

Russian Fine Arts Section at the World's Columbian Exposition 1893

Notes on Organization and Reception

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Abstract Russian participation in American 19th-century World Fairs remains a rather neglected topic. The Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago was the largest and most ambitious fair before Paris 1900 and was considered an important event by Russian institutions. The expositional committee in St. Petersburg released publications on Russian economics, industry, technologies, etc. specifically for the occasion. Although international exhibitions in the 19th century were, first of all, industrial and technological displays, the artistic representation of a country had played a role since the first exposition in London in 1851 and was supposed to show the development of the national artistic school. Based on archival documents and published correspondence, the case of Russian fine arts participation at the Chicago exposition is examined. An attempt is made to outline the organizational issues as well as reception of Russian fine arts in the USA at that time.

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Keywords World's Columbian Exposition. Russian fine arts. Imperial Fine Arts Academy. Peredvizhniki. Russian painters in America.

1 Introduction

In the spring of 1893 in Chicago, the World's Columbian Exposition opened its gates to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival to the American shores. After the Philadelphian Centennial Exhibition in 1876 it is considered as the second official international exposition held in the USA, and the Russian Empire participated in both of these fairs. A special committee was organized to prepare for the Columbian Exposition in St. Petersburg and Pavel Glukhovskoy, member of The Council of the Ministry of Finance, was appointed as a general commissioner of the Russian department at the Fair. The Imperial Fine Arts Academy had to organize the Russian fine arts section, which was supposed to show the development of the national artistic school.

One of the valuable sources for describing the organization of the Russian fine arts section at the Columbian Exposition are the documents of the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), which contain some of the correspondence between the artists and the commission which was responsible for the exhibition and the letters of Feodor Kamensky, the curator of the Russian fine arts section in Chicago. To overview the reception of the Russian fine arts section, the main sources are the reviews of an American historian

Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832-1918) – *The Book of the Fair* (1893), and of painter and art critic William Walton (1843-1915) – *Art and Architecture* (1893). For the time, the principal research concerning the topic of Russian participation at the nineteenth century world's expositions is the dissertation of Dr. David C. Fisher, who studied the problem of defining Russia's national identity by participation in international fairs (Fisher 2001), though approaches to examine Russia's art and architecture have been made since the 1970s. This article exposes the factors that influenced the formation of a particular Russian fine arts collection at the Columbian Exposition and outlines the possible reasons for the public interest in it and in certain painters.

2 Organizing the Russian fine arts section

Since the London 1862 international Fair, Russian sections of the Fine Arts department had been organized by the Russian Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. Traditionally, a special commission of professors and administrative staff, who selected the artworks, was formed. In 1862 the exposition of the Russian section should have been comprised of the works from private and imperial family collections and was supposed to



Figure 1. Ilya Repin. *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1880-1891. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. Source: Wikimedia Commons

demonstrate the development of Russian art over the last hundred years (Kutejnikova 1971, 89). However, not all of the owners agreed to loan their works, so the expositional concept changed and instead it was decided to take the works of artists who were recently awarded an academic title or a golden medal. For the Paris Fair of 1878 the commission offered the 'eminent painters' to exhibit their works. Although the collectors (for example the Tretyakov brothers, the Moscow patrons of art who owned a great collection of Russian art) were willing to give the works, the *Peredvizhniki* (or *the Wanderers*), the group of realist¹ artists, refused to contribute as at that time they generally set themselves aside from the official policy of the Academy.

By the 1890s the disposition had changed and the *Peredvizhniki* gained an influential role in institutional issues. Preparation for the Colum-

bian Exposition occurred at a crucial moment for the Academy. The group of reformers led by the count Ivan Tolstoy (1858-1916), a conference-secretary of the Academy and later its vice-president, pursued a policy of transforming the academic teaching system. In 1890 Tolstoy managed to get a resolution for creating a special commission, which, by 1893, had developed new academic bylaws, enacted in 1894 (Lisovskij 1982, 136). One of the changes was the formation of personal workshops instead of the former educational format, which was divided into classes of historical, portrait, genre, military and landscape painting. Some former or current members of the *Peredvizhniki* group got their workshops. Vladimir Makovsky (1846-1920), Ilya Repin (1844-1930) and Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842-1910) who joined the commission for forming the Russian art collection at the Chicago Exposition also appeared among the first professors in that new academic system. At the same time, in the early 1890s, the art of the *Peredvizhniki* became almost 'official', which was actually confirmed by the institutional recognition of the artists named above as Academic professors.

Count Tolstoy with Repin, Kuindzhi, Makovsky, Karl Lemoch (1841-1910) and Alexey Korzukhin

¹ A very influential Russian art critic Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906) associated the group with the motto "nationality and realism" and interpreted their art as confronting the academic idealistic and cosmopolite approach in art - which affected the reception of *Peredvizhniki's* art at their times and later (Shabanov 2015, 12), though there actually was not a clear border between the two 'camps' of artists and they existed in confrontation and interrelation at the same time.



Figure 2. Heinrich Semiradsky. *Phryne*, 1889. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. Source: Wikimedia Commons

(1835-1894),² also members of the *Peredvizhniki*, formed a commission to organize the Russian fine arts collection in Chicago. At the first meeting on the 5th of May 1892³ they made a list of 65 artists and later sent out invitation letters. It was planned to organize a special exhibition-review in the halls of the Academy. The participants were asked to reply whether they were ready to take part or not, and to deliver the works to the Academy by the 15th of August 1892. The Academy undertook all the further expenses for the chosen works.⁴

Apparently there was no particular conception for the exposition so all the willing artists were allowed to present their works. Artists were aware of the forthcoming exhibition before the official invitation and some used their friendship with Tolstoy for personal gain – the count received letters in which he was asked to intercede for the works in front of the Academy's president. For example, Pelageya Couriar (1848-1898) on the 9th of November 1891 wrote asking for permission to forward her painting to Chicago as she had acquaintances there persuading

her to send something (*Vo glave Imperatorskoj akademii* 2009, 185). Her *Landscape*, which was finally shipped to the exposition appeared to be on the short list of sold Russian artworks. The other artist, Nikolay Dmitriev-Orenburgsky (1837-1898), a few days before the deadline for the review exhibition in the Academy, also wrote to Tolstoy. He described being very busy painting in his village during those “perfect days” and therefore he did not want to go to St. Petersburg. So he asked Tolstoy to take and bring two of his works from the studio in the Academy to the exhibition halls.⁵ Apparently Tolstoy did that favour, as three works of Dmitriev-Orenburgsky were eventually sent to Chicago.

Among the reasons for the impossibility of sending the artworks was, as previously, the problem of ownership. Not every collector granted permission to ship works to Chicago. A situation of that kind happened to the respectful artist Viktor Vasnetsov (1848-1926). According to his personal correspondence with Tolstoy an invitation had not been delivered to the artist but, as a result of the ‘friendly insistence’ of Kuindzhi, he decided to send his famous *Alionushka* and *A*

² Paintings of Lemoch and Korzukhin were represented at the Philadelphian Fair in 1876.

³ Correspondence from count Tolstoy. RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 35, 37-40.

⁴ RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 138.

⁵ Correspondence from Dmitriev-Orenburgsky. RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 233.



Figure 3. Nikolay Kusnetsov. *An Arbiter of Peace*, 1888. David Owsley Museum of Art Ball State University. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Knight at the Crossroads.⁶ However the owners did not allow it (*Vo glave Imperatorskoj akademii* 2009, 246).

In respect to some artists' demands, the commission made a request to take eleven works, most of which were in the battle genre – by Repin, Semiradsky, Vereshchagin, Bogolyubov, Dubovskoy, Beggrov, Kivshenko, Dmitriev-Orenburgsky – from the emperor's private collection. Alexander III only allowed the use of Repin's *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks (the Cossacks)* (fig. 1) and Semiradsky's *Phryne* (fig. 2). According to comments from reviewers in Chicago these two huge works aroused the greatest public interest.

Two works of Heinrich Semiradsky (1843-1902) appeared at the exhibition: *Phryne* and *Christ in the House of Lazarus*, even though he first proposed other paintings. The artist informed the Academy that he would like to send *Bakhus* and *The Temptation of St. Hieronymus*, but only if the emperor agreed to give *Phryne* from his collection, as those two mentioned paintings were less

valuable – both in size and subject – than *Phryne*.⁷ Nikolay Dubovskoy (1859-1918) wanted to send only a landscape: *Hushing (Calm Before the Storm)*.⁸ The emperor gave no permission but at the next Fair in Paris 1900 this painting was honored with the silver medal. Alexander Beggrov (1841-1914) in his letter to the Academy inquired upon his works and the commission's choice to collect the works belonging to the royal family, as he had no appropriate works for the moment.⁹ The commission found it possible to demand the *Deck of the Frigate "Svetlana"*, but was unsuccessful in obtaining it.

It is quite interesting that the emperor did not give any military paintings from his collection. And at the exposition there were almost no Russian works depicting battles or similar motifs. This fact was marked by William Walton – he was

⁶ The painting appeared at the Paris Exposition in 1900 entitled *Iliia, the Hero of Murom*.

⁷ Correspondence from Semiradsky. RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 175.

⁸ Correspondence from Dubovskoy. RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 164.

⁹ Correspondence from Beggrov. RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 169.

surprised by the absence of that topic among the artworks of a “great military empire” (Walton 1893, 71). Kivshenko’s *The Military Council at Fily* appeared to be the only significant “military picture”, referring to “the greatest catastrophe in Russian history – the fire of Moscow” during the war of 1812. The painting was perceived as a military one, even though the depicted scene was not a battle, but a council.

The existing popular apprehension of Russia in America in the late nineteenth century could be called fairly vague. In addition to existing stereotypes, such as cold snowy winters and Russian richness and (often senseless) luxury, which actually was always confirmed by varied exhibits in the Russian departments at fairs, a negative attitude was promoted by accusatory texts about the life of Russian political prisoners in Siberia and the whole system of Russian Siberian exile by journalist and traveler George Kennan (1845-1924), who returned back to America from Russia a few years before the Columbian Exposition. He criticized the tsarist regime and glorified the revolutionaries¹⁰ and his propaganda was widespread, thus it is possible to say that by 1893 a certainly not very iridescent image of Russia did exist. At the same time, positive interest aroused because of Russian liberal reforms, especially concerning serfdom – which was compared to American slavery (Pavlovskaja 1998, 204-41).

This could perhaps clarify the choice of paintings, which were provided with comments in the English version of a Russian general catalogue – thirteen paintings created during the previous decade by quite well-known artists in Russia. The subjects could have been unclear to foreigners – Korzukhin’s *The Brides Evening Party*, Novoskoltsev’s *The Last Moments of the Metropolitan Philip*, Miassoyedov’s *Flight of Grigory Otrepiev From a Tavern on the Frontier of Lithuania* and others. Most of the paintings depicted historical events or national customs, but two paintings were about the current social situation in Russia: *An Arbitrator of Peace* (fig. 3)¹¹ by Nikolay Kusnetsov (1850-1930) and *Alms for the Sake of Christ* (fig. 4) by Konstantin Savitsky (1844-1905). The first one was about the abolition of serfdom in Russia (in 1861), which set the peasants free on condition that they served



Figure 4. Konstantin Savitsky. *Alms for the Sake of Christ*, 1891-1892. Regional Art Museum in Irkutsk . Source: Artpoisk.info

their master for two years more before leaving. In order to prevent disputes between the peasants and their former masters, special “arbiters of peace” were introduced from “the best men of the nobility”, “impartial, just and disinterested” – who helped to change the rural and economic organization of the country without any riots (*Catalogue* 1893, 369). Actually, the arbiters of peace were indeed the ones who intended to help the peasants who were nearly always illiterate and unable to read or even sign the document for their liberation. The second painting was about the convicts in Siberia. The description of life of fugitive prisoners in “dark and lonesome” forests of Siberia was full of compassion: “they wander about in the wilderness, half naked, hungry and miserable” and “every evening, before going to rest, each peasant puts a loaf of bread and a jug of ‘kvass’, a home brewed sour liquor, made of malt, on the outer sill of their window with the words: ‘take it in Christ’s name’”. This help from common peasants was described as the only help the convicts got (*Catalogue* 1893, 376-77). Dr. Fisher considers that Russian department organizers at the international fairs always intended to educate foreigners about Russia (Fisher 2003, 13). Here also all the paintings’ explanations were most likely supposed to create a certain idealistic image of Russia’s past and present, although were not used by the commentators in their reviews.

¹⁰ His book *Siberia and the Exile System* was released in 1891 in two volumes.

¹¹ It was sold for 592 dollars to Mrs Arthur Caton from Chicago.

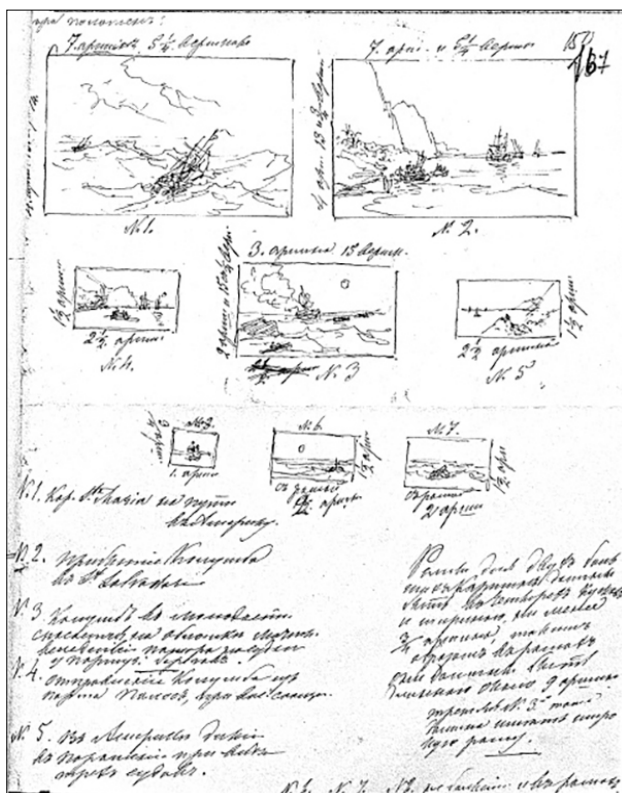


Figure 5. Correspondence from Ivan Aivazovsky . Source: RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-1, 167

3 Curator

A curator for the Russian section appeared unexpectedly (his assignment was not generally planned) right before the opening of the Fair – Feodor Kamensky (1836-1913), a Russian sculptor who had graduated from the Imperial Fine Arts Academy in 1873 and lived in America. His appearance became possible by virtue of Kamensky's sister, Sophia Nenninger, who ensured his promotion to the curator position in messages to Tolstoy. Kamensky participated in the American fine arts section's organization and also worked at the sculptor atelier creating statues and decorations for the Exposition's main buildings. As Sophia Nenninger claimed, her brother was ready to offer his services "for good reward". He was expected to help in the unpacking and installation of the sculptures, hanging the paintings, communication and other issues as he was familiar with local circumstances and knew not only Russian and English, but also Italian, French and Spanish. Nenninger was rather importunate

in her letters to the Academy¹² and it was finally arranged.

We learn About Kamensky's work at the Fair from his letters published in several spring issues of the Russian newspaper *Novosti i Birzhevaja Gazeta* and from his regular reports to the Academy. In general, his messages were highly positive and even too flattering for the Russian artists – as he did not mention any criticisms from the Americans at all.¹³ Kamensky stressed his importance to the Russian section in every way and thus had managed to get a good salary. His participation seemed to be rather efficient indeed, although the general commissioner of the Russian department did not always approve his actions. For example, the day before the official opening of the Russian fine arts section, Kamensky just let the public in, without waiting for the specially invited guests. At the same time he administrated the sales of artworks, which seemed to be difficult without well-organized communication with the painters living in Russia and Europe. Furthermore, Kamensky had no information concerning the minimal prices for the works. Just 22 of 135 Russian works were sold in Chicago.¹⁴ Some were sold for lower prices and some potential purchasers just moved to other countries' halls unable to wait longer for an answer from the Russian side – in addition to the economic depression that started that year in the USA.

4 Traces of the Russian artists in America: academic Salon art and the "national character"

By the time of the Exposition the image of Russian art was formed by the previous Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia, the reviews from European exhibitions, personal artists' displays and by a number of publications at such journals as *Harper's Magazine*, *Scribner's Monthly*, and *The Century*. In 1889 an art critic Clarence Cook (1828-1900) claimed that before Philadelphia there was hardly anyone familiar with any Russian artists. Still, the Russian fine arts exhibition in 1876 could not be compared to those in Europe

¹² Correspondence from Nenninger. RGIA f. 789, op. 11, d.80-1, 337, 347, 404.

¹³ Correspondence from Kamensky. RGIA f. 789, op. 11, d.80-2, 21.

¹⁴ List of Russian artworks sending to Chicago (with prices). RGIA f. 789, op. 11, d. 80-2, 154-158.

since too few eminent artists sent their works. Thus it might have been difficult to evaluate the Russian painting school (Cook 1889, 279). That did not quite relate to the Russian section in Chicago. Its content can be called characterizing for the period, bringing together academic 'idealists' and 'realists' who wanted to show a *national accent* in their art.

In December of 1889 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published an article entitled *Modern Russian Art* by the journalist and critic Theodore Child (1846-1892) in which he described, in detail, his visit to the Tretyakov's collection in Moscow. Among the painters he distinguished Ilya Repin - placing his works above the rest of Russian painting (Child 1889a, 78). At the Chicago Exposition only one of Repin's works was presented - but it became nearly the most important one of the Russian section. The huge *The Cossacks* was first shown in America in 1893, but some fragments of it could be seen as illustrations in a wide article published in the November issue of *The Century* and entitled *A Russian National Artist*, written by Isabel F. Hapgood (1851-1928), who was a translator of Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) and promoted Russian culture in America. Researcher T. Borodina claims that there were more reproductions of Repin's artworks during the 1880-1890s in America than in Russia and some of the engravings were made by the artist himself (Borodina 2008, 59-60). William Walton saw *The Cossacks* as revealing the "true national character" claiming it to be a masterpiece without an equal among ten thousand paintings in the international galleries at the Fair (Walton 1893, 62). Bancroft also admitted it to be a masterpiece - though he found the subject repulsive (Bancroft 1893, 755).

Marine painter Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900) took part in the previous fair in Philadelphia sending seven of his works. For Chicago he prepared twenty works - all of them approved by the commission. Five paintings contained scenes of Columbus' journey. One of them, *Columbus' Farewell*, was sold for 1200 dollars,¹⁵ less than Aivazovsky expected. We suppose that the buyer was a rather well-known art collector from New York, a German emigrant Charles William Schuman, a famous owner of a jewelry shop who - by that time - also possessed works of Konstantin Makovsky. In the archive's documents on sales

from that exhibition the buyer's name was written as: *Schuman New York* while other purchasers records were more detailed. In that case any comments were perhaps not necessary.

Apart from these five, Aivazovsky presented fifteen smaller paintings. The painter was known for being exceedingly productive and in 1898 the newspaper *Peterburgskaja Gazeta* even published an article entitled *Prilichija v Iskusstve (Decency in Art)* in which the author quoted the painter complaining about being accused of making too many small paintings and selling them cheaply - which was found 'indecent'. But Aivazovsky himself was convinced that by doing so he popularized art, making it more obtainable for those who could not afford larger paintings (Pr-ov, V. 1898).

Aivazovsky started preparing for Chicago long before the official invitation and wrote one letter after another to the Academy commission with sketches of his works (fig. 5) explaining the amount of space required. He indeed knew how to popularize his art. Having the works sent to the Academy in 1892, the artist took a trip to Chicago himself. He planned to reach Niagara Falls, visit some cities and afterwards come to Chicago for the Fair's opening. During his trip around the USA Aivazovsky created a lot of artworks and opened a personal exhibition in New York and Washington - with only seven of twenty four represented works painted in Russia. That visit was widely discussed in American and European press (Sargsian 1986, 85) and was also important in a diplomatic sense as the two paintings created in Russia - *The Ship of Help* and *Food Distribution* depicting the American philanthropic campaign in the southern region of the Russian Empire - were gifted to the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington (and later sold at *Sotheby's*).

The painter returned to Europe in the winter of 1893, before the Fair's opening but his artistic presentation in the USA had already made him famous there. Six of his paintings were later sold in Chicago and the rest (excluding two stolen during packaging) were taken to San Francisco, where a new international exhibition had to be opened on the 27th of January 1894 - the *Mid-winter International Exposition*.

Another artist familiar to Americans was Konstantin Makovsky (1839-1915). The aforementioned Charles William Schuman purchased his *A Boyar Wedding Feast* for 60.000 dollars as far back as 1885 - after its presentation at the international exhibition in Antwerp (Plenniki krasoty 2011, 124). Schuman used to collect European Sa-

15 List of Russian artworks sold at Columbian Exposition. RGIA f.789, op.11, d.80-2, 103.



Figure 6. Hall of the Russian section in the Fine arts Palace. Source: Glukhovskoy (1895), Wikimedia Commons

lon art and by 1891 he owned four of Makovsky's paintings, which he described with the rest of his collection in a brochure *Art and Gems* (1891) and exhibited in New York and other cities. It is considered that Makovsky became famous in America through Schuman. In press during the 1890s Makovsky was shown as a "new Russian genius in art", whose oeuvre proved that "Russia shined in art as in literature" (Plenniki krasoty 2011, 125). However, at the Columbian Exposition, Schuman did not buy any of Makovsky's paintings and all of them were forwarded to the Midwinter International Exposition with the works of Aivazovsky. The fact that the paintings were sent to that exhibition in California showed the attitude towards them as valuable works. The exhibition appeared to be an extension of Chicago's and, according to the concept, only the best items would be selected for it (Smith [2005] 2006, 113).¹⁶

Heinrich Semiradsky participating at the Centennial Exhibition was also famous throughout Europe and his *Phryne* became one of the most striking showpieces of the Russian section. He wanted to exhibit it in 1889 at the Exposition in Paris if Russia would participate. Instead, Semiradsky opened a personal display in Saint

Petersburg where Alexander III purchased the painting to his collection and brought up - for the first time in public - the question of a Russian national fine arts museum. In fact, the painting had formed the base of what now is the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg (Plenniki krasoty 2011, 32-34).

Kamensky, referencing *Phryne*, reported to the Academy that "Semiradsky's work was doing a credit to Russia".¹⁷ Although William Walton remarked that while the composition was indeed inventive, the painting lacked sincerity and conviction (Walton 1893, 66-67). Bancroft also wrote that "though with strong virility of conception and execution, it is rather a spectacular than an artistic composition, with lavishness, not to say garishness of colouring", concluding that it may had been a fair interpretation of Slavic art, but not art in its higher sense (Bancroft 1893, 756). Nevertheless, potential buyers were interested in Semiradsky's paintings and Kamensky even asked the Academy to send him the artist's address. Despite not being for sale, both his paintings had prices - forty thousand rubles for *Phryne* and seven thousand for *Christ in the House of Lazarus*.¹⁸

¹⁷ Correspondence from Kamensky. RGIA f. 789, op. 11, d. 80-2, 10.

¹⁶ Makovsky's *The Toilet of the Bride* was left in California (now at de Young Fine Arts museum).

¹⁸ List of Russian artworks meant to be sent to Chicago (with prices). RGIA f. 789, op. 11, d. 80-2, 154-58.

It is worth noting that none of Vassily Vereshchagin's (1842-1904) works were presented in Chicago, although he was one of the most famous Russian artists in America at the time: in 1881 *Scribner's Monthly* magazine published a wide article concerning his art; in 1888-1891 his large exhibition in America had been run, by the end of which 110 artworks were sold at auction (Zhuravleva 2012, 296-97). His painting *The Siege of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra* was unsuccessfully requested from Alexander III's collection for exhibition at the Columbian Exposition. Nevertheless, it might be said that the painter himself was present at the Fair - in a symbolic way - as a bronze statue by Ilya Gintzburg (1859-1939), which was bought for the museum in Saint-Louis by Mr. Halsey Cooley Ives,¹⁹ the director of the Fine Arts Department, marking Vereshchagin's recognition in America.

Art of the Russian Salon and 'national realism' happened to oppose each other on the walls of the exhibition halls in Chicago (fig. 6) - which in some way corresponded with the artistic situation in Russia. Semiradsky and Makovsky were among the most famous Russian artists in America and their paintings were among the most broad-scale works at the Russian section, but William Walton saw a lack of 'national' in them (Walton 1893, 66) declaring that the "real national accent" was achieved by Repin in his *The Cossacks*. Walton also proclaimed Repin to be "a realist, a democrat, a man newly arrived at 'intelligence'" quoting Theodore Child's article about contemporary Russian art (Walton 1893, 62-63). Repin and Semiradsky are considered to be the main representatives of the two 'confronting' leagues of artists, standing respectively for 'the real' and 'the ideal' and seeing the purposes and means of art differently (Has'janova 2001, 8). In American press Aivazovsky, as "the first among the idealists" was contraposed to Repin as "the first among the realists" - which was reflected in an issue of the *American Herald* (Russkij Hudozhestvennyj Otdel 1893). The note was almost entirely about Aivazovsky praise from the American public. Of course not all of the reviewers were positive. Bancroft was more than sceptical, saying about his paintings that most of them were marines and none of them very remarkable, except for the luminosity of hue (Bancroft 1893, 756). William Walton only noted the large num-

ber of Aivazovsky's works without any interest in actually describing them (Walton 1893, 70).

The hint of contraposition could be already seen in the earlier American text, though without accenting on *national*. In the illustrated catalogue for the masterpieces of the previous Centennial International Exhibition Semiradsky's work *The Amulet Seller* was reproduced and provided with a commentary, where Semiradsky was referred to representatives of a "Roman School" and his painting was called "the largest and the most important" work of that kind (Strahan 1876?, 302-03). Only after the passage about Semiradsky, although he of course was called Russian, an art historian Earl Shinn (pseudonym Edward Strahan, 1837-1886) turned to Russian contributors, shortly characterizing the set of works as the most striking and individual at the Fair and describing the rural *Old Russian Couple* by Nikolai Zagorsky (1849-893) who started to exhibit with Peredvizhniki since 1880 (Konovalov 2008, 206) and was presented in Chicago by two paintings (RGIA 80-82; 154-58). Mentioning one of them, *A Broken Heart*, depicting a mother comforting her daughter, Bancroft wrote with sympathy to such art: "Scattered among the more pretentious works are pictures of home and everyday life, in pleasing contrast with the highly wrought and sensuous paintings which surround them" (Bancroft 1893, 757). His other work *At Breakfast* received attention of William Walton, who defined it as "a very good example of the unpleasant domestic genre", marking the "forcibleness with which the artist has presented his little incident" (Walton 1893, 71).

5 Conclusions

As previously, the organization of Russian fine arts department was entrusted to the Imperial Fine Arts Academy - and the commission consisted of painters belonging to the *Peredvizhniki* group, which reflected their official approach with the Academy. The represented art collection, formed without specific conception and widely influenced by personal relation between the painters and the members of the commission, illustrated the end of the 'confrontation' between 'national artists' and academics and, to some extent, concluded the period in Russian art bringing together a number of very important works in the history of Russian painting. Actually, in the nineties of nineteenth century there already existed new art trends such as *art nouveau* and

¹⁹ He also bought two paintings: E. Polenova's *After the Bath*, for 51 \$ and K. Kryzhitsky's *A Night at Little Russia* for 204 \$.

impressionism, though this was not represented in Chicago but only the next world's fair in Paris.

At that time interest to Russian culture in America surely existed and was influenced among other things by several publications both positive and negative. Generally Russian fine arts was familiar to the readers of *Harper's Magazine*, *Scribner's Monthly*, and *The Century* by varied publications, and to art professionals in America – by previous American and European exhibitions and personal artists' show. As at other international fairs, Russian organizers of different departments intended to educate about the country – for this purpose served the commentaries in the general catalogue of the Russian section, explaining to foreigners some scenes and attributes difficult to understand, romanticizing the history of the country and life of its tsars and serfs.

Fortunate became the unexpected appearance of a curator for the Russian section, who managed the sales of artworks and communicated with the public. As in the reviews we can find the search for realistic 'national accent' in painting and sculpture, the list of sold works shows that buyers were also good at obtaining pleasurable Salon artworks such as *Landscape* by Couriar, *A Head of Italian Woman* by Alexeev, *A Silent Day, After the Storm* by Endogurov, marines of Aivazovsky and wanted to enrich their museums collections with the busts of eminent Russians like Tolstoy and Vereshchagin.

In any way, the exposition had to show a high level of Russian art, though professional opinion could be rather sceptical (Bancroft 1893, 754): "from a Russian point of view it is doubtless of excellent quality; but art is universal, and works of art cannot be judged by the tenets and methods of a single school. In this super-abundance of energy, too often accompanied with faulty modeling and colouring, there is *the intention rather than the embodiment of art*". The notion corresponded with the popular image of Russia as a semi-barbaric wild inartistic region (Wellman 1893, 1) and also referred to a French historian and architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc's (1814-1879) concept of Russian art as combination of western and eastern features, only being on its way to 'civilized' worldwide art. Printed in 1877 his research on development of Russian art and architecture, *L'art russe: ses origines, ses éléments constitutifs, son apogée, son avenir*, had finally influenced not only European but American attitude to it as well. Theodore Child in 1889 was describing Moscow architecture guided by

Viollet-le-Duc's ideas (Child 1889b, 342-44). In 1893 Wiliam Walton referred to Viollet-le-Duc concerning Russian applied arts (Walton 1893, 58-59) and, mentioning Pimonenko's *Easter Halloween*, he slightly mockingly wrote: "[that] may not be very high art", though "at least better than black-avisaged icons to be covered with gold plate" (Walton 1893, 65).

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