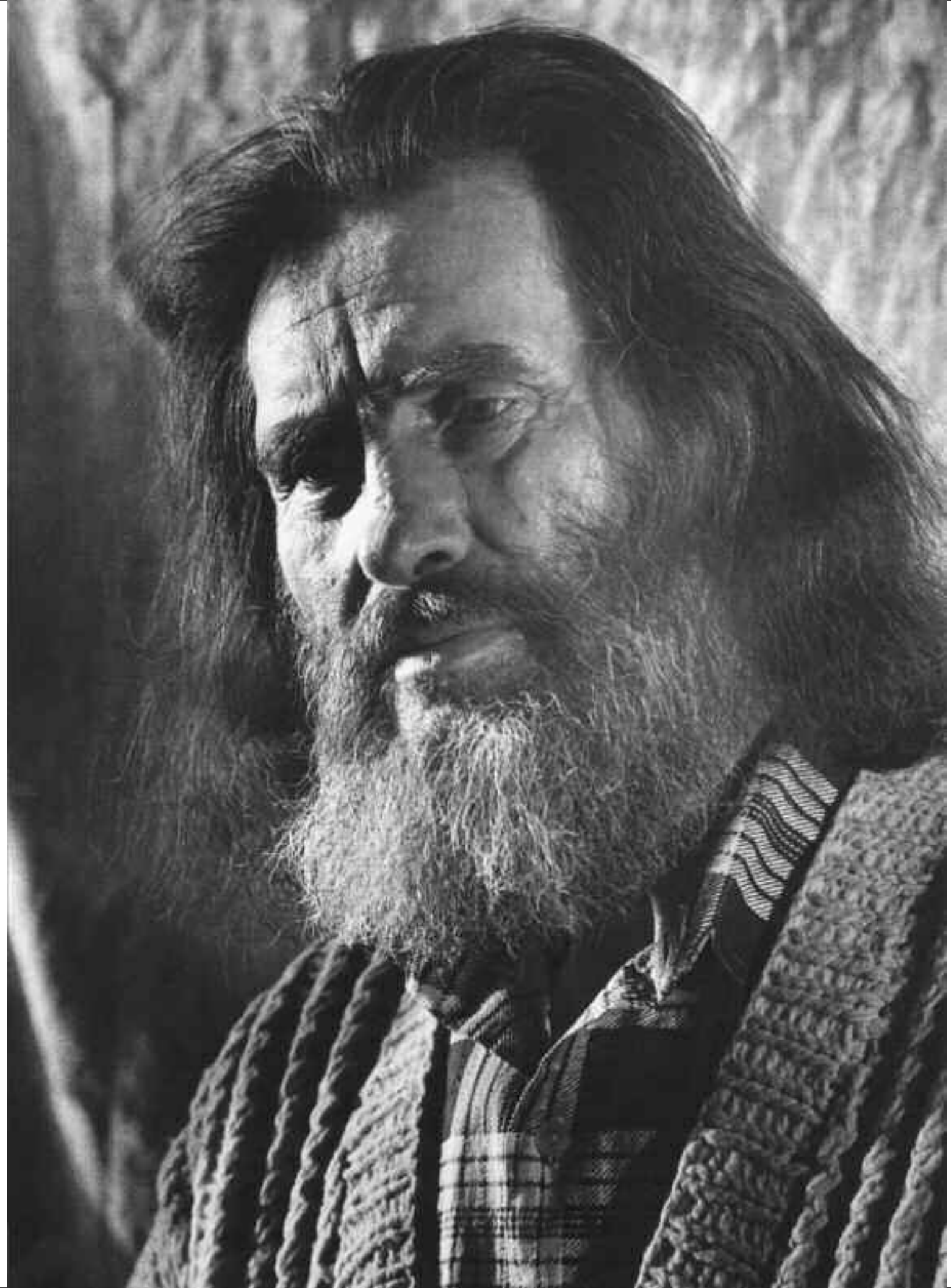

RE-IMAGINING RUSSIA:
BORIS CHETKOV
LANDSCAPE & GENRE PAINTING

THEODORA CLARKE

PUSHKIN GROUP LTD

This book is published to commerate the retrospective exhibition
Re-imagining Russia: Boris Chetkov Landscape & Genre Paintings
At the Westbury Hotel Gallery, Mayfair, London

Frontispiece: Boris Chetkov, 1998

Page 4: *Evening Church*, 1989, acrylic on panel,
40.5 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

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Plate 1 • *Old Staraya Ladoga* 1989, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 86 cm / 28 x 34 inches

Looking at a single painting by any artist, it is difficult to gauge the depth and scope of that artist. Gather together a hundred works by that artist and one can begin to draw associations and make assumptions. Gather together thousands of extraordinarily original paintings, drawings and works in glass, combine them with an incredible life story, and one can begin to uncover the true depth and scope of an artist's greatness.

The ongoing collection and research of Boris Chetkov's life work is still in its early stages, but the deeper we investigate the clearer it becomes that Chetkov is truly a singular discovery, worthy of the highest level of intellectual discourse, and destined to be appreciated more fully as our research evolves.

Boris Chetkov lived his life in pursuit of truth, with art as his guide. Each new work was be approached courageously, without fear of the outcome — for better or worse. This is the essence of artistic integrity.

Confronting a blank canvas with bold assurance, he would draw a painting from that canvas completely in the moment, unpredictably — each work different from the last, like a sculptor imagining a finished work and bringing it to life from raw stone. His goal was to reach a higher wavelength — to be an emotional and psychic channel to paint whatever came through him. He achieved his goal with each painting, providing another piece of the puzzle of Boris Chetkov.

With his innate mastery of a broad range of techniques and styles, Chetkov could feel the color of each moment. He tapped his natural gift and poured out a seemingly endless stream of expression in inimitable portraits, genre scenes, still lifes, landscapes and compositions — all with varying degrees of abstraction.

In this essay by our esteemed Russian art scholar, Theodora Clarke, Chetkov's biography and inner motives are explored, giving us deeper insight into this enigmatic individual. By placing him properly in historical context, she outlines his singular contributions and lays the foundation for further research.

I hope and trust that you, our distinguished readers, will find great satisfaction and an enhanced view of the world through your enjoyment of Chetkov's paintings — his gift to all of us.

Kenneth Pushkin

CREATIVITY & EXPERIMENTATION:
SITUATING BORIS CHETKOV IN THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN ART

Theodora Clarke

Art should be an experiment, without any set rules. No limits, no horizon.
BORIS CHETKOV [1]

INTRODUCTION ■ Western histories of Russian art have traditionally had a tendency to dismiss Russian art after 1932 and the advent of Socialist Realism. The artists of the early twentieth century, in particular the Russian avant-garde, have been the focus of much scholarship. However, recent attitudes have changed and the diversity of Russian art produced in the later years of the Soviet Union is beginning to come to light. As Bown and Taylor have previously noted, "Soviet culture was less monolithic, more heterogeneous and, quite simply, more interesting and important than the simple stereotype suggests." [2] There remain a number of artists whose work has been overlooked from this time of whom Boris Chetkov (1926–2010) is the pre-eminent example.

This publication accompanies the first exhibition of works by this major contemporary Russian artist in the United Kingdom. Chetkov remains an enigma in Russia today and is still little known in the West. This important show in London, *Re-imagining Russia*, during Russian Art Week, introduces the artist through his landscape and genre paintings.[3] Chetkov was a skilled painter but he is also known for his other artistic prowess as a master glass blower. His decorative and functional glass works have often been displayed, while Chetkov remains less familiar to the wider public as a painter. His vibrant and colourful pictures form the subject of this book. This renewed interest in Chetkov's work has been driven by the Pushkin Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The gallery has played an invaluable role in exhibiting and promoting outstanding contemporary Russian artists who have been disregarded by history. The Director Kenneth Pushkin was fortunate to have known Chetkov personally and to acquire a number of works directly from the artist's studio. These pictures form the basis for this discussion of Chetkov and serve as a visual introduction for the reader to his energetic and wide-ranging oeuvre.

During his lifetime Chetkov's works were included in exhibitions across the world, most notably at the State Hermitage Museum in Russia. He was also honoured with the first one-man show at the Konstantinovsky Presidential Palace in St Petersburg. His paintings have been acquired by numerous private collections and museums including the State Russian Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in Japan. The works featured here range from his earliest compositions in the 1950s to those executed in the final decade of his life.

Plate 2 • *Self-Portrait* 1973, oil on panel, 51 x 35.5 cm / 20 x 14 inches

The purpose of this essay is to evaluate Chetkov's career and work through an academic lens. By refocusing attention on the artist we can examine the significant contribution he made to creativity in the Soviet Union. I will consider Chekov's creative output within the wider context of the history of Russian art in the last century. [4] However, the emphasis will also be placed on the unique development of Chetkov's career and his highly personal depiction of life in rural Russia. It is important to acknowledge here Dr. Alexander Borovsky, Chief Curator of Contemporary Art at the State Russian Museum, who wrote the first in depth monograph on Chetkov.[5] His prior research has been invaluable and this text will build on his earlier scholarship. It is hoped that this essay will also act as a good companion to Borovsky's other excellent book on Chetkov's portraits.

In 2004 Chetkov wrote an autobiography which contains reminiscences of his upbringing and his experiences of daily life in the Soviet Union. These writings provide us with greater insight into Chetkov's creative processes. Quotations from the artists' memoirs are drawn upon here to provide anecdotes from his childhood and to further explain his artistic impulses. Reproduced here for the first time also are a number of previously unpublished paintings, drawings and archival material relating to the artist's life. This book is the first opportunity to discuss Chetkov's work since his death in 2010. *Re-imagining Russia* represents an important opportunity to showcase the work of this significant Russian artist, who was a leading figure of the Russian avant-garde following the Second World War.

Fig. 1
Boris Alexandrovitch Chetkov at 10 years old (left), with his sisters, 1936.

INHERITED TRADITIONS: EARLY LIFE & INFLUENCES

In order to understand Chetkov as an artist it is necessary to first familiarise ourselves with a few biographical details of his life. Boris Aleksandrovich Chetkov was born in 1926 in the village of Novaya Lyalya in the Sverdlovsk region of Russia. Throughout his life he was attracted to scenes of the Russian landscape. It is clear that his work has an underlying sense of nostalgia. Rural settings, such as lakes or birch trees in the forest, became recurring motifs in his work. He used his artistic impulses to recreate scenes in vivid colours of his childhood memories. He spent his early life on collective farms and lived through the most oppressive years of the Soviet Union.

His rural upbringing was violently disrupted by his arrest (for 'hooliganism') and subsequent imprisonment in the Gulag Archipelago during his early teenage years. This period of his life was immediately followed by military conscription, in the final year of the Second World War, following which he made the transition back to civilian life. As Professor Albert Kostenevich has written: "It seems that the creativity and the very biography of the artist are the purely Russian phenomenon: it is hard for a

Western spectator to understand the severe "soviet" context: ordeals of life experienced by the artist in his young age — hungry childhood, Gulag, war; professional development under the cruel pressing of that totalitarian state."[6] Chetkov's fascinating life story is an essential part of his narrative. This background helps us to understand his work and how Chetkov came to develop such a unique and highly individualistic artistic style.

Fig. 2
Chetkov's parents, 1950s

The village where Chetkov grew up was in a remote, rural part of Russia to the east of the Ural Mountains (*Figure 1*). His childhood coincided with the period when the worlds of traditional peasant life and industrialisation began to clash. His father worked at the metal factory in Krasnouralsk but he spent most of time with his extended family in the countryside. His memories of living with his grandparents (*Fig. 2*) in Soltanovo seem to have made the greatest impression on him. His grandfather Andrey Chetkov was a wealthy landowner who owned a large house with a big courtyard and many animals. His grandfather is an example of the traditional peasant who worked hard and became prosperous, only to be later stripped of their land under Stalin's plans for collectivisation in the new Soviet Union. Works by Chetkov such as *Port of Arkhangelsk* (1957 Plate), *Fishermen at the Dam* (1965 Plate), *Landscape on the River* (1970), and *Evening in the Village* (1994 Plate) depict this rural way of life in Russia and show how the countryside greatly influenced him as an artist throughout his life. In his autobiography Chetkov writes:

> *I loved being in my grandparents' house. On the walls were photographs of opera singers and a large coloured reproduction of what I later learned was a painting by Rembrandt, and books in leather bindings with clasps. In particular there were books that had reproductions of different breeds of horses, and books about the animal world and some with fairy tales.*[7]

Animals are a recurring theme in his pictures which serve to remind us of the significance of Chetkov's upbringing. In an early work *Roosters Fight* (1959 Plate) the artist depicts birds as flashes of colour on an ochre background. In the top right hand corner we can see a large rooster rearing up to attack the others. The head and beak is clearly recognisable with the bird's feathers splayed out aggressively behind. The whole composition has a swirling dynamism as Chetkov creates a scene full of movement. This is a lively scene of domestic daily life on a farm in Russia which the artist has drawn from life.

His paintings of horses also convey a sense of energy and animation. Other Russian artists, such as Wassily Kandinsky, were also drawn to the figure of the horse and rider but for different reasons. For Chetkov, the horse seems to represent freedom and childhood. There are many examples in his oeuvre such as *Horses Turning Large* (1994 Plate), *Horse Riding* (1992), *The*

Plate 3 • *Evening in the Village* 1994, acrylic on canvas, 51 x 71 cm / 20 x 28 inches

Ride (1996–97), *Woman on a Blue Horse* (2003–2004), *Stampede of the Mustangs* (2000). Kandinsky was preoccupied with the biblical connotations of horses and the Horseman of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelation.[8] It has been suggested that "the rider symbolized Kandinsky's crusade against state aesthetic conventions and the possibility of achieving a more spiritual future through the transformative powers of art." [9] This observation could also be applied to Chetkov. However, for the later artist we can also see the rider as a more literal representation; he is depicting local villagers mounted on their farm animals. These works are also another variation of the Nature motif which demonstrates the artist's interest in observation and narration.

Chetkov recalls first being interested in art as a small child. He writes: "When I was about five years old, my mother gave me a big album made of wrapping paper. I started painting everything I was told about. For example, I tried to illustrate the fairy tales *Kolobok*, *Grey Wolf* and *Serpent Gorinich*." [10] He was later taught by Vladimir Eifert for three years who introduced him to the history of art through books and painting in the open air. [11] It was from this initial instruction that Chetkov learned about Expressionism and
Abstraction, two artistic movements which would later prove hugely influential on his own style of painting.

However, the most significant visual stimuli for the young artist were to be found in the attic at his grandparents' home. Chetkov remembers:

> *There was not a single corner in the house or the courtyard that I did not poke into. Once I discovered a door in a dark corridor that led to a store-room. I crept there quietly and emerged into a huge light space, discovering a whole new world. There were objects unused and unwanted for many years but in perfect condition. Each had its place: the saddles and yokes, harness and shaft-bows. They hung on hooks with woven lashes and shepherd's switches beside them. On benches were pushchairs. There were painted spinning wheels with the threads still on them; nearby lay a spindle. I remember the gaily painted sleigh. The harness was adorned with little jingling bells of all sizes. The broad painted shaft-boxes were different sizes, with a bell on top. It recalled some museum of applied art, with the kind of things I later saw in museums, only in museums they were less carefully selected, as if the people who had selected them had never known the way of life of ordinary Russians. I was simply enchanted and when I came to stay with my grandfather I would creep into the attic and spend hours enthralled by all this equipment, the smell of old leather and the tinkle of the many small bells.* [12]

These recollections are important in helping us to understand Chetkov's influences and motivations. In this quotation he demonstrates his interest in local, traditional forms of art.

Plate 4 • *Staraya Ladoga Fog* 2002, acrylic on panel, 71 x 79 cm / 28 x 31 inches

Plate 5 • *Ladoga Landscape* 1979, acrylic on panel, 40.5 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

Plate 6 • *Horse Races* 1983, acrylic on panel, 51 x 71 cm / 20 x 28 inches

Plate 7 • *A Walk* 1999, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 84 cm / 26 x 33 inches

Kandinsky, who later became the founder of Russian abstraction, also wrote of the importance of folk art and ordinary peasant life. In his memoirs he writes:

> *In these unusual izbas I first came into contact with the miracle that later became one element in my works. Here I learned not to look at the picture from outside but to move around inside it, to live in it. I clearly remember that I stopped on the doorstep before this unexpected spectacle. The table, benches, an important-looking vast stove, the cupboards and dresses, everything was painted with colourful, sweeping ornament. On the walls were lubki: symbolic representations of mighty heroes, battles, songs told in paint. The icon corner was hung with painted and printed images and in front of them was a warm red icon lamp that seemed to know something, to live wrapped up in itself, to be some mysteriously whispering, modest yet proud star. When at last I entered the gornitsa, the painting closed around me and I entered into it.*[13]

As Borovsky has previously noted, both Chetkov and Kandinsky demonstrate in these recollections how important native art was to their artistic development.[14]

It is essential to consider the art that preceded his work in an attempt to understand the traditions he inherited. The cultivation and investigation of folk art had begun in earnest at the turn of the twentieth century. Wood cuts became popular with artists of the Russian avant-garde. Another influence on Neo-Primitivist painters, such as Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, were signboards by peasant artists such as Pirosmanashvili.[15] Modernist painters began to borrow patterns and floral designs from embroideries, shawls and painted trays. Most important of all was the discovery of icons whose artistic value became understood as artworks instead of religious objects of devotion.[16] It is instructive here to turn to the art historian David Elliott in *One Hundred Years* who identifies what he sees as three trends throughout the twentieth century in Russian art.[17] He proposes they are: the influence of folk art and primitivism, the push for innovation and the conviction that art is a philosophical activity. These three points are all relevant to Chetkov. As Elliott explains, "Lubki (printed broadsheets), paintings on glass and lacquer, toys and painted shop and inn signs have all contributed to the 'national' archetype which helps to form our idea of Russian art."[18]

Chetkov grew up in a rural area of Russia far away from the major urban cities. He was exposed as a child to the peasant art of the ex-serf population who would hand paint dolls, embroider linen and create religious imagery for local churches.[19]
Images of daily life are encapsulated in works such as *Uzhin* (1963 **Plate**) and *Green Meadows and Flowers* (1969 **Plate**). In the latter work the artist depicts the rural scene in an entirely abstract manner which only alludes to its subject matter. The flowers are depicted in an expressionistic manner as splashes of colour with the green form, dominating the centre of the composition, representing the grassy meadow. *Uzhin* similarly depicts a view of a real topographical scene in an abstract manner. The recognisable elements, such as buildings and people, are masked. The painting uses form and colour instead to create an impression of bustling daily life in the region. His studies of landscapes across the Soviet Union become increasingly abstract: planes are turned into patterns of

Plate 8 • *Green Meadow and Flowers* 1969, acrylic on panel, 30.5 x 30.5 cm / 12 x 12 inches

Plate 9 • *Visiting a Georgian Friend* 1980, acrylic on canvas, 51 × 81 cm / 20 × 32 inches

lines and colours. Chetkov's technique draws on his awareness of the flatness of the two-dimensional picture plane. He flattens the picture plane and represents the world of everyday life. Chetkov was inspired by the traditions of Russian folk art and drew on multiple visual sources for ideas. His use of bold colours reminds us of Filipp Malyavin's work. The latter's large painting *Peasant Woman* (**Fig**) depicts two local women in bright red dresses. The fabric is depicted as a mosaic of colourful facets.[20] As the generation of Russian artists had before him, Chetkov looked for new ways to depict and interpret objects with innovative forms (**FIG** *Andrei Ender Colours of Nature* 1922).

The Russian avant-garde paid close attention to their indigenous arts and crafts such as the toy, the icon, the lubok and urban folklore. They transferred these methods and motifs into their own pictorial vocabulary which resulted in the formulation of a neo-primitive aesthetic. Goncharova was one of the greatest twentieth-century Russian artists to renounce the West.[21] She had studied French modernism but was more drawn to the folk art of her homeland. For her, modern art always remained inextricably linked to ancient traditions. She was attracted to the bright colours and rough lines of Russian folk culture. Famously in the introduction to her exhibition catalogue of 1913 she wrote:

> *The art of my country is incomparably more profound and important than anything that I know in the West ... I turn away from the West because for me personally it has dried up and because my sympathies lie with the East ... If I extol the art of my country, then it is because I think that it fully deserves this and should occupy a more honourable place than it has done hitherto.*[22]

Goncharova produced many works with an agricultural theme such as the nine-part series *Harvest*.

Fig. 3
Couple in Harmony
1980, ink on paper,
40.5 x 28.5 cm
16 x 11.25 inches

In the 1910s other leaders of Russian modernism, such as Kazimir Malevich and Aristarkh Lentulov, also became interested in peasant and folk art. A number of works by Chetkov demonstrate an interest in and tendency towards Primitivism. This is particularly notable in his figurative and genre compositions. Works such as *Old Man and Old Woman* (1970 **Plate**), *Russian Men* (1972 **Plate**) and *Visiting a Georgian Friend* (1980 **Plate**) all share visual allusions with their work. Traces of these earlier painters are clearly visible in the thick impasto and dynamic, expressive brushstrokes of Chetkov's paintings. *Old Man and Old Woman* comprises of non-objective elements in a style which also recalls the work of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. The figures are represented as geometrical forms in the colours of black, white and brown. Likewise *Russian Men* depicts two figures but in a more representative manner. In this work the people are more clearly defined; their faces and bodies are outlined for the viewer. The entire composition is shaped by Chetkov: he constructs his human forms through blocks of colour

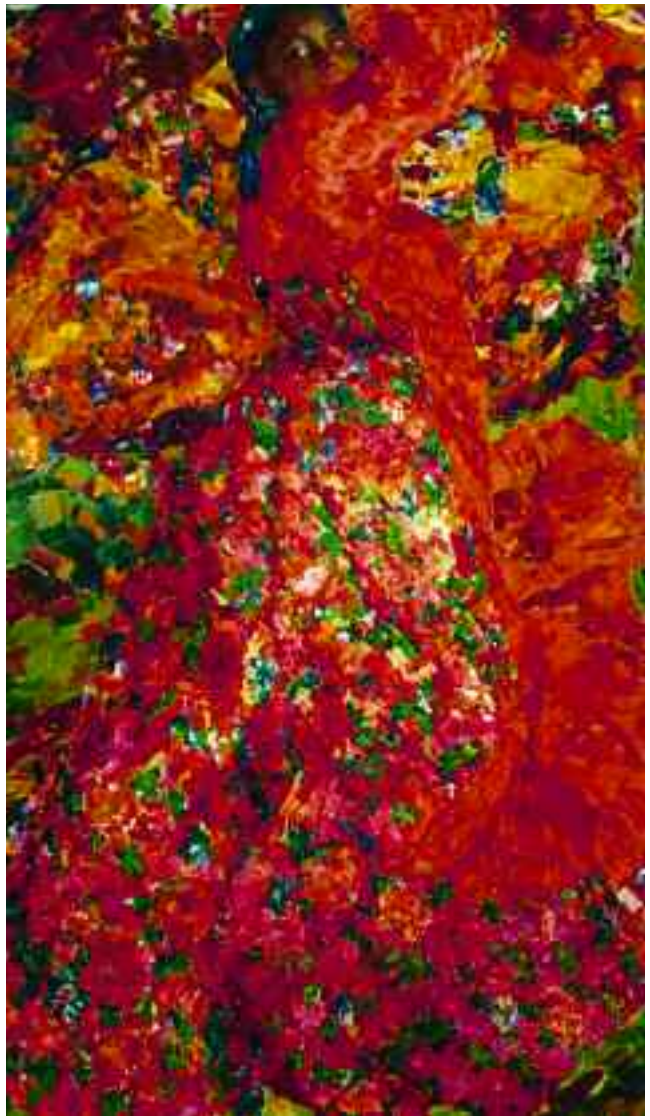

Fig. 4 Filipp Malyavin (1869-1940) Dancing Peasant Women
1913 oil on canvas, 210 x 125 cm / 83 x 49 inches.
The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.
Photo © The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Fig. 5 Boris Chetkov Roosters Fight *1959 oil on panel, 71 x 51 cm / 28 x 20 inches*

Fig. 6 • Boris Ender Colours of Nature
The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.
Photo © The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Fig. 7 Boris Chetkov Yellow Moons
1972 acrylic on panel, 46 x 33 cm / 18 x 13 inches

Fig. 8
Marc Chagall
(1887–1985)
Chemists in Vitebsk
1914 oil, tempera, charcoal, gouache, pencil and watercolor on paper, mounted on cardboard, 40 x 52.4 cm 16 x 20.5 inches

and rhythmic strokes of paint. The artist had an emotional response to all his subjects and was fascinated by the challenges of representation. We can also see his interest in folk art and the influence of the lubok print in drawings such as *Couple in Harmony* (*Fig. 3*). Chetkov developed a versatile pictorial language which was dominated by saturated colours like his avant-garde predecessors. From his depictions of daily life in the Urals we can also draw connections with Marc Chagall. These visual similarities are made apparent when we compare pictures, such as Chagall's *Chemists in Vitebsk* (Fig. 3) with Chetkov's *After the Storm* (1962 **Plate**). The latter's work recalls the art of the past with his depictions of rural life in Russia.

Fig. 9
Chetkov as a student (far right) being reviewed by his Professor F. K. Schmelov, a famous protégé of Ilya Mashkov, 1953.

Chetkov's paintings also share some stylistic similarities with the work of the Knave of Diamonds.[23] This artistic group were known for their devotion to Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse. Like these artists, Chetkov was also attracted by bright colours and simple, heavily outlined forms. In 1959, he graduated from the Sverdlovsk Secondary Art School after having studied in the studio of the highly acclaimed artist Vladimir Shmelyov (*Fig. 4*). His teacher was a former protégé of Ilya Mashkov, a leading figure in the Knave of Diamonds.

Aristarkh Lentulov was another great painter in the same group. He had first studied in St Petersburg before moving to Paris to study in the studio of Henri Le Fauconnier in 1911. Lentulov took as his subjects the old buildings of Russia such as churches, kremlins and monasteries. In his paintings he depicts these old buildings as vibrating and pulsating with an inner energy such as *Moscow* (1913). The buildings are made up of fragments of colour, which are stacked on top of each other, to evoke the dynamism of the city. Lentulov painted a series of churches which show the influence of the French Cubists. In works such as *Churches, New Jerusalem* (1917 **Plate**) the artist breaks up the recognisable subject matter into facets. He assembles shifting planes and differing perspectives of the same building into one image; this creates a multidimensional effect on the canvas. Chetkov delivers a similar effect with *Convent* (1968 **Plate**), *Evening Church* (1989 **Plate**), *Old Staraya Ladoga Church of St. Nickolas* (1995 **Plate**) and *Monastery* (1993–94) which also break up the form into blocks of colour. He believed that art was a philosophical activity and was attracted both to religion and mysticism. Both artists present religious buildings as towering forms in joyful colours which glorify Old Russia and the Motherland.

Chetkov was drawn to paint multiple scenes with religious iconography.[24] Most of the avant-garde artists were Orthodox and the

Plate 10 • *After the Storm* 1962, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 54 cm / 18.9 x 21.25 inches

Fig. 10 Aristarkh Lentulov (1882-1943)
Churches New Jerusalem *1917*

Fig. 11 Boris Chetkov Convent *1988, oil on canvas, 68.5 x 68.5 cm / 27 x 27 inches*

components of the Russian Church service such as the icon and iconostasis had a profound visual effect. Chetkov's family were traditional icon painters and his maternal grandfather painted religious imagery for church interiors. A pair of works depicts *Cathedral of St Vladimir* (1970 Plate and Plate) and show a traditional Russian Orthodox Church with its onion dome. These two paintings present the same view but in contrasting ways. Similar to Claude Monet who painted multiple versions of Rouen Cathedral, Chetkov was also interested in the way that light imparts to a subject a distinctly different character at different times of the day and year. The effects of light on the subject here become as impor-tant as the subject itself. In these two paintings, the artist depicts the same subject, the cathedral, under different lighting. One version shows the church in a blaze of colour dominated by warm yellows and reds. The other shows exactly the same setting but in a calmer, more reflective scene suffused with white and pale blues. Like Monet, Chetkov found it challenging to paint light because of its ever-changing nature which makes it extremely difficult to capture on canvas; he would use sketches combined with his memory of the scene. These paintings use thick layers of richly textured paint to capture the subject in changing light conditions.

Plate 11 • *Old Staraya Ladoga-The Church of St. Basil* 1996–97, acrylic on canvas, 81 x 100 cm / 32 x 39 inches

Plate 12 • *Cathedral of St. Vladimir* 1970, acrylic on panel, 51 x 40.5 cm / 20 x 16 inches

Plate 13 • *Cathedral of St. Vladimir* 1970, acrylic on panel, 51 x 40.5 cm / 20 x 16 inches

EXPLORING COLOUR & ABSTRACTION ■ Chetkov refused to admit that any other artists were present in his mind whilst painting. Nevertheless, it is possible to extrapolate between his work and earlier modern masters. As previously discussed, he was fortunate to have had a relatively extensive art historical training from his tutor. There are visual links between his work and other artists such as Goncharova and Lentulov. However, the most obvious visual parallel with Chetkov is with Kandinsky.[25] Both artists shared a deep interest in folk art, religion and spirituality. Kandinsky's rejection of materialism in favour of the spiritual constitutes the leitmotif of his *Improvisations* and *Compositions* and also many of his seminal essays such as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.[26] It is pertinent here to make a comparison of these two artists through their investigation of colour. Deeply interested in nature, Chetkov strove to explore and communicate the unique colour relationships present in the world around him. He once wrote: "I wallow in nature's colour relationships."[27] Kandinsky famously wrote: "Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposely, to cause vibrations in the soul."[28] He also said "Colour is a means of exerting direct influence on the soul."[29] We can find an echo of these thoughts in Chetkov's writings: "We are all people and related to each other… we see the stains of colour here and there, everything influences us."[30] Kandinsky and Chetkov painted many landscape paintings throughout their careers. They were both interested in experimenting with the picture plane as they separately moved towards abstraction. They also had a shared fascination for colourful scenes of their native homeland and the Russian landscape.

Chetkov was inspired by real life and drew directly from his own experiences. Due to his father's search for work, his family moved several times to different parts of the Soviet Union. This meant that Chetkov was exposed to many different landscapes and cultures whilst growing up. When they moved to Karaganda in Kazakhstan he often drew his surroundings and was inspired by the oriental streets and local clothing. In his memoirs he recalls:

> *Our family moved to Kazakhstan. It was in spring. Narrow streets, camels, colourful and vibrant colours around, noisy markets with plenty of bric-a-brac on sale. I was enchanted by this world, and spent all the time at the market, drawing everything I saw around me."*[31]

The large painting *Bazaar in Samarkand* (1994 Plate) depicts a busy market in the city where traders line the street in a riot of colour. A donkey and cart enters the composition, from the left hand side, which dominates the foreground and draws our eye. The figures of the bystanders are not realistically depicted but are merely dashes of colour. Forms are alluded to by impressionistic dabs of paint rendered in lively colours. Another earlier work (1960 Plate) depicts the historic city on the Silk Road in the luminous hour of twilight. The hazy silhouette of the minarets is depicted just as the sun is setting. Chetkov makes good use of the complementary colours, yellow and blue, to create a strong visual contrast between the shapes of the buildings against a vivid sky. For all the variety of subjects the artist depicted, his works seem to be united by a common

Plate 14 • *The Swan* 2000, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 81 cm / 28 x 32 inches

Plate 15 • *Sunset in Samarkand* 1960, acrylic on panel, 40.5 x 60 cm / 16 x 23.5 inches

Plate 16 • *Bazaar in Samarkand* 1994, acrylic on canvas, 81 x 101.5 cm / 32 x 40 inches

Plate 17 • *Muted Scream* 2006, acrylic on panel, 61 x 81 cm / 24 x 32 inches

Plate 18 • *Uzhin* 1963, oil on panel, 40.5 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

emotional mood. The artist is not simply copying nature. Instead, Chetkov is creating his compositions to be dynamic and energetic interpretations of scenes that are both profound and dramatic. Landscapes are depicted through thick brushstrokes, heavy use of impact and sensational colours. This trend becomes particularly evident in his later works from the 1990s.

The natural world is a recurring theme for both artists. Both Kandinsky and Chetkov first experimented with non-objective painting by depicting village scenes which verged on abstraction. These landscapes still contain recognisable motifs, such as houses or trees, but the forms have begun to dissolve into more abstract, geometric blocks of colour. The turning point for Kandinsky's style in moving from representational to abstract occurred in 1895. He attended a French Impressionist exhibition and saw Monet's *Haystacks at Giverny*. Kandinsky stated afterwards:

> *…it was from the catalogue I learned this was a haystack. I was upset I had not recognized it. I also thought the painter had no right to paint in such an imprecise fashion. Dimly I was aware too that the object did not appear in the picture…* [32]

The artist's path to abstraction and his belief in spiritual content set him apart from other painters in Russia. He did not use purely geometric forms or approach nonrepresentational painting in a more rational way like artists such as Kazimir Malevich. In his later works Kandinsky masks recognisable elements leaving only the curve of a hill or the form of an onion dome to imply a sense of geographical place. In many ways, Chetkov uses a similar device. Although he did not consistently explore abstraction like Kandinsky, he also disguises forms. He creates fantastical colourscapes, which are punctuated by occasionally recognisable features, such as in *On the Banks of the Volkov River* (1993), *Blue House in Autumn* (1999), *Christmas* (1996 **Plate**) and *Sunrise* (2008 **Plate**). In each of these paintings the natural world is depicted in as constructed patches of colour which ignore conventional perspective. In *White Cloud* (1993 PLATE) the scene is dominated by a blustery sky and in the foreground only small figures are suggested. The roofs of houses, covered in snow, are the only other recognisable elements in an otherwise entirely abstract work. *White Cloud with Apple Blossoms* (1968-69 **Plate**) likewise depicts a scene of country life. A homestead in woodland is presented where the picture plane comprises of facets of colour. The natural setting is suffused with a strong blue colour which imbues the piece with a lyricism and evokes the mood of the setting.

Another work which shows Chetkov's increasing tendency towards abstraction is the painting *Blue Haze* (1966 **Plate**). An early work by Chetkov it depicts a brooding, melancholy landscape which shows the outline of houses by the edge of a lake. The forms are roughly hewn and the texture of the paint reveals Chetkov's impulsive method of working. The composition consists of a patchwork of blue forms. The realistic elements in the scene, such as the boat and the church, are not drawn with verisimilitude. Instead, these forms are sketched quickly and are alluded to rather than realistically depicted in the work. This painting reflects Kandinsky's instructions that: "In a composition in which corporeal elements are more or less superfluous, they can be more or less omitted and replaced by purely abstract forms, or by corporeal forms that have been completed abstracted." [33]

Plate 19 • *White Cloud* 1978, acrylic on panel, 46 x 48 cm / 18 x 19 inches

Plate 20 • *Sunset* 1970, acrylic on panel, 40.5 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

Plate 21 • *Sunrise* 2008, oil & acrylic on canvas, 81 x 100 cm / 32 x 39.5 inches

Plate 22 • *Landscape* 1964, oil on masonite, 35.5 x 43 cm / 14 x 17 inches

Plate 23 • *Church of St. Vladimir* 1991, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 81 cm / 24 x 32 inches

Fig. 12
Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)
Something Dusky *1917*
The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.
Photo © The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Fig. 13
Boris Chetkov Flight of the Hawk *1997*
oil on canvas, 81 x 75 cm / 32 x 29.50 inches

There are visual parallels between works such as Chetkov's *Flight of the Hawk* (1997 **Fig**) and Kandinsky's *Something Dusky* (1917 **FIG**). Both artists use a joyous cacophony of colours and swirling geometric shapes. For Kandinsky these works are like musical symphonies. For Chetkov they are "nature's colour relationship" captured and explored on canvas. If you compare these two works there is a strong visual resonance between them, despite the fact that they were produced by different artists in different decades. Like Kandinsky, Chetkov was also attracted to music as a subject throughout his career in works such as *Composition, Music* (1970 **Fig**) and a *Portrait of Shostakovich* (1955 **fig**). In the latter, one of Chetkov's earliest known paintings, the famous composer is shown seated at a piano depicted in violent colours and in a shocking and primitive manner. Other examples which show similarities between each other's work are Chetkov's *Muted Scream* (2006 **Plate**) which recalls Kandinsky's *Improvisation*. Likewise, *Landscape* (1972 **Plate**) and *Landscape* (1971 **Plate**) share similarities with Kandinsky's earlier works in Murnau such as *Summer Landscape* (1909).

Fig. 14 (above)
Portrait of
Shostokovich
1955 oil on canvas,
66 x 48 cm
26 x 19 inches

Fig. 15
Composition, Music
1970 acrylic on panel,
81 x 51 cm
32 x 20 inches

At a time when the Russian avant-garde was still demonised in the Soviet Union as formalist and bourgeois, Chetkov resurrected many of their techniques. His works share the deliberate "unsophistication" of Primitivist or folk art, the abstraction and spirituality of Kandinsky and the romantic whimsical view of peasant life as pioneered by Chagall. This is a striking achievement when you consider the context of his artistic production in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Chetkov's paintings were in in stark opposition to the official style of Socialist Realism. The examples above demonstrate that although Chetkov saw himself as a lone figure who was separate from any individual or movement, his painting is still rooted in the history and traditions of Russian art.

NATURE & THE RUSSIAN LANDSCAPE A key theme throughout Chetkov's work is his communication of a raw and emotional response to the natural and physical world. Whether he depicts a still life, landscape, portrait or genre painting, Chetkov strives to capture the emotional and dynamic essence of his subject. His genre and landscape paintings show the rivers, forests, villages and historic churches of Russia. He transforms the local countryside through gestural brush strokes and vibrant colours. He engages with the environment on a conscious and subconscious level. He once said: "…I think that the artist must *feel* nature, not *copy* nature."[34] His numerous views of the Russian countryside retain a folk art quality and show an almost spiritual response to the wild colours of nature. In his autobiography Chetkov does not cite any specific artists or movements as a direct influence on his work. Nevertheless, we can see visual parallels between his work and that of his predecessors. His art is imbued with the spirit of earlier artists such as we have seen with icons, folk art and the Russian avant-garde. I would also like to draw attention to the work of the Peredvizhniki (Передвижники/Wanderers) and how landscape painting became a cornerstone of Russian art.

Russia is a vast country which encompasses a range of landscapes including birch tree forests, open grasslands on the Steppes, meandering rivers and huge lakes. The significance of landscape to Russian culture cannot be overstated. Landscape painting was considered much more than a realistic depiction of a topographical scene; it was also bound up with ideas of the "Motherland" (Родина/rodina). As art historian David Jackson has explained: "Its ethos, however, surpassed the physical, the land itself, to encapsulate an indefinable and inexpressible sense of belonging that was entangled in a heady mix of fierce national pride and lachrymose nostalgia. Traditionally this was the place of home, the receptacle of the Russian soul, a birthright surpassing social divisions and binding all." [35]

For many Russians their landscape is intertwined with their search for a national identity. Authors, poets, musicians and artists have all created emotional and highly subjective representations of Russian landscapes. We can understand better the emotional romanticism that Russians attached to their landscape if we turn to literary sources as well as painting. This quotation is from the famous Russian author Ivan Turgenev:

> *He drew in a deep breath and began to sing … and each one of us felt a wave of sweetness and shivery anticipation creeping over us….The honest fiery soul of Russia resounded and breathed through it and quite simply seized us by the heart, plucked directly at our Russian heart-strings… He sang, and in every sound his voice made there breathed something familiar as our birthright and so vast no eye could encompass it, just as if the Russian steppe were being unrolled before us, stretching away into an endless distance. I felt emotion throb in my heart and tears rose to my eyes."* [36]

During the nineteenth century landscape painting as a genre became increasingly popular and the Wanderers initiated a boom in representations of the natural world.[37] Some of the greatest Russian artists of the period created iconic scenes of the Russian countryside. However, landscape painting did not always attract admiration. One of the best known paintings is

Plate 24 • *Electric Landscape* 1993, acrylic on canvas, 79 x 61 cm / 31.25 x 24 inches

Aleksei Savrasov's *The Rooks Have Returned* (1871) which was the subject of much criticism as its first exhibition. The chief complaint was that the background had been depicted as the main subject matter. In a contemporary review of the work the critic writes: "In general, we do not very much like artists who have chosen landscape for their exclusive and only speciality…such one-sidedness is strange to us….Landscape is necessary to the artists a background, as a decoration…But by itself landscape is pointless."[38]

In this work Savrasov uses a restricted palette of browns, greys and blues to evoke a poetic, yet realistic, view of a village at the end of winter. The rooks are returning to nest as the snow begins to melt which marks the spring thaw. Chetkov's landscapes in contrast are filled with bright reds, blues and greens to create a veritable kaleidoscope of colour on canvas. A prime example of this is *Electric Landscape* (1993 **Plate**). Traditional representations of the Russian landscape depict birch trees, forests covered in snow and tend to show the beautiful countryside in the cold of winter. Chetkov is unusual in that very few of his paintings depict Russia in this way. His landscapes are lively creations that sing with colour and mesmerise the viewer with his bold choice of palette.

Fig. 16
Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842-1910)
Spots of Moonlight in the Forest
The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg. Photo © The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Landscape painting was attacked by critics as being unworthy of depiction. In the hierarchy of genres, which was promoted by the official Academy, landscapes were ranked below history, portrait and genre paintings. To be a landscape painter in the nineteenth century was a tough profession. Nearly one hundred years later, Chetkov found a similar challenge, albeit very different, as he struggled to get his semi-abstract landscapes recognised in an art world dominated by the demands of Socialist Realism. It is useful here to compare Chetkov's work to other earlier landscape artists of the nineteenth century. Ivan Shishkin's *Morning in a Pine Forest* (1889), featuring three small bears, is a quintessential image of Russia that encapsulates for many people their national identity through nature. This type of native landscape painting is imbued with the nationalist and patriotic spirit of Russia. Arkhip Kuindzhi's work is characterised by radiant colour and beautiful but unearthly landscapes; contrasts of colour are manipulated to create specific moods. His works have a luminous, glowing quality such as in *Moonlight Night on the Dneiper* (1880). Other works by Kuindzhi that depict traditional scenes of the Russian landscape include *Spots of Moon Light in Forest* (date? **FIG**).[39] If we make a visual comparison between Chetkov's work *Rays of Sun* (2005 **Plate**) and Kuindzhi, we can see that both paint scenes as investigations of light and colour. Their works have parallels in their simplification of forms, rough application of paint, intensity of colour and almost abstract compositions.

In Chetkov's paintings we can see how the subject matter has been constructed out of different geometrical elements to create forms. For example, in *Trunks of Trees* (1960 **Plate**), the dappled effect of light falling on tree trunks is created by heavy impasto. The paint has been laid thickly on the canvas on carton panel in broad brushstrokes. It is this technique that makes the paint appear to

Plate 25 • *Trunks of the Trees* 1960 acrylic on panel, 25.5 x 35.5 cm / 10 x 14 inches

Plate 26 • *Morning at Ladoga* 1980, acrylic on canvas, 71 × 81 cm / 28 × 32 inches

Plate 27 • *Nostalgia* 2002, oil & acrylic on canvas, 71 x 81 cm / 28 x 32 inches

Plate 28 • *Shadows of March* 2008, acrylic on canvas, 75 x 55 cm / 29.5 x 21.75 inches

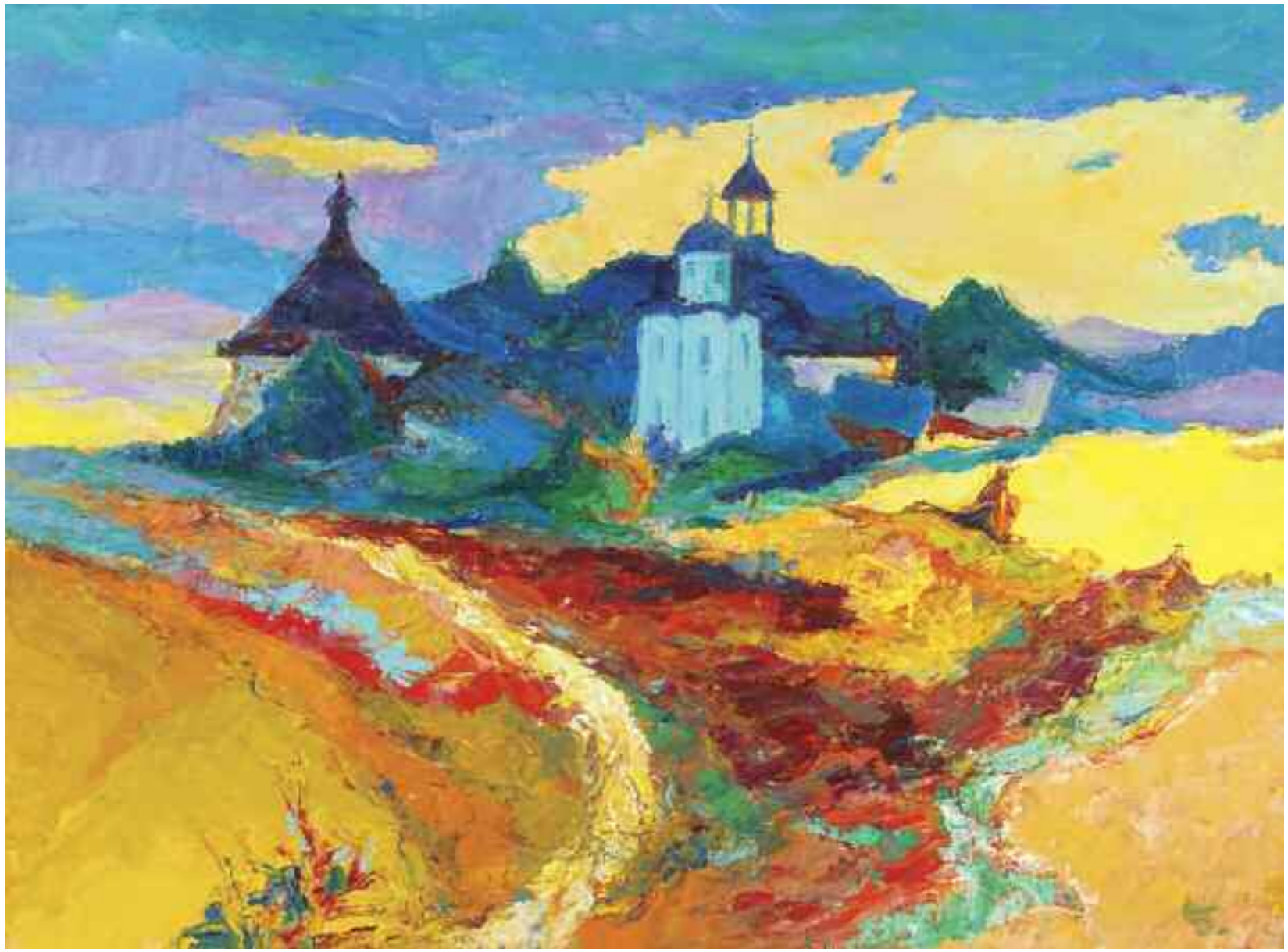

Plate 29 • *Ancient Fortress* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 81 cm / 24 x 32 inches

come out of the canvas and helps to evoke emotion and mood in a landscape painting. This work recalls Shishkin's painting *Oaks* (*Fig. ?*). The Wanderers inspired generations of later artists with their vision of the Motherland. Clearly the group's works are very different in style to Chetkov's work. However, their presentation of a distinctly Russian landscape is a tradition which Chetkov continues in his painting.

Fig. 17 Ivan Shishkin (1832-1898) Oaks *1887 oil on canvas. The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg. Photo © The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg*

Artists like Isaac Levitan were attacked for showing such Impressionistic works, considered "daubs" or "unfinished sketches," such as *Twilight Lake* (1897). He fluctuates between painting a fleeting moment, in a sketchy and hurried manner, to more defined images. Chetkov flirts with both experimental and traditional methods of paintings. His landscapes are both a celebration of nature and also creative experiments in colour and light. He describes his creative process in his autobiography:

> *I dived into a fantasy world, which had no connection with reality. I kept making quick sketches all the time so that I could use them for my paintings later; some of them I used after as many as thirty years or more. Sometimes, diving into the colours of surroundings, I ignored the finer details. I realised this was an issue when looking through my old works. It doesn't matter how long you have been an artist, but if you are not in harmony with your work it will die before the artist himself.*[40]

Fig. 18
Isaac Levitan
Twilight Lake

Levitan aimed to evoke psychological responses from natural scenery. His words would surely resonate to his artistic heir Chekov: "Can anything be more tragic than to feel the infinite beauty of your surroundings, to read nature's innermost secrets and, conscious of your own helplessness, to be incapable of expressing these powerful emotions?"[41] There is a sublime power to nature and the natural landscape has tremendous power to evoke emotion and awe in the viewer. Chetkov, like his nineteenth century predecessors, was well aware of this phenomenon. This was one of the reasons why he was drawn to the same scenes on multiple occasions.

Towards the end of his life Chetkov moved to Chernavino village, outside of St Petersburg. He worked at his nearby dacha at Staraya Ladoga and depicted many versions of the scenery, around the lake, close to his home. These landscape paintings show Chetkov's attention to mood and have an emotional and lyrical intensity. Many of the views were painted in one sitting and reflect the artist's interest in Nature. His aim was to re-create the atmosphere of real geographical places by experimenting with colour and form. Examples include *Ladoga Landscape* (1979 **Plate**), *Flood on the Ladoga* (1996 **Plate**) and *Staraya Ladoga Fog* (2002 **Plate**) which are dominated by a blue colour palette and edge towards abstraction. However, these pictures still retain recognisable motifs, such as the wooden house,

and have not yet become totally abstract. As with many of the artist's works the effect is dreamlike and hallucinatory such as in *Seaside* (1990 **Plate**), *Fall on the Ladoga Lake* (2000), *Vacation in Gatchina* (1970 **Plate**) and *Shadows of March* (2008 **Plate**). His villages are not depictions of collectivization but capture local village life with a poetic mood. The artist paints scenes far removed from the joyless life of a collective farm. Instead he recreates scenes from his happy childhood which have an eternal lyricism. These images are of distinctly Russian landscapes which are rooted in the history of Russian art.

Fig. 19
Nizhniy Tagil Gulag

Landscapes can be topographical depictions of specific places but they are also sites of memory laden with meaning. One of Levitan's most evocative landscapes would have had special resonance for Chetkov for this very reason. The melancholic landscape *The Vladimirka Road* (1892) by Levitan shows an epic view of land and sky with a dirt road leading off into the distance. The title is important as it transforms the atmospheric landscape into a haunting work. Contemporary Russian audiences would have known that this road was the route via which convicts were forcibly marched to exile in Siberia. Chetkov himself was sentenced to one year in the famous Gulag Archipelago. When he was a teenager, Chetkov was arrested as the accomplice for a crime committed by other teenagers. He was sent to a correctional facility in the Nizhniy Tagil (*Figure ?*) to work as a logger in horrific conditions during the harsh Russian winter. The experiences of the gulag have been brought to life by writers such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Chetkov describes the challenges he faced during his period of incarceration in his autobiography. He writes:

> *At first we were held in a lock-up ward, but soon taken to a train station and put into prison wagons. It was a long journey, and the heat was unbearable. We could hear the sound of locks and doors squeaking and cracking as we moved. Prisoners were begging for water, forgetting about food. We could also hear the guards, shouting and swearing. After 24 hours, we were given a herring each, with no bread or water…*
>
> *Finally, we were ordered to come outside, and were pushed out of the wagons one by one. It was snowing and very cold. We were surrounded by guards with their police dogs, straining at the leads and baring their teeth. When we were exiting the wagons, guards would scream 'To your knees!" from time to time; those who remained standing were hit with a rifle. We reached some barracks and were accommodated there. We later found out it was a lumber factory in Nizhniy Tagil Gulag. We constantly heard axes ringing and saws squealing…*
>
> *I was skinny and pessimistic. I was responsible for the fire and also had to carry things from place to place. All in freezing weather, -30 degrees… Morning started at 4am; in the evening we were given some skilly and a piece of bread."* [42]

After his sentence Chetkov was briefly reunited with his father, who had also been arrested, before being sent to a penal

battalion to fight in the final years of the Second World War. Over 20 million Soviet citizens died during the war and the German attack of 1942 on the Soviet Union caused huge devastation to both the cities and countryside.[43] It has been suggested that in Levitan's works there is "an impulse towards an emotional catharsis."[44] Can this also be said to be true of Chetkov? In his memoirs, landscape plays an important role in his descriptions. For example, it is interesting to note his comments on the natural world when he writes about growing up in the Soviet Union. In another description of life in the 1930s, during Stalin's Purges and the Terror, Chetkov writes:

> *My mother's sister worked in the town council; her husband was an attorney. When he was young, he worked in Irbit and had to take the family of Pavel Morozov to their execution by firing squad. The first wagon carried Pavel's grandfather and father, and the second one was for the guards and a doctor, strong working people. The grandfather had a huge beard, and the father was around thirty years old. It was autumn, the sky was blue, full of white, light clouds. It was a warm autumn evening, and a breezy wind shook the leaves on the trees. Pavel's father was very thoughtful and his grandfather was looking at the sky. Trees were listening, the leaves whisper. The grandfather said, "Nature is so beautiful! I want to live". They were grain-growers; they kept some seeds to plant in the spring so that they had bread to feed the family. But Pavel, being a Young Pioneer, gave them away. So the officials came and took away all the stock, condemning the family to starvation; it was a tragedy for the family. But Pavel Morozov was proclaimed a national hero, and his grandfather and father- sentenced to death as public enemies."* [45]

Another reading of Chetkov's work could be interpreted as forming an emotional catharsis of his own. Painting was a way of processing the sufferings he had been through in his own life and witnessed in those around him. For example, if we compare his works *There will be Light* (date? **Plate**) to *Muted Scream* (date? **Plate**) we can see here the contrast between light and dark, optimism and pessimism.

Chetkov's passion for Russian scenery was seemingly inexhaustible. He returned to landscape many times; motifs of trees, lakes and rivers feature frequently in compositions. With his broad brushstrokes and lively colours, Chetkov created paintings which resonate with emotion and threaten to overwhelm the viewer. His works are designed to be a sensory overload. There is also a spirituality that Chetkov captures in his paintings of the Russian landscape. This is true whether he is depicting the close up of a tree trunk or larger genre scenes featuring animals and people in the countryside. Chetkov was a mystic who was interested in portraying truth. The collector Pavel Tretyakov once said to the landscape painter Apollinary Goravsky: "I need either richness in nature no effective use of light: no miracles. Give me a murky puddle, so long as it contains truth and poetry. There is poetry to be found in everything." [46] The same is true of Chetkov's landscape paintings.

Plate 30 • *Blue Colors of the Ladoga* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 81 x 96.5 cm / 32 x 38 inches

Plate 31 • *Khutor* 2000, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 81 cm / 28 x 32 inches

Plate 32 • S*taraya Ladoga* 1969, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 73.5 cm / 24 x 29 inches

EXPERIMENTATION & UNOFFICIAL ART ■ In this final section I wish to discuss Chetkov's place amongst his contemporaries and look at examples of official and unofficial art from the 1950s until Chetkov's passing in 2010. I consider how his career developed in the context of his artistic generation and the natural evolution of his style. It is interesting here to consider the Moscow Conceptualists and Nonconformists and also the works of the avant garde Armenian artists Martiros Saryan and Yervand Kochar with whom he met with in 1970. (*Fig.??*).[47] Their works provide an interesting juxtaposition to Chetkov's creative output. Perhaps one of the key reasons why Chetkov is not as well-known as many of his Russian contemporaries is due to his apparently self-imposed artistic isolation. Underground and unofficial artists tended to work in groups or networks, particularly in Leningrad and Moscow. Those artists who were based in these major cities received significant press attention, especially in the West, when their exhibitions were inevitably supressed under the Soviet regime. For example the famous 1974 exhibition by Soviet artists in Moscow, that was bulldozed by the authorities, 'The Bulldozer Exhibit', sparked a huge outcry and inspired an exhibition of Soviet underground art at the ICA in London in 1977.[48] As Boun and Taylor explain, "the Soviet art given most attention in the West was that which promoted a 'dissident' political stance".[49]

These Russian artists were conceptual and provocative. They created works that were satirical and which appropriated techniques of official art but used them to subvert official messages. Chetkov took a very different approach to artists such as Komar and Melamid, Dmitri Prigov, Eric Bulatov and Oleg Vassilev (*Fig. ?*). He separated himself from the work of his contemporaries like Ilya Kabakov, Vladimir Yanilevsky and Oskar Rabin.[50] For the duration of his career Chetkov followed his own vision, apart from any trend or political movement. His works display a quiet, personal and very different type of rebellion against the imposed norm. He never sought out the acceptance of these other underground

Fig. 20
Sarayan
Kotaik. Mountains. *1926*
oil on canvas,
70 x 70 cm
27.5 x 27.5 inches.
Sarian House-museum,
Erevan © Sarian Family

Fig. 21
Oleg Vassiliev
Space and Nature
2010, oil on canvas,
94 x 190 cm
37 x 75 inches,
Private Collection
© 2010 Oleg Vassiliev

Fig. 22
Oscar Rabin
Five Wolves Five Dollars
1999, oil on canvas
73.5 x 100 cm
30 x 39 inches
© Galerie Blue Square

Plate 33 • Bacchanalia 1970, acrylic on panel, 51 x 71 cm / 20 x 28 inches

Fig. 23

Nizhniy Tagil Gulag fellow students in the Studio of Vladimir Shmelyov, 1950s

Fig. 24

Nizhniy Tagil Gulag fellow students in the Studio of Vladimir Shmelyov, 1950s

artists and was never recognized by them or accepted by the establishment of 'Soviet' artists. In a sense, he had no peers. Yet he never held any grudges or harboured any bitterness; he remained content in his own world. His work perhaps is most comparable to Rabin who also tackled landscapes. However, Rabin's paintings are thick with muddy impasto paint and lack the riotous colour of Chetkov or his obsession with the natural world. Many of Rabin's canvases are of the urban Moscow landscape depicted in encrusted shades of sombre browns, reds and blues.

Working as an artist during the Soviet era had its difficulties. Artists had their works suppressed or rejected if they did not conform to Socialist Realism and official standards of art.[51] For many years this style represented the official line in culture up to the late 1980s and for decades was the cornerstone of art practice and debate in the Soviet Union. Official, approved art was supposed to glorify the state and present Soviet life in a heroic fashion. The goal of Socialist Realism was to depict Russia in a recognisable and accessible way. This was achieved through realistic painting that emphasized the common life of the proletariat, the peasantry, the Red Army and the political leadership such as Kugach's *Title here* (19?? *Fig. ?*). Popular works were forms of monumental propaganda which depicted heavy industry and construction projects or portrayed idealised Soviet men and women working in harmony for the good fo the state (*Fig. ?*). The Socialist Realist style, post 1932, was meant to be "national in form, socialist in context and devoid of class connections."[52] As an outlier, Chetkov, like the Nonconformists, suffered for his art: "I was not allowed to exhibit my works anywhere, and sometimes it happened that my works were destroyed."[53]

His memoirs are particularly interesting for their insight into life at a Soviet art school. When he graduated from his local art school in the Urals, Chetkov returned to Leningrad in 1960. He had previously studied there, eight years earlier, but left following a serious

illness. This time he applied to the Repin Institute (the former Academy of Arts) but was rejected. His style of painting did not meet the school's expectations. His early works demonstrated an independent spirit which did not conform to the official style of Communist ideology.

Fig. 25

Nizhniy Tagil Gulag fellow students in the Studio of Vladimir Shmelyov, 1950s

Chetkov's training coincided with a time in Soviet history when his teachers were paranoid about any manifestation of freedom of thought. "Life was not so comfortable for painters who wished to work outside the confines of Socialist Realism." [54] He decided to move to Moscow and was accepted to the textiles department of the Moscow Higher Artistic and Industrial School, the former Stroganov School. It is worth quoting in full his experiences there:

> *I loved studying there. Extra-curriculum painting classes, the great library, the en suite museum. The famous artist Vasiliev was head of department and the artist Vitachin taught sculpture… It was the place where I felt completely free and independent. I would organise exhibitions, talks and discussions about art; engaging academics and the general public.*
>
> *However, trouble came where I didn't expect it. The head of department Vasiliev was replaced by a zealous Communist, Seleznev. However, a couple of times after Seleznev's appointment I noticed a girl, also a student, who was standing behind a column and scribbling something in her notepad while I was discussing art and, in unflattering terms, social realism. It turned out that I was a black sheep among the Communists, most of whom were in the Communist Young League in school. On one occasion, I was discussing exhibitions of Soviet and Western art with Seleznev; a seemingly innocent conversation. He suddenly started talking of my works (at that point, we all had submitted them for a final diploma) and giving me recommendations, how I should change them. Later it turned out that they were not suitable due to ideological reasons.*
> *Two weeks later, the head of the institute told me that the department insisted I was expelled; so he helped me to transfer to the State Art and Industry Academy in Leningrad. At the autumn exhibition, my works were painted over; my paintings and drawings were marked with a mere 3 [C]. However, I was allowed to uphold my diploma, even though my fellow Communist students were clearly not happy about it."* [55]

Chetkov's refusal to conform to the official ideology meant that he soon himself under observation by the Communist Party. Unlike his fellow students he was not indoctrinated by Soviet propaganda. This independent spirit meant he risked exclusion for purely ideological reasons. He was accused of having skill but not being identifiable as part of a traditional 'school' of

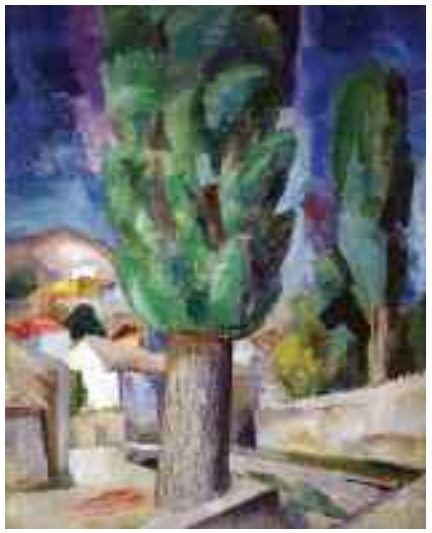

Fig. 26
Robert Falk
(1886–1958)
Lombardy Poplar
1915 oil on canvas,
108 x 88 cm
42.5 x 34.5 inches.

painting and for his failure to depict subjects in a realistic manner. The end result was that Chetkov was only just allowed to pass his exams and graduate.

Chetkov's artistic studies coincided with a period of Soviet history in which freedom of thought and creativity were crushed. His stay in Moscow coincided with the famous visit by Nikita Krushchev, then General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to the exhibition at Manège in 1962.[56] At the "Thirty Years of the Moscow Union of Artists Exhibition," Socialist Realist works were displayed alongside important artists of the thirties, including Drevin, Falk, Kuznetsov and Shterenberg, who were being shown after years of neglect (*Fig. ?*). The dictatorship of Stalin had not tolerated open deviation from the established code of Socialist Realism. Since his death in March 1953 there had been a degree of relaxation in the arts. Many young artists had come to believe that a 'thaw' was occurring as Soviet culture entered a more liberal era. However, Krushchev on seeing the abstract and expressionistic works of Falk and others exploded in anger. He stormed out of the exhibition shouting, "Forbid it! Forbid the whole thing! Put an end to this outrage! I'm ordering you! I'm telling you!"[57] Kruschev attacked modern art as being dissident and radical. The result was that the Party unleashed a campaign against any tolerance towards formalist, abstract or expressionistic artistic experimentation and the press railed against cultural 'deviationists'.

During the years of the Soviet Union, artistic production had been controlled and realism became the dominant form of artistic expressionism from the 1930s onwards. The average Soviet citizen was denied the possibility of seeing any 'modern art' such as Picasso or Kandinsky.[58] Expressionist painting with its bold colours and simplified forms was mocked by conservatives. Art became a form of highly charged propaganda and 'formalist' painting, particularly abstraction, was persecuted.[59] Despite this, Chetkov still began to produce non-objective works such as *The White Horse* (1960 **Plate**) and *Landscape* (**Plate** 1970). In *Sunset* (**Plate** 1970) he depicts the sky as light is fading with simple sweeps of colour on canvas. Streaks of red, blue and white create arcs which allude to the subject matter. However, the content is unclear without knowledge of the work's title. *Bacchanalia* (1970 **Plate**) similarly is a purely abstract work which is far removed from classical paintings of this subject. He depicts geometrical elements instead of figures at the traditional Roman festival or Bacchus, the God of Wine. It was in this hostile environment towards experimentation that Chetkov honed his painterly skill and developed as an artist. One example of the prevailing mood towards modernist painting is the attack made in 1962 by the highest ranking administrative figure in Soviet art. A.K. Lebedev said of Vincent Van Gogh:

> *An intentional deformation of objects, a deliberate imprecision of outline, harsh and quite unnatural combinations of colour, the over-sophisticated manner of painting with its painfully nervous worm-like smears made his art inaccessible to the broad masses of viewers".*[60]

Fig. 27
Boris Chetkov examines one of his glass works in his studio, 1991

If we imagine how Chetkov's paintings must have looked to his teachers, who were working within the official State guidelines of Socialist Realism, and the Communist censors, we could just as easily apply this description to Chetkov's work. Despite these diffi-culties of working as an artist within the confines of Communism in the Soviet Union, Chetkov continued to reject Socialist Realism. He de-fended criticism of his abstract and expressionist style of painting arguing, "A school is the following of a well-beaten track. I know nothing of that. Whether your aim is to make boots or chop wood, it's all the same to me- downright boring. Creativity is a state of experimentation."[61] It was only with the collapse of the Soviet Union, that Russian artists begin to operate in an atmosphere of freedom.

Fig. 28
Dino
Photo © Wendy McEahern
NEED CAPTION

Chetkov's experiences at art school pushed him away from estab-lished groups. Instead, he studied the art of glass making. He simulta-neously worked with a range of mediums alongside painting including wood, stone, ceramics and metal. In the late 1960s Chetkov did some designs for the Lomonsov (formerly Imperial Academy) and then was offered a job at a glass factory. It was here that he found his niche and spent a significant part of his professional life working with the medium (*Fig. ?*). The factory in Staraya Vishera in the Novgorod region had first been founded in 1888. It was appropriated by the Soviets to mass produce everyday objects following the Russian Revolution. The site was renamed the Glass Factory of the First Communist Volunteer Detachment (1KDO) and Chetkov was appointed the Chief Artist. He found the material of glass to be an inspiration. The vivid colours he was able to achieve while working with glass and the fluidity of the material, undoubtedly impacted on his painterly output. "Working with glass is enchanting, it carries you away, liberates your fantasy. The artist becomes a magician when he creates an object from a shapeless hot paste."[62]

Plate 34 • *A White Horse* 1960, acrylic on panel, 51 x 81 cm / 20 x 32 inches

Plate 35 • *Theater* 1987, acrylic on canvas, 68.5 x 89 cm / 27 x 35 inches

Plate 36 • *Carmen* 1990, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 89 cm / 28 x 35 inches

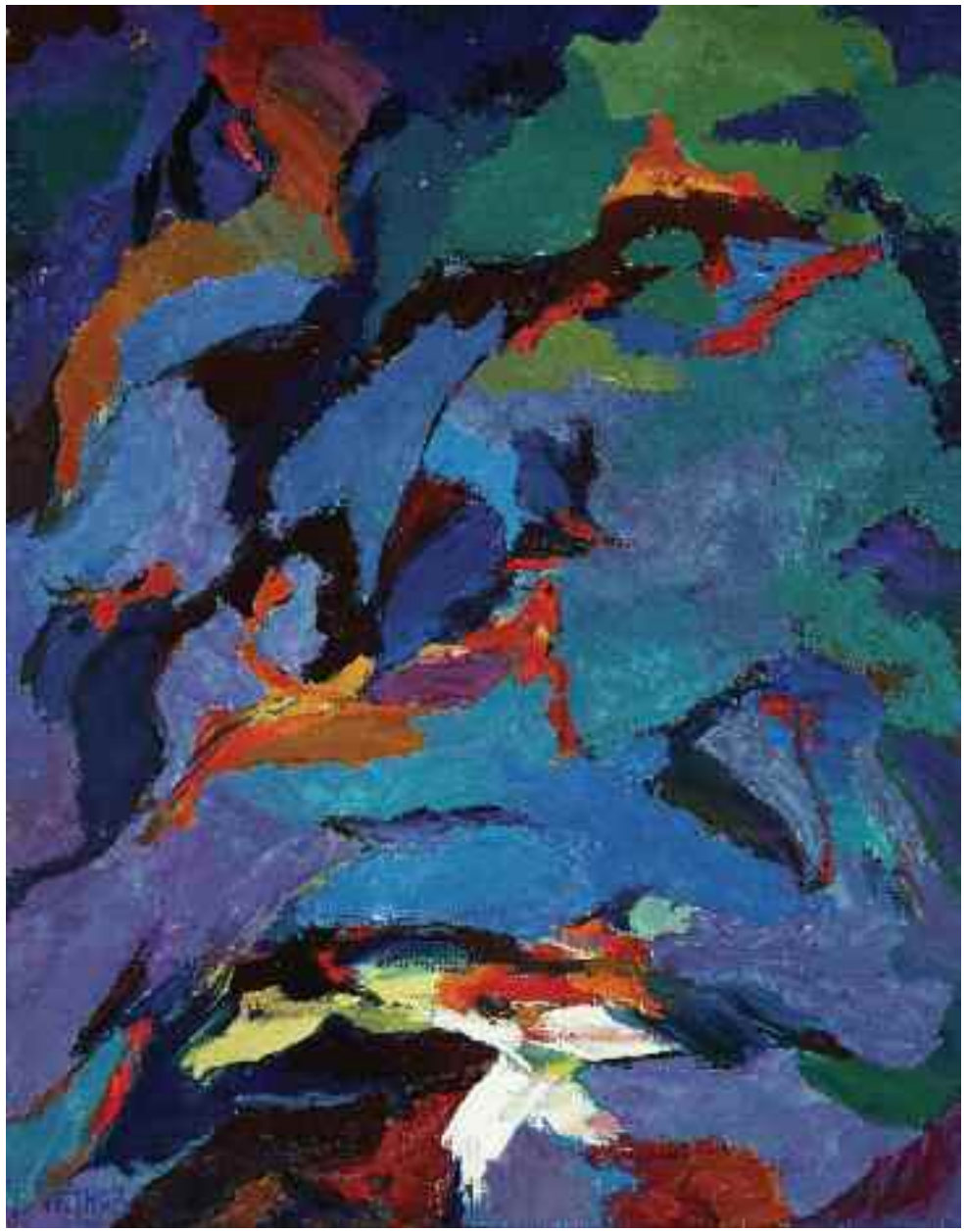

Plate 37 • *Run* 2002, acrylic on canvas, 94 x 74 cm / 37 x 29 inches

Fig. 29
Maquette-Cosmos
1978 gouache
on board,
32 x 41 cm
12.5 x 16 inches

In the 1970s, Chetkov found a measure of notoriety when he was commissioned to create a series of stained glass compositions for State installations such as *Cosmos* (Fig.?), which was designed for the Baikonur Cosmodrome. For Chetkov, who had been marginalized throughout his artistic career, this was as close as he would ever come to producing "Official" art.

Chetkov's work as a professional glass worker coincided with a fortunate time when experimentation was at its height. By keeping away from the eyes of the censors who were focused on the traditional decorative arts of painting and sculpture, Chetkov granted himself a certain degree of freedom to exhibit in other mediums. A rebel by nature, he rejected utilitarian functionality and instead began to produce three-dimensional objects which reflected his interests in colour and volume (*Fig. ?*). In 1960 sulphide glass had been created which opened up new opportunities to create different forms of coloured glass which Chetkov used to his full advantage. As with his paintings, Chetkov suffused his glass with rich colours and played with the tactile quality of the medium.

In 1993 an exhibition was held in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg of the work of Ernst Fuchs, from the Viennese school of Fantastical Realism. His works make use of Symbolism, literary content and psychedelic immersion in the self. While Fuchs was essentially an illustrator, Chetkov was attracted to his quirky personality and bazaar philosphy — traits which were suppressed and rare in Soviet culture. The following year Chetkov met the artist again in Vienna and adopting his own version of Fuch's mystical philosphy, Chetkov began to present himself as the head of the Russian faction of the Vienna School of Fantastical Realism.

CONCLUSION ■ It is difficult to trace a clear chronology of development throughout Chetkov's career. His tendency to revisit ideas and simultaneously embody various styles makes a linear history difficult. He produced numerous pictures later in life which were inspired by the memories of his youth. However, by exploring how Chetkov continuously returned to the theme of landscape and genre paintings, it is possible to get a sense of the varied subjects and strands of thought that evolved throughout his career. Landscape and genre paintings have been traditional subjects throughout the history of Russian art from the Wanderers to today. Chetkov took elements from these different artists and movements and used them to develop his own direction. He was primarily interested in experimenting with colour and form. Chetkov's version of painterly abstraction is characterised by impasto application,

energetic and emotive forms and exceptionally vivid colour.

Chetkov both inherits and reinvents the traditions of Russian art. He was a bold experimenter who took artistic risks which resulted in the creation of original and stunning images. He developed his own unique unofficial artistic style. We could describe his work as a new hybrid of Fantastic Realism and Primitivism. Chetkov through the course of his life, and the depth and breadth of his expression, ultimately could be said to have created his own school which we can call 'Experimentalism'. Rather than overtly political or conceptual, his school of painting depicts a spiritual and folkloric impression of rural Russia. He repeatedly returned to the places and influences of his childhood. Religion, everyday life and the raw forms and colours of nature are themes extensively explored in Chetkov's works. They often take the form of gestural compositions in varying degrees of abstraction.

His Experimentalist style mixes elements of folk art and primitivism, spirituality and the Russian avant-garde. Chetkov's oeuvre is visually and thematically reminiscent of the early works of Kandinsky, Goncharova and Lentulov. However, his choice of subjects and attraction to nature also recalls the strong tradition of landscape painting in Russia. His works allude to the traditions established by Shishkin, Levitan, Kuindzhi and other early masters of the genre. Chetkov stated that "creativity is a state of experimentation." [64] While he claimed he never consciously followed the influence of these earlier masters, we can easily see comparisons with their work. In carving his own path, Chetkov established himself as an important contributor and spiritual heir to this Russian artistic legacy.

Official histories of the Soviet Union still neglect the range of cultural expression produced. The conventional view that Socialist Realism dominated Soviet art and culture up to 1985 and the beginnings of *perestroika* (reconstruction) is only now being challenged. Artists who worked against the doctrines of the state have often been omitted from the history of art, pushed aside for their failure to comply with Soviet culture under conditions of totalitarian rule. Chetkov is one of these artists who has been overlooked in literature on twentieth century Russian art. I hope that this book sheds some light on this artist and sets out why he is worthy of our attention. It is for future scholars to further investigate this fruitful period of creativity in the second half of the twentieth century and to consider those rare artists who worked in the Soviet Union but were not part of the official discourse of Socialist Realism. It is time for these artists to reclaim their place in the history of art. The recognition of Chetkov as an artistic genius in Russia is long overdue.

Plate 38 • *Old Staraya Ladoga Church of St. Nickolas* 1995, acrylic on canvas, 56 x 66 cm / 22 x 26 inches

Plate 39 • *Christmas* 1996, acrylic on canvas, 58.5 x 81 cm / 23 x 32 inches

Plate 40 • *Blue Day* 1996, acrylic on canvas, 81 x 71 cm / 32 x 28 inches

Plate 41 • *Picnic* 2003, acrylic on canvas, 81 x 71 cm / 32 x 28 inches

Plate 42 • *Mirage* 1986, acrylic on panel, 81 x 71 cm / 32 x 28 inches

Plate 43 • *Old Staraya Ladoga* 1989, acrylic on canvas, 51 x 101.5 cm / 20 x 40 inches

Plate 44 • *Evening* 1994, oil & acrylic on canvas, 51 x 63.5 cm / 20 x 25 inches

Plate 45 • *Golden Evening* 1994, oil & acrylic on canvas, 67 x 62 cm / 26.5 x 24.5 inches

Plate 46 • *Seaside* 1960, oil on board, 70 x 51 cm / 27.5 x 20 inches

Plate 47 • *Annunciation* 1993, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 81 cm / 28 x 32 inches

Plate 48 • *Colorful Village* 1993, acrylic on canvas, 71 × 81 cm / 28 × 32 inches

Plate 49 • *April* 1968 oil on canvas, 40.5 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

Plate 50 • *White Cloud of Apple Blossoms* 1968–69, oil on canvas, 80 x 90 cm / 31.5 x 35.5 inches

Plate 51 • *Morning on the Ladoga* 1993, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 81 cm / 28 x 32 inches

Plate 52 • *Rays of Sun* 2005, acrylic on canvas, 71 × 81 cm / 28 × 32 inches

Plate 53 • *Southern Shore of the Crimea* 1973, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 58.5 cm / 18 x 23 inches

Plate 54 • *Urban Composition* 1988, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 66 cm / 30 x 26 inches

Plate 55 • *Old Man and Old Woman* 1970 acrylic on panel, 51 x 81 cm / 20 x 32 inches

Plate 56 • *There Will Be Light* 1959, oil on board, 30.5 × 51 cm / 12 × 20 inches

Plate 57 • *Black Moon Above the City* 1970, oil on board, 35.5 x 51 cm / 14 x 20 inches

Plate 58 • *Petrushka the Traveler* 1975, oil on panel, 48 x 68.5 cm / 19 x 27 inches

Plate 59 • *Game of Black Balls* 1969, acrylic on panel, 71 x 51 cm / 28 x 20 inches

Plate 60 • *Aleko of Nostalgia* 1993, oil on canvas, 70 x 80 cm / 27.5 x 31.5 inches
Right: Plate 61 • *Declaration of Love* 1966, oil & acrylic on canvas, 80 x 51 cm / 31.5 x 20 inches

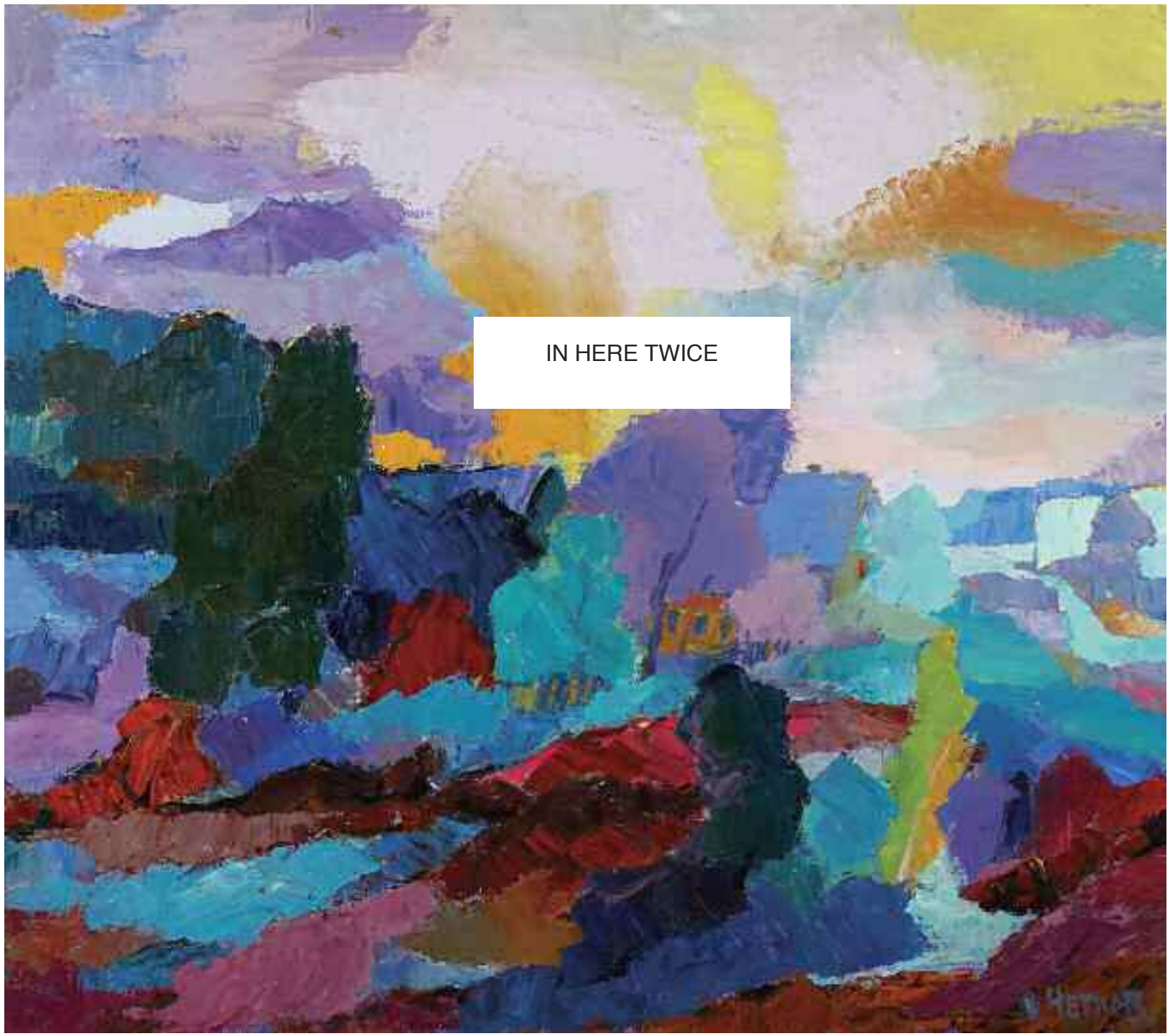

Plate 62 • *Morning on the Ladoga* 1993, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 81 cm / 28 x 32 inches

Plate 63 • *The Meeting* 1990, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 73.5 cm / 28 x 29 inches

Plate 64 • *Russian Women with Aliens* 1969, oil & acrylic on canvas, 70 x 51 cm / 27.5 x 20 inches

Plate 65 • *Russian Men* 1972, oil & acrylic on canvas, 71 x 51 cm / 28 x 20 inches

Plate 66 • *Roofs* 2003 acrylic on panel, 61 x 81 cm / 24 x 32 inches

Plate 67 • *Supposed Man Against the Blue* 1970, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 61 cm / 29 x 24 inches

Plate 68 • *Corrida* 1990, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 81 cm / 24 x 32 inches

Plate 69 • *Evening, Premonition of a Thunderstorm* 1994, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 81 cm / 24 x 32 inches

Plate 70 • *Port of Arkhangelsk* 1957, oil on canvas, 41 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

Plate 71 • *Landscape on a River* 1970, acrylic on panel, 41 x 51 cm / 16 x 20 inches

Plate 72 • *Fisherman at the Dam* 1965, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 58.5 cm / 18 x 23 inches

Plate 73 • *Blue Haze* 1966, oil on canvas, 90 x 64 cm / 35.5 x 25.3 inches

Plate 74 • *Maybe* 2009 oil & acrylic on canvas, 71 x 86 cm / 28 x 34 inches

Plate 75 • *Horses Turning Large* 1994, acrylic on canvas, 109 x 129.5 cm / 43 x 51 inches

NOTES

1. B. Chetkov. Interview with Kenneth Pushkin, July 20, 2004. Hereafter referred to as *Interview*.

2. M. C. Bown and B. Taylor, eds., *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917–1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 2.

3. *Re-imagining Russia: The Landscape and Genre Paintings of Boris Chetkov*, The Westbury Hotel. London. 22-4 November 2013. Exhibition curated by the author.

4. A. Borovsky, *Boris Chetkov. Portraitist.* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: The Pushkin Group, 2008).

5. A. Borovsky, *Boris Chetkov. Russian Modernist. Across All Barriers* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: The Pushkin Group, 2006).

6. A. Kostenevich, *Furious Chetkov*. 'Introduction' in A. Borovsky, *Boris Chetkov. Portraitist,* p. 13.

7. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* Manuscript, Archives of Kenneth Pushkin (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2003), p. 2.

8. Kandinsky's favourite and recurring motif is the horseman which he also used on the covers of his theoretical manifesto *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) and the *Blue Rider Almanac* (1912).

9. See entry for Plate 170 Kandinsky's 'Sketch for Composition II' in *Russia! Catalogue of the Exhibition*. (New York: Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 2005), p. 40.

10. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences*, p. 2. Emphasis added.

11. B. Chetkov cited in *Interview*. Vladimir Eifert was the Deputy Director of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and a close friend of the well-known curator Igor Grabar. He was sent to Kazakhstan when Stalin banished anyone of German origin from the Russian capital. Chetkov explains: "…about 5000 reproductions I studied. Various artists he [Eifert] acquainted us with the history of art from the very beginning, from the moment art appeared. Dutch, African, everything!".

12. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* p. 2.

11. W. Kandinsky. Cited in A. Borovsky, *Boris Chetkov. Russian Modernist.* p. 6.

14. Ibid, pp. 5-6.

15. Niko Pirosmanashvili (1862–1918) was a self-taught Georgian primitivist painter known for painting scenes of rural life.

16. In 1913 Mikhail Larionov organised an *Exhibition of Icons and Lubki* in Moscow to highlight Russia's cultural legacy.

17. D. Elliott. *100 Years of Russian Art, 1889–1989: From Private Collections in the USSR.* (Oxford: Lund Humphries with Barbican Art Gallery and Museum of Modern Art, 1989). p. 9.

18. Ibid.

19. In 1861 serfdom, the system which tied the Russian peasants irrevocably to their landlords, was abolished at the Tsar's imperial command. This was the first and most important of liberal reforms effected during the reign of Alexander II of Russia.

20. See C. Gray *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*. (New York: Abrams, 1962). This work also recalls Mikhail Vrubel's mosaic like paintings and ceramics at the Abramtsevo estate near Moscow.

21. See J. E. Bowlt 'The Neo-Russian Style' in N. Rzhevsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* (second edition) (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 223-249.

22. N. Goncharova. 'Preface to catalogue of one-man exhibition', 1913. See A. Parton. *Goncharova: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova* (London: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd, 2010).

23. For further reading see Gray. *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922*. The Knave of Diamonds group's first exhibition took place January 1911 and included the Burliuk brothers, Larionov, Goncharova, Lentulov, Exter and Kandinsky. It also included the so-called Russian Cézannists Falk, Konchalovsky, Mashkov and a group of French artists.

24. See I. Mikhailova. *Philosophical-methodological Analysis of the Art of Fantastical Realism (Based on the Art of Boris Chetkov)* (St. Petersburg, 2005).

25. See J. E. Bowlt and R. W. Long, eds., *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of "On The Spiritual in Art"* (Newtownville, 1984).

26. W. Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. (1911). Translated by M. Sadler. (Republished by Dover Publications, 1977). In interpreting art as a vehicle of transcendence, Kandinsky shared a common desire with many of the Russian Symbolist writers such as Bely, Blok and Vladimir Soloviev. See J. Bowlt's chapter 'Art. The Neo-Russian Style' in N. Rzhevsky, ed., The *Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture,* pp. 213-249.

27. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* p. 6.

28. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911). Cited in Anna Moszynska, *Abstract Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990).

29. Ibid.

30. B. Chetkov. *Interview*.

31. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* p 6.

32. W. Kandinsky. Cited in P. van der Veer. *Spirituality*: *East and West*. (Utrecht,

The Netherlands, 2006), p. 50.

33. W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. (1911).

34. B. Chetkov. *Interview*. Emphasis added.

35. D. Jackson. *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth Century Russian Painting*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.119.

36. Ivan Turgenev 'Singers' in *Sketches from a Hunter's Album,* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 162-3. First published in *The Contemporary*, No. 11, 1850.

37. See D. Jackson. *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth Century Russian Painting*, pp.122-133.

38. E. K. Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art. The State and Society. The Peredvizhniki and their Tradition*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 77 quoting *The Cause*, No. 12, December 1871, p. 117.

39. See V. Lenyashin and V. Kruglov. *Russian Impressionism. Painting from the Collection of the Russian Museum*. (St Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2000).

40. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences*, p.7.

41. I. Levitan quoted in T. Yurova, (Leningrad: Aurora, 1988), p. 11.

42. B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* Manuscript, Archives of Kenneth Pushkin (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2003), p. 4.

43 For further reading see A. Bird, *A History of Russian Painting* (Oxford, 1987).

44. See D. Jackson. *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth Century Russian Painting*, p.128.

45. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* p.3. Emphasis added. The Young Pioneer Organization was a mass youth organization of the USSR for children of age 10–15 in the Soviet Union between 1922 and 1991.

46. Pavel Tretyakov quoted in A. Botkina, *Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov in Life and Art*, (Moscow, 1993), p. 42.

47. See A. Borovsky's survey of 'Non-Conformist Art in Leningrad' looking at the diversity of artistic expression from the 1950s to the present day against a background of restrictions. Chapter 12 in Bown and Taylor, eds., *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992*.

48. The mid 1970s saw the peak of the official struggle against Nonconformism in Moscow and Leningrad such as the Bulldozer Art exhibition in Moscow of 1974. See ibid.

49. Ibid, p. 9.

50. Non-Conformist art refers to 'underground' or 'unofficial' art in the Soviet Union. It is mainly applied to artwork produced from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. The term also suggests the artist's independence from Soviet ideology.

51. Socialist Realism was the officially Marxist aesthetic for the visual arts which had propagandistic and ideological functions. Socialist Realist paintings and sculptures used naturalistic idealisation to portray workers and daily life in the Soviet Union. In 1932 the Central Committee of the Communist Party decreed that all existing literary and artistic groups and organizations should be disbanded and replaced with unified associations of creative professions which brought the history of post-revolutionary art to an end. Well known Soviet artists include: Brodsky, Samokhvalov, Ioganson, Deineka, Laktionov and Gerasimov who produced a large number of heroic paintings of Joseph Stalin and other members of the Politburo.

lii Zhdanov, speech in J. Bowlt. *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde. Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 283.

liii B. Chetkov. *Interview*.

liv A. Bird, *A History of Russian Painting*, p. 274.

lv B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences*, pp. 7-8.

lvi For a more detailed description of this exhibition and the political fallout see A. Bird, *A History of Russian Painting,* pp. 270-271.

lvii Nikita Krushchev, 1962. Cited in V. G. Swanson, *Soviet Impressionism* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2001), p. 197.

lviii The first exhibition of Picasso in Moscow only took place in 1957. It was not until 1959 that American art was displayed. The Archives of American Art organised in Moscow the first public showing of the Abstract Expressionists, including Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Georgia O'Keefe. These exhibitions are credited with accelerating the breakdown of traditional values in Soviet art.

lix See Chapter One, 'My Country, 'Tis of Thee…' in M. C. Bown, *Contemporary Russian Art* (Oxford, 1989).

lx A.K. Lebedev, 1962. Cited in V. G. Swanson, *Soviet Impressionism.* p. 200.

lxi B. Chetkov, cited in A. Borovsky, *Boris Chetkov. Russian Modernist. Across All Barriers*, p. 13.

lxii B. Chetkov, *Reminiscences,* p. 9.

lxiii See A. Borovsky, *Boris Chetkov. Portraitist.*

lxiv Ibid.

Plate 76 • *Sunset* 1959, oil on masonite, 49.5 x 39 cm / 19.5 x 15.5 inches

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

1970 *Avant-garde Paintings,* Kirov's Palace, Leningrad
1971 *Art of the Avant-garde*, Palace of the Youth, Leningrad
1973 *Boris Chetkov*, Coffeehouse, Summer Garden, The Hermitage, Leningrad
1974 *World Exhibition*, Center of Modern Art, Osaka, Japan
1975 *World Exhibition*, Sapporo, Japan
1978 *5th International Exhibition of Contemporary Russian Painters*, Vienna, Austria, Munich, Germany and Paris, France
1979 *Paintings, Graphics, Glass*, House of Scientists, the Hermitage, Leningrad
1980 *Boris Chetkov*, Blue Reception Room of the Artists' Union, Leningrad
1983 *Avant-garde Paintings*, Kirov's Palace, Leningrad
1985 *Annual Exhibition*, Manege, Leningrad
1989 *Two Generations*, Museum of Modern Art, Perth, Australia
1989 *Paintings, Graphics, Glass*, Five Angles, Leningrad
1991 *Boris Chetkov*, Museum of Finnish Glass, Saareyami, Finland
1991 *Invitational Exhibition*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Saarijärven, Finland
1991 *Annual Exhibition*, Manege, St Petersburg
1991 *Kustarnei on Liteini*, Borei Gallery, St Petersburg
1993 *Boris Chetkov*, Center for Contemporary Art, Marseilles, France
1993 *Boris Chetkov*, Forum, St Petersburg
1993 *Exhibition dedicated to 90th Anniversary of the Artist B. Smirnov*, Manege, St Petersburg
1993 *Art of The New Epic*, National Library, Berlin, Germany
1994 *International Glass Artists Exhibition* Alborelli Gallery, Venice, Italy
1994 *125th Anniversary International Exhibition*, Kunstlerhaus am Karlsplatz, Vienna, Austria
1994 *Annual Exhibition*, Manege, St Petersburg
1995 *The Spiritual Heritage*, Museum Schlob Ehrenburg, Coburg, Bavaria
1995 *Artist's Vocation*, Château de Rochegude Drôme, France
1995 *Broman 200th Anniversary Exhibition*, Rauma Art Museum, Rauma, Finland
1996 *Annual Exhibition*, Kassel Reserve, Kassel, Germany
1997 *10th Anniversary Exhibition*, Institut d'Études Supérieures des Arts, Paris, France
1997 *The Legendary Heritage*, Musaus Anniversary Exhibition, Ehrenburg, Germany
1998 *War and Peace*, Schopenhauer Archive, Frankfurt, Germany
1998 *Symbolism in the Real World*, Museum Villa Schtuck, Munich, Germany
1999 *Fantasy and Reality*, Schonbusch Castle, Ashaffenburg, Germany
2000 *Avant-garde Artists*, Obvodny Gallery, St Petersburg
2001 Forum Gallery St. Petersburg
2002 *The Union of Artists 70th Anniversary Exhibition*, Manege, St. Petersburg
2003 *Artists of the City Annual Exhibition*, Manege, St Petersburg
2005 Solo Exhibition, Kwang Hwa Cultural Center, Hong Kong
2009 – 10 National Congress Palace at Konstantinovsky (Presidential Residence). The last exhibition in Chetkov's lifetime and the first solo exhibit presented at the Palace
2012 *Boris Chetkov* , Solo exhibition, Howell Gallery, Oklahoma City
2013 *Re-Imagining Russia: Boris Chetkov Landscape & Genre Paintings*, Retrospective exhibition, Russian Art Week, London

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T. Yurova, *Levitan* (Leningrad: Aurora, 1988)