

The Art of New York Living

Moscow Nights -and Days

by Kenneth Jay Linsner

With the start of the fall art season here in New York, we tend to focus on our own events and galas, little knowing what is happening in some of the areas of the world where newfound riches have created an ever growing demand for the finite pool of investment-grade art and antiques.

The Moscow Art Fair which took place at the end of September provided a glimpse into that market. The Oligarchs, the richest of the Russians, now top the list of the wealthiest people in Eastern Europe and many have made it to the top of the world's richest. After Bentleys, platinum tea sets, multi-million dollar custom helicopters and yachts, what will they buy next?

The Art and Antiques Fair that was launched last year with 25 dealers was held in the Academy of Arts and attracted about 25,000 visitors. This year almost 70 dealers participated and the event was held in the newly reconstructed Manege, a neo-classical building, once an equestrian academy, within the shadow of the walls of the Kremlin. In many ways it resembles the Armory in New York with almost 35-foot-high ceilings and ample floor space. The opening night attracted more than 5,000 people with the oligarchic crowd clearly in evidence as well as actors, actresses, television, dance and musical personalities.

Last year the dealers were constrained in that they could not sell items directly from their booths, the works being under temporary import status and the entire fair deemed a cultural event. This year

the organizers obtained fairly favorable tax and customs clearance for the exhibitors and Fair could proceed on more Western terms.

The bulk of the dealers' offerings were directed to what they perceived as the Russian taste — Chagall, Impressionists, Russian works of art from the 19th through the 20th centuries and contemporary prints, paintings and drawings, although this last group was not cutting-edge and a great number of Warhol prints with Soviet themes and the like were in evidence.

As I said when interviewed at the Fair it is a great mistake to assume that the potential buyers have been living in a paper bag until this moment. I would have liked to see a broader range of material with less emphasis on Soviet and Russian themes.

Developing trust with this new breed of collector is the major issue. I have been advising one such collecting family for the past two years and it has taken that long to get them to view me as a serious advisor and not just an opportunist. I have nothing to sell to them and act only as their agent and, I presume, for those who do have things to sell the task is doubly difficult.

Things did sell at the Fair though, although I suspect that many of the larger sales, such as a Paul Signac, that went for a reported \$9 million, were consummated before the Fair.

Next year the Art and Antiques Fair will team up, in time, with the contemporary art exhibition called Art Moscow. This double dip

will undoubtedly bring out larger crowds — at one point the general public was forced to wait on a line extending around the Manege much as the line which extended from the Guggenheim last month for their show "Russia." That this is not the end of the evolution of the Western concept of the Fair is witnessed by the next event on the schedule — the Millionaire Fair where, you guessed it, one can buy Bentleys, platinum tea sets and multimillion dollar helicopters.

Ah yes, compared to this New York living is reserved.



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