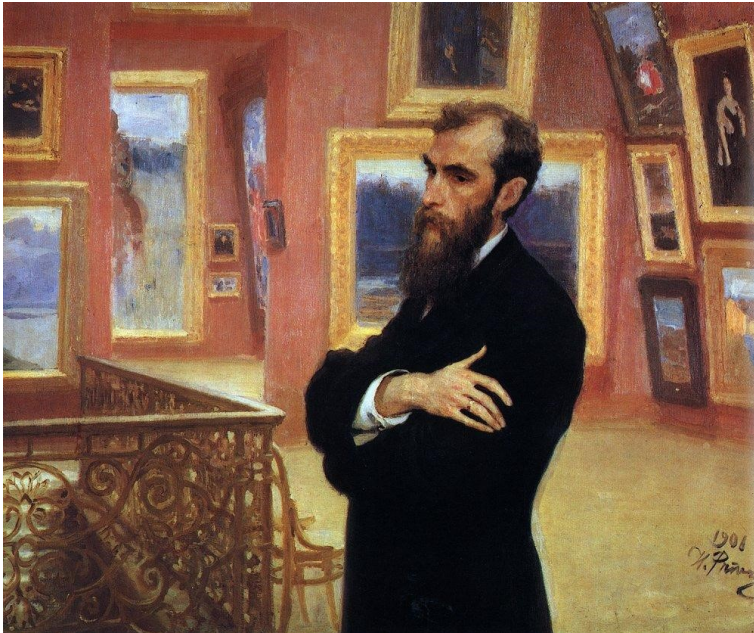


Great Russian Art Collections: Tretyakov, Shchukin and Morozov

Background notes

Jane Angelini — 7 October 2020

Pavel Tretyakov and his Gallery



Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Pavel Tretyakov*, 1901

"He alone maintained the whole school of Russian painting. An unprecedented and grandiose deed!" In these words, the Russian painter Ilya Repin expressed both his own attitude and that of his contemporaries towards the collecting activity of Pavel Tretyakov. For more than 100 years the Gallery has proudly, and gratefully, borne the name of its founder, who turned the institution into a prominent cultural monument to Russian art.

The history of the Tretyakov Gallery dates back to 1856, when the young Moscow merchant Pavel Tretyakov (1832-1898) purchased his first two paintings by Russian artists, that would lay the foundation of his collecting activity. From then on and through to the end of his life, Tretyakov consistently and diligently purchased the paintings of Russian artists - by the dozen, and sometimes even by the hundred each year.

In 1860 he composed a "Letter of Testament" in the case of his sudden death, in which he defined his main wish, even the goal of his life: "I have inherited from my father a total capital of 108,000 in silver roubles including property; my wish is for that capital to be shared between my brother and sisters equally. As for the amount of 150,000 silver roubles, I bequeath that to organizing an Art Museum in Moscow. For me, who loves painting so candidly and ardently, there cannot be a better wish than to lay the foundation of a public Fine Arts depository, affordable for all, bringing benefit to many and pleasure to everybody." "I would like," added Tretyakov, "to establish a National Gallery, in other words a gallery containing the works of Russian artists."

The young Moscow collector considered it essential that his idea for a national museum should not depend on either bureaucrats or government, but rest fully on private initiative. The mid 19th century saw numerous social and cultural changes taking place in Russia and indeed across Europe. A growing middle class, whose wealth was based on trade rather than privilege, removed the hitherto exclusive hold on art that the court, the nobility and the Academy of Art had maintained since the early 18th century. Tretyakov created his collection over 42 years, with little external assistance or official support. What he had at his disposal was exponential wealth, produced by a booming family textile business. In some years he spent from 7,000 to 200,000 roubles a year on purchasing pictures. The sort of money that the Medici family had in Renaissance times, or Saatchi or Peggy Guggenheim in the 20th century.

Tretyakov supported talented artists all over Russia and was a personal friend of many of them. He especially admired a number of young realist painters known as "Peredvizhniki" (The Wanderers), who protested against academic restrictions. The work of these painters became the foundation of Tretyakov's collection and include well-known names such as Perov, Feodotov, Kramskoi, Savrasov, Repin, Shishkin and Levitan. At the end

of the 1860s, apparently influenced by the British National Portrait Gallery, Tretyakov decided to set up a portrait gallery of great Russian writers, composers and artists and thanks to his efforts Russian portrait art of the second half of the 19th century reached new heights and became known worldwide. The best works were those he commissioned - portraits of Tolstoy, Nekrasov, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Goncharov, Tchaikovsky, amongst others.



Ivan Kramskoy, *Portrait of Leo Tolstoy*, 1873

Tretyakov's excellent intuition guided his choice of works of art that typified the Russian school of painting. The collector's authority among artists was enormous, and both their support and confidence in creating the first Russian museum of art were unswerving. The collector and the artists became like-minded in a common cause. In later years he purchased medieval icons and paintings of the 18th and early 19th century, forming a truly national collection.

Tretyakov's gallery, as well as the collector's personality attracted many outstanding individuals of the time. His house became one of the most important spiritual centres in Moscow back in the 1870s. Artists saw in Tretyakov not only a buyer of their paintings, but a man of wide artistic interests and of the best human qualities. "The Tretyakov family, where I find so much kindness, warmth and amiability, is an embodiment of the best qualities of Russian life," recollected the artist Vasily Maximov.

In 1892 Tretyakov presented to the city of Moscow all of his collection, amounting to more than 2,000 works of art. In 1900 according to the decision of the Gallery Board, Tretyakov's former house was turned into exhibition rooms. After the October Revolution a decree was issued with regard to the nationalization of the gallery, which changed its status: from a city museum it was turned into a national museum. According to that decree the name of the gallery's founder, Pavel Tretyakov, was assigned to it forever.



Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

The Collections of Shchukin and Morozov



Dmitry Melnikov, *Portrait of Sergei Shchukin*, 1914

It was not unusual for a member of Moscow's business elite to become a patron of the arts in late imperial Russia. Thanks to Pavel Tretyakov, the purchase of modern Russian art had become an eminently respectable, even fashionable activity; it was, however, unusual for Moscow merchants to buy contemporary paintings by the most trailblazing members of the French avant-garde. The exceptional collections of French avant-garde paintings in Russia today exist thanks to two wealthy Russian textile traders and their families : Shchukin and Morozov, inextricably linked, although the latter worked somewhat in the shadow of the former. Both had vast sums of money to spend on their collections, thanks to their successful family businesses and both had a tremendous influence on cultural life in Moscow. They contributed directly to international recognition for contemporary French artists and their collections had a profound influence on the development of the Russian avant garde in the 20th century. The collections of modern art assembled by Ivan Morozov and Sergei Shchukin are among the finest in the world and are today housed in museums in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The Russian art world was ripe for a change of direction by the end of the 19th century, and it seems fitting that Shchukin bought his first Monet in 1898, the year of Tretyakov's death. It was around this time that he became an habitu   of the bold new galleries in Paris, notably Paul Durand-Ruel's gallery, where many of the French Impressionists were displayed and sold. The French state still branded the Impressionists as charlatans when refusing a bequest of 60 canvases in 1894, and, with the notable exception of Kandinsky, the Petersburg and Moscow public was shocked by the handful of their canvases included in an 1896 exhibition of French art. Shchukin, a man of great sangfroid, quickly developed a reputation in Moscow for his audacious collecting, which often demanded considerable personal courage on his part. In 1903, he graduated from Monet and Degas to the post-Impressionists, and started buying C  zanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin (an artist he found especially absorbing). Not content with hanging such scandalous paintings in his home, he was keen to show them off to visitors, supremely confident of their artistic worth; he relished the furious indignation and ridicule they provoked from his more conservative dinner guests. His unerring critical acumen, coupled with his prodigious buying power, soon brought him the respect of the artists he patronised and their dealers, perhaps none more so than Matisse. It is fair to say that Shchukin discovered Matisse and that his collection of Matisse paintings is the most important in his art-collecting career. In 1909, as a result of their ensuing correspondence and warm friendship, Shchukin commissioned Matisse to paint two enormous panels for the main staircase in his home, the Trubetskoy Palace.



Henri Matisse, *La Danse*, 1910

The naked figures in *La Danse* and *La Musique* (1910) caused a scandal at the Salon d'Automne that year, and initially even Shchukin balked, but he rapidly changed his mind. In 1911, when Matisse came to Moscow to install the panels, he also supervised the hanging of the 21 of his paintings Shchukin had collected to date. It was Matisse who took Shchukin to Montmartre to meet Picasso in the autumn of 1908, which led to him purchasing Picasso's early cubist painting. Having bequeathed his collection to the Tretyakov Gallery after his wife's death, Shchukin had by this time already started opening it to the public, and the impact on the Russian avant-garde was most important. Thanks to Shchukin's extraordinary ability to select only representative masterpieces, Russian artists such as Goncharova, Larionov, Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin and others among their revolutionary contemporaries were able to acquire an immediate understanding of the latest and most important developments in modern art without even having to go to Paris. Shchukin eventually owned 38 works by Matisse, and 50 paintings by Picasso (Shchukin owned the largest collection of his work anywhere in the world at that time), and several by André Derain, who became his final enthusiasm.



Valentin Serov, *Portrait of Ivan Morozov*, 1910

Ivan Morozov was another prodigious collector of the French Avant Garde, as well as of Russian painters. He (and his brother) began purchasing paintings in the first decade of the 20th century. Unlike his passionate compatriot, Shchukin, Morozov was more analytical and more deliberate. His methodology is perhaps best reflected in the fact that not a single receipt from his French dealers was destroyed, or lost, during the period 1903-14. Twice a year, Morozov took the train to Paris: in April he would visit the Salon des Independants; in October, the official Autumn Salon. He made most of his acquisitions through dealers: in the early years, he would bring home two or three paintings; in later years, perhaps ten; in 1907 and 1908 he returned with over 60 canvases. During his 11 years collecting Western art, he bought a total of 278 paintings and 23 sculptures, spending 1.5 million francs in the process - more than any other art collector of the age.

Unlike Shchukin, Morozov never shared his collection with the public. His gallery mansion was shared only with his family and friends, and the occasional scholar. The large hall was devoted to Impressionists like Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Degas and Sisley. Close by, were pictures by Cezanne and Matisse, and a large entry hall and stairway with pictures by Denis and Bonnard. Upstairs, the second floor belonged to Post-Impressionist painters, such as: Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Picasso. His collection of Russian art was equally extensive although not as interesting. Upon his death he bequeathed the collection to the Russian State. The Revolution intervened and eventually the collection was requisitioned by the Soviets. At this point Shchukin and Morozov became inseparable names as their collections were merged and divided between Moscow and St Petersburg.

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