the two of them working together, even agreeing to paint a picture for the planned people's exhibitions.⁷⁰⁶ By October at the latest, however, Polenova was back in Moscow and Iakunchikova was continuing her semi-peripatetic existence in Europe and Russia.

⁷⁰⁴ Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, "A Long Engagement: Russian Art and the 'West'" in *Russian Art East & West*, 6

⁷⁰⁵ "Я бы очень хотела, чтобы теперь она начала серьезно работать в России. Это дало бы ей ту почву, которой у нее здесь не хватает. Она сама с этим совсем соглашается." E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, May 1895, 533.

⁷⁰⁶ V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, May 19/31, 1895, 534-535.

3.12 CONTINUED STRUGGLES WITH THE PHANTOM AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF EUROPEAN MODERNISM

By the mid-1890s, Iakunchikova and Polenova were both exploring subjective states inspired by contemporary art in Europe. While their interests in the fine arts remained influenced by French art, they both turned towards Britain and its Arts and Crafts movement for further inspiration. In addition, Iakunchikova was gaining attention for her work abroad. In spite of the excitement the new investigations and experiences gave both women, they were still struggling with the phantom's caprices.

Iakunchikova traveled to England at some point during May or June 1895. She wrote to Polenova that at first she was utterly shocked by the differences between London and Paris, but soon grew to like the fact that “The residential buildings here do not require any false decorations, there are no screwed-up iron grids on the windows, no tinted pseudo-Renaissance-Empire-Rococo facades, garlands of stucco or stone, etc. They are simply smooth, and, if decorated, then with real, lively, rich creative work.”⁷⁰⁷ She was also taken with the museums, reporting, “The museums here are bewitching, you can dig up such an unlimited mass of things that you simply choke.”⁷⁰⁸

This letter also contains three watercolor sketches: (1) a series of ceramic pots, (2) the cover of *Baby's Own Aesop* by Walter Crane, and (3) the cover of *The Evergreen*. The latter two show that Iakunchikova was seriously investigating the contemporary British art scene, likely

⁷⁰⁷ “Дома для жилья не требуют фалшивых украшений, нет там ни напутанных железных решеток в окнах, отлитых псевдоренесансовых эмпирических рококовских фрунтов гирлянд из штукатурки и камня etc... просто гладко, а если украшено, то с творчеством живым сочным настоящим.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, July 2/June 20, 1895, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9700, sheet 1.

⁷⁰⁸ “Музеи обворожительные можно черпать такую безграничную массу что просто захлебнешься.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, July 2/June 20, 1895, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9700, sheet 1.

spurred by her relationship with the English journalist Netta Peacock, whom she had met that year. Netta proved to be a valuable contact for both Iakunchikova and, later, for Polenova.

In fact, in the same year, *The Studio* published an article with four of Iakunchikova's prints: *Le Soir*, *Effroi*, and *Quietude*, in addition to an untitled work.⁷⁰⁹ They are the only works reproduced in the article, even though it makes reference to other (male) artists. The author, Octave Uzanne, states that among contemporary printmakers "the cleverest are M. Albert Bertrand, M. Eugène Delâtre, and his pupil Mlle. Marie Jacouchikoff." He notes that Iakunchikova, "by dint of enthusiastic labor, quite feminine in its ardour ... has great gifts as a painter. ... Mlle. Jacouchikoff bids fair to lead us very soon into a new field of colour-printing" In spite of the typically sexist reference to her "feminine ... ardour" the article is highly complimentary, noting that she is more talented than her teacher, Delâtre, especially "in her vision of things."⁷¹⁰ It is likely that Iakunchikova's *Quietude*, *L'irréparable* and *Effroi* were acquired by the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) at this time—a major coup for a twenty-six-year-old woman artist in the nineteenth century.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ *The Studio* was a British journal dedicated to the arts and crafts movements in Britain, Europe and the US. Its first issue was released in April 1893 with cover designs by Aubrey Beardsley and it remained influential throughout the 1890s. Gleeson White was the editor for the first two years and his interests in design and printmaking set the tone for the first years of *The Studio*. Simon Houfe, *The Birth of the Studio* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Baron Publishing, 1978) n.p.

⁷¹⁰ Octave Uzanne, "Modern Colour Engraving with Notes on Some Work by Marie Jacouchikoff," *The Studio* 6 (1895-1896), 152-152.

⁷¹¹ The date of the Victoria and Albert Museum's acquisition of these prints is uncertain. They are listed in the 1903 *Catalogue of Prints* produced by the museum and if the inventory numbers provide any clue the acquisition date seems to be 1896. In the Iakunchikov fond in the Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division there is a press clipping (fond 205, no. 334) that I have been unable to trace, but which reads, "An interesting young artist of Russian birth has lately been paying a flying visit to London. This is Mlle. Marie Vassiliovna Jacouchikov, who, though still quite young and extremely good-looking, being tall, fair and elegant, has done work of an exceedingly original character. She first came to Paris in the winter of 1889-90, and studied for a short time under Rolshoven in the Foubourg St. Honoré. Finding studio routine irksome and cramping to her talent, she soon left him, and began on her own account, taking endless trouble to understand the special characteristics of every detail in her drawings. Her tendency is towards the idealistic and symbolic. There is something weird and mystic in all her productions, and they are the outcome of an essentially poetic mind. In 1893 she exhibited for the first time at Champ de Mars, contributing two pastels, one of the small cemetery at Meudon, full of sunlight and spring feeling, the other a

In spite of these successes, July found Iakunchikova again struggling in Biarritz. In a draft letter to Polenova, she describes her continued difficulties with the phantom:

I hope, my dear Elena Dmitrievna, that the phantom is with you and not roaming around for nothing, because he still has not returned to me, he has not even come close since the end of winter, i.e., as you guessed, since March. When you asked me about him a few weeks ago, he not only was not with me, but I simply completely despaired of ever meeting him again. Now I am beginning to feel that he is somewhere not far off and is bothered by external things, like, for example, rain, sun, heat and other mundane trifles. All of this is more or less surmountable or removable and I am beginning to hope. All the same, you hold on tight to him, don't let him go, you need him for your picture to be wonderful and so that I can exclaim with joy when you send a photograph of it. ...

June 28

Time is ticking, bringing with it all kinds of insignificant changes, but in essence changing nothing. ... The days pass either in ennui and despair that the phantom will never return, or in his unexpected appearance and in all-consuming effort to hang on to him and use his presence. Then I am not up to writing letters or anything else on earth. Unfortunately he has a strange attitude towards me: he comes and teases me and distracts me, but the next day he's gone and the traces he left are insignificant sketches and drafts.⁷¹²

portrait of a young girl. In 1894 she exhibited a large Russian landscape, "The New Moon," and "Le Reflet Intime," the reflection of a girl standing near a lighted lamp. These were both in oils.

In addition, she showed work much more distinctly characteristic of her talent, namely, six coloured etchings, of which two, "Quiétude" and "L'Effroi," were reproduced in the Studio for December 1895. She began this uncommon process in 1893, taking three lessons from the clever but little-known artist Eugène Delâtre, and has had the satisfaction of having had some of her eaux-fortes purchased by the South Kensington authorities. The process of producing them is very lengthy, complicated, and expensive, as a fresh plate is required for every colour, and comparatively few copies can be struck off. She is now engaged on decorative wood panels, following out an idea of her own. To begin with, this may be described as a sort of glorified and very much improved poker work, the outlines being carved with a thermocatère, a surgical instrument having points of various thicknesses, which burns the outlines. These are then filled in with colour, like an ordinary oil painting. Very great accuracy in drawing is needful, as nothing can hide deficiencies in draughtsmanship. A set of panels done in Paris last winter are now being exhibited at St. Petersburg, and meet with much admiration." The final sentence suggests that the article was written in 1899, when Iakunchikova's prints were exhibited in Diaghilev's Russian-Finnish exhibition. I have no evidence that she made a trip to England in that year, however. It is likely Netta Peacock was the author of this text.

⁷¹² "Надеюсь, дорогая Елена Дмитриевна, что призрак у вас, а не гуляет зря, потому что ко мне он еще не возвращался, не подходил близко с конца зимы, т.е. как вы угадали с марта. Когда вы спрашивали меня о нем несколько недель тому назад, он не только не был у меня, но я просто совсем отчаялась когда либо с ним свидеться. Теперь же начинаю ощущать что он где то не очень далеко и что ему мешают только внешние причины, как напр. дождик солнце зной и разные житейские пустяки. Все это более или мени победимо или устранимо и я начинаю надеяться. Однако же вы крепко держитесь за него, не отпускайте, нужно чтобы ваша картина была чудесная и чтобы можно было ахнуть от радости когда вы пришлете с нея фотографию. ... 28 июля Время идет принося с собой всякий ничтожные перемены а в сущности не изменяя ничего. ... Дни проходят или в тоске и отчаяние, что призрак никогда не вернется, или в неожиданном его

It is possible that the phantom was incarnated in a painting of the same year. Kiselev suggests that the figure in *Moonrise with Angel* (Восход луны с ангелом) is no angel, for the painting was titled only after Iakunchikova's death. He posits that it is instead a phantom, the ghost Elise, inspired by Turgenev's story *Ghosts* (Призраки), lines from which are found in Iakunchikova's diary for 1895. Kiselev also argues that the image was created under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, whom Iakunchikova had come to know on her trip to England and through her relationship with Peacock, especially since Peacock posed for the figure. He places particular emphasis on the contrast between the landscape, which is painted in Iakunchikova's usual style, and the figure, which is attenuated and curved in the manner of art nouveau.⁷¹³

Whatever the inspiration for this image, it is clear that it does have a connection with the mystical and ineffable, states that Iakunchikova was exploring during this period. This painting is somewhat of an outlier in Iakunchikova's oeuvre though, being the only known representation of a female spirit, unless one considers the presence of Iakunchikova herself in the prints discussed above and in *The Sorrow of Memory* (Печаль памяти). This work is unfinished and undated, but likely from the mid-to-late 1890s given the presence of the candle (cf. *Candle, Extinguishing* [Свеча. Задует.], 1897) and Vvedenskoe, which she had visited in 1894. During this trip she produced a painting, *Vvedenskoe: Colonnade and Park from the Window* (Введенское. Колоннада и парк из окна.) of the Corinthian columns that repeats the visual device of *View from the Bell Tower of the Savvino-Storozhevskii Monastery near Zvenigorod*. As with *View from the Bell Tower*, she revisited the subject later in her career, in 1897. She also

появлении и в всепоглощающем старании удержать его и воспользоваться его присутствием, тогда уже не до писем и не до чего другого на свете. К сожалению странное он имеет ко мне отношение придет подразнит увлечет, а на другой день его уж нет и останется следа—малозначущие зарисовки и наброски.” Draft of M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, July 9 and 28, 1895, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 205, no. 26, sheets 1-2.

⁷¹³ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 81-82.

visited the estate on her honeymoon in 1896 and had been devastated by its state of disrepair (cf. *Dustcovers* [Чехли], 1897), so it is possible the painting is from that time.⁷¹⁴ The self-portrait in this image is more ghostly than the others, in part due to its remaining unfinished, but the final image would also likely have that quality given the night scene and the estate floating in the background. It is perhaps Iakunchikova herself as phantom.

Iakunchikova was in Russia towards the end of the summer 1895, where she planned to paint the subject she had been assigned for the people's exhibitions: "Northern monasteries." As indicated, the Savvino-Storozhevskii Monastery was an early subject of hers, so this theme suited her. While in Russia, she visited the Polenovs estate, Borok, where she painted *By the Fireplace* (У камина). This image, as mentioned, is one of her few works with a figure. It shows Iakunchikova's continued interest in light and color and the device of a large object in the foreground.

Her visit to Russia was short, for she had returned to Paris by October. Immediately upon her return she rushed to a lithograph exhibit, at which she was struck "by the unobjective life of art in spite of its complexly worked out technical machine."⁷¹⁵ Although this comment seems murky, further in the letter Iakunchikova makes reference to the idea that using machines is detrimental to art, which this exhibition seemed to have disproved to her. Her acceptance of the possibility of reproducing art mechanically is another indication of her modernist inclinations.

⁷¹⁴ In the fall of 1896 Iakunchikova married Lev Nikolaevich Veber (Weber), with whom she had grown increasingly close over the prior three years. Iakunchikova insisted that they be married in Russia and they spent their honeymoon traveling the Moscow region. Weber, *From Orient to Occident*, 189.

⁷¹⁵ "необъективная жизнь искусства несмотря на свою сложно выработанную техническую машину." M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, October 1895, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9701, sheet 1.

With Iakunchikova back in Paris, Polenova began to explore some themes that likely were inspired by her trip abroad and her conversations with Iakunchikova. In late October 1895 she returned to a subject she first began working on two years prior: the theme of loneliness as expressed in the first line of the second stanza of Poe's *The Raven* as translated by the Symbolist poet Konstantin Bal'mont.⁷¹⁶ The original appears to be lost, but Egishe Tatevosian, a student of Polenov, left behind a description indicating it was a cityscape at night showing a view of roofs. In the foreground a human face with an expression of ennui was blowing into a chimney. According to Tatevosian, this image was meant to represent the loneliness one felt on a cold night when the wind howls in the chimney.⁷¹⁷ The work sounds similar to Iakunchikova's unfinished *The Sorrow of Memory*.

At the same time, Polenova began working on *The Serpent* (Змий) (also known as *The Beast* [Зверь]), but was struggling with its "nature."⁷¹⁸ She continued to work on this image until her death, never managing to finish it.⁷¹⁹ Nevertheless, it provides a very interesting glimpse into the way Polenova was continuing to work with subjects from the past while incorporating what she had seen and experienced in Paris. As it relates closely to Iakunchikova's *Little Girl and Wood Sprite*, I will discuss it in detail in the next chapter. Polenova had been so entranced by the art in Paris and her symbiotic relationship with Iakunchikova that she planned to return to Paris early in 1896.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁶ In English the line is "Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December." Bal'mont's version is Ясно помню... Ожиданье... Поздней осени рыданья... [I clearly remember ... The anticipation ... Late fall's sobbing ...].

⁷¹⁷ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 774 n 1.

⁷¹⁸ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, October 30, 1895, 538.

⁷¹⁹ Natal'ia Vasil'evna suggested that this image came to represent the threat that Polenova's head injury posed to her life. Borok, "Pamiati Eleny Dmitrievny Polenovoi," *Mir iskusstva*, no. 2 (1899): 119.

⁷²⁰ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, October 30, 1895, 539.

On December 24, 1895, however, Polenova's mother, Mariia Alekseevna, died, leaving her alone and changing her financial situation considerably. Vasili Dmitrievich worried about her, but wrote "work will save her and she can fill her life with it in the future."⁷²¹ Little did he know how short Polenova's future would be.

⁷²¹ "ее спасает работа и она в дальнейшем может ей наполнить жизнь." V. D. Polenov to S. D. Sverbeeva, January 31, 1895, 542.

4.0 ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

One of the signals of the continuing shifts in the Russian art world was the Creative Experiments exhibition (Выставка опытов творчества) Repin organized at the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in 1896. While Polenova had been one of the organizers of the exhibitions of studies in Moscow, which had been something new in the art world at that time, Repin's exhibition focused on the clearly experimental, pushing the boundaries even farther. As Alison Hilton and others have noted, "Repin was keenly aware that the impetus of critical realism had faltered."⁷²² Thus, shortly after his arrival at the Academy, Repin began to seek new pathways for Russian art. He told Polenova, "No portraits, life studies, or finished painting will be accepted. The fruits of pure imagination are especially preferred, but all kinds of interesting compositions and other creative experiments will be accepted."⁷²³ In a later letter he continued, "[W]e will try to eliminate any kind of formalism and regulation. Artistic activity, freedom of creativity, and the cult of talent are our basic principles."⁷²⁴ The emphasis of the exhibition was radical enough to make the Academy nervous. The younger artists were wary of participating

⁷²² Alison Hilton, "The Exhibition of Experiments in St. Petersburg and the Independent Sketch," *The Art Bulletin* 70, no. 4 (1988): 677.

⁷²³ "Портреты, этюды с натуры и оконченные картины не будут приняты. Плоды чистого воображения предпочитают особенно, но будут приняты всякие интересные композиции и прочие опыты творчества." I. E. Repin to E. D. Polenova, October 13, 1896, 554.

⁷²⁴ "[П]остараемся устранить всякий формализм и регламентацию. Художественная деятельность, свобода творчества, культ талантов—вот наши основные принципы." I. E. Repin to E. D. Polenova, October 27, 1896, 555.

for fear of possible reprisals and two of Repin's closest allies, Surikov and Serov refused to submit works.⁷²⁵

The fact that Repin, one of the most famous of the Peredvizhniki, who long insisted on narrative, realism and/or ideological content in art, was advocating pure experimentation was a major shock to the Russian "system." While Polenova accepted Repin's invitation, it appears that Polenov hesitated. In a letter of November 10 Repin wrote to her, "For God's sake, work on Vasili Dmitrievich, so he doesn't get grumpy but sends more sketches. For I know what kind of treasure that stingy knight is hoarding!" He also insisted that the Academy had completely changed and the old ways were disappearing.⁷²⁶ In response, Polenova sent her work in progress on the theme of Poe's Raven, which she titled *Bad Weather* (Ненастье).

The exhibition cannot be considered a success by any measure, bringing in only about 5000 visitors and approximately 20,000 rubles in sales. As Hilton has argued, it was nonetheless important for several reasons:

First, it was an unusual example of art patronage by a practicing artist. Second, it reflected the changing role of public art exhibitions. ... Third, in another sense, the pedagogical goals, the encouragement of experimental techniques and individual expression, were important components of Repin's approach to teaching. Fourth, it was the first exhibition to focus on the process of artistic work Finally, although it fell short of expectations, the exhibition was, in the broadest sense, an example of the process of change taking place in the Russian art world at the end of the century.⁷²⁷

This change marked both Polenova's and Iakunchikova's works during the last years of their lives, especially since they were among the instigators of it.

⁷²⁵ Hilton, "Exhibition," 681.

⁷²⁶ "Ради бога, подействуйте на Василия Дмитриевича, чтобы он не куксился, а прислал бы побольше своих эскизов. Ведь я знаю, что за сокровища у этого скупого рыцаря хранятся!" I. E. Repin to E. D. Polenova, November 10, 1896, 557.

⁷²⁷ Hilton, "Exhibition," 681-682.

While the work Polenova submitted has not survived, the works Iakunchikova exhibited have, and they are indeed experimental. At this time she turned to pokerwork and oil on panel, which in itself shows her interest in line and form, particularly the stylized plant motifs of Art Nouveau. These works also reflect her knowledge of *cloisonisme*,⁷²⁸ while echoing the flatness of *lubok*. An unfinished work of 1896, *Oranges* (Апельсины), demonstrates the process of pokerwork, which involves using a hot needle to draw upon a wood panel and then filling the drawing in with oil paints. In the background it also shows Iakunchikova's interest in the intertwining plant motifs common in Art Nouveau.

The Oar (Весло), one of the works she sent for Repin's exhibition, is an excellent example of how she synthesized her interests and influences in her art. Water lilies are frequently seen in French art from late Impressionism to Art Nouveau. The sharp diagonal of the oar creates a fracturing of space that interrupts the rhythm of the water lily pattern. Here Iakunchikova is interested in an explicitly "decorative reworking of impressions from nature," but remains concerned with conveying a tangible perception of the natural world.⁷²⁹

The stylistic and emotional/sensual elements found in *The Oar* are also present in another work she sent: *Window* (Окно). The Russian landscape is known for its coniferous forests. Iakunchikova's choice to depict an open window through which we gaze upon nothing but the varied green tones of fir trees makes the image less about watching life outside than about looking, or possibly remembering. The contrast of the white flowers and window sill against the

⁷²⁸ While Kiselev makes the claims that Iakunchikova was familiar "with the cloisonnism of Paul Gauguin and the Pont-Aven, school" and knew Japanese art, "which she saw at the Paris store of Samuel Bing," ("The Panel and the Tapestry in the Art of the Russian Modern," *Experiment/Эксперимент: A Journal of Russian Culture*, no. 7 (2001): 180), he offers no documentary evidence for them. These claims are, obviously, not impossible as we do have documentary evidence that Iakunchikova had examined Japanese art and also spent time in Brittany.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 182 and Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 93-94. Hilton notes that several of the works in the exhibition were influenced by symbolism, "partly the result of contact with European art and perhaps also of Polenova's role in the selection." "Exhibition," 691.

dark greens at first attracts the viewer's attention and then draws it into the depths of the pines. This image may be an attempt to explore the concept of synesthesia then becoming popular in the art world by evoking the aroma of the pine forest coming into the house, into the body through the open window.⁷³⁰ Hilton notes that the critical reception of this work was particularly negative. It was

criticized for being 'unfinished,' 'careless,' in the application of paint, and for other insufficiencies associated with the 'impressionist' and 'symbolist' tendencies in recent art. The criticism hardly seems warranted. The artist employed an unusual technique, poker-work But on the whole, this was a rather formally composed study, in which the pine boughs of clear blue and pale green were framed within the window. Along with its more stylized companion pieces, it illustrates the kind of creative interpretation of nature, the free movement from natural source to imaginative rendering, that Repin wanted to demonstrate in this exhibition.⁷³¹

While Hilton is correct that to our eyes *Window* hardly seems radical, to Russian critics who were still deeply committed to the critical realism of the Peredvizhniki of the 1880s, these works were not only radical, but as she points out about other works, they also "implied a rejection of traditional values."⁷³²

A third submission, *Spring Approaches: Two Roads* (Весна наступает. Две дороги.), provides a contrast between the modern railroad and the dirt road that runs alongside. Kiselev claims that this work is about the passing of generations.⁷³³ While such a reading is possible, I would argue that the turn of the seasons and the two roads provide both endings and beginnings for a journey while also suggesting different paths to be taken, which is the subject of this final chapter.

⁷³⁰ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 93.

⁷³¹ Hilton, "Exhibition," 694.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 695.

⁷³³ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 93.

4.1 STASOV AND POLENOVA: AN ENDING

In early 1896 Stasov wrote to Polenova that he had new plans to write an article entitled “Our New Illustrators” about her, Nesterov and Bem. He asked her to remind him which of her works she considered suitable for publication.⁷³⁴ In response Polenova said that she had several works that were complete enough that she had exhibited them in Petersburg in 1894 and in Moscow in 1896. These were “War of the Mushrooms,” “The Little White Duck,” “Grandfather Frost,” and “The Hut on Chicken Legs.”⁷³⁵ She reported that she had received positive feedback from the Moscow exhibition, but Tretyakov did not buy any of them. There were other people interested in them, but she did not want to sell the originals. She was working on making copies to exhibit in an upcoming charity exhibition for the planned people’s historical exhibitions.⁷³⁶

Stasov did eventually provide commissions for Polenova. In late 1896 he asked her to create an illumination for the address in celebration of Ropet’s twenty-fifth year in the arts. In nineteenth-century Russia, the formal address given at a celebration would be presented to the honoree in a highly decorated written form at the end of the ceremony. It was to this document that Stasov wanted Polenova to contribute. Polenova produced an image that drew upon her favorite motif from Russian architecture: the horse, as well as other elements from both peasant and church structures. It also prominently displays the brilliant red that has long been revered in Russian culture, so much so that in Old Russian the word for “red” and “beautiful” was one.

⁷³⁴ V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, February 29, 1896, 545-546.

⁷³⁵ Polenova may have been mistaken about the latter date. Other letters indicate that they were exhibited in 1895 at an exhibition entitled “The Publishing Industry” (Печатное дело). E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, November 1894, 511.

⁷³⁶ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, March 4, 1896, 546-547.

Stasov told her that her image was an absolute hit,⁷³⁷ and it even merited a personal letter of thanks from Ropet.⁷³⁸

Due to the success of her illumination, Stasov asked her to do another one, this time for Antokol'skii. This episode provides another glance into gender relations in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. Stasov informed Polenova that he also asked Bem to provide a drawing because "There will be various addresses and, in my opinion, we should not do without the women. The women must appear to be on the same level as the men. But I do not care or worry about any sort of women artists except you and Madame Bem."⁷³⁹ He asked her specifically to draw Ivan Tsarevich and the Firebird at the magical tree because in his autobiography Antokol'skii had said that at nineteen he had traveled from Vilnius to Petersburg with a Firebird's feather in his hands. Apparently true to form, Bem was going to make a picture of children sculpting.⁷⁴⁰

Polenova agreed to the request, telling Stasov that it so happened she was in the process of starting a new series of illustrations for Russian fairy tales and had begun with the Firebird.⁷⁴¹ By Dec 21, Stasov had received her image and reported with his usual abundance of exclamation points that he was absolutely delighted.⁷⁴² After the party, he reported that Antokol'skii and everyone, "at least everyone who is more artistic," loved her Ivan Tsarevich, but he was annoyed that all of the women were too shy to give a speech, so he appointed his sister-in-law to do so. She, however, failed to say anything about Polenova's or Bem's work, so Stasov felt forced, "as

⁷³⁷ V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, November 8, 1896, 556.

⁷³⁸ I. P. Ropet to E. D. Polenova, November 5, 1896, 556.

⁷³⁹ "Будут разные адреса, и, по моей мысли, мы не должны обойтись без женского. Надо, чтобы женщины явились наравне с мужчинами. Но я ни о каких женщинах-художницах не забочусь и не беспокоюсь, кроме Вас и м-ме Бем." V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, December 5, 1896, 557.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 557-558.

⁷⁴¹ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, December 8, 1896, 558.

⁷⁴² V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, December 21, 1896, 559.

the chief master of ceremonies and initiator of the entire celebration, to go up to the table and in a voice loud enough that the entire hall could hear, give a new speech (I gave several of them yesterday!) about who these two artists of ours are, Polenova and Bem, and how these two delightful—although completely different—current little pictures of theirs are full of originality, poetry and picturesqueness.”⁷⁴³

Polenova’s *Ivan Tsarevich and the Firebird* is a departure from her other fairy tale images and shows the strong influence of Art Nouveau in the whiplash curves used to represent the plants in the background. It may also have been influenced by Iakunchikova’s interest in cloissonisme and her subsequent experiments in pokerwork. Polenova had worked in a graphic style with flat color and heavy outlines, for example in *Synko-Filipko*, but the color contrast of the Firebird and Ivan against the dark background makes these figures stand out much more than any of those in *Synko-Filipko*.

As Stasov had expressed interest in getting her stories into print,⁷⁴⁴ Polenova turned to him for advice in January 1897 regarding publishing. A publisher, Aleksei Dmitrievich Stupin, wanted to print them, but as black and white woodcuts rather than color illustrations. She refused, and he proposed that she do other illustrations, but less complex to make them easier to publish. She also worried about the texts, since if she were to publish them she would not be able to use Afanas’ev because of copyright issues. She was particularly concerned with her lack of literary talent and the need to make her stories appropriate for children. Most of all, for the first time she expressed the concern that perhaps some of the stories she had collected were

⁷⁴³ “как главный распорядитель и починатель всего праздника, пошел к столу и громогласно на всю залу держал новую речь (у меня вчера их было несколько!) о том, что такое эти две художницы наши, Поленова и Бем, и что такое эти две прелестные—хотя и совершенно в разных родах—картинки их сегодняшние, полные оригинальности, поэзии и живописности.” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, December 30, 1896, 560. Antokol’skii, like Ropet, was moved to write Polenova a personal thanks. M. M. Antokol’skii to E. D. Polenova, January 1897, 561.

⁷⁴⁴ V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, December 10, 1896, 559.

“contemporary, made-up fairy tales, and completely not from the people.”⁷⁴⁵ I have no evidence that such indeed was the case, but oral folklore had continued to evolve over the nineteenth century, so it is possible that particular versions of tales she knew were contemporary.

Stasov insisted that the illustrations must be published in color, but advised her to consult with the Il'in publishing company in St. Petersburg before making a commitment to Stupin.⁷⁴⁶ Ultimately Polenova agreed and she proposed to publish three stories together, one she collected on her own with two from Afanas'ev (*The Little White Duck* and *Ivan the Fool*), but still feared problems with the rights. She asked for a total of 100 rubles for each story (25 rubles for each picture).⁷⁴⁷ Unfortunately, negotiations with Il'in fell through, and Polenova feared she would be forced to give in to Stupin regarding woodcuts for the first series of stories.⁷⁴⁸

Polenova asked Stasov whether he would review her stories and new illustrations because this venture was extremely important to her. She wrote, “I don't know one publication for children in which the illustrations transmitted the poetry and aroma of old Russia's cache, and Russian children are growing up on the poetry of wonderfully illustrated English and German fairy tales.”⁷⁴⁹ The last statement provides evidence that by this point Polenova was aware of English and German work in fairy tales and wanted Russian children to have the same experience that these provided. Although she had long been aware of the unique properties of Russian art, this is her most explicit statement that she wanted to ensure Russians know and love their heritage.

⁷⁴⁵ “современные, выдуманные сказка, совсем не народные.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, January 9, 1897, 562.

⁷⁴⁶ V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, January 10, 1897, 562.

⁷⁴⁷ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, February 7, 1897, 564.

⁷⁴⁸ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, April 27, 1897, 565.

⁷⁴⁹ “я не знаю ни одного детского издания, где бы иллюстрации передавали поэзию и аромат древнерусского склада, и русские дети растут на поэзии английских и немецких чудно иллюстрированных сказок.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, January 9, 1897, 562. Unfortunately, Polenova's stories were not published until after her death in 1906. Sakharova, *Khronika*, 778 n 27.

Her interest in and synthesis of forms from the West would prove a point of contention with Stasov. He told Polenova that he considered her most recent illustrations the best she had done, especially with regard to her representation of the human figure, which had been problematic in the past. He singled out the bear in “How the Bear Lost His Tail” for criticism, noting that the bear’s claw was particularly clumsy and the nest looked as though it was sitting in a swamp. What he objected to most of all, however, was her use of colors. He said that if she was following “English illustrators, the deceased Fedor Sollogub or even Repin” then he does not approve because it was “affected, artificial and conventional.”

Why use five or six colors when at the present time you can and should use twice and four times as many?! What is this unnecessary economy of means, what is this imitation of folkish clumsiness and poverty?! It is the same thing as if Pushkin, Lermontov or other writers took it into their heads to pluck the Russian [language] bare and set aside all of its contemporary resources and means, imagining themselves to be very nationalistic!⁷⁵⁰

Apparently Stasov approved of Polenova’s interest in folk art, but did not think it best to turn contemporary Russian art into something crude and primitive based upon it. For Stasov, the ideal seems not to have been folk art, but the highly decorated interiors of medieval Russian architecture. It is tempting to think that he feared her publications would turn into nothing more than cheap lubok. While Stasov and Polenova agreed that one should take advantage of contemporary technology, Stasov did not quite understand Polenova’s concerns about the publication problems she had already experienced with the “War of the Mushrooms” or her desire to just get the books into print.

⁷⁵⁰ “К чему употреблять пять, шесть красок, когда можно и должно употреблять их, в нынешнее время, второе и вчетверо больше?! Что за ненужная экономия средств, что за подделка под народную неумелость и скудность?! Это то же самое, как если бы Пушкин, Лермонтов и другие писатели вздумали общипывать русский [язык] и оставлять в стороне все его нынешние ресурсы и средства, воображая быть очень национальными!” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, April 27, 1897, 567.

He continued in this vein, stressing that if Polenova made these choices out of style, it was her business, after all, “I never demand anything from or dare to have my say with E. M. Bem, even though I find her system of representing everything through little children completely false! In my opinion, this is very poor and even absurd, but if her nature, taste and talent demand it, I bow to her willingly and with respect and follow her graceful and talented creations with love.”⁷⁵¹ In other words, Stasov was willing to support an artist like Bem even though her art was “completely false” because she could achieve nothing better. This letter provides a startling contrast to his earlier proclamations about Bem’s talent and no doubt made Polenova wonder what he truly thought of her.

In response, Polenova thanked Stasov for his observations, but replied firmly regarding format (i.e., the decision not to publish in full color) that she had no choice:

although this form was worked out by the English, I like it very much and I regret very much that they are ceasing to use it and that recently their illustrations for children have taken on an entirely different character. I personally like the current ones much less than the former, for example, Walter Crane’s illustrations of fairy tales. I think the method of publication will not prevent them from having a national character. I think that it’s not the method, for we were not the ones who come up with engraving or etching or chromolithography, but in all of these methods a composition may be or may not be nationally Russian depending on whether the artist sensed Russian life and its characteristic features. That’s how I look at it. Which of us is more correct? I don’t know.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵¹ “я никогда ровно иного не требую и не осмеливаюсь взыскивать с Е. М. Бем, хотя нахожу совершенно фальшивой ее систему все на свете изображать вечно только посредством маленьких детей! По-моему, это очень худо и даже нелепо, но если ее натура, вкус и талант того требуют,—я с охотой и почтением преклоняюсь и с любовью слежу за ее грациозными и талантливыми творениями.” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, April 27, 1897, 567.

⁷⁵² “хотя форма эта выработана англичанами, она мне ужасно нравится, и я очень сожалею, что она у них выходит из употребления и что за последнее время их детские иллюстрации получали совсем другой характер, и мне лично теперешний гораздо меньше нравится, чем тогдашний, напр[имер] иллюстрации Walter Crane к сказкам. Я думаю, что способ издания не мешать носить национальный характер, что дело не в способе, ведь ни гравюру, ни офорт, ни хромолиотографию выдумали не мы, но во всех этих способах может быть или не быть русскою национальною в зависимости от того, чувствовал ли художник русскую жизнь и ее характерные черты. Вот, как я смотрю на дело. Кто правее из нас?—Не знаю.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, May 19, 1897, 568.

This revealing statement emphasizes Polenova's willingness to borrow technologies or stylistic techniques from other cultures, for what marked art as Russian was the presence of "Russian life and its characteristic features."⁷⁵³ For Polenova, these features seemed to range from wintry weather to folk art. Her definitions of Russianness, while based in stereotype, also derived from her close observations of contemporary village life. Her strong commitment while at Abramtsevo to producing a "living" art rather than merely copying objects that had long been moldering in museums undoubtedly contributed to her more flexible conception of national art. In contrast, Stasov's conception of national art seems to have come largely from his work at the Russian National Library as art bibliographer and his archaeological investigations into Russian architecture. While both of them valued the *narod* as a source of the authentically Russian, Polenova looked to the present, whereas Stasov looked to a fixed past.⁷⁵⁴

In response to further drafts that she sent him, Stasov declared, "Your nature is so oriented towards everything national, so deeply, so sincerely, so faithfully and aptly, that nothing like it has been seen or heard of among women, and, invariably, will not soon be heard of again! Moreover, I think that even among men this is rare and quite an exception."⁷⁵⁵ Naturally, Stasov could not help but critique, pointing out her punctuation errors, a few places where he believed her language was more French or German than Russian, or at the very least bookish rather than

⁷⁵³ Sternin argues that Polenova's desire to push Russian art beyond the boundaries set by Stasov and other conservative critics was a part of the pan-European search for a regularized style in the decorative arts. *Na rubezhe*, 156.

⁷⁵⁴ Sternin argues that this feature of Polenova's art was part of her attempts to "internationalize certain artistic devices of current pan-European creative practice." For this he cites her reference to Walter Crane. *Na rubezhe*, 156. While it is the case that Polenova was clearly looking at contemporary art practice in Europe, I do not think she was interested in "internationalizing" anything. Rather, I think, as she noted about printing technologies and had been evident from her early career, that she was willing to learn new media and techniques if she felt they would help her achieve her artistic goals.

⁷⁵⁵ "Ваша натура направлена ко всему национальному, так глубоко, так искренне, так верно и метко, что у нас еще подобного не видано и не слыхано между женщинами, да, вероятно, не скоро будет услыхано в другой раз! Мало того: я думаю, что и между мужчинами—это редкость и исключение изрядное." V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, July 2, 1897, 569.

colloquial.⁷⁵⁶ Since she was a highly educated member of Russian society, the stilted language may perhaps have been expected.

While these conflicts no doubt strained their relationship, it all came apart with the establishment of the journal *Fine Art and Industrial Art* (Искусство и художественная промышленность). Founded in 1898 by Nikolai Petrovich Sobko (1851-1906), an art historian and secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, it presented itself as a journal dedicated to the fostering of a healthy national art, that is, one that would battle against any attempts on the part of decadence to infiltrate Russian art.⁷⁵⁷ Stasov wrote to Polenova to tell her about the plans for it and that they would publish a great number of works in full color. He asked for permission to publish several of her drawings. He also noted that he had heard that in October a “decadent” journal would begin publication. Stasov remarked, “I fear that I will have to spend nearly the entire winter in competition and battle with these decadents!”⁷⁵⁸

The “decadents” Stasov had in mind was the group of young people that had banded together around Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev (1872-1929) in the early 1890s in St. Petersburg. The World of Art group, as they had taken to calling themselves by the late 1890s, was dedicated to completely revitalizing Russian art. They had approached both Mamontov and Tenisheva about subsidizing their journal, suggesting that it would be dedicated primarily to the *kustar* revival.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 570.

⁷⁵⁷ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 70.

⁷⁵⁸ “Как я боюсь, что мне придется провести чуть не всю зиму в сражениях и боях с этими декадентами.» V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, May 14, 1898, 578-579. The mere fact of the nearly simultaneous appearance of two art journals in Russia attests to the greatly increased audience for art criticism. As I noted above and Sternin argues, the Peredvizhniki’s efforts to increase the viewing public for art had resulted in a much broader interest in the arts in Russian society. Concurrently, it fostered the development of Russian art criticism. By the 1890s, there were a number of art journals and art reviews appeared in the most provincial newspapers. This activity also contributed to the plurality of conflicts in the Russian art world during this period. *Na rubezhe*, 25-27. For more on the development of Russian art criticism in the nineteenth century, see Alexey Makhrov, “The Pioneers of Russian Art Criticism: Between State and Public Opinion, 1804-1855,” *Slavic and East European Review* 81, no. 4 (2003): 614-633 and Carol Adlam, “Realist Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Russian Art Writing,” *Slavic and East European Review* 83, no. 4 (2005): 638-663.

While the *kustar* revival was indeed part of the *World of Art*'s content, Diaghilev and his fellow editors had a much broader project in mind, one that had an eye trained firmly on contemporary European art.

As it turned out, the “decadents” had the upper hand. Polenova told Stasov that she could not send him anything to publish because she had already promised drawings to Diaghilev, with whom she became acquainted in Paris, and an “English illustrated journal” (*The Artist*). Polenova acknowledged that she did not know Diaghilev that well, but was “sympathetic to his artistic tastes, the direction of his journal and the character of his exhibitions.” Plus, many of her friends were collaborating with him. It was attractive because he was trying to do something completely new, to tear art “from that horrible soporific routine in which many love to remain.” Perhaps the greatest insult was that she asked Stasov to return her drawings so she could give them to the publishers to whom she had promised them.⁷⁵⁹

Not surprisingly, Stasov was furious.

You yourself, I think, can understand very well what kind of blow (a horrible and painful blow!) it was to learn that you have turned into a “decadentess” and united with the Russian and English decadents (the latter, I think, in the journal *Studio*, but nevertheless I will not begin to guess!). ... But, since you have allowed me, in spite of your transition to “decadence,” to maintain my relationship with you, I consider it my duty to write you everything about Diaghilev that I have long been gathering, but I could not, because they told me that you are ill and you are not up to hearing news from Russia about the arts⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁹ “его художественные вкусы, направление его журнала и характер его выставок мне симпатичны. ... из той ужасной снотворной рутины, в которой очень многие любят оставаться.” E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, May 22, 1898, 579-580.

⁷⁶⁰ “Вы, я думаю, и сами можете понять, какой был для меня удар (удар страшный и большой!) узнать, что Вы пошли в «декадентки» и соединились с русскими и английскими декадентами (последние, я думаю, в журнале «Studio»,—а впрочем, наверное отгадать не берусь!). ... Но так как Вы позволяете мне, невзирая на Ваш переход в «декаденство», оставаться с Вами в прежних отношениях, то я считаю своей обязанностью написать Вам насчет Дягилева все то, что давно собирался, но не мог, потому что то мне говорили, что Вы нездоровы и Вам не до известий из России о художествах” V. V. Stasov to E. D. Polenova, May 31/June 12, 1898, 580.

Stasov proceeded to declare Diaghilev an impudent, ignorant snob and to rail against art for art's sake. He insisted that the Russian decadents had no ideas of their own and were just copying Parisian trends for the sake of novelty. After he had published a negative article about them, Diaghilev came around trying to curry favor, but Stasov refused to give into it. He was indignant to learn subsequently that Diaghilev was going to publish an article (in his own journal, of course, since no one else would publish it) about how Stasov and the Peredvizhniki were once useful, but no more. Stasov concluded by reiterating that Polenova did not belong in their midst. Moreover, he emphatically stated, decadence was already over in Paris.⁷⁶¹

What infuriated Stasov and other conservative critics most of all was the shift in ethos that the “decadents” represented. Whereas they perceived the Peredvizhniki as a collective working for the good of Russian art as a whole, they understood World of Art to be an organization formed solely for the purposes of providing exhibition and sales opportunities for individual artists. Unable to perceive that the Peredvizhniki formed in part for the very same reasons, they viewed Diaghilev as a sign of a terrible shift from a socially oriented arts community to one permeated with egotism and pointless navel gazing.⁷⁶²

Stasov would make another overture to Polenova, about which I will speak below, but this disagreement essentially ended their relationship.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 580-582. Stasov had written a negative review of the Exhibition of Russian and Finnish Artists that Diaghilev had arranged in *The News and Stock Gazette* (Новости и биржевая газета), January 27 and February 24, 1898.

⁷⁶² Sternin, *70e-80e gody*, 21, 37-38.

4.2 THE 1896 NIZHNII NOVGOROD FAIR: DRESS REHEARSAL

In April 1896, Polenova was traveling down a sharp incline to Trubnaia Square in Moscow when the cab she was riding in suddenly became tangled in the tramway rails and turned over. Polenova hit her head on the road hard enough to cause serious head trauma, which eventually killed her.⁷⁶³ The lengthy recovery period, plus financial strains, made it impossible for Polenova to return to Paris in 1896 as she had planned. She did not, however, cease to be active in the Russian art world, contributing new designs for the Nizhnii Novgorod Fair.

The 1896 All Russia Industrial and Art Exhibition at the annual fair in Nizhnii Novgorod served as a dress rehearsal of sorts for the 1900 Exposition Universelle. The yearly fair was a long established event of great economic and cultural significance in the empire. Due in part to the Russian Empire's sheer vastness and in part to the lack of a modernized economic infrastructure, trade via periodic fairs remained one of the dominant forms of Russian business well into the early twentieth century.⁷⁶⁴ Because of its location at the crossroads of the Volga and Oka Rivers—the main north-south and east-west trading arteries—the area around Nizhnii Novgorod had been a major trading center since the fourteenth century. The modern yearly fair, which began at the nearby Makar'evskii Monastery, dated back to the seventeenth century. In the early nineteenth century, plans began to be made for a permanent trading complex.⁷⁶⁵ By the 1890s there were 1870 permanent buildings on the premises and over 2000 temporary wooden structures, which drew approximately 15,000 people per day from all over the Russian Empire,

⁷⁶³ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 779 n 30. According to Dr. Dennis Stull, the available evidence suggests that she suffered a basal skull fracture. As the fracture healed, it caused some excess bone growth that began pressing on the carotid artery, which slowly cut off blood flow to the brain, causing her body to shut down over the next two years.

⁷⁶⁴ Anne Lincoln Fitzpatrick, *The Great Russian Fair* (New York: Macmillan, 1990) 2.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-21.

Europe and Asia while the fair was open officially between July 15 and September 10.⁷⁶⁶ In the late 1880s the Main Building (Главный дом) of the fair, which had been erected in the 1820s, was taken down and a new one in the Russian Revival Style opened in 1890.⁷⁶⁷ While this expansion cemented the fair as the primary trading center of the Russian Empire, it did not cease to have an international character, with the Chinese trading rows and their distinctive architecture remaining among the most popular sights of the complex. Whereas in earlier years tea dominated the trade, by the end of the nineteenth century the cotton goods market and the church bell market were among the most famous and busiest centers of activity.⁷⁶⁸

For the 1896 All Russia Industrial and Art Exhibition, the Minister of Finance, Sergei Iu. Vitte, proposed that Mamontov build a pavilion dedicated to his construction of the northern railway line. Mamontov was happy to take on this project and sent Korovin and Serov to Murmansk to create works for it. In addition, Mamontov had also commissioned panels from Vrubel, which turned out to be the *success de scandale* of the exhibition. Vrubel proposed two themes, providing an interesting example of the shifts and alliances taking place in Russian art.⁷⁶⁹ He chose to depict Mikula Selianinovich, the legendary hero of Russian byliny, on one, and a theme from French literature on the other: Edmond Rostand's play *La Princesse Liontaine* (1895).⁷⁷⁰ The exhibition jury rejected Vrubel's panels, infuriating Mamontov and sending Vrubel into a depressive spiral. Vrubel had already been damned in the critical press as a

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 29, 32, 46-47.

⁷⁶⁷ A. P. Mel'nikov, *Ocherki bytovoï istorii Nizhegorodskoi iarmarki (1817-1917)*, 1917 (Reprint Nizhnii Novgorod: Nizhegorodskii komp'iuternyi tsentr pol'zovatelei, 1993), 171-173.

⁷⁶⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Fair*, 47-64.

⁷⁶⁹ Sternin notes that the critical reaction to this event indicates that the conflict in the Russian art world had passed from the battle between the Peredvizhniki and the Academy to a more generalized concern for the future of Russian art, which involved a variety of critical responses. *Na rubezhe*, 20-23.

⁷⁷⁰ The play was first performed in Russian translation on January 4, 1896. Natal'ia Sukhova, "Vrubel's Princess of Dreams/Греза Врубеля," *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine/Третьяковская галерея*, no. 2 (2005), 29-31. (This magazine is published in parallel English/Russian translation.)

decadent in the increasing reaction in the Russian art world against the perception of an encroaching Western decadent influence, so it is perhaps this reputation that caused the panels to be rejected out of hand.⁷⁷¹ They were, however, not completely finished by the time of the jury proceedings, so the jury had an easy excuse. In the end, Polenov and Korovin stepped up to help finish Vrubel's panels, and Mamontov had a separate pavilion built at the fair especially for them at his own expense,⁷⁷² a move reminiscent of Courbet's actions at the 1855 Exposition Universelle.

For her part, Polenova was involved in the women's *kustar* display.⁷⁷³ While it may seem surprising that she returned to design work after her break with Abramtsevo, this decision was in part motivated by financial concerns. For this exhibition, Mariia Fedorovna Iakunchikova commissioned her to design an embroidered panel based on a Russian folk theme, which would be executed by the talented embroiderers at Mariia Fedorovna's workshop at Solomenko.⁷⁷⁴

Polenova wrote about it:

I got it into my head to create a design for an embroidery, which will be exhibited in the summer at Nizhnii. Here is the story of this commission: I need to tell you that after my mother passed away (she died at the end of December '95) my material circumstances changed sharply. I have no right to say that I'm completely without means, but, nevertheless, in order to continue to live as I'm accustomed, I have to work partly to earn money. Already in the fall they proposed I create and carry out large embroidered panel (5 x 3 arshins) on any subject I choose as long as it's Russian in character. I refused then, because I

⁷⁷¹ See Grover, "Mamontov," 270-277. Grover mistakenly identifies Princesse Liontaine as a theme from Russian folklore. Sukhova suggests that the reason for the rejection was that Mamontov did not get the Imperial Academy's approval prior to commissioning Vrubel to do the panels. "Vrubel's Princess," 32-33.

⁷⁷² V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, June 4, 1896, 550-551; S. I. Mamontov to V. D. Polenov, June 4, 1896, 551; and V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, June 19, 1896, 552. The reviews of Vrubel's works in the press were decidedly mixed, some condemning them and others hailing them as something original and new. Sukhova, "Vrubel's Princess," 34-35.

⁷⁷³ The sheer decorativeness of the pavilion is startling, and speaks of what may be termed an "hypergendering" of the sphere in this context. It is possible that this was purposely done to make the display stand out against the background of the hypermasculine industrial machinery.

⁷⁷⁴ M. F. Iakunchikova, Iakunchikova's sister-in-law, established the workshop during a famine in 1891. In the 1890s it became, along with Abramtsevo and M. Tenisheva's Talashkino, one of the most famous *kustar* workshops.

wanted to work on my own painting, but now, when circumstances have changed and they again proposed this work, I accepted the commission.

For the subject I chose the fairy-tale Firebird guarding the golden apples. I represent a dark night ... fairy-tale flowers and grasses wind and entwine around the tree. ... everything is strongly stylized. This work has interested me terribly.⁷⁷⁵

Polenova's design for this panel perhaps shows in sharpest relief the encroaching influence of art nouveau, though, as I have noted, intertwining motifs are not unknown in Russian folk art. The representation of the depths of a dark night is also unusual, though perhaps it is a result of the time she spent in Kostroma sketching at night trying to capture the unique properties of colors and starlight. The choice may have been purely formal as well, for the vermilion Firebird and the golden apples veritably sparkle against the dark background. The choice to represent not just the tree, but various flora twisting and twining around it, not only lends a sense of movement and energy to the scene, but also references the whiplash lines and entwined foliage in contemporary decorative art in Europe. Perhaps in this work she freed herself from the constraints of the more geometric designs required of the wood carving that served as her model for so long. In general at this time artists who were interested in Russian folklore and history ceased to be rigidly concerned with a historically "correct" representation of Russian folk art and turned more towards its decorative and expressive characteristics.⁷⁷⁶ Based on this work and Polenova's

⁷⁷⁵ "Я взумала сделать рисунок дая вышивки, которая будет выставлена летом в Нижнем. Вот история этого заказа: нужно Вам сказать, ято после кончины моей матери (умершей в конце декабря 1895) мои материальные обстоятельства сильно изменились. Я не в праве сказать, чтобы я осталась совсем без средств, но все-таки, чтобы продолжать жить соответственно привычкам, мне придется работать отчасти и для заработка. — Еще с осени мне предлагали сочинить и исполнить большое панно (в 5 и 3 аршин) для вышивки, на какой я хочу сюжет, только было бы в русском характере. Тогда я отказалась, потому что хотелось работать свою картину, но теперь, когда обстоятельства изменились и мне вторично предложили эту работу — я приняла заказ.

Сюжетом я выбрала сказочную Жар-птицу, стерегущую золотые яблоки. Я изображаю темную ночь ... вокруг дерева свиваются и переплетаются сказочные цветы и травы. ... все сильно простилизовано. Работа эта меня ужасно заинтересовала" E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, January 29, 1896, 543-544.

⁷⁷⁶ Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 140-141.

comments regarding V. M. Vasnetsov's anachronisms, it appears that she was also moving in this direction.⁷⁷⁷

The fair opened with great pomp and circumstance on May 26, 1896 and drew nearly a million visitors before closing on October 1. Nicholas II and his family arrived on July 17, close to the traditional fair opening day. The main exhibit space was the Machine Hall, a glass and iron structure reminiscent of Paxton's Crystal Palace. The technological novelties at the fair included the first Russian automobile and a steam-driven tractor.⁷⁷⁸ It was as if the Empire was trying to prove both to itself and to the outside world that it had a firm grasp on modernity. Polenov reported that Mamontov's Pavilion of the North (as it was called) was "very nearly the most lively and talented [thing] at the exhibition."⁷⁷⁹ He complained, however, that the "initiators of the exhibition, Vitte and Morozov, are very weak in esthetics," since they set it up so that the two "most grandiose Russian rivers" (the Oka and the Volga) were not visible.⁷⁸⁰

The exhibition merited a review in the French journal *Revue des arts décoratifs*. It reported that the exhibition was "a picturesque city as big as the Paris Exposition in 1889."⁷⁸¹ The author also noted the large pavilion dedicated to Siberia, which also would be the focus of Russia's display at the 1900 Exposition Universelle. The author's fascination with the Russian *izba* (peasant hut) perhaps forecasts the public's interest in the Russian *kustar* pavilion in 1900.

⁷⁷⁷ See also Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 40-41.

⁷⁷⁸ V. I. Maslov, "Vserossiiskaia torgovo-promyshlennaia i khudozhestvennaia vystavka v Nizhnem Novgorode," *Otchina*, no. 2 (2003), 41-45.

⁷⁷⁹ "Чуть не самый живой и талантливый на выставке." V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, May 30, 1896, 550. With the exception of Mamontov's pavilion, the fine arts exhibitions at the fair received negative reviews across the board. Part of this was just the sheer overload of works presented: 230 from the Peredvizhniki and 325 from the Academy. Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 18-19.

⁷⁸⁰ "Инициаторы выставки, Витте и Морозов, в эстетике слабы." and "самых грандиозных русских рек" V. D. Polenov to N. V. Polenova, June 4, 1896, 550-551.

⁷⁸¹ "une ville pittoresque aussi étendue que l'Exposition de Paris en 1889." T. "L'Exposition de Nijni-Novgorod." *Revue des arts décoratifs* 16 (1896): 336

We are here in the heart of Russia and, specifically, nearby an old, hospitable izba calls us. This is where the muzhiks of all parts of the Empire, from Siberia to the gates of Moscow and from Astrakhan to St. Petersburg, let us see the useful or artistic works to which they are devoted in the hours that are not dedicated to toiling on the land.⁷⁸²

Curiously, the reviewer did not pick out any particular works of interest stating that if he were to do so, “I would be obliged to neglect numerous picturesque and curious details” More importantly, he writes, it is important to recognize the progress Russia has made: “This is a decisive response to Russia’s detractors, who try to represent it as poor and backwards. The progress made over the past fifteen years is truly extraordinary.”⁷⁸³ Apparently France at least still perceived Russia as a picturesque, backwards empire, yet delighted in the particular exotic details of its backwardness (e.g., the izba), something the reviewer finds distasteful. Nevertheless, the recognition of this perception is something Russia took advantage of to its benefit for the 1900 Exposition Universelle.

4.3 POLENOVA AND IAKUNCHIKOVA: ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

Polenova first began to become seriously ill in the summer of 1897. She was advised to go abroad, specifically to Spain “to eat grapes” (!). She traveled first to Paris for a brief visit and then continued on to Spain where she divided five weeks between Granada and Malaga. Golovin, who was becoming her young protégé, accompanied her on the trip. In November she

⁷⁸² Nous sommes ici au coeur de la Russie, et précisément, tout à côté, une ancienne izba nous appelle, hospitalière; c’est là que les moujiks de toutes les parties de l’empire, des confins sibériens aux portes de Moscou, et d’Astrakan à Petersbourg, nous convient à voir les travaux utiles ou artistiques aux-quels ils emploient les heures qu’ils ne peuvent consacrer aux rudes travaux de la terre. Ibid., 337.

⁷⁸³ “[J]e suis obligé de négliger de parti pris d’innombrables détails pittoresques ou curieux... . C’est là que s’offre la réponse décisive aux détracteurs de la Russie, qui s’acharnent à la représenter comme pauvre et arriérée. Les progrès accomplis dans les quinze dernières années sont vraiment extraordinaires.” Ibid., 337.

returned to Paris for treatment in Golovin's company.⁷⁸⁴ She immediately took a studio for three months, which was the minimum rental period. Polenova reported home that she really liked it because it was large and bright and fairly inexpensive. In addition, Polenova was feeling better overall and hoped she might be able to rent the studio out for a year so she could live in both Moscow and Paris.⁷⁸⁵

Meanwhile, her part-Muscovite, part-Parisian counterpart, Iakunchikova, had had a busy year. She was still associating with Netta Peacock⁷⁸⁶ and her work appeared again in *The Studio*. While the article does not mention her by name in the text (her name is present under the illustration of her work), she is referred to as "a famous lady engraver."⁷⁸⁷ The epithet "famous" may be an exaggeration, but it does indicate that Iakunchikova's work in aquatints and other printmaking media had solidified her reputation abroad.

In 1897 in Paris Iakunchikova had met Sergei Diaghilev and other members of the future World of Art group, who looked to her as an innovative prophet of new art,⁷⁸⁸ and she enthusiastically participated in their activities both in Russia and in Paris. This interest was not without a distinct gendered conception, however. In 1898 Konstantin Somov wrote of her in a letter, "She's now an interesting woman artist, which is a rare exception for women. She draws well, subtly feels tone and assez personelle. Her technique is masculine."⁷⁸⁹ That the World of Art group, like Iakunchikova herself, inhabited a liminal space between Russianness and modernity (defined mostly by Parisian standards) may have accounted for their mutual attraction.

⁷⁸⁴ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, November 2/14, 1897, 575-576.

⁷⁸⁵ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, November 13/25, 1897, 576 and E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, November 1897, 576.

⁷⁸⁶ M. V. Iakunchikova to Z. N. Iakunchikova, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 12543, sheets 1-2.

⁷⁸⁷ Gleeson White, "Some Recent Bookplates. Mostly Pictorial," *The Studio* 10 (1897): 117.

⁷⁸⁸ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 105-109.

⁷⁸⁹ "Она сейчас интересная художница, что очень большое исключение для женщин. Хорошо рисует, тонко чувствует тон и assez personelle. Техника мужская." As quoted in Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 152 n 32.

The negative reactions of the Russian press to the works she exhibited with them firmly placed her in the “decadent” camp. A review of Diaghilev’s Russian-Finnish Exhibition highlighted her in particular:

... the “Parisian” artist Iakunchikov [sic] also suffers [from decadence], except in the beautifully painted pastel *Winter in Petersburg* and the tempera *Bells*, all of the rest of the pastels and “temperas” create a very strange impression! This is, again, some kind of Japanese painting where on top of the paint the contours of a face or an object are for some reason surrounded with a black border. Such is his [sic] *Flame*—a candle standing alone on a table and “being blown out” by a draft, *Horror*—the face of a young woman with widened eyes and hair standing on end, and the *Profile* of some young man preparing to kiss a flower. But the picture entitled *Irreparable* can be called the height of decadence! It shows a young woman sitting on her haunches with a hatchet with which she has just chopped a grapevine. What is “irreparable” here only Allah knows! I am afraid that what is irreparable is the manner of painting, which this talented artist undoubtedly borrowed from the Parisian decadents.⁷⁹⁰

This review is typical not only in its rejection of anything that even hints at “decadence,” but also in its assumption that the artist was male. No woman artist would produce such things, of course. To be charitable to the reviewer, Iakunchikova sometimes signed her works with just her monogram and many of her works are signed with the French version of her name, Jacouchikoff, which would give no information as to gender.⁷⁹¹ As this review indicates, while

⁷⁹⁰ “страдает [декаденсом] тоже “парижский” художник Якунчиков за исключением прекрасно написанной пастели “Зима в Петербурге” и темпера “Колокола”, все остальные пастели и “темпера” производят крайне странное впечатление! Это, опять таки, какая то японская живопись, где сверх краски контуры лика или предмета зачем то обводятся черной каймой. Таковы его “Пламя”—одиного стоящая на столе и “оплывающая” от сквозняка, свеча,—“Страх”—лицо девушки с вытаращенными глазами и приподнявшимися волосами,—“Профиль” какого то юноши, собирающегося поцеловать цветок. Но верхом декадентства следует назвать картинку названную: “Непоправимое”! и изображающую сидящую на корточках девицу с топориком, которым она только что нарубила виноградную лозу. Что тут “непоправимое”—Аллах ведает! Боюсь, что непоправима та манера письма, которую, несомненно, талантливый художник заимствовал у парижских упадочников.” Sarmata [pseud.], “Kartinki zhizni,” *Pridneprovskii krai. Ezhednevnaia, nauchno-literaturnaia, politicheskaiia i ekonomicheskaiia gazeta*, February 4, 1898. The reference to Allah could be an ironic, orientaling gesture. Considering that the review was published in an Ekaterinoslav (known as Dnepropetrovsk during the Soviet period) newspaper, however, it is more likely simply due to the fact that the city was in the southern part of the empire, where more Muslims were present. Hence, a reference to Allah would not be seen as particularly unusual.

⁷⁹¹ I have not been able to locate a catalog for the exhibition to see how Iakunchikova was listed.

exhibitions of contemporary Western art had become more common in Russia in the 1890s,⁷⁹² many Russian critics remained hostile to it.

By the end of the year Polenova was again struggling with her health and decided to stay on in Paris. Significantly, it was through Iakunchikova that Polenova met Diaghilev and his group, which resulted in her break with Stasov. She also met Netta Peacock, who would prove helpful in getting Polenova's works published and also arranging for her to spend time working in Britain. In addition, Polenova was also helping both Iakunchikovas and Golovin with the preparations for a *kustar* pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle.⁷⁹³

Polenova was particularly aggrieved because her hands were beginning to fail.⁷⁹⁴ Nonetheless, she worked as hard as she could in collaboration with Golovin on the designs for a dining room for Nara, Mariia Fedorovna's estate. The Nara dining room commission was one of Polenova's last major works and the first to gain her recognition abroad. Netta Peacock approached *The Artist* with Polenova and Golovin's designs and reported in February 1898 that the journal wanted to publish them.⁷⁹⁵ After she returned to Russia in May, Polenova reported to Iakunchikova that, even though it was a commission and not her own work,

I am doing it with pleasure and without growing tired. ... In moments of rest, i.e., during intermissions, I make Annushka (the laundress) tell me tales and I get lost in my imagination... How much [illegible], how much inspiration there is in Russia, how much more colorfully and intensively you see it after a long absence—it's a delight how good it is.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹² Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 89-90.

⁷⁹³ E. D. Polenova to N. V. Polenova, May 3/15, 1898, 587, 780 n 32.

⁷⁹⁴ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, December 26, 1897/January 7, 1898, 577.

⁷⁹⁵ N. Peacock to E. D. Polenova, February 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 8402, sheet 1.

⁷⁹⁶ “я ее делаю с удовольствием и без утомления. В минуты отдыха, так сказать во время антрактов заставляю Аннушку (прачку) сказывать сказки и утываюсь... Сколько [???], сколько вдохновения в России, насколько ее видишь колоритнее и интесивнее после долгого отсутствия—прелесть как это хорошо.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 205, no. 85, sheet 1. The second ellipsis is in the original.

Clearly old modes of working had not ceased to inspire Polenova's art.

Her designs for the dining room show a complete modernist fantasy world of a Russian interior.⁷⁹⁷ Peacock's article about the dining room provides an interesting look at the international world of the arts and crafts movement from a British perspective. The article was published with the note that in the next issue "a clever and original scheme for English Dining-room" would be provided for comparison.⁷⁹⁸ Peacock began her article with a comment reminding readers of the arguments of the arts and crafts movement, which provides justification for the focus of her article. "Considering the protest which has arisen in England against the tyranny of machine-made wall papers, the cry for a new influence to infuse character and style into our designs, and the lament over the poverty of idea which characterises so much of our own decoration, a scheme of this kind, fresh from another land, in which colour and form have been combined with rare ability, cannot fail to be regarded with interest."⁷⁹⁹ Peacock's observations suggest that the tenets first espoused by William Morris decades earlier were still in circulation. Thus, at least in this respect Russia was not lagging behind. She noted that the designs for the room were unfinished, with only the wall decorations completely sketched out. The dining room was to be a continuation of the *kustar* workshop model, with Polenova and Golovin providing the designs and *kustar* workers making everything from the linen for the canvasses upon which the murals would be made to the final embroideries for the tapestries.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁷ See also Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 66-69.

⁷⁹⁸ *The Artist, An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* 24, no. 229 (1899). The English dining room does indeed provide a significant point of comparison in its comparative plainness. See Anonymous, "A Scheme of Design for a Dining-Room by A. H. Baxter," *The Artist, An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* 24, no. 230 (1899): 79-85.

⁷⁹⁹ Netta Peacock, "A Log House Dining-Room in Russia." *The Artist, An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* 24, no. 229 (1899): 1.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

The remainder of the article was devoted to describing the colors, “so essentially Russian in its groupings and tones,”⁸⁰¹ and explaining the fairy-tale motifs (the Firebird, the Swan Princess) to an English audience. Peacock did, however, take special care to note the presence of interlocking motifs that are also found in Celtic and Scandinavian art, which shows “The curious mixture of the North and the Orient, which is so strikingly contrasted in all things Russian”⁸⁰² This last statement recapitulates long-held stereotypes about Russian culture, but is accurate in the case of the dining room, suggesting that Polenova and Golovin were working with motifs broadly recognized as Russian.

The extant color sketches show a world saturated with color, but I am not sure it can be identified as specifically Russian color. As I have noted, the types of floral ornament found in peasant homes tend to emphasize brilliant color, but other than the preference for red found in Russian culture, I believe what Peacock identifies as a particularly Russian color scheme is simply the mere presence of color. This is especially evident in contrast to the nearly monochromatic color scheme of the English dining room, which the article notes its designer “has also purposely restrained himself to the production of a quiet and harmonious effect by the simplest means of expression.”⁸⁰³ A letter Peacock wrote to Polenova at the proposal stage for the article further confirms this suspicion,

On Thursday morning I saw Wallace Crowdy, Editor of "The Artist"--another very pleasant + most profitable interview. He is really charming. I learned more from him in half-an-hour than I have done for a long time. . . . He can give no definite answer about your other designs without seeing some of them, so I want you to send me one or two of the carved wood + one or two of the embroideries. Ever such rough sketches will do—he can judge of their value—but please pick

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 9.

⁸⁰³ Anonymous, “A Scheme of Design for a Dining-Room by A. H. Baxter,” *The Artist, An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* 24, no. 230 (1899): 84.

out the most Russian—he loves the Oriental influence in Russian design—color.⁸⁰⁴

This passage is particularly interesting for Peacock’s suggestion that Polenova emphasize the exotic and perform some self-orientalizing in order to ensure publication.⁸⁰⁵

Meanwhile, Iakunchikova was in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc eagerly awaiting the birth of her first child. She wrote to Polenova that she was quite happy there because it reminded her of Russia. “[My] bright dreams of Russia are practically better than reality. ... In the morning you wake up and, having heard the rustle of brooms beneath the windows, you think you are not here, but in Zhukovka. How to not forget all this and do something”⁸⁰⁶ She was really missing Russia at this point, but considered it impossible to travel in her condition, so the presence of things that reminded her of Russia was very comforting, especially since her husband was in Munich finishing up his medical studies.⁸⁰⁷

In spite of her pregnancy, Iakunchikova was indeed continuing to “do something.” She had accepted Diaghilev’s invitation to create a cover for the World of Art’s new journal and was very happy that Polenova had also agreed to work with him. A particular aspect of Russian art Iakunchikova had become engrossed in after discovering herself pregnant was wooden toys, though, as she wrote to Polenova, “they are not as interesting to do without you and without

⁸⁰⁴ N. Peacock to E. D. Polenova, July 6, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 8409, sheets 2-3.

⁸⁰⁵ Interestingly, it appears that Peacock had also talked to Walter Crane about Polenova, for she wrote, “I spoke to him of your illustrations. He asked lots of questions + added ‘simplicity is to be aimed at. I think that we all make a great mistake in losing sight of that fact.’ We also discussed his socialistic ideas—he told me he had been led to socialism through the door of art, that his great hope for the art of the future lay in socialism, it was only under happier conditions that a really high ideal could be maintained + that the production of bad work in order to procure bread + butter could be avoided.” N. Peacock to E. D. Polenova, July 6, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 8409, sheet 2.

⁸⁰⁶ “яркие мечты о России почти лучше действительности. ... Утром полупроснешься и заслышав шелест метлы под окнами почудится что не здесь а в Жуковке ... Как бы не забыть все это и сделать как нибудь...” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, August 13, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9708, sheets 1-2. The final ellipse is in the original.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

Russia.”⁸⁰⁸ In other words, as she was Polenova’s touchstone for contemporary European art, Polenova was her touchstone for all things Russian. As toys would become one of her major contributions to the *kustar* pavilion, I will here just mention the crib she prepared for her newborn. The present location of the bed is unknown, but a period photograph shows that the panels were scenes of Russian toys set in a Russian landscape. With the exception of the cows, each of the figures are depicted on stands, making it clear that they are meant to be toys created in the Russian tradition of toy making. In her memoirs, Natal’ia Vasil’evna recalled this bed, noting that Iakunchikova “wanted [her son’s] first conscious impressions to be of Russian life.”⁸⁰⁹

That Polenova was still very important to Iakunchikova is evident in the fact that she was thrilled to think of the possibility of Polenova coming to spend the winter, especially after her visit earlier that year. “You probably do not know just how much your presence in Paris brought me to a final equilibrium. ... [I]t seems to me that for the first time in my life I have begun to understand consciously, directly in words, what I have to do to move forward on the path of life and on the path of art.”⁸¹⁰

Polenova, however, was unsure of her winter plans, and confused about Netta Peacock’s intentions. She told Iakunchikova that she definitely did not want to spend the winter in Russia and, at the very least, “For this I should accomplish the following in Russia: (1) finish the commission [the dining room]; (2) clarify my financial situation; (3) [illegible] my health; and

⁸⁰⁸ “Без вас и без России не так интересно сделать.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, June 18, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9707, sheet 2.

⁸⁰⁹ “Ей хотелось, чтобы его первые сознательные впечатления были от русской жизни.” Polenova, *Iakunchikova*, 44 and Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 128.

⁸¹⁰ “Вы вероятно сами не знаете насколько ваше пребывание в Париже подвинуло меня к окончательному равновесию. ... мне кажется в первый раз в жизни я начинаю в сознании прямо словами понимать как нужно делать чтобы подвигаться по жизненному пути и по пути искусства.” M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, June 18, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9707, sheet 2.

(4) gather into myself more of the Russian spirit.”⁸¹¹ Polenova’s correspondence with Netta Peacock at this time indicates that she was planning to spend time working in Scotland and England in the winter of 1898-1899,⁸¹² but was despondent about her health and how it prevented her from working. In her best English, she wrote,

You want me to send designs for carved wood and embroideries to the Editor of the artist, with the greatest plaesur; only I cannot do that at present because Stassoff has got them and he himself is abroad until autumn. One of those days I intend to write to him. I am working the dining room for Mrs Marie Jakouchnikoff but cannot do much. I cannot work more than two or three hours a day and the doctor does not allow me to do much more. Not long ago I received a letter from Mme Narishkin, she begs me not to refuse to do the building for the Exhibition, as you wrote me not to refuse I did not;—her letter was a very gentel one, I answered I do not refuse but I did not promise anything—I told I would ask my doctor, and I did so, but he did not allow me to accept till I am better,—and I am not, every day I am wors, now I hardly can walk across the room. I have been to see five doctors and good ones almost all professors, they all were very nice so attentive towards me but not one of them knows what is the matter with me, my ears and eyes and nose and everything is quite in order but I myself am not, it makes one rather dull; sometimes I begin to think that now never anything agreable will happen to me.⁸¹³

Mariia Fedorovna Iakunchikova, head of the *kustar* division, had approached Polenova about designing a terem and other exhibitions for the *kustar* pavilion for the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Stasov was very insistent that she take part and she did work on some designs during the winter of 1897-1898. However, with her health continuing to fail, she wrote to Stasov that she had to decline because she was losing ability to walk and sometimes her hands would

⁸¹¹ “Для этого я должна в России сделать следующее: 1) кончить заказ. 2) выяснить денежные дела. 3) [??] здоровье. 4) Набрать в себе побольше русского духу.” E. D. Polenova to M. V. Iakunchikova, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, Fond 205 Iakunchikov, no. 85, sheet 2.

⁸¹² See N. Peacock to E. D. Polenova, June 21, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 8407, sheet 1; E. D. Polenova to N. Peacock, July 5/17, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 6898, sheet 2; N. Peacock to E. D. Polenova, July 7, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 8409, sheet 4; and N. Peacock to E. D. Polenova, July 31, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 8404, sheets 2-4

⁸¹³ E. D. Polenova to N. Peacock, July 5/17, 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 6898, sheets 1-2. I have left the spelling as in the original document.

not work. She was hoping to finish the dining room by August and go abroad again to seek medical assistance.⁸¹⁴ Stasov was utterly furious at her refusal, writing to Ropet,

It appears that we are losing Polenova!!! She is now doing and saying such insane things that I am terribly afraid that she has begun to lose her mind! They say that she has already gone crazy twice and went to be treated in Paris! And now she has linked up with the *decadents* and only talks of money and payments when Madame Bem etc. try to talk her into participating in the *Russian women's section* for the World's Fair of 1900. ... Terrible! Terrible!⁸¹⁵

In a way, Stasov was correct: Polenova's condition continued to fail and the doctors were perplexed. Ultimately they decided that she was suffering from a nervous problem and merely needed to spend some time in the country getting fresh air. She proposed to visit Vasilii Dmitrievich and Natal'ia Vasil'evna at Borok.⁸¹⁶ Natal'ia Vasil'evna was shocked when she finally saw Polenova. She wrote to Konstantin Dmitrievich,

Lilia's condition, apparently, is very serious, I have not decided to say hopeless, but in any case we cannot expect anything good. It is an illness of the brain, but an organic disease, not a nervous one and, probably, the reason is her fall from the carriage onto the roadway about two years ago. The doctors who treated her in the summer apparently did not consider her illness very serious because they recommended time in the country, bathing and entertainment. Vasilii brought her here on August 15 and on August 17 she began to have hemorrhaging and periodic losses of consciousness; then she got up again, but could hardly walk.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁴ E. D. Polenova to V. V. Stasov, July 5/17, 1898, 582.

⁸¹⁵ "А Поленову мы, кажется, *теряем*!!! Она нынче говорит и делает такие безумия, что я страшно боюсь, не начинает ли она в уме мешаться! Ведь говорят, она раза два с ума уже сходила и лечилась в Париже! А нынче связалась с *декадентами* и только говорит о деньгах и плате, когла мадам Бем и проч. уговариваюь ее поработать для *русского женского отдела* на Всем[ирную] выставку 1900 года. ... Ужасно! Ужасно!" V. V. Stasov to I. P. Ropet, August 11, 1898, N. D. Chernikova, and Iu. S. Kalashnikov, eds., *V. V. Stasov. Pis'ma k deiateliam russkoi kul'tury*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), 102. Emphasis in the original.

⁸¹⁶ E. D. Polenova to V. D. Polenova, July 27, 1898, 583.

⁸¹⁷ "Состояние Лили, по-видимому, очень серьезное, не решаюь еще говорить безнадежное, но во всяком случае ждать хорошего нельзя. Болезнь мозга, но болезнь органическая, не нервная и, вероятно, причина ее падение из пролетки на мостовую два года тому назад. Доктора, лечившие ее летом, по-видимому, не считали ее заболевание таким глубоким, так как рекомендовали ей деревню, купанье и развлечение. Василий привез ее сюда 15 августа, а 17-го у нее началась мозговая рвота, потери сознания временами; затем она опять всамала, но ходить почти не могла." N. V. Polenova to K. D. Polenov, August 1898, 583.

Due to her increasingly incapacitated condition, her family checked her into Dr. Tokarskii's psychiatric hospital in Moscow, where she died on November 7, 1898.⁸¹⁸

Iakunchikova's son, Stepan, was born in early November 1898.⁸¹⁹ Because of her own delicate health, the family hid Polenova's death from her. Thus, on November 15 she wrote to Natal'ia Vasil'evna to inquire after her,

Everything that is most dear to me is so closely connected to her that I cannot help but think of her at every step. ... The winter during her presence in Paris passed by, it passed by like a miraculous dream. We lived together, she, Netta, Golovin, Mak, and I, so happily, actively and affably. How Netta and I dreamed of her coming this year. I do not believe, do not, that there is no hope especially now that she has reached a true stage of development, a true flowering of her artistic activity, that her life, if not physically than spiritually, will be cut off. That is horribly cruel.⁸²⁰

Unfortunately life was indeed horribly cruel. The day after writing this letter, she found a letter her sister Vera had written to their mother about Polenova's funeral. Iakunchikova was devastated, telling Natal'ia Vasil'evna, "I have been orphaned."⁸²¹

4.4 THE RUSSIAN HANDICRAFTS PAVILION: AN END AND A BEGINNING

Perhaps underscoring Polenova's connections to the new generation of artists, Diaghilev arranged for a memorial exhibition of Polenova's works at the second World of Art exhibit in

⁸¹⁸ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 782 n 39.

⁸¹⁹ Lev Weber wrote in his memoirs that upon the birth of their first child Iakunchikova exclaimed, "I am a completed entity: Art and Procreation!" *Orient to Occident*, 211.

⁸²⁰ "Все, что есть для меня самого дорогого, так тесно связано с ней, что не могу на каждом шагу не вспоминать ее. ... Прошла зима во время ее пребывания в Париже, прошла, как дивный сон. Мы так дружно, весело и активно прожили вместе ... она, Netta, Головин, Мака и я. Как мы с Nett'ой мечтали об ее приезде опчть в этом году. Я не верю, что нет надежды, неужели теперь, когда она достигла настоящий степени развития, настоящего расцвета ее художественной деятельности, ее жизнь не физически, то духовно оборвется. Это жестоко ужасно." M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, November 15/27, 1898, 583-584. Mak is the nickname for Lev Weber, Iakunchikova's husband. Ellipses are in the original.

⁸²¹ "я осиротела." M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, November 16/29, 1898, 584.

January 1899. In addition, Diaghilev used the cover Iakunchikova designed for the *World of Art* journal for the memorial issue dedicated to Polenova's works. Iakunchikova's expertise as a printmaker and graphic designer are evident in both the initial sketch and the final design. The sketch shows more stylistic restraint and less sensuality than the final design, but both indicate how Iakunchikova had fully synthesized her interests in Russian folk art and Art Nouveau. Iakunchikova had treated the Art Nouveau swan motif in earlier works, but here it is fully integrated into a recognizable *lubok*-style Russian landscape and with stylized old Russian script echoing the decorative fonts of Art Nouveau.⁸²² The swan rising from the water adds to the scene a sense of the transience of life that was hinted at in works such as *Candle, Extinguishing* and which became more evident in her work as her own health deteriorated. The crowning feature of this image is the subtle inclusion of Russian Orthodox crosses on the tops of the pine trees. Sakharova notes the design is strangely foreboding, as if the swans are bidding farewell.⁸²³

Curiously, the "fight" for Polenova continued after her death. The *World of Art* article was written by Natal'ia Vasil'evna under the pseudonym Borok.⁸²⁴ The article concentrates primarily on Polenova's work from the 1890s, especially in the reproductions. It underscores her vast love of Russia and Russian folk art, but also noted the influence of Western art trends especially the light and colors of Impressionism.⁸²⁵ It concludes with the observation that Polenova did a lot to move Russian art into the future and "the candle she lit will burn and continue to light the path for all those who are working and searching along the path of art."⁸²⁶

⁸²² Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (1979), 105-106.

⁸²³ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 36.

⁸²⁴ Borok was the name of her and Vasilii Dmitrievich's estate south of Moscow. This fact would have been known to close friends of the Polenovs, so the pseudonym was not completely opaque.

⁸²⁵ Borok, "Pamiati," 109

⁸²⁶ "светоч, зажженный ею, будет гореть и далее и освещать путь всем работающим и ищущим на пути искусства." Ibid, 120.

Not to be outdone by the “decadents,” Stasov published a memorial article in the November issue of *Fine Art and Industrial Art*.⁸²⁷ The first part of the article was a biography and Stasov relied heavily on their correspondence. Stasov emphasized her close connections with folk art and mourned the fact that in the last years of her life she had not continued to design work for Abramtsevo, for “she was created for it.”⁸²⁸ In addition, he considered her abilities in fairy tale illustrations and the creation of vignettes to be work for which her talents were best suited.⁸²⁹ Stasov could not pass up the opportunity to attribute her downfall to the influence of decadence, noting that, “It began to seem to me that in the 1890s Elena Dmitrievna was far from the former Elena Dmitrievna, that some kind of change had begun in her and that she was starting down rails that were new and formerly completely alien to her.”⁸³⁰ He ascribed this to her visit to the 1889 Exposition Universelle, which knocked her off her true path.⁸³¹ Nevertheless, Stasov refused to dwell on this (after only three pages), and ended his article with a lament that she did not manage to do everything that her “ardent love for Russia, for Russian folk art” would have allowed and “Before her, no single Russian woman even thought of or

⁸²⁷ Stasov was quite pleased that the “decadents” article came out first, thinking his article would show how intellectually superior he and his camp were in comparison. In addition, he said that Iakunchikova’s cover was utterly stupid and decadent. Letters of V. V. Stasov to N. P. Sobko, June 2, 1899 and September 25, 1899, *V. V. Stasov Pis'ma*, 160-161.

⁸²⁸ “Ею создано бляю это дело ...” Stasov, V. V. “Elena Dmitrievna Polenova, biograficheskii ocherk,” *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'*, no. 13 (1899): 22. In contrast, he notes about *Icon Painting Workshop* that it demonstrates that she had no talent for history painting. Neither did she have a talent for genre pictures, but they were better than her attempts at historical subjects. *Ibid.*, 24-26.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸³⁰ “мне начинало уже казаться, что в 90-х годах нашего столетия Елена Дмитриевна была далеко не прежняя Елена Дмитриевна, что с нею начинается какой-то переворот, и что она вступает на новый, прежде совершенно ей чуждый рельс.” *Ibid.*, 47. It is tempting to think that Stasov chose the train metaphor in particular to signal his contempt for the modernity he felt had led Polenova astray.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*

accomplished in the arts what she thought of and accomplished. She shows what we still can and should expect from future Russian artists.”⁸³²

The *kustar* pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle would prove to be both an ending for the Stasovs of Russia and a beginning for the “decadents,” thus proving them both right that Polenova’s art would be a point of departure for future artists, though not in the way Stasov desired. Due to Polenova’s untimely death, Iakunchikova decided to throw herself into the preparations for the pavilion in part due to her brother’s and sister-in-law’s involvement in the project, for which she had already done some work during the winter of 1897-1898. Iakunchikova spent the summer of 1899 at Mariia Fedorovna’s estate along the Nara River for this purpose.⁸³³ The works Iakunchikova produced and collected for the *kustar* pavilion can be seen as an illustration of this point.

It has become a commonplace in scholarship on world’s fairs that the events are exercises in demonstrating national identity, especially for those held in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries. The 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, however, was perhaps the site of the most strident overtures. With its colonial section (location of the Pavillon de la Russie Extra-Européenne et Polaire, aka L’Asie russe) and “human zoo” Paris provided a glimpse of the destabilizing forces in European politics that would eventually lead to World War I.⁸³⁴ Each

⁸³² “Раньше нея, ни одна русская женщина не задумывала и не выполняла в искусстве того, что она задумала и выполнила. Она показывает, чего еще можно и должно ждать от будущих русских женщин-художниц.” Ibid, p. 49. Stasov’s article provoked a furious reaction from Vasilii Dmitrievich. He wrote to Stasov, “In it there are many warm feelings from you, many interesting details, but a lot that you invented. You often ascribe your own personal views, sympathies and feelings to her. You are trying to make her into your own and ascribe things to her that were never there.” (В ней много горячего чувства с вашей стороны, много интересных данных, но много выдуманного вами. Вы часто приписываете ей ваши личные взгляды, симпатии и чувства. Вы стараетесь сделать ее на свой лад и приписываете ей то, чего у нее не было.) As cited in Sternin, *70e-80e gody*, 185.

⁸³³ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 40.

⁸³⁴ For example, Çelik and Kinney argue that “the expositions were more powerful than pictorial, literary, or journalistic descriptions because they presented simultaneously a physical, visual, and educational discursive field, organizing a range of perceptual responses to a global hierarchy of nations and races. ... In addition, the cross-

country's pavilion at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle was constructed to present a desired identity to the outside world, with the emphasis on imperialism in many countries' displays, and Russia was no different. For this fair Russia distinctly emphasized its status as an "exotic other," yet was also intent on proving its place in the modern world, as evidenced by its special pavilion concerning the conquering of Siberia by railroad. Given the prevalence of the arts and crafts movements across Europe, which was particularly energized in France by Siegfried Bing's opening of his L'Art nouveau gallery in 1895, I would like to suggest that the members of the committees in charge of Russian exhibitions recognized the potential to establish Russia as a center of original modern craft production by devoting a separate pavilion to the Russian handicrafts movement. In addition, due to the successes of Abramtsevo, the *kustar* movement had expanded greatly by the late 1890s, resulting in the involvement of a number of high-ranking gentry women who had the potential to influence arts policy.⁸³⁵

The Section of Kustar Objects and Handicrafts of Russia at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle is one of several exhibition spaces Russia constructed that did not fall into the 28 official exhibition groups set up by Exposition officials.⁸³⁶ Indeed, the "Village Russe"—as it was immediately christened by the foreign press and as it quickly became known among Exposition attendees—almost seems to have been an afterthought.⁸³⁷ What is particularly interesting about the Village Russe is that it was an enterprise largely resulting from the

cultural character of the international exhibitions produced a formalized comparative apparatus; although its conceptual model was industrial competition, its form of enunciation often was aesthetic and cultural."

"Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles" *Assemblage*, no. 13 (Dec. 1990): 37-38.

⁸³⁵ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 46-47.

⁸³⁶ Russia's other unofficial spaces were Imperial Appanages; Imperial Borders; Institutions under Empress Mariia Fedorovna; Temperance; Horse Breeding; the Red Cross Society; Alcohol Production; Meteorology; the Finish Pavilion; Railroads; Roads, Highways and Ports; and the Flour Trade. Portions of this section were first presented at the 2007 American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies National Convention.

⁸³⁷ The Village Russe was not the only popular "village" among the visitors to the fair. There was also the "Village Suisse." In contrast to the Village Russe, the Village Suisse was appreciated not as something particularly exotic, but as delightfully picturesque.

involvement of Russian women and illustrates the gender quandaries faced by women in the arts in Russia at the fin-de-siècle.

In 1895, by order of Nicholas II, Russia accepted France's invitation to participate in the 1900 Exposition Universelle. The Ministry of Finance under the direction of Sergei Witte was appointed overseer of the selection and development of exhibitions. The two vice-presidents of the exhibition commission were M. A. Raffalovich, a member of the Ministry of Finance, and Prince Tennishev, who was appointed Commissar General of the Russian Section of the Exposition.⁸³⁸ According to the official report of the Head Committee for the Construction of the Section of the Kustar Industries and Handicrafts of Russia for the All-World Exhibition in Paris in 1900 (hereinafter "the Committee"), work on developing a handicrafts exhibit was begun in January 1899 under the auspices of Grand Duchess Elisaveta Fedorovna (granddaughter of Queen Victoria, wife of Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, elder sister of Tsarina Alexandra). The report makes much of the incredibly short period it had to develop the exhibit.⁸³⁹ Since Polenova had been asked to participate at the latest by early summer 1898,⁸⁴⁰ however, I cannot but conclude that a handicrafts display had likely been under discussion for some time, but not officially sanctioned until 1899.

While I have yet to uncover any documents to attest to this hypothesis, it is likely that Princess Tennisheva was quite influential in promoting a *kustar* display for the Exposition. She had been involved in philanthropic activities aimed at benefiting peasants since her 1892 marriage to Prince Tennishev and was well known in arts circles. She is not listed among the

⁸³⁸ M. A. Raffalovich, "Préface a l'édition française du Catalogue Général de la Section Russe," *Catalogue Général de la Section Russe* (Paris: Imprimerie Paul Dupont, 1900), v.

⁸³⁹ E. P. Ermolova et al., *Kustarnyi otdel na vystavke 1900 g. v Parizhe. Otchet* (Moscow: Tipografiia Vil'de, 1901), 3-4.

⁸⁴⁰ E. D. Polenova to N. Peacock, July 5/17 1898, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 6898, sheets 1-2.

Committee participants, likely to avoid any hint of bias on the part of her husband. A more intriguing omission is that of Stasov, who was another major force agitating for a display of Russian crafts at the Exposition.⁸⁴¹ The absence of his name from the Committee's final report suggests that he was ultimately excluded from preparations, but it is unclear why. It may well have been because Stasov was very strict about what he thought Russian art should and should not be and many Russian artists who worked in the *kustar* industries were branching out beyond his stringent definitions, thus provoking his ire.

In the end, given the sociocultural atmosphere in Russia and abroad by the end of the nineteenth century, the decision to construct a display dedicated to the *kustar* industries was likely motivated by these factors: (1) the special energies poured into the *kustar* industries after the liberation of the serfs in 1861, (2) the recognition that handicrafts had become a major focus of artists working across Europe from England to Hungary, which was emphasized by the rising international fame of the Abramtsevo workshops headed by Polenova, and (3) Russia's desire to project itself as a unique, superior synthesis of tradition and innovation stemming from its ability to successfully balance between East and West. Another possible motivating factor was Russia's desire to redeem itself from the poor reviews the Russian *kustar* exhibit received at the 1889 exhibition⁸⁴² and the financial success of the *kustar* exhibits, among others, at the 1896 Nizhnii Novgorod Fair.⁸⁴³

The fact that the block-printed cotton (набойка) produced from Natal'ia Iakovlevna Davydova's (1873-1926) designs were among the most popular exhibits underscores the latter

⁸⁴¹ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 70.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁸⁴³ As a matter of fact, Raffalovich makes a point of mentioning the fair as an important point of departure, noting, "A la dernière Exposition nationale russe, que eut lieu en 1896, à Nijni-Novgorod, il se dégageait très nettement l'impression que, tout en demeurant une grande contrée agricole, la Russie devenait un État industriel, mettant en valeur les admirables richesses d'un sol si abondamment pourvu de ressources de toute nature." *Ibid.*, v-vi.

supposition. Wendy Salmond notes that of the fabrics displayed at the exposition, “meter upon meter [of printed cotton] was bought up by Parisian dressmakers,”⁸⁴⁴ which indicates their appeal to a modern European audience. The appeal may have been partly due to exoticism. Nevertheless, it is clear that the designs had some resonance with contemporary tastes, otherwise dressmakers would likely not have gambled on the purchase. The production of printed cotton textiles was an industry that Russia had long tried to dominate, especially within the empire, going so far as to print special designs to appeal to the populations in the eastern and southern regions.⁸⁴⁵ There is no reason to think that Russia would not be interested in expanding its production to a European market.

Ultimately, the decision to construct a pavilion for the *kustar* industries resulted in the collection and display of over 6000 objects in the Section of Kustar Objects and Handicrafts of Russia. Grand Duchess Elisaveta Fedorovna herself took on the collection of religious objects; N. L. Shabel'skaia agreed to create a historical display; A. N. Naryshkina was in charge of collecting laces and embroideries; fabrics, clothing and shoes were selected by M. F. Iakunchikova; E. P. Ermolova collected knitted shawls and ivory sculptures; D. N. Shipov assembled a collection of toys, rush furniture, abacuses and other objects created in Moscow Province; and N. A. Zherinskii and N. M. Bakunin were in charge of assembling anything that

⁸⁴⁴ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 139. Natal'ia Vasil'evna recalled that early in the Abramtsevo workshop days Polenova had also shown an interest in block printed cottons. *Abramtsevo*, 51-52.

⁸⁴⁵ Annie Carlano, “The Inside Story: Russian Printed Cottons for the Central Asian Market, 1850-1950,” *HALL*, no. 107 (November/December 1999): 87. For a more in-depth study of the Russian cotton market see Susan Meller, ed. *Russian Textiles: Printed Cloth for the Bazaars of Central Asia* (New York: Abrams, 2007).

did not fit into the other groups.⁸⁴⁶ Note that five of the eight members in charge of collecting objects were women, further cementing women's association with the *kustar* industries.⁸⁴⁷

Nicholas II himself selected Konstantin Korovin to design and oversee the construction of an appropriately styled complex to house the massive collection.⁸⁴⁸ While it is the case that there were no female architects for the tsar to select for this project, Korovin was not an architect either, so the design was finalized by the young architect Il'ia Evgrafovich Bondarenko. An accomplished painter and designer, Korovin was up to the task, but the selection of a male artist to design the buildings for the women to “decorate” the interiors reinforces long-standing binaries that equate the exterior world with the masculine and the interior with the feminine. I think it important to reiterate at this point that the fact that Polenova had been asked to take charge of designing the *terem* for the pavilion. The choice of a woman artist to handle the displays for the *terem*—the traditional chambers in which Russian women were secluded from society—speaks volumes about the gendering of the art sphere, especially since a male artist (Konstantin Korovin) was in charge of the architecture of the remaining buildings for the pavilion.

The final display complex consisted of four buildings connected by a gallery, including a church, the *terem* of a boyar's home, a peasant home, and a section devoted to modern handicrafts. The homes were decorated with *kustar* objects and completed with tableaux vivants. The particular choice to have a *terem* rather than a communal living space inside the boyar's home further places the emphasis on women and exoticizes them within Russian culture. The

⁸⁴⁶ E. P. Ermolova et al., *Kustarnyi otdel*, 7.

⁸⁴⁷ The fact that Stasov referred to this project as the “Russian women's section” in his correspondence suggests that it was originally conceived as a project along the lines of the Women's Pavilion at the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago.

⁸⁴⁸ Ermolova et al., *Kustarnyi otdel*, 8.

buildings were constructed in “a successful combination in the style of seventeenth-century northern Russian architecture”⁸⁴⁹ right outside the kremlinlike walls of the Russian Asiatic Palace. The Palace was essentially a display dedicated to Russia’s conquering of the lands and peoples in the way of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, emphasizing the masculine, imperial metaphor of the powerful, protective Fatherland (отечество).⁸⁵⁰

The placement of the Handicrafts Pavilion in the colonial section of the Exposition may not have been Russia’s choice,⁸⁵¹ but it does serve to further emphasize the ordinary Russian’s status as an exotic other. Russia capitalized on its status by choosing to transport whole logs and male Russian peasants to Paris to construct the pavilion. The Committee’s official report argues this was done because it was less expensive than acquiring materials in Paris,⁸⁵² but it definitely attracted attention. Indeed, a photograph of real, live “moujicks” at work on the pavilion was published in the journal *L’Illustration* in March 1900.⁸⁵³ Mariia Fedorovna Iakunchikova (dressed in Russian costume) presented bread and salt (a traditional welcome offering to guests and travelers) to Émile Loubet, President of the French Republic, at the opening of the pavilion on April 17, 1900. Maurice Normand commented on the gilt crystal salt bowl and the finely carved board upon which the bread rested as well as the contrast provided by her companions: “arcane and skilled artisans with bushy beards and clear gray eyes” who had come from “a poor province along the upper Volga.”⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁵⁰ This was something Benua picked up on, but did not express quite so clearly in his exhibition review. “Pis’ma so vsemirnoi vystavki,” *Mir iskusstva* 2, nos. 17-18 (1900):108.

⁸⁵¹ Ermolova et al. states that the French administration could propose only a narrow strip of land near the Trocadéro for the construction of the pavilion. *Kustarnyi otdel*, 15.

⁸⁵² Ibid., 8-9.

⁸⁵³ The photograph is reproduced in Musée d’Orsay, *L’Art russe dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle: en quête d’identité* (Paris: Musée d’Orsay, 2005), 315.

⁸⁵⁴ Maurice Normand. “La Russie à l’Exposition,” *L’Illustration*, May 5, 1900, 283, as cited in Musée d’Orsay, *L’Art russe*, 313. See also Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 91.

While the entire “village” was deemed intriguing by the foreign press, it was the objects in the building dedicated to modern handicrafts that were designed by artists such as Polenova, Iakunchikova, and Natal’ia Davydova that attracted critics’ primary attention. As Netta Peacock put it, “It is the latter that interests us in particular because it represents the most modern and best of Russian decorative art.”⁸⁵⁵ Male artists such as Golovin and Vrubel were represented as well, but they were in the minority. At this point I would like to turn attention to the works contributed by Polenova and Iakunchikova in order to further elucidate the artistic strategies these women employed to carve out successful careers both at home and abroad. I do not wish to suggest that male artists never adopted the same strategies, but they did so much less frequently.

It may be most instructive to consider first the silver-medal-winning display cabinet Iakunchikova designed. Created to fit into a corner, the cabinet has four tiers of shelving with three closed compartments on the lowest tier. At first glance the cabinet appears to be in perfect keeping with traditional Russian woodcarving. Large and solid, it retains a strong reference to the trees it came from as well as an association with the “primitive” aspects of folk arts. It is richly decorated with ornamental floral and figurative motifs commonly employed by Russian wood carvers. It rests on three-dimensional carvings of iconic Russian animals such as bears, what seems to be a crouching wolf, and fish. There are depictions of mythical creatures such as *bereginy* (a female creature similar to a mermaid) and various birds, as well as what appear to be depictions from folk tales.

⁸⁵⁵ “C’est celle-ci qui nous intéresse particulièrement, car elle représente le plus moderne et le meilleur de l’art décoratif russe.” Netta Peacock, “Le Village Russe et le mouvement d’art moscovite,” *L’Art décoratif*, no. 24 (1900): 229. Peacock’s friendship with Iakunchikova and Polenova may further inform her bias. Other foreign press seemed equally interested in the modern decorative arts section, however.

Upon closer inspection, however, there is a striking innovation that speaks to Iakunchikova's knowledge of French modern art: curved lines. While curved lines are certainly not unknown in the Russian decorative arts, large cabinets produced by the *kustar* industries tended to be squared off. This is true even of revival cabinets designed at Abramtsevo. While this curve is certainly not the pronounced whiplash of Art Nouveau, it is quite striking in the fact that it encompasses the entire top of the cabinet and is integrated into its very form rather than being merely a decorative addition. It is even more marked when examined in combination with the straight lines of the cabinet's "crown" in the corner section. While speaking to a modern art sensibility that preferred the sensual curve to the pragmatic straight line, this particular curve is also quite suggestive of the Russian forest. It is at once reminiscent of a mushroom cap and, at the right end, the roughness of the wood suggests a tree trunk.

The evocative nature of the cabinet is reinforced in miniature by the toy city Iakunchikova designed to go with it. Where the cabinet is a solid, imposing chunk of Imperial Russia, *Little City* (Городок) is a Russia one can touch, hold, and rearrange according to whim. It is a condensed survey of Russian architecture: gilded onion domes, tent roofs, whitewashed stone, kremlin walls, wooden houses, and brightly painted decorative accents. *Little City* functions on a number of semantic levels. Russian wooden toys were quite popular in Europe in the late-nineteenth century. To this point Iakunchikova had shown little interest in them, but, as noted above, the birth of her son in 1898 spurred her to create a bed for him that depicted wooden toys and to try her hand at designing them. She also created a pokerwork panel by the same name that provides a bird's eye view of a brightly colored kremlin that has the same toylike qualities. While the toys had a deep personal significance for her, their creation also coincides with the apex of the Neorussian style in architecture, which sought to place indigenous Russian

forms into the modern world. The dynamic lines and strong colors present in both the group of toys and the panel *Little City* reflected current trends in Russian architecture,⁸⁵⁶ as well as expectations for exaggeration in children's toys. In addition, while toys were typically produced by male woodworkers, as was this set, the design of toys, especially for one's own children, was an activity that critics could only approve of for a female artist. The toys thus fulfill many functions at once. Ultimately, though, they are an approachable piece of exotica for Western consumption.

Appliqué panels and embroidery were particularly prevalent in the modern handicrafts building. The fact that one of the mannequins in the terem is positioned at her needlework helped reinforce the association of this craft with women. To honor her deceased friend and mentor, Iakunchikova had an appliqué panel produced from Polenova's *Ivan Tsarevich and the Firebird* (c. 1896). The image shows Ivan sitting below a fruiting tree over which the Firebird soars. The form of the work itself, an appliquéd panel, hearkens to Russian textile work, but it was also an art form popular with Art Nouveau practitioners. Thus, for a Russian woman artist it provides a way to link to traditional women's crafts and to modern European art. While the authorship of fairy tales and legends cannot be traced, the most common way for upper-class children to learn these tales was through their peasant nannies. Consequently, fairy tales in Russia have an inviolable link to the *narod* and especially its female half. I do not think Polenova had all of these associations in mind when she began her artistic career in the 1870s, but her continued involvement in *kustar* production provided a modicum of career security and, obviously, resulted in establishment success.

⁸⁵⁶ Kiselev, *Iakunchikova* (2005), 129.

The third work Iakunchikova created for the exposition most clearly shows the blending of styles, themes and gender issues with which she grappled throughout her career. It was at Mariia Fedorovna's estate that she made the sketch for the panel she exhibited at the *kustar* pavilion, which was ultimately executed at Solomenko.⁸⁵⁷ *Little Girl and Wood Sprite* shows a little peasant girl out gathering berries in the woods while a menacing, male wood sprite (*leshii*) gazes at her from behind a tree. Iakunchikova has placed the little peasant girl in a stereotypically Russian context. Barefoot, wearing a colorful head scarf and sarafan, she at first seems to be off on a merry mushroom- and berry-gathering expedition. A closer look at her face and the scale of the flora in relation to her quickly changes our perception of the work's tone. The girl is clearly a very small child and one who has perhaps been sent into the woods alone for the first time. This aspect is heightened by the *leshii*, who appears as a lurking predator much more menacing than the Big Bad Wolf, and just as menacing as the serpentlike predator in Polenova's *Beast*.

The work also shows Iakunchikova's appropriation of the sinuous lines of Art Nouveau, particularly in the treatment of the birch trees, and the use of heavy outlines and the flattening of space in Japanese prints popular with many post-Impressionists. Curiously, it also provides evidence of the symbiotic relationship she shared with Polenova. Comparison of the highly stylized birch tree at the far right with the trees in Polenova's *Beast* and the one at the right of Iakunchikova's cover for the *World of Art* reveals startling similarities. I do not know which artist first designed this stylized tree, but the fact that they both picked up on it shows the extent to which they shared artistic ideas towards the end of their lives.

⁸⁵⁷ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 41. It is possible that she first conceived of this work several years earlier, for in a 1895 she told Polenova that she had "begun Little Girl" (Начала Девочки.) M. V. Iakunchikova to E. D. Polenova, October 1895, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 54, no. 9701, sheets 1-2.

Axeli Gallen-Kallela's *Aino Tryptich*, which was exhibited at the 1891 Salon de Société nationale des beaux-arts, provides another point of comparison. Since Iakunchikova wrote his name in her notes for that exhibition, it is quite likely she was familiar with this work. The leering expression of Vainamoinen as he gazes on Aino in the left panel is oddly reminiscent of Iakunchikova's *Ieshii*.

In the end, however, *Little Girl and Wood Sprite* is ostensibly a production of “women’s work” for display in a pavilion dedicated to crafts—often ascribed to the domestic, female domain. In spite of the gendering of the space in which it is hung and its very form, plus the associations with traditional modes of existence, *Little Girl and Wood Sprite* clearly emerges from a modernist aesthetic. The fact that it was accepted for display indicates its ability to satisfy preconceived notions about Russianness and about appropriate female craft production in spite of its obvious references to European, i.e., Western, modern art.

The *kustar* pavilion was showered with medals. In addition to those won by the women artists, Mamontov won a gold medal for his majolicas. Vrubel and Golovin also received gold medals for works executed at Mamontov’s Moscow ceramics workshop. Interestingly, in the fine arts, Serov and Korovin, both young artists closely associated with the Polenovs and the Mamontov circle, won awards at the Exposition, but the older generation, including V. Vasnetsov and Polenov himself, were passed over by the jury.⁸⁵⁸ This further indicated to Russians a shift on the world stage. Even more interesting is Benua’s reaction to the fair:

Russia as a nation, as a state, is not at the exposition at all. ... True, there is a kremlin of decent stature, there is a Russian village, there is an official pavilion for the sale of wine (built in a Portuguese style for some reason), there is a military pavilion ... and two or three Russian restaurants, but, in essence, the “kremlin” does not represent Russia, but rather Siberia, the Russian village is more of a miniature annex than an official pavilion, and the “Official Sales” and

⁸⁵⁸ Sakharova, *Khronika*, 37-38.

the “Military Section,” though they are typical for Russia, nonetheless, of course, do not express our national culture.⁸⁵⁹

This passage in essence replicates the anxiety felt by Russian intellectuals over the Empire's status since the mid-nineteenth century: Where, exactly, *is* Russia? It is clear that at this point, at least for the “decadents” of the World of Art, this question had not been resolved. There was also some discontent among Russians that the *kustar* pavilion had been deemed the “Village Russe” since it really did not represent any Russian village they knew of. Benua’s response was that this was all much ado about nothing for this display contained, “our most interesting and most artistic exhibits. This is no Russian village, but all the same it is a purely Russian construction, a poetic recreation of those wooden, whimsical and quaint villages with tall terems, passageways, canopies, chambers and entranceways that were scattered about pre-Petrine Russia.”⁸⁶⁰ In other words, the most Russian part of Russia’s exhibits was purely imaginary. It presented to the outside world an image of Russia that no longer exists. For Benua, this was not a problem because the “poetry” of the *kustar* pavilion transmitted the essence of Russianness as he conceived it.

The French press was generally favorable to Russia’s exhibits, the *kustar* pavilion in particular.⁸⁶¹ *Figaro illustré* produced a special edition entitled “La Russie a l’exposition” that provided an overview of all of Russia’s contributions. It also helped that Peacock was asked to

⁸⁵⁹ “России, как нации, как государства, вовсе на выставке нет. ... Есть, правда, порядочной величины Кремль. есть русская деревня, есть павильон казенной продажи вина (построенный почему-то в португальском стиле), есть павильон военного отдела ... и два-три русских ресторана, но «Кремль» представляет в сущности, не Россию, а Сибирь, русская деревня—скорее миниатюрная аппеке, нежели официальный павильон, а «Казанная Продажа» и «Военный Отдел», хотя и типичны для России, но все-же, разумеется, не выражают нашей национальной культуры.” Benua, “Pis’ma,” 107.

⁸⁶⁰ “нашим самым интересным и самым художественным экспонатом. Это не русская деревня, но это, все-таки, чисто-русская постройка, поэтичное возсоздание тех деревянных, затейливых и причудливых городов, с высокими теремами, переходами, сенями, палатами, и светлицами, которые были рассеены по допетровской России.” Ibid., 108.

⁸⁶¹ Part of this may be political as a result of the recent improvement in relations between the two countries.

write articles for the French, English and German press to publicize the pavilion. Her article “Le Village Russe et le mouvement d'art moscovite” in *L'Art décoratif* undoubtedly had the strongest impact for its recapitulation of the history of the Abramtsevo workshops and Polenova’s participation in them. The article in general emphasized the modernity of the objects while also noting their deep roots in Russian folk culture.⁸⁶² This view perhaps best expresses the significance of the Village Russe: in spite of its replication of seventeenth-century forms, it encapsulated an art movement with a thoroughly modern ethos. In other words, it produced what Polenova had long desired: a living, adapting, changing Russian art rather than a mere copy of a long-dead tradition.

The fusion of the Russian and the Western, as well as tradition and innovation, present in the Handicrafts Pavilion proved to be a successful gamble for Russia and for Russian women artists. In all, the Handicrafts Pavilion came away with 119 awards, and nearly 18,500 rubles worth of goods were sold.⁸⁶³ After 1900 Russian society rapidly changed and the Russian art world shifted towards a more radicalized avant-garde. The participation of women in one of Russia’s most successful international exhibits helped pave the way for women’s strong presence in the Russian avant-garde and perhaps for the continued interest in traditional *kustar* goods like the textiles designed by radical artists such as Liubov’ Sergeevna Popova (1889-1924) and Vavara Fedorovna Stepanova (1894-1958) in the early twentieth-century.

⁸⁶² Peacock, “Le Village Russe,” 228-235.

⁸⁶³ Ermolova et al., *Kustarnyi otdel*, 16-17.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Russian art world underwent rapid change in the 1890s and Iakunchikova and Polenova paid no small part in the transformation. While all chronological boundaries are mere conveniences for the researcher, the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle may be seen as the marker between the transition period Iakunchikova and Polenova facilitated and the emergence of the Russian avant-garde. There were several events that accelerated the changes that had been in motion since the mid-1890s. P. M. Tretyakov died on December 4, 1898, depriving Russia of its most avid collector of Russian art. Mamontov was arrested in 1899 for misappropriation of government funds. He was exonerated in 1901, but the trial and time spent in prison ruined him, ending his ability to contribute to the arts as he had in the past. The house in Moscow on Spasskaia-Sadovaia (the dining room of which Polenova had once depicted) and its contents were sold at auction—a dramatic end to an era.

In addition, in 1893 women had been readmitted to the Imperial Academy and their numbers steadily increased, indicating an expansion in the opportunities women artists had for arts education. As pioneering women artists and as members of a large group of women involved in the *kustar* revival, Polenova and Iakunchikova undoubtedly served as an example for many younger women in this period of new educational freedom. Wendy Salmond has suggested that their and other women's involvement in modernizing Russian art offers a partial

explanation for the large numbers of women among the twentieth-century Russian avant-garde (i.e., the Amazons of the Avant-garde, as Popova, Stepanova and others came to be called).⁸⁶⁴

Iakunchikova's health steadily declined and her tuberculosis was exacerbated by the birth of her second son in April 1901. During her final year of life, as she struggled to keep creating, Abramtsevo remained strong in her memory. In a draft letter to Natal'ia Vasil'evna she wrote.

It must have been wonderful to be at Abramtsevo for Easter. Did you get a chance to rest there? ... It is impossible not to rest there. In my opinion, Abramtsevo is an inexhaustible source of inspiration. I am imagining the partly melted remains of the snow under the fir trees, the damp roads, a spring evening ... I never saw Abramtsevo at that time, but I can imagine it because of E[lena] D[mitrievna]'s watercolors. If I ... could be with you only for a day and drink tea with you in Abramtsevo's dining room.⁸⁶⁵

Iakunchikova passed away on December 27, 1902 (New Style), having never seen Abramtsevo again.

The absence of Iakunchikova and Polenova from the art world does not mean that their presence ceased to be felt. These women, who wrestled with their phantom in order to cast off the stagnation that Russian art had reached by the end of the 1880s, had a strong influence on the artists who came after them, artists who absorbed their investigations and changed them to suit new artistic concerns and a new sociopolitical environment. In addition, the *kustar* revival that began at Abramtsevo continued to expand and have considerable success both at home and abroad until the outbreak of World War I.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶⁴ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 13.

⁸⁶⁵ "Как должно быть чудно было на пасхе в Абрамцево отдохнула ли ты немного там? ... Нельзя там не отдохнуть. Абрамцево по моему неисчерпаемый источник вдохновения. Воображаю себе талыя остатки снега под елками сырая дороги весенний вечер ... я никогда Абрамцево в это время не видала но по акварелям Е. Д. живо его себе предствалю. Чтобы я ... на денек быть среди вас пить с вами чай в Абрамцевской столовой." Draft Letter of M. V. Iakunchikova to N. V. Polenova, April 23, 1902, Tretyakov Gallery Manuscript Division, fond 205, no. 28, sheet 2.

⁸⁶⁶ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, 93 and *passim*.

The World of Art, which championed both women, would become a dominant force in Russian art, giving it a spectacular new reputation in Europe, in part through the heavily stylized representations of the Russian fairy-tale realm that Polenova had been the first to thoroughly investigate.⁸⁶⁷ The first such event was Diaghilev's Section Russe at the 1906 Paris Salon d'automne. This was the initiator of what would become the famous Saisons Russes and would dramatically change European conceptions of Russianness. The Section Russe had *kustar* objects, but rather than being segregated into a special pavilion as at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, here they were presented as an integral part of a multicultural empire.⁸⁶⁸ Artists such as Ivan Bilibin, Al'bert Benua, and Konstantin Somov added their own distinctive interpretation to the folklore and fairy-tale subjects Polenova examined. They worked in a range of media for exhibitions, publications and the stage.

The World of Art was also the center of Russian Symbolism. The lyrical nostalgia of Iakunchikova's works developed into the Symbolist- and Art-Nouveau-inflected creations of some of the World of Art members and the Blue Rose group. The World of Art turned firmly away from the critical requirements of the "rulers of thought" (i.e., the Peredvizhniki and their supporters) towards an art that emphasized subjective personal experience and pure aesthetic pleasure over "objective" reason.⁸⁶⁹ Its members saw Iakunchikova's investigations as a starting point for tearing Russian art away from the Stasovs of the Russian art world. The Blue Rose

⁸⁶⁷ That Polenova's contributions to Russian art were recognized by her contemporaries is evident in Sergei Glagol's review of her 1902 memorial exhibition. He stated that "future historians should note that Russian art began an entirely new epoch with the works of the deceased artist." "Posmertnaia vystavka rabot khudozhnitsy Eleny Dmitrievny Polenovoi," *Kur'er*, March 26, 1902, as cited in Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 141.

⁸⁶⁸ Jane Ashton Sharp, *Russian Modernism Between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 143-146. Sharp points out that this exhibition and other activities were a part of the Russian government's attempts to curry favor with European allies after the political turmoil of 1905.

⁸⁶⁹ Sternin, *Na rubezhe*, 148.

group was sufficiently enamored of her to dedicate a special issue of their journal, *The Scales* (Весы), to her in 1905.

The World of Art also continued the investigations into Russian history begun by the Peredvizhniki and furthered by the Polenov and Abramtsevo circles. Instead of medieval Russia, however, they shifted their attentions to the eighteenth century. This century was the period in which Russian elites became thoroughly Westernized, to the point where by the end of the century some did not even speak Russian. This Westernization precipitated the identity crisis many Russian intellectuals experienced in the mid-nineteenth century and the subsequent search to define Russianness. The World of Art's interest in the Westernization of Russia points to the culmination of the increasing interest in Western art that was part of the 1890s. The West ceased to be a point of opposition, but instead serving as a point of integration for many of these artists.

The increasing political strife towards the fin-de-siècle also led to the emergence of a radicalized avant-garde. At first glance, these artists may seem to be in strict opposition to the World of Art and other Symbolist groups, but they shared some of the same source material. These artists also continued the investigations of Russian folk art, but they focused on its “primitive” and Eastern aspects. This would lead to the emergence of Neoprimitivism as practiced by Natal'ia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, and influenced by Western artists such as Gauguin and Cezanne. It is in Neoprimitivism that the anti-urban, anti-industrial concerns that had surfaced in the British Arts and Crafts movement in the 1860s came to the fore in Russia.⁸⁷⁰ Also, it is in these concerns that the new artists manifested their social activism. While Polenova's interest in the *kustar* industries were motivated by the combination of her strong sense of social duty and a desire to forge a new, living Russian art, the Neoprimitivists

⁸⁷⁰ Sharp, *Goncharova*, 47. As another point of continuity, both Goncharova and Larionov studied at the Moscow School.

looked to folk art as a way to completely reject the forms of art produced within all arts institutions. They argued that institutionalized art of any kind was far removed from life, and, thus, the reality of the majority of Russians.⁸⁷¹

As the Russian Empire slowly dissolved into chaos, the thread linking Polenova and Iakunchikova with the next generation of Russian artists snapped. While it is a stretch to argue that Polenova and Iakunchikova found the way out of the stagnation that many artists experienced in the 1890s or even that they found a way to tame the phantom that haunted them, their investigations certainly led the way for Russian art and artists to continue to develop on their own terms well into the twentieth century.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 54.

APPENDIX A

TIMELINE

Date	Arts & Politics	Polenova	Iakunchikova
1850		Born November 15	
1855	Alexander II Reign Begins Great Reforms Begin		
1861	Liberation of the Serfs		
1863	Revolt of the Fourteen at the Imperial Academy		
1866	Attempted Assassination of Alexander II		
1870	Peredvizhniki Founded Mamontovs Purchase Abramtsevo	Studies in Paris with Charles Chaplin	Born January 29
1872	Polytechnic Exhibition		
1873	Women Admitted to Academy as Full-Status Students		
1873	Populist “Going to the People” Begins		

Date	Arts & Politics	Polenova	Iakunchikova
1874	Great Reforms End Populist “Going to the People” Ends P. M. Tretyakov Opens Gallery to Public	Shkliarevskii Episode	
1876	Women’s Admission to Academy Restricted		
1877-1878		Serves as Nurse During Russo-Turkish War	
1879		Enters School of Society for Encouragement of the Arts Dmitrii Vasil'evich Dies Work at Liteiny-Tauride School	
1880		Ceramics Study in Paris	
1881	Alexander II Assassinated March 1 Alexander III's Reign Begins	Vera Dmitrievna Dies March 7	
1882		Moves to Moscow Begins Exhibiting at Society for Encouragement of the Arts & Moscow Society	
1883		<i>Crows in The Snow</i>	
1884		Drawing Evenings Begin P. M. Tretyakov Purchases Polenova's Watercolors	Vvedenskoe Sold
1885	Repin's <i>Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan</i> Censored by Alexander III	Begins Work at Abramtsevo Workshop	Enters Moscow School

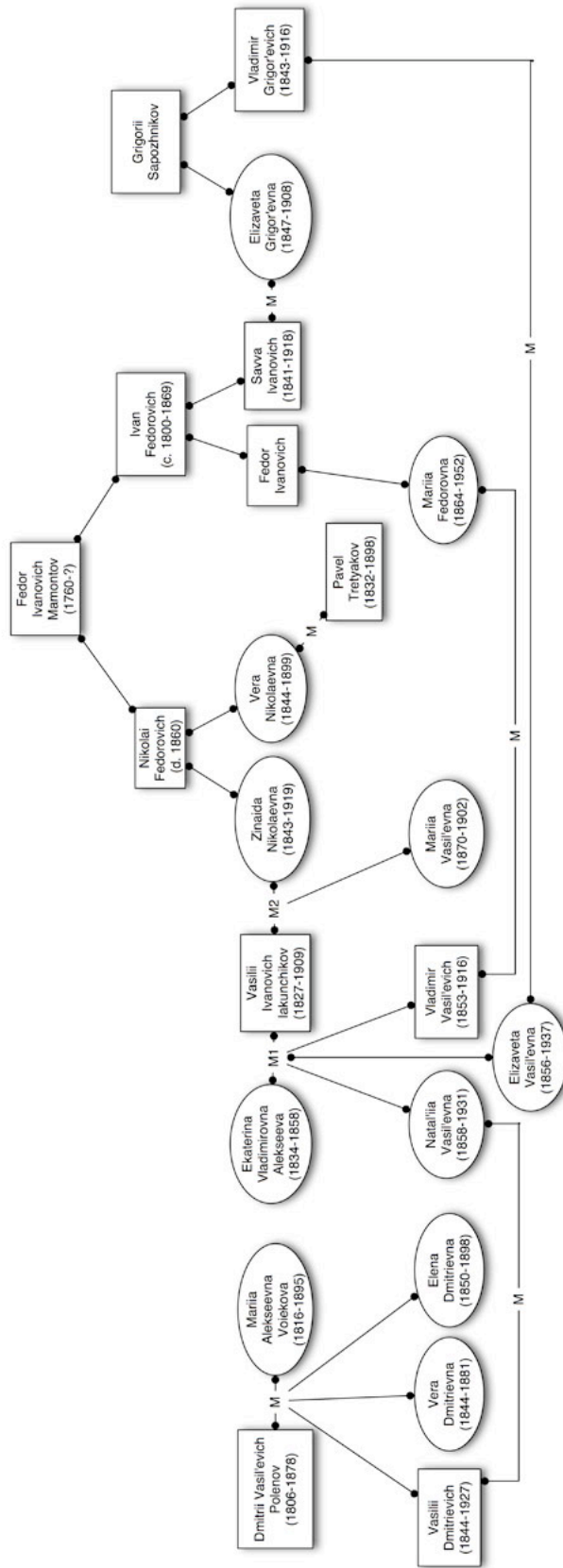
Date	Arts & Politics	Polenova	Iakunchikova
1886	First Traveling Academy Exhibit Universities and Other Higher Education Closed to Women	Begins Work on Fairy Tales	Joins Polenov Circle Wins First Prize at Moscow School for <i>Tsar in the Prayer Room</i>
1887	Vasilii Dmitrievich's <i>Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery</i> exhibited	<i>Icon Painting Workshop</i> Wins Second Place at School for the Encouragement of the Arts	
1888			First Trip Abroad
1889	Annual Exhibitions of Studies at the Moscow Society Begin Paris Exposition Universelle	Summers in Kostroma <i>War of the Mushrooms</i> Published <i>The Organ Grinder</i> Accepted by Peredvizhnik Jury	Diagnosed with TB
1890	Reform of the Academy Begins	Begins Battle with the Peredvizhniki	
1891	Famine	<i>Guests</i> Exhibited with the Peredvizhniki	<i>View From the Bell Tower of the Savvino-Storozhevskii Monastery Near Zvenigorod</i>
1892	Tretyakov Donates His Collection to Moscow	<i>Nursery</i> Exhibited with the Peredvizhniki	Meets Carrière And Besnard
1893	Women Readmitted into the Academy Moscow Association of Artists Forms	Break with Abramtsevo	Begins Work with Aquatints <i>Meudon Cemetery</i> at Champ-De-Mars
1894	Alexander III Dies Nicholas II's Reign Begins	Begins Correspondence with Stasov	Helps Arrange Exhibition of Women's Art in Paris <i>Reflets intimes</i> and Aquatints at Champ-De-Mars

Date	Arts & Politics	Polenova	Iakunchikova
1895		Visits Iakunchikova in Paris Mariia Alekseevna Dies	Begins Experimenting with Pokerwork Prints Published in <i>The Studio</i>
1896	Repin's Exhibition of Experiments All Russia Industrial and Art Exhibition, Nizhnii Novgorod	Carriage Accident	Marries Lev Veber
1897	Diagilev Proposes Formation of World of Art	Decides to Try Publishing Fairy/Folk Tales Again Winters in Spain & Paris	
1898	Exhibition of Russian & Finnish Artists First Issue of Fine Art and Industrial Art First Issue of World of Art Russian Museum (St. Petersburg) Opens P. M. Tretyakov Dies December 4	Dining Room for M. F. Iakunchikova Break with Stasov Dies November 7	Stepan Born
1899	First World of Art Exhibit Mamontov Arrested		Works in Russia on Kustar Pavilion
1900	Paris Exposition Universelle		Silver Medals at Exposition Universelle
1901			Jakov Born
1902			Dies December 14

APPENDIX B

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The chart on the following page is not a complete genealogy, but illustrates the complex network of family connections among the Iakunchikovs, Mamontovs, Polenovs and Tretyakovs.



APPENDIX C

KEY PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED

Antipova, Praskov'ia Dmitrievna (dates unknown) — friend and confidante of Elena Dmitrievna; fellow student at the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts

Antokol'skii, Mark Matveevich (1843-1902) — sculptor; member of the Peredvizhniki

Bem, Elizaveta Merkur'evna (1843-1914) — artist known primarily for her silhouettes and watercolors of children

Bogoliubov, Aleksei Petrovich (1824-1896) — painter known for his marine scenes; a tutor of the young Alexander III; charged with looking after Academy pensioners in Paris

Chistiakov, Pavel Petrovich (1832-1919) — professor at the Imperial Academy of the Arts; early tutor of the Polenovs

Chizhov, Fedor Vasilievich (1811-1877) — Slavophile; historian; family friend of the Polenovs

Egorov, Evdokim Alekseevich (1832-1891) — potter and ceramicist; ran a studio in Paris

Gartman, Viktor Aleksandrovich (1834-1873) — architect who pioneered the Russian Revival style

Golovin, Aleksandr Iakovlevich (1863-1930) — artist and stage designer; protégé of Polenova

Goloushev, Sergei Sergeevich (1855-1920) — art critic; early tutor of Iakunchikova

Grigorovich, Dmitrii Vasil'evich (1822-1899) — Director, School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts

Iakunchikov, Vasilii Ivanovich (1827-1909) — father of Iakunchikova; textile and brick magnate; major supporter of the Moscow Conservatory

Iakunchikova (nee Mamontova), Mariia Fedorovna — wife of V. V. Iakunchikov; involved in the *kustar* revival and the *kustar* pavilion

Iakunchikova (nee Mamontova), Zinaida Nikolaevna (1843-1919) — mother of Iakunchikova; cousin of S. I. Mamontov; accomplished pianist

Iakunchikova, Natal'ia Vasil'evna (1858-1931) — sister of Iakunchikova; wife of Vasili Dmitrievich

Korovin, Konstantin Alekseevich (1861-1939) — painter; member of the Polenov circle; designer of the *kustar* pavilion

Kovalevskii, Pavel Mikhailovich (1823-1907) — literary and arts critic

Kramskoi, Ivan Nikolaevich (1837-1887) — painter; one of The Fourteen who revolted at the Imperial Academy of the Arts in 1863; member of the Peredvizhniki

Kuindzhi, Arkhip Ivanovich (1842-1910) — painter known for vast landscapes and moonlit scenes

Levitan, Isaac Il'ich (1860-1900) — painter known for lyrical landscapes

Makovskii, Konstantin Egorovich (1839-1915) — painter; member of the Peredvizhniki; known for his idealized representations of Russian life in earlier eras

Mamontov, Savva Ivanovich (1841-1918) — industrialist; arts patron; owner of Abramtsevo

Mamontova (nee Sapozhnikova), Elizaveta Grigor'evna (1847-1908) — arts patron; owner of Abramtsevo

Martynov, Nikolai Avenirovich (1842-1913) — watercolorist; early tutor of Iakunchikova

Moscow Association of Artists (1893-1924) — begun in 1893, but not officially registered until 1896; exhibition group formed in opposition to the Peredvizhniki

Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture — founded in 1843; officially a branch of the Imperial Academy, but known for being more liberal and progressive

Moscow Society of Lovers of Art (1860-1918) — founded to promote the arts and provide exhibition alternatives for young artists; a major exhibition venue in the nineteenth century

Ostroukhov, Il'ia Semenovich (1858-1929) — artist; family friend of the Mamontovs and Polenovs

Peredvizhniki (1870-1922) — officially The Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions; formed in opposition to the Imperial Academy; early advocates of critical realism and national themes in Russian art

Polenov, Konstantin Dmitrievich (1848-1917) — brother of Polenova; a naturalist by training and owner of Anashka

Polenov, Vasili Dmitrievich (1844-1927) — brother of Polenova; famous painter and member of the Peredvizhniki

Polenova, Vera Dmitrievna (1844-1881) — sister of Elena Dmitrievna; twin of Vasili Dmitrievich; very involved in social work; married to the pedagogue Ivan Petrovich Khrushchov (1838-1904)

Repin, Il'ia Efimovich (1844-1930) — painter; internationally famous member of the Peredvizhniki

Ropet (Petrov), Ivan Pavlovich (1845-1908) — architect; one of the innovators of the Russian Revival style

Savitskii, Konstantin Apollonovich (1844-1905) — painter; member of the Peredvizhniki; known for pictures depicting hardships among the peasants and working classes

Savrasov, Alexei Kondrat'evich (1830-1897) — painter; member of the Peredvizhniki; known for lyrical landscapes of Rural Russia

Serov, Valentin Aleksandrovich (1865-1911) — painter; student of Vasiliï Dmitrievich; close family friend of the Mamontovs

Shanks, Emiliia (Emily) Iakovlevna (1857-1936) — painter; student of Vasiliï Dmitrievich; daughter of a British born merchant

Shanks, Mariia (Mary) Iakovlevna (1866-?) — painter; student of Vasiliï Dmitrievich; daughter of a British born merchant

Shchukin, Sergei Ivanovich (1854-1936) — industrialist; arts patron

Shishkin, Ivan Ivanovich (1832-1898) — painter; member of the Peredvizhniki; known for his forest scenes

Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (1820-1929) — from 1882-1917 called the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Artists; begun as an organization for arts patrons; held exhibitions and provided support to artists; in 1857 founded a drawing school that expanded its offerings over time

Stasov, Vladimir Vasil'evich (1824-1906) — arts critic; chief bibliographer of the arts section of the Russian National Library

Stasova, Nadezhda Vasil'evna (1822-1895) — social activist; agitated for education for women

Surikov, Vasiliï Ivanovich (1848-1916) — painter

Titov, Valer'ian Aleksandrovich (dates unknown) — friend of S. I. Mamontov and partner in the railroad business; commissioned icons from Polenova for the Ekaterinoslav train station

Tretyakov, Nikolai Sergeevich (1857-1896) — painter

Tretyakov, Pavel Mikhailovich (1832-1898) — industrialist; founder of the Tretyakov Gallery

Tretyakov, Sergei Mikhailovich (1834-1892) — industrialist; collector of European art

Vasnetsov, Apollinariï Mikhailovich (1856-1933) — painter; member of the Abramtsevo group

Vasnetsov, Viktor Mikhailovich (1848-1926) — painter; member of the Peredvizhniki and the Abramtsevo group

Voeikov, Leonid Alekseevich (1818-1886) — Polenova's uncle; proprietor of the family estate Ol'shanka

Vrubel, Mikhail Aleksandrovich (1856-1910) — artist associated with the Mamontov Circle in the 1890s and known for his distinctly modernist, symbolist works

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