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"A Silken Whirlwind of Unbridled Colors": [1]

Aleksander Volkov and His Pictorial Legacy

To undertake an appreciation of Aleksandr Nikolaevich Volkov (1886-1957) is a difficult task, indeed – and not only because he was an original artist, a sensitive poet, an accomplished singer and a charismatic mentor to an entire generation of painters. Rather, study of Volkov is complicated further by other, more extrinsic elements, for, in pursuing "painting as an environment and habitat",[2] Volkov explored disparate esthetic and philosophical concepts, integrated the *couleur locale* of his patria, Uzbekistan, with international styles, not least, Symbolism and Cubo-Futurism and fell victim to the political vagaries of the Soviet system as he "lost his way amidst the debris of Formalism".[3] Even Volkov's adjustment to the exigencies of Socialist Realism in the 1930s-50s with the themes of the cotton campaign, motorized transport, agricultural abundance and new ethnic awareness can now be regarded as part of the global orientation towards a new figuration and towards an *art engagé* supported by the diverse political orders of that time – Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy and Roosevelt's America. In other words, Volkov was at once national and international, intensely patriotic and readily assimilative, idiosyncratic and eclectic, a combination of conditions which makes critical judgement of his *oeuvre* all the more hazardous, relative and approximate.

Nevertheless, within this wide diapason of difference Volkov's art was informed by specific concerns which are easily identifiable, merit serious attention and, to a considerable extent, relate to many of the "accursed questions" of Russian culture in general or, rather, of what, conventionally, is regarded as "Russian" culture. Among them is the interaction of Russian art and the East (in Volkov's case, Central Asia), a mutual borrowing and dilemma which characterized much of 19th and 20th century Russian art and

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[1] The quotation ("шелковый вихорь невзнузданных красок") is from Volkov's poem, "Staryi gorod" (1923), published in G. Bellingeri, C. Manfredi and G. Scarcia, eds.: *Alexander Volkov. Motivi uzbechi,* Venice: Università degli Studi Ca' Foscari, 1998, p. 56.

[2] "Zhivopis' kak sreda obitaniia" Is the title of the exhibition of works by Aleksandr A. Volkov and Andrei Volkov held at the AZ Municipal Gallery, Moscow, in 2002.

[3] Quoted in E. Bruskova: "Peschanyi krai goriachii moi…." in *Sovetskaia kul'tura,* M, 1967, No. 27, 3 March, p. 6, where the original source is not indicated.

literature (from Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights" to Pavel Kuznetsov's evocations of Kirghizia). Indeed, a primary issue confronting the student of Volkov's work is his response to imported styles such as Cubism and Suprematism and his alliance, therefore, with colleagues in a similar territorial predicament such as Aleksandr Nikolaev (Usto-Mumin), Nikolai Karakhan, Mikhail Kurzin, Ruvim Mazel' and Martiros Sar'ian.

The collection of the Savitsky Art Museum in Nukus, for example, where Volkov is well represented, suggests that such encounters even contributed to the formation of an "Oriental avant-garde" whereby ethnic types, national decoration and local ritual became the objects of Cubist fragmentation, Futurist dislocation and Suprematist geometrization, together constituting a radical pictorial vocabulary. The visual results may be far from the canonical registers of Picasso, Boccioni and Malevich, but they are intriguing in their high ambivalence: in Volkov's case, the stimulus, on the one hand, led to an extensive series of "free improvisations on themes of the East";[4] on the other, as Aleksei Sidorov observed in 1923, "In many works there is more Paris than Tashkent, more Matisse and Picasso than an Eastern carpet".[5]

Of course, Volkov's artistic position touches on many other central issues: the role of primitive or popular culture within the evolution of the professional artist (Natal'ia Goncharova's and Mikhail Larionov's Neo-Primitivism is, of course, a manifest example of this concern); the persistence of the religious or, rather, Christian, doctrine within the iconographic syntax of pre- and post-Revolutionary Russia (Volkov painted his *Pietà* [private collection, Moscow] in spite of the Bolsheviks' atheist propaganda); the interdisciplinarity of Russian Modernism whereby poets painted (Andrei Belyi, Maksimilian Voloshin), painters wrote poetry (Kazimir Malevich, Volkov) or composed music (Mikalojaus Čiurlionis, Vasilii Kandinsky) and actors and dancers painted (Nikolai Evreinov, Vaslav Nijinsky). Even if the esthetic results were not always magisterial, the sensibility of the Russian Silver Age was synthetic and singular and, once again, Volkov was fully representative of this tendency, his son, Valerii, confirming that in Volkov's world "it is difficult to separate colors from sounds and words".[6]

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[4] R. Taktash: *Aleksandr Volkov*, Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo literatury i iskusstva im. Gafura Guliama, 1982, p. 61.
[5] A. Sidorov: "Novye khudozhestvennye vystavki" in *Pravda,* M, 1923, 17 November. Quoted in Taktash: *Aleksandr Volkov*, p. 10.
[6] V. Volkov: "Mozaika vospominanii" in *Aleksandr Volkov i ego ucheniki.* Catalog of exhibition at the State Museum of Art of the Peoples of the East, Moscow, 1967, p. 17.

After all, to Volkov, music was of the utmost importance, informed many of his activities, resounding in his operatic voice, his poetry ("To the sonorous refrain of amber faces")[7] and the titles of his pictures (*The Tinkle of Camel Bells,* 1917-24, State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan, Tashkent). Not surprisingly, prominent writers were just as impressed by Volkov's aural reception of the East as they were by his vision, Nikolai Tikhonov, for example, making liberal reference to the poetry in his 1967 review:

> "and the sounds of the passing caravan,
>
> and the dance to the blows of the dutar,
>
> and the colors of the dancer himself"[8]

Volkov's poetry, however, did not evoke the "tragic harmony"[9] of Aleksandr Blok, Aleksandr Skriabin and Mikhail Vrubel', for his character was more positive and assured than that of the Symbolists. Ultimately, unlike the rootless Blok, Skriabin and Vrubel', Volkov seems to have found a psychological and physical gratification and *joie de vivre* in the organic world of his beloved Uzbekistan. He may have referred to his generation as "nomads"[10] and a fundamental motif of his early work was the journey (expressed in his many interpretations of the caravan), but for him the journey and the desert were metaphors for melody, familiar, not foreign, amicable, not hostile, and so very different from the dissonance and alienation of "*The Stranger*", *Demon Downcast* (1902, GTG) and *Prometheus*.

This is not to overlook Volkov's obligation to the Russian *fin de siècle,* especially to the art of Vrubel', and many observers of Volkov's work have commented upon this. For example, Volkov transposed Vrubel's palette of mauve, blue and carmine from the deeply personal *Demon Seated* (1890, GTG) to his own *Self-Portrait* of 1919 (State Museum of Art of Peoples of the East, Moscow) (not demonic, of course, but still a quizzical examination of the self); the fetching *Persian Girl* of 1916 (State Museum of Art of Peoples of the East, Moscow) would seem to be a reminiscence of Vrubel's *Girl against the Background of a Persian Carpet* (1886, Museum of Russian Art, Kiev); while the portrait of his first

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[7] A. Volkov: "Vsegda vosled devichii smekh i nezhnost'" (1924-25) in Bellingeri, Manfredi and Scarcia, *Alexander Volkov. Motivi uzbechi,* p. 88.
[8] N. Tikhonov: "Master granatovoi chaikhany" in *Literaturnaia Rossiia,* M, 1967, No. 21, 19 May, p. 15. Tikhonov was reviewing Volkov's retrospective exhibition at the State Museum of Art of the Peoples of the East in Moscow.
[9] M. Miasina: "Temy, siuzhety i obrazy v tvorchestve Aleksandra Volkova" in *Nauchnye soobshcheniia Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia iskusstva narodov Vostoka,* M, 1981, No. XV, p. 61.
[10] A. Volkov: "My zdes' tol'ko kochevniki" (1924) in Bellingeri, Manfredi and Scarcia: *Alexander Volkov. Motivi uzbechi,* p. 84.

wife, Mariia Volkova-Taratunina (1916, private collection, Moscow), has much in common with Vrubel's portrait of *Nadezhda Zabela-Vrubel', the Artist's Wife, in a Summer "Empire" Toilette* of 1898 (GTG).

Nevertheless, even if Volkov revered Vrubel' and genuflected before the *Descent of the Holy Ghost* in the Vladimir Cathedral in Kiev, his recognition would seem to have been more of painterly devices than of the brooding and sinister allegories of Vrubel's diseased imagination. True, Volkov did paint a *Demon* in 1913 (private collection, Moscow), composed his *Women and a Peacock* of 1921 (private collection, Moscow) perhaps as a homage to Vrubel's "peacock pattern" in the Vladimir Cathedral[11] and portrayed the tormented Vrubel' as late as 1956, but he did not share the Nietzschean limbo and existential loneliness of his hero. Rather, Volkov applied Vrubel's "Cubist" faceting,[12] crystalline formations[13] and crepuscular tones for their visual, not philosophical, effect – just as other disciples of Vrubel' were doing at that time such as Nikolai Kul'bin, Nikolai Milioti and Anton Pevzner.

Of course, Volkov was exposed to innumerable influences, artistic and scientific, in the first years of the 20th century and his encounter with Vrubel' was only one of them. Indeed, beyond his close reading of Vrubel's paintings, there may be other explanations for Volkov's focus on the crystal and "crystallic decomposition",[14] expressed so strongly in *Persian Girl* and the cadaverous *Male Nude, Supine* (ca. 1915, Savitsky Art Gallery, Nukus). Firstly, as a student in the so called Biological Group of the Natural Division of the Physical and Mathematical Department at St. Petersburg University in 1908, Volkov was fascinated by the microscope and its revelation of the "harmony, beauty and majesty of living matter".[15] Perhaps it is not accidental that both Kul'bin (physician, musician and painter) and Volkov came to the crystalline structure of their artistic compositions after professional engagements with microscopy and biology. Secondly, Volkov apprehended the fundamentals of somatic structure, physiology and anatomy through his coursework in 1910 under Mikhail Bernshtein, a student of Il'ia Repin and author of anatomical atlases,

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[11] See Taktash, *Aleksandr Volkov*, p. 8.
[12] Nikolai Kul'bin referred to Vrubel' as a "Cubist" in his article "Kubizm" in *Strelets,* P, 1915, No. 1, p. 104; also see Sergei Makovsky: *Siluety russkikh khudozhnikov,* Prague: Nasha rech', 1922, pp. 120-21.
[13] Kul'bin, "Kubizm".
[14] Yu. Dzhura-Poplavsky: "Zhivaia zemlia. Turkestan v proizvedeniiakh khudozhnika Volkova» in *Krasnyi zvon*, Tashkent, 1919, 11 August, No. 5. Quoted in V. Volkov: "Shkola Volkova" in *Ogonek,* M, 1988, May, No. 20, p. 8.
[15] M. Zemskaia: *Aleksandr Volkov. Master "Granatovoi chaikhany",* M: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1975, p. 33.

whose private studio in St. Petersburg nurtured several other avant-gardists, not least, Vera Ermolaeva and Vladimir Lebedev.[16]

That Volkov was especially aware of the Symbolist esthetic, however, is also demonstrated by his serious interest in the fresco, the mural and the panneau. Even if he received only one major commission in this area, i.e. the wall-painting for the Turkestan Pavilion at the "All-Russian Agricultural Exhibition" in Moscow in 1923, he seems to have conceived several of his early masterpieces as designs for wall decorations. This is evident from the peculiar arched framing which graces a number of the oils and watercolors of the late 1910s and early 1920s such as *Eastern School* (1918, private collection, Moscow) and *Conversation beneath the Branch of the Pomegranate Tree* (1918-19, Oriental Arts museum, Moscow) – as if their ultimate destination was to have been below a vaulted ceiling much in the way that Vrubel' designed his *Paris* triptych for the Dunker mansion in 1893 or the *Faust* cycle for Aleksei Morozov's mansion in 1896.

A special case in point is the *Pietà* of 1921, a polyphonic composition crowned by an arched frame. Although in 1921, obviously, Volkov could not have expected an ecclesiastical commission for this subject, the very theme, conception and presentation indicate that he envisioned it as part of a church fresco. Furthermore, Volkov's *Pietà* connects immediately with the three versions of *Lamentation* (1887, Museum of Russian Art, Kiev), especially the second one, which Vrubel' had intended for the Vladimir Cathedral and which, of course, continued the long tradition of sacred Italian painting, above all. At the same time, Volkov's division of his *Pietà* into regular geometric sections also produces the impression of a stained glass window – the same kind of vitreous effect elicited in his *In the Chaikhana. Vitrage Compostion* of 1921 (private collection, Moscow) and the accompanying graphic cycle entitled *Vitrage Compositions* (many of which are in the GRM) as well as some of his landscapes of ca. 1930. Incidentally, David Kakabadze evoked a similar vitreous effect in his Georgian landscapes of the early 1930s.

That Volkov would have contemplated the subject of the mourning of Jesus the Saviour just as the Bolsheviks were destroying churches and executing priests in a ruthless iconoclastic campaign testifies to a steadfast defense of individual belief in the face of communal censorship, and on this level his stance was dissident and brazen. But *Pietà* also marked the culmination to a long series of Christian subjects which

[16] See, for example, M. Bernshtein: *Problema uchebnogo risunka,* L, 1940

Volkov had been exploring in the 1910s such as *Christ in the Mountains*, *Face of Christ* and *Golgotha* (private collection, Moscow) – and the *Pietà* might also be regarded as a lamentation for Holy Russia herself, now injured and soiled by a diabolical regime. We heed this desperate note in many concurrent references to the Christian story in early Soviet culture, for that very moment also witnessed the birth of the Makovets society in Moscow, Vasilii Chekrygin's Apocalyptic cycle and Pavel Florensky's plea for the preservation of the Troitse-Sergiev Lavra.

Be that as it may, the technique and format of works such as *Caravan (Striped)* (1917, Moscow Regional Museum of Local Lore, Istra), *Eastern School* and *Pietà,* confirm that Volkov was paying homage to the tradition of the panneau, especially as developed by the early Russian Modernists (Konstantin Bogaevsky, Lev Bakst, Evgenii Lansere, Petrov-Vodkin, Vrubel', to mention only a few). After ca. 1923, however, Volkov seems to have discounted the arched frame as he began to incorporate a new iconography of robust workers and red caravans. At first glance, therefore, the concept of the panneau or the mural would seem to be foreign to Volkov's practice of the 1930s-50s – except for association with the work of Mykhailo Boichuk, the *boichukisty.* Still, the parallels are there in the magnification and "cinematic" framing of the image, the statuesque and frontal rendering of the figure, the emphasis on hieratic gesture and musculature and the restrained color scheme. While the possibility of "horizontal" influence through exhibitions and publications cannot be excluded, the common point of educational departure for all parties – the Kiev Art Institute (Volkov studied there in 1912-16) and its principal pedagogue, Fedor Krichevsky – is of major consequence.

Even if Boichuk himself worked with Krichevsky only after the Revolution in what was then called the Ukrainian State Academy of Art, they were united in their search for a new monumental style which was to have combined the ancient tradition of the mural and the new ethnic hagiography of workers and machines. All this is to say that, if scholars of Volkov's work have noted the parallels between his agricultural compositions of the 1930s and the monumental art of Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros,[17] the Ukrainian connection needs also to be highlighted and investigated.

Whether early or late, the denominator common to most of Volkov's paintings is the sense of place, because throughout his life and travels Volkov retained an organic link with indigenous Uzbekistan

[17] See Taktash, *Aleksandr Volkov,* p. 29.

and he celebrated its concrete reality in his evocations of the desert, the camels, the mountains, the midday sun, the popular festivities and the *chaikhana.* Once again, Volkov differed markedly from the Symbolists, for their landscapes were wastelands and their time of day the dawn and the dusk (neither night, nor day). For all his veneration of the Symbolists, the difference between Vrubel' and Volkov is as dramatic as between "lost" and "found".

Volkov's sense of belonging and ready identity with a national heritage (even if, technically speaking, Volkov was Russian, not Uzbek) prompted his interest in popular culture, especially in the late 1910s and 1920s, and in the energetic debate over the relationship of high art to low being conducted by artists such as Goncharova, Kuznetsov, Larionov, Malevich, Vladimir Markov (Waldemars Matvejs) and Aleksandr Shevchenko. Some argued that esthetic renovation would come about through the adoption and adaptation of these alternative principles (Larionov's incorporation of graffiti into his *Soldier* paintings is an obvious example); others regarded the art of the East as an archaeological relic, picturing it in a conventional, "Western" technique – Petrov-Vodkin's and Liubov' Popova's renderings of Samarkand are a case in point; yet others, not least, Goncharova, maintained that the East, not Paris, had provided modern European painters such as Gauguin and Matisse with their innovations in color and form.

Volkov seems to have entertained a compromise, retaining the technical mastery of perspective and proportion which he had acquired in St. Petersburg and Kiev and yet experimenting with the bold color harmonies, variegated textures and solar resplendence which he found in the *kishlak* and the desert of his native Fergana. With their vigorous yellow, red and orange, paintings such as the two *Caravans* of 1921 in the George Costakis Collection at the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, or the cycle called *Eastern Primitive* (1918-20)[18] reflect Volkov's passion for place, for the indigenous and the visceral – while reminding us of the arid light and sharpened contours of Kuznetsov's Kirghizia or Sar'ian's Armenia.

In turn, reference to this primitive impulse brings us to Volkov's deep interest in the Russian icon and to his attempt to transfer some of its structural devices to his studio paintings. Although, in his appreciation of the Russian icon, Volkov was following a vogue of the 1910s (Pavel Filonov, Goncharova, Malevich and Tatlin all expressed a keen interest in the icon), he seems, like Tatlin, to have been concerned more with the construction of the icon and the formal resolution of its imagery than in the spiritual

[18] For a partial listing of the oils and drwaings in the cycle see *A. Volkov i ego ucheniki.* pp. 41, 45.

dimension of its symbology. If, for example, Tatlin could extrapolate the figures of a Virgin and Child and reduce them to geometric units, Volkov could paraphrase the spiraling incline, curved and inverse perspectives, spare physiognomies and arrested gestures of Rublev's *Trinity,* transmuting it into *Farewell* (1919, GRM) or, more forcefully, into the famous *Garnet Chaikhana* (1924, GTG).

If Volkov studied the manners and mores of Uzbekistan and lived most of his life in Tashkent, his local iconography was extremely economical and succinct, oscillating between the desert caravan and the *chaikhana,* a separation of exterior and interior which, to Volkov, represented the two poles of Uzbek life. On the one hand, there was the call of the wild and the nomadic shift as the camels swayed along the ancient Silk Route between West and East and East and West, the timeless firmament above and the endless expanse of the wilderness below where man had relinquished power to the divine. On the other hand, the *chaikhana* symbolized the moment of rest and respite, the physical enjoyment of food, drink and profane entertainment and man's illusory control of his surroundings. If the desert is about silence, eternity and the suspension of private space, the *chaikhana* is about noise, temporality and human collusion. To Volkov, therefore, these two conditions dominated and molded the Uzbek way of life, at least until eroded by the Soviet imposition of technology, atheism and collective ownership.

If, during the Stalin era, Volkov adjusted his personal vision to the tenets of Socialist Realism, even becoming chair of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Artists of Uzbekistan, he always strove to retain the "magic crystal of inspiration".[19] If he always recognized the values of local lore and national identity, he also sought a superior force which could eclipse the minutiae of everyday life and if he could never acquiesce to a single doctrine, Christian, Muslim or Communist, he did distinguish and invoke a transcending power, i.e. music, and many of his compositions aspire towards a musical condition. While Volkov understood the Symbolists' appeal to music as the highest order and as an instrument for spiritual release, he seems to have been drawn to music or to what Valerii Volkov calls "resonance"[20] more as sensatory indulgence in melody, harmony, rhythm, interval and orchestration than as a medium for touching the beyond. Unlike Kandinsky, Volkov did not talk about the "inner sound" of the work of painting and unlike Skriabin he did not equate certain sounds with certain colors.

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[19] I. Ustimenko: "Uvidet' i poniat'" in *Komsomolets Uzbekistana,* Tashkent, 1986, 14 November.
[20] V. Volkov: "Shkola Volkova" in *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo,* M, 2004, special issue dedicated to the 250th Anniversary of the Russian Academy of Arts, p. 86.

On the other hand, Volkov delighted in melody or rhythm, applying the notion of musical sequentiality – what Aleksei Sidorov called the "rhythm of colors"[21] – not only to his early *Caravan* series, but also to his Soviet epics such as *Blazing a New Road* (1932, Savitsky Art Gallery, Nukus) and *Brigade Entering the Field* (1933, Savitsky Art Gallery, Nukus). Here is the rhythm of process and procession, the Eternal Return which he describes just as graphically in his poetical cycles - as Melitsa Zemskaia affirmed in her discussion of the camel pictures, a basic function was to "expose the image of movement and the passing of time".[22] Volkov's many portraits of Uzbek musicians with their trumpets, drums and zithers perpetuate this rhythmicality, especially when we recall that traditional Uzbek music relies upon monody and monotone for its often hypnotic effect.[23]

In the 1930s and 1940s Volkov directed particular attention to the agricultural and industrial reforms of Uzbekistan, as the program of collectivization, in particular, took rapid effect, transforming the landscape and its settlements. Whether illusory or not, Volkov depicted the enthusiasm of a populus in search of a new self-determination as it adapted to the pressures of Soviet reality. Volkov's numerous interpretations of farming (gathering tomatoes, picking cotton) are gestures to this desired condition of the efficient workforce, industrial synchrony and streamlined production.

But, as in the case of other Soviet artists of the 1930s-50s, not least Kuznetsov and Sar'ian, Volkov did not cease to acknowledge his other, more lyrical, artistic persona, at once less manifest and more meditative, in paintings which yielded the ordained repertoire of Socialist Realism to another, more private code. During the 1940s, in particular, Volkov was drawn to the "neutral" landscape, i.e. to the landscape as a musical score, melodic and mellifluous, devoid of political engagement and societal relevance. In these scenes of desert, fields and mountains, with their stark formal contrasts and prismatic light, Volkov found a subtlety of tone, a serenity and a magic silence which contrasted so forcefully with the louder hymns to Soviet labor. Some of these evocations of natural beauty even contain the mauve, carmine and violet of the very early works, eliciting the crepuscular tones of the Symbolist vision.

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[21] Sidorov, "Novye khudozhestvennye vystavki" in *Pravda,* M, 1923, 17 November. Quoted in Taktash, *Aleksandr Volkov*, p. 10.
[22] Zemskaia, *Aleksandr Volkov*, p. 86.
[23] See N. Chakhvadze: "Russkii khudozhnik v inonatsiol'noi srede (zhivopis' A.N. Volkova i vostochnaia monodiia)" in *Vestnik Magnitogorskoi gosudarstvennoi konservatorii,* Magnitogorsk, 2001, No. 2, pp. 5-13.

To some extent, Volkov's pantheistic escape is paralleled by his repeated sallies into the genre of portraiture, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. Whether highly politicized such as the Lenin series or deeply contemplative such as the interpretation of Vrubel', the portrait assumed an ever stronger role in Volkov's later repertoire – which is confirmed by the increasing focus on the self-portrait. It is as if the artist was surveying the private landscape not only as a counterpart to the regimen of material reality, but rather as a source of inner reflection and solace. No doubt, this explains Volkov's unabashed fascination with the self-portrait in his very last years, as he cast a backward glance to reckon and take toll of his long and intense creative life.

Volkov understood the physical world as a single totality and constant cycle. His rhythmic emphasis relates, in turn, to his essential understanding of the physical world as a single totality and constant cycle, not unlike the Theosophists' equation of all things, animal, vegetable and mineral. In 1919, in one of the first serious assessments of the artist's work, Volkov's friend and promoter, the poet Yurii Dzhura-Poplavsky, underscored this notion of the "living earth", wherein "the mountains and the sky, people and plants and animals emerge as the creation of a single element and as the constituent parts of a single plan".[24] The mosaic quality makes us realize that the existence of the external ornament of the earth, constituent parts of which are people, stones, and plants, that the existence of this external decoration of the earth – is conditioned by the unity of all the earthly (or put more correctly – cosmic) aspiration". There is a faint echo here of Filonov's theory of Universal Flowering and Mikhail Matiushin's of Expanded Viewing, according to which reality is a single, organic and vital totality.

Aleksandr Volkov died half a century ago and, given the sobriety of historical perspective, we can now approach his artistic achievement with reason and veneration. The cultural and social contexts of his art can be defined, the reasons for his stylistic changes established, the originality of his contribution confirmed and his rightful place in the Pantheon of Russian art awarded. However, Volkov must be remembered not only for his paintings, drawings and poems, but also for his custodianship of the artistic dynasty which bears his name and the three other Volkovs – Aleksandr, Valerii and Andrei. Inspired by music from the grace of Mozart to the rush of the flamenco, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich attends to the "rhythm of arranging the strokes and patches on the canvas as well as to the rhythm involved in the

[24] Dzhura-Poplavsky, "Zhivaia zemlia. Turkestan v proizvedeniiakh khudozhnika Volkova». Quoted in Volkov: "Shkola Volkova" in *Ogonek,* p. 8.

technique of painting";[25] his bright, kinetic paintings vie with the "stereoscopic color"[26] of Valerii's own powerful abstractions of concrete subjects such as a city, a circus or a sea; while Andrei, the youngest member of the dynasty, pursues abstract painting, establishing abrupt syncopations between the monochrome field and the sudden intrusion of a contrasting color – fragments of what Andrei sees as the "colossal mosaic" of contemporary culture.[27]

But if their elder now enjoys the verdict of ages, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, Valerii and Andrei are still creating and evolving, each elaborating his personal style, each totally committed to his vocation and each refusing to taint inner vision with external ideology. As Andrei insists, "I am not wont to choose color, rather, it alights upon me".[28] There does, indeed, seem to be a superior force which, in a world of commercial compromise and political harassment, illuminates the Volkovs' path and feeds their flame of inspiration, and this, surely, is the most vital part of the artistic legacy which we are privileged to inherit.

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[25] A. Volkov: untitled statement in *Alexandre Volkov. Farbenfest*. Catalog of exhibition at the Kulturforum der Stadtresidenz, Oberursel, 2001, unpaginated. .

[26] V. Volkov: "Razmyshleniia o zhivopisi" in *A. Lanskoi Parizh, V. Volkov Moskva. V poiskakh svobody.* Catalog of exhibition at the State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, 1996, unpaginated.

[27] A. Volkov: untitled statement in *Khudozhniki Volkovy. Tri pokoleniia.* Catalog of exhibition at the Exhibition Hall of the TImiriazev Region, Moscow, 1991, unpaginated.

[28] A. Volkov: untitled statement in *Zhivopis' kak sreda obitaniia,* p. 4.