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## TRETIAKOV GALLERY DISGRACED

Posted on [25. August 2011](#) by [Patricia Railing](#)

Since April 2011, General Director of the Tretyakov Gallery, Irina Lebedeva, has been the main spokesperson on the commercial art market website ArtInvestment.Ru in the denunciation of two books published in the West on Natalia Goncharova. Anthony Parton's, *Goncharova. The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova*, appeared in October 2010, and Denise Bazetoux's, *Natalia Gontcharova, Son oeuvre entre tradition et modernité*, Volume 1 of the Catalogue Raisonné, appeared in March 2011.

The denunciations turn on accusations of fake works of art being reproduced in these two books. These assertions are not based on any familiarity with or knowledge of the originals but on reproductions in the two books. Nor have the accusers had access to any supporting materials on the works such as documents, scientific expertises, and so on.

In an attempt to justify their accusations, ArtInvestment.Ru published (28 June 2011) a lengthy comparison of works that belong to three Russian museums versus works found in Western collections and reproduced in the two books. The unnamed authors, but who are Tretyakov Gallery curators as announced in previous statements, appear to be writing in the name of the International Confederation of Antique and Art Dealers (ICAAD), Russia, and the CIS (?), even on their behalf. The authors rely on stylistic analysis, documents of 1913, and "provenance" or "lack of provenance", basing their arguments on the 411 works by Goncharova in the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery.

What is patently undisguised is that the Tretyakov Gallery writers' denunciation of the works of art by Goncharova was dictated by the interests of the art market.

This is openly declared not only in their article in the name of ICAAD – an association of art dealers – but also in the "Conclusion" to their article. Such statements that the two Western books on Natalia Goncharova "can have a negative effect on the artists's (sic) heritage and market for her works for decades", or that they can cause "confusion ... to future collectors and investors on the art market" reveal the audience they are addressing and the interests they have been defending in this unscholarly campaign.

As for the art historical interests, 411 works plus a few others are hardly sufficient grounds on which to base authoritative assessments about the creative career of Natalia Goncharova – she showed nearly 800 works in her 1913 exhibition alone.

It thus appears that an association of art dealers appropriated the professional services of the Tretyakov Gallery – from the General Director, Irina Lebedeva, to the curators – with the intention of defending its own commercial interests.

And this lending of museum status to commercial interests did not stop at this deceit.

For on 3 August 2011 the Deputy Director of the Tretyakov Gallery, Oleg Belikov, was reported on a number of website newspapers to have been arrested by the police for the embezzlement of over 87 million rubles prior to taking up his post at the Tretyakov in 2009. Mr. Belikov resigned from the gallery two days later.

([www.themoscownews.com/local/20110805](http://www.themoscownews.com/local/20110805))

Misconduct by Mr. Belikov has also been reported to have taken place within the Tretyakov Gallery itself. A "Letter to the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation on Corruption in the State Tretyakov Gallery", A. A. Avdeev,

Administration of the President of the Russian Federation and General Prosecutor of the Russian Federation, of 13 March 2011, listed a number of accusations of embezzlement and mismanagement in areas related to Mr. Belikov's responsibilities within the Tretyakov Gallery. ([Yandex cache archive](#)) In addition, doctrinaire conditions were said to have been imposed on the curatorial staff of the gallery that were restricting their freedom and compromising the integrity of their art historical practice.

#### THE MORAL OF THE STORY –

It is well known that curators in Western museums are strictly forbidden to work for the art market in any way. Tretyakov Gallery curators, on the other hand, are advisors to the art market and are listed on the ArtInvestment website as such. Other sources defend museum curators as “the experts” because of their daily contact with works of art and this continues the “tradition of Soviet times” ([//news.mail.ru/society/6557816/](#)). But there was no art market in Russia in Soviet times, no auction houses, no commercial galleries.

Such an “advisory role” of museums to the art market is a prime source for conflicts of interests, particularly in light of the said-corruption within the Tretyakov Gallery itself.

When commercial and financial interests dictate to professional interests – in this case, responsible, informed and unbiased art history – and so contaminate an academic and scholarly institution such as a museum, can any of the pronouncements from this museum in the name of art history have any credibility?

Administration

25 August 2011

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