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## ART HISTORIANS VICIOUSLY ATTACKED

Posted on 4. May 2011 by [InCoRM](#)

Two books on the Russian Avant-Garde artist, NATALIA GONCHAROVA, were the focus of attacks in the Russian on-line magazine, *Art Investment*, on 27 April under the title, “A Rigged in Art: Russian Experts to Protect Creative Work by Natalia Goncharova”. It covered a TV press conference broadcast the previous day in Russia.

Highly respected and well known Western art historians are the authors of these scholarly publications – Anthony Parton’s, *Goncharova: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova*, published by the Antique Collector’s Club, England, in October 2010, and Denise Bazetoux’s volume 1 of her catalogue raisonnée, *Natalia Gontcharova: son oeuvre entre tradition et modernité / Natalia Goncharova: Her Work Between Tradition and Modernity*, published by Arteprint, Brussels, in March 2011.

The apparent reason for the attacks was to claim that “60-70% of the works” reproduced in these volumes “are fakes” or are “counterfeits”.

None of the individuals who are recorded as having made these accusations has published on this painter, nor can any of them claim to be a specialist or expert of the art of Natalia Goncharova on any other grounds.

To have an opinion about the authenticity of an artist’s work one needs to have seen and studied as many works as possible. In fact, those quoted in *Art Investment* have admitted that they have not seen this amorphous and unidentified “60-70%” – around 2,000 works altogether,

We set out the accusations of the speakers as *Art Investment* reports them and reply with the actual facts of the matter.

### ACCUSATION

The art historians “never came to the Tretyakov Gallery” to consult their large collection, said two spokesladies from the Tretyakov Gallery, Irina Lebedeva and Irina Vakar.

### REPLY – FALSE

All the works from the Tretyakov Gallery reproduced in Anthony Parton’s book were given reproduction rights by official and formal permission from the Tretyakov Gallery who were fully aware of his project.

Denise Bazetoux was in correspondence with Mrs. Derevianko of the External Service Department of the Tretyakov Gallery in March 1999, receiving but very little of the information as requested. She also attempted to have telephone conversations with Madame Mia at the Gallery from whom she received no responses to her inquiries. Conversely, she had full cooperation with the Kandinsky Library at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris whose extremely important and extensive Goncharova archives were made available to her as were works by the artist housed in the reserves of the museum.

### ACCUSATION

Many of the paintings come from “private collections”, according to speakers as reported by *Art Investment*. “We don’t know who they are.”

### REPLY – TRUE

Collectors like to keep their anonymity, including Petr Aven. There is nothing new in this and is a practice followed by Russian publications.

#### ACCUSATION

To “verify the authenticity of fake paintings will not be difficult: they are all painted in our time and any technological expertise can immediately identify it.”, Petr Aven is quoted as saying.

#### REPLY – FACT

Mr. Aven obviously does not know that a large number of the paintings reproduced in each of these two publications – apart from the paintings in the “legitimate” Russian museums (and why not?) – have “technological” expertises accompanying them by known and reputable scientists which reveal without a shadow of a doubt that the works were not “painted in our time” but were executed at least 60 years ago. In addition, a high percentage have gone through several well known auction houses.

#### ACCUSATION

“A call to publishers who have published these books” was initiated, said James Butterwick, “in order to inform [them] about the situation but the reaction was: they trust Professor Parton.”

#### REPLY – THANK GOODNESS

And why wouldn't they, given his fine reputation? On the basis of the facts, then, there are no concrete reasons to doubt that of the over 3,000 works reproduced in these two publications together, 100% of the works are by the hand of Natalia Goncharova.

#### ART INVESTMENT ASKS

“Why [is the West] not afraid of the reaction from Russia?”, says *Art Investment* (which is financed by Petr Aven)? “Because the credibility of our expertise in the West is not perfect.”

#### OUR REPLY

The lack of credibility of the Tretyakov Gallery on a number of grounds has been documented in the Russian and Western press over the past few years. Nor is there a published and qualified art historian and expert dedicated to research on Natalia Goncharova's work in Russia. The artist came to the West in 1915 and she lived in Paris until her death in 1962, never to return to Russia. The largest part of her work and archives have remained in the West. Anthony Parton and Denise Bazetoux, having devoted decades to the study of her work, remain the most highly qualified and scholarly authors and experts on the art of Natalia Goncharova.

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#### REVIEWS –

Anthony Parton's book, *GONCHAROVA The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova*, was reviewed in THE ART NEWSPAPER, “PAINTERLY PROTESTS – The many faces of Natalia Goncharova's prolific career”, March 2011, by Averil King.

Denise Bazetoux's book, *NATALIA GONCHAROVA Between Tradition and Modernity*, was reviewed in THE ART NEWSPAPER, “The real Natalia Goncharova”, April 2011, by Claudia Barbieri, who also addresses some of the related issues.

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