

Dear Readers!

The new issue of “The Art of Eurasia” journal is dedicated to folk art — a crucial domain within the global history of culture. Our leading section, ‘Forum’, focuses on this very theme; however, before exploring it in detail, we shall provide a brief overview of the other contributions to this issue.

We are delighted with our long-standing collaboration with colleagues from the Vetka Museum of Old Believers and Belarusian Traditions named after F.R. Shklyarau (Republic of Belarus). Their articles analyse the semantics and artistic expression of two renowned iconographic subjects: the Nativity of the Virgin and the Last Judgment. The profound insight with which Old Believer iconography is explored will undoubtedly inspire readers to view these rare treasures in person. We look forward to future publications from the staff of this exceptional museum, which houses a most magnificent collection.

Articles on the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries consistently form the core of our permanent section, with each contribution typically uncovering a little-known chapter of history. This is hardly surprising: the field of enquiry is not only vast but also continually expanding, as new works of art are created that require scholarly analysis and presentation to the public. Regrettably, there are poignant instances where artists, having completed their earthly and creative journeys, remain mere entries in exhibition catalogues, while much of their oeuvre vanishes, dispersed among haphazard and ephemeral collections. We therefore consider it a great privilege to publish a study on such a rediscovered master, an exhibition, or simply an individual piece or series of works. Furthermore, contemporary culture is incredibly multifaceted; at times, it is difficult even for an art historian to conceptualise how disparate global artistic movements, traditions, and ideological currents have converged to produce particular canvases. The articles in the ‘Art of the 20th–21st Centuries’ section of this new issue offer answers to some of these complex questions.

Within the spectrum of artistic disciplines, the philosophy and theory of art belong, perhaps, to the least known and popular fields. This is profoundly unjust, given that they provide the foundational knowledge of art: many eminent thinkers have not only contemplated its origins but also established sound and promising trajectories for the analysis and interpretation of the artworks themselves. Our section ‘Philosophy and Theory of Art’ is dedicated to this very purpose; in the current issue, drawing upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the perception of the work of art, a compelling comparison is drawn between Dutch still-life paintings from the height of their golden age and the still lifes of Claude Monet.

In our primary section, ‘Forum’, folk art is presented as an enduring, omnipresent foundation within culture. There is not a single nation, nor a single historical epoch, wherein craftsmen — more often than not remaining anonymous — have not made their mark. Yet, when we encounter carefully preserved towels embroidered by our great-grandmothers in museums or within family homes, and look closely at their patterns or the ideal proportions of ceramic wares, we become imbued with the profound wisdom and exceptional sense of beauty possessed by their creators.

One is reminded of expeditions when, having struck up a conversation and gained the trust of simple yet remarkably perceptive village women, we would ask them to show us the surviving heritage of their mothers and other matriarchs of the family. It was then that breathtaking homespun costumes, completely covered in ornament, and woven sashes so beautiful they remain etched in the memory for a lifetime, would emerge from old chests. Meanwhile, the hostess's stories still echo in one's mind: how the ancestors arrived and settled in a barren wasteland, how they tasted their own bread only in the third year, how they took root in the new land and bonded with the locals, and how they rejoiced when, after the evening milking, the mother would set a pitcher of milk on the table and slice the bread into thick chunks. Everyone would anticipate this moment, remembering every detail — such as how, having gathered all the crumbs from the table, the mother would mechanically pop them into her mouth. Could it truly be, one wondered, that these very same heavy, toil-worn hands embroidered such delicate patterns? Yet new treasures were being retrieved from the chest, and those same weathered hands would smooth out the creases on the embroidered wedding shirt of a husband who never returned from the war. They had lived well, it seemed; children's voices had resounded in the house — but then tragedy struck, leaving behind only the shirt, a yellowed photograph with cracked edges, a handful of letters, and a killed-in-action notice. Overcoming these sorrowful memories and heartened by our attention, the craftswoman would then begin to bring out other, newer things, recently embroidered for future grandchildren — because it is vital that something beautiful surround a person from the very moment of birth, so that they might grow accustomed to it...

This, then, is the true purpose of folk art — and, indeed, of art in general: it is not merely an embellishment of life, still less an exercise in egoistic 'self-expression'. Rather, it is an instrument that, in co-creation with Nature itself, shapes humanity, thereby forging a new world — a world of authentic existence rooted in enduring values.

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