

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

AiA Art News-service

The Telegraph

Experts question Russian Modernism show in Ghent and Rockefeller riches come to London: the latest art news

The Museum does not own the pictures; they are on loan from the little known Dieleghem Foundation in Belgium, a not-for profit organisation owned by Russian businessman Igor Toporovski which, the museum says, is “using the museum as a platform to share its astonishing collection with the public for the first time.”

Toporovski has told the Belgian press that his “extended family” acquired the works over several decades since the Stalin era from reputable private sources. But he has never shown them before, and they are unknown to many acknowledged western scholars.



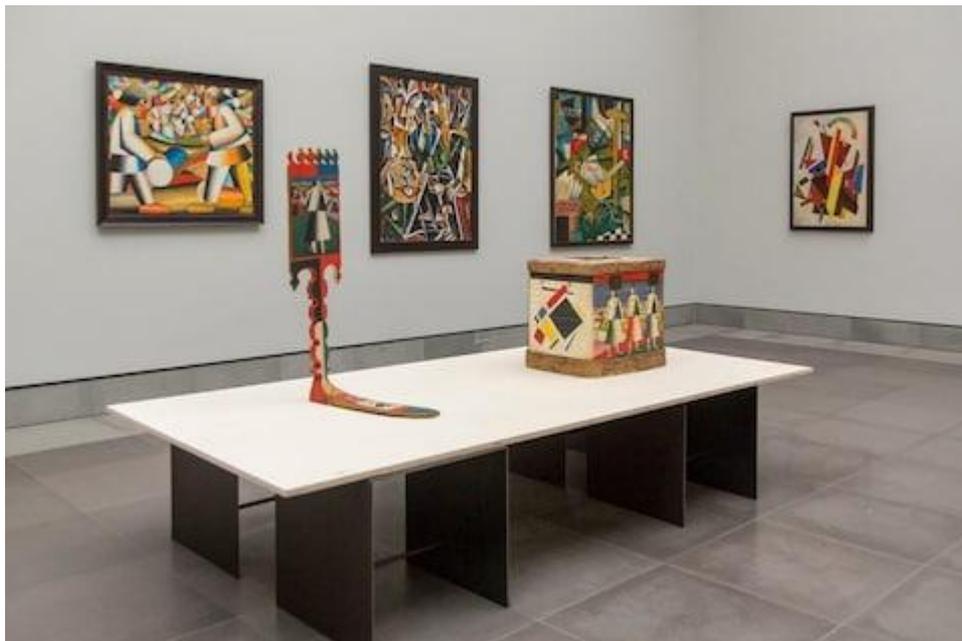
Left: Vladimir Tatlin. Nude. 1913. State Tetyakov Gallery, Moscow. Right: Painting from Toporovski collection attributed to Tatlin and dated 1914.

The signatories of the letter, which describes the Ghent exhibition as “highly questionable”, include art historians Dr Natalia Murray of the Courtauld Institute, who organised the exhibition *Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932* at the Royal Academy last year; Dr Vivian Endicott Barnett, author of the catalogues raisonnés for Alexej von Jawlensky and Wassily Kandinsky; Dr Konstantin Akinsha, the curator of an exhibition on Russian avant garde at the Neue Galerie in New York; and Professor Aleksandra Shatskikh, who has written several books on Malevich.

Other signatories include specialist Russian art dealers James Butterwick (London) and Ingrid Hutton (New York); Julian Barran, formerly a director of Sotheby’s Impressionist and Modern Art department in London and head of Sotheby’s France; Impressionist and Modern art dealers Ivor Braka, Jacques de la Béraudière and Richard Nagy; and Russian art advisor and collector, Alex Lachmann.

The paintings, they say, “have no exhibition history, have never before been reproduced in serious scholarly publications, and have no traceable sales records. The exhibited paintings by Wassily Kandinsky and Alexej von Jawlensky are not included in the catalogues raisonnés — internationally recognised as definitive sources for authentication of works of these artists.

Objects such as a box and distaff allegedly decorated by Malevich have no known analogues and there are no historical records that even mention that Malevich ever was involved in the decoration of such objects.” The letter goes on to ask that the exhibition is taken down until their questions are addressed. The two essential questions are: where have these works come from, and who has authenticated them?



Installation shot from 'Russian Modernism' at The Museum of Fine Art, Ghent. Paintings from left to right attributed to Kazimir Malevich, Liubov Popova, and Olga Rozonova (two works). In the centre, Vologda region distaff and a hawker's basket with painting attributed to Malevich.

Alex Lachmann, an adviser and collector of modern Russian art, takes issue, telling me: “The paintings are all ridiculous on stylistic grounds. I can’t imagine how a public museum, which is supported by taxpayers’ money, can put these highly questionable things on the walls before doing an in-depth research, as is common practice in the museum world and as every responsible curator or museum director is obligated to do.”

When challenged over authenticity on Facebook by the Russian artist, Pavel Otdelnov, the museum replied: “We can assure you that the museum has sufficient guarantees from the owners regarding the authenticity of the works shown in the galleries.” When asked by *The Daily Telegraph* to provide documentation of the works’ provenance, to reveal which experts had authenticated them, and scientific analysis for proof of age, the owner, Igor Toporovski, said these were “confidential documents.”

“Chemical analysis is only required when there are scientific (artistic) doubts or in case of judicial trial,” Toporovski added. “In the international museum practice neither certificates of authenticity, nor chemical conclusions are required. Nevertheless, each artwork belonging to the Foundation has its own file: provenance, history and technical description (condition). The Foundation can provide this information on request, for research, scholars and professionals.” However, he declined to forward any of this information by email.

Rockefeller riches come to London

Christie’s has reason to be cheerful about 2018 as it will be selling the \$700 million (£520 million) collection of the late banking scion David Rockefeller and his wife Peggy.

The public is being drip-fed highlights of the contents as they tour the art centres of the world. In November in Hong Kong, coinciding with Christie’s sales there, we were shown a \$70 million Rose Period portrait of a nubile young girl by Picasso; a potentially record busting \$50 million reclining female by Matisse; and a \$35 million water lily painting by Monet, on top of choice porcelain dinner sets and Chinese works of art.



Eugene Delacroix, Tiger Playing with a Tortoise Estimate \$5 million - \$7 million Coming to London for the Rockefeller sale preview CREDIT: IMAGE COURTESY CHRISTIE'S.

The next stop is London from February 20th through to March 8th, during the Impressionist, Modern and Contemporary art sales. In addition to those Hong Kong highlights there will be the first glimpse of a lusciously painted view of Venice by John Singer Sargent (\$3-5 million), one of Monet's *plein air* paintings of his wife, Camille, on the windswept beach at Trouville (\$8-12 million), and a magnificent painting of a tiger playing with a tortoise by the Romantic artist, Eugène Delacroix, with a \$5 – 8 million (£3.6 – 5.8 million) estimate.

Rockefeller bought the tiger back in the 1960s from the legendary dealer, Eugene Thaw, who passed away earlier this year. Delacroix was fascinated by wild animals and would go to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, which received its first tiger in 1847, to sketch them. This painting, from 1862, was made in the last years of his life. Delacroix is a much favoured artist at Christie's at the moment.

Just before Christmas they sold an oil sketch for his famous homage to the French Revolution, The 28 July – Liberty Guiding the People, that had been estimated at £1 million, for £3.1 million pounds. The record for a Delacroix was set 20 years ago in Paris when a painting of Arabian cavalry on horseback sold for £4.6 million (\$7.8 million at the time).