ОТ РЕДАКТОРА

Dear Readers!

The upcoming New Year holiday is a magical time, and we would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to all of our readers, as well as our authors. We have no doubt that they will continue to impress us with their research, just as they have in this December issue. As you read through these articles, we hope that you will discover new and fascinating aspects of art history — our gift to you for the New Year.

Each issue of our journal focuses on a central theme, and for this issue, we have chosen to explore the concept of the artistic school. This encompasses a wide range of topics, including the activities of specific educational institutions, the development of masters within creative associations, and the relationship between a mature artist and their disciples. In our opinion, this last aspect is the most crucial. The bond between teacher and student — both professional and personal — is a fundamental value that has stood the test of time and cannot be replaced by “internet education”.

This connection has been evident in the art world since ancient times. For example, while studying rock carvings from the Early Bronze Age in Altai and Mongolia, we were struck by the perfection of their lines, expressiveness, and symbolic depth. Nearby, we also found petroglyphs that were noticeably inferior in execution. This suggests that even in ancient times, masters had to carefully select and train their apprentices, teaching them how to craft tools, choose the right stone for a drawing, and compose an image. This process also involved initiation into the mysteries of the universe, with stories of gods and natural forces being shared, and the great myth of the cosmic deer carrying the sun on its antlers being passed down through generations.

This master-student relationships are further revealed throughout history in countless nuances — yet, at the same time, similar traits emerge across different centuries, countries, and mentors. For instance, this issue features side-by-side articles about the bottega (workshop) of Sandro Botticelli, the remarkable Renaissance artist in Florence, and one of Russia’s first art schools in the village of Safonkovo, located in a house purpose-built by Alexey Venetsianov. Despite the differences in time, themes, subjects, and style, the training of young talents follows similar principles. Moreover, the Russian artist speaks to his young students about the necessity of studying metaphysics — for without it, one cannot grasp the nature of the world or the meaning of Beauty within it. Similarly, in Botticelli’s bottega, we encounter the cult of the Neoplatonists and their ideas of the Beautiful as a facet of the Absolute.

Passing accumulated knowledge to successors is one of the primary goals of art. This leads, for example, to the unique phenomenon of five generations of the Brullov family; beyond the prominent painter Karl and the architect Alexander — one of the most significant Saint Petersburg builders of the Nicholas era — every generation produced remarkable masters. Furthermore, countless artists from Professor Karl Pavlovich Brullov’s perennially crowded workshop spread across all of Russia. This was a testament to the creative energy of the teacher himself and the entire Brullov lineage.

There is also a certain energy inherent in national art as a whole, but it is constantly changing and diverse. Sometimes it may diminish, but other times it may ignite when one or more masters provide a strong push for the advancement of art in a country. This is when a “national school of art” emerges. This is evident when exploring the art of various regions such as the Caucasus, Altai, Buryatia, Kalmykia, Yakutia, and others. The fusion of classical Russian art education and local traditions leads to fascinating new creative associations and regional schools. It is crucial that these different elements blend together and complement each other harmoniously. The articles in this journal showcase the impact of folk art on contemporary Kalmyk art, and the development of a new iconography based on a literary monument in Nevyansk in the Urals. This demonstrates that a regional artistic school is not solely focused on preserving centuries-old traditions or uniting various artistic lineages, but it must also embrace new ideas and continue to evolve in order to stay relevant and vibrant.

At the foundation of all this lie the two pillars of artistic life as a whole — the teacher and the disciple. Within them and their co-creation lies the key to any tradition and to the understanding of any school of art.

N.K. Roerich has a wonderful essay “Kuindzhi’s Studio”. In it, writing from the Himalayas in 1936, forty years after graduating from the Academy of Arts, he remembers his Teacher and all his fellow students. He writes: “…Mighty Kuindzhi was not only a great artist but also a great Teacher of life. His private life was unusual, solitary, and only his closest disciples knew the depth of his soul. <…> One of the joys of Kuindzhi was to help the poor in a way that they did not know where the blessings came from. <…> Every memory of Kuindzhi, of his teaching both in the art of painting and in the art of life, evokes unforgettable details. How much these landmarks of experience are needed when they testify to proven courage and genuine creativity! <…> And among themselves, Kuindzhi’s disciples remained in a special, unbreakable bond. The Teacher succeeded not only in arming them for creativity and the struggle of life, but also in uniting them in the common service to Art and Humankind.”

These words — so brief yet profound, so concise in essence and precise in meaning — speak not only of A.I. Kuindzhi, but of all teachers of artists, across all nations and through all ages.

Mikhail Shishin
Chief Editor