



**EXPLORING COLOR**  
**OLGA ROZANOVA**  
**AND THE EARLY**  
**RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE**  
**1910-1918**

NINA GURIANOVA

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NINA GURIANOVA

TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN BY  
CHARLES ROUGLE

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# acknowledgement

The life and works of the Russian avant-garde artist Olga Rozanova (1886–1918) have been for a long time yet another “blank spot” in the history of twentieth-century Russian art. Although Rozanova has thus far not attracted the sustained attention of art historians, she is usually devoted a page or two in practically all major studies on the history of the early avant-garde.

Most of the very few publications dealing directly with Rozanova are journal articles or newspaper reviews, published mostly in Russia. Particularly important among them are two essays on her posthumous exhibition in 1913–1919 written by her contemporaries: a review by constructivist Varvara Stepanova in the journal *Iskusstvo* (no. 4, 1919), and the introduction to her exhibition catalogue written by suprematist Ivan Kliun. These brief remarks directly reflect the reception of Rozanova’s art by her fellow artists in the leftist artistic circle. Another critical work on Rozanova by Russian art historian Abram Efros was first published in the journal *Moskva* (no. 3, 1919) and later included in his collection *Profiles* (Moscow, 1930). His article remained the only scholarly work dedicated to Rozanova for more than forty years.

In the late 1970s the appearance of Rozanova’s works at exhibitions of Russian avant-garde art in Europe and the United States was well received, inspiring essays on Rozanova by Hubertus Gassner and Wassili Rakitin published in the catalog *Russian Women–Artists of the Avant-Garde 1910–1930* (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynka, 1979, in English and German). These articles, unfortunately not free from factual errors that were difficult to escape at a time when Russian archives were closed to researchers, provide a substantive general survey of her art. Several of Rozanova’s articles were translated into English by John Bowlt at the same time. This new wave of scholarly interest revealed



the importance and complexity of the role Rozanova played in the history of the Russian avant-garde in the 1910s.

However, this rise of interest in Rozanova's work was followed by another considerable hiatus lasting until 1989–1990 and the publication of several articles in the Russian press and a book by Miuda Yablonsky, *Women Artists of Russia's New Age, 1900–1935* (London: Abrams, 1990), with a chapter on Rozanova. In 1991 a modest exhibition of Rozanova's works was opened in Moscow (the next year the show traveled to St. Petersburg and Helsinki): *Olga Rozanova 1886–1918*, ed. E. Chepik et al. (Helsinki, 1992).

Because the brief biographical entries on the artist in dictionaries and exhibition catalogs are still full of all sorts of factual errors, and because Rozanova's oeuvre has essentially not yet been studied in its entirety, some of the necessary tasks of the present book have been to reconstruct an accurate chronology of Rozanova's art and life, as well as to search out, systematize, and date painterly works by Rozanova (the artist herself almost never put a date on her paintings) scattered among private collections and provincial museums in Russia. No further research had been done until now, which presented a real problem: often the same work appeared in different publications, under different titles, and with different dates.

Many of the unpublished materials from archives constituting the necessary documentary context of the research make up a separate chronological section of this first monograph on the artist.

I would like to thank Ms. Evgeniia N. Petrova, Deputy Director of the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg as well as Ms. Elena Basner, Ms. Nataliia Kozyreva and Ms. Olga Schikhareva, curators at the same museum; Mr. Rodionov, director of the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, and Ms. Nataliia Avtonomova, curator at the same museum; Ms. Nataliia Volkova, director of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, and Ms. Elena Gasparova, curator of the same archive; Ms. Elena Pogorelskaia, curator of the State Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow; Mr. Geurt Imanse, Chief Curator for research and Documentation, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Mr. De Router, Director of the Foundation Cultural Centre Khardzhiev-Chaga, Amsterdam; the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid; Ms. K. Gmurzynska of Gallerie Gmurzynska, Cologne; Mr. Aleksandr Lavrentev, Moscow; Mr. Aleksandr Fedorovsky, Berlin; Mr. Aleksandr Parnis, Moscow; Ms. Irina N. Punina, St. Petersburg; Mr. Vladimir Goriainov of Galart Publishers, Moscow; Mr. Harvey Shipley Miller of the

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I am deeply grateful to Professor Dmitrii V. Sarabianov, whose advice and assistance made an enormous contribution to the dissertation defended in 1992, out of which the present book grew. To Professors Robert Belknap, John Bowlt, Charlotte Douglas, and Boris Gasparov, who took upon themselves the labor of reading the manuscript, I am indebted for many valuable comments. Fred van der Marck and Liza Rudneva, with great forbearance, have seen this book through the press. Charles Rougle made an excellent translation of this book, working in close collaboration with the author; and Brian Bendlin's editorial guidance decisively shaped the text. I am grateful to Skúta Helgason and Stewart Cauley of Pollen Design for their inventive, yet tactful design. My work would not have been possible without the friendly support and help of Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, Gerald Janacek, Henryk Baran, Karen Myers, the late Mr. Timushi-san, and of my mother, Alevtina Shekhter, to each of whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

—Nina Gurianova



# foreword

This book is devoted to the life and work of Olga Rozanova, one of the most colorful figures in early-twentieth-century Russian visual art, who is finally winning the recognition she deserves. The painting of the Russian avant-garde has sometimes been presented as equivalent to the work of its “most important” representatives—Kazimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky, Vladimir Tatlin, Mikhail Larionov, Pavel Filonov, and March Chagall. These names alone attest to the amazing variety that is perhaps a unique feature of Russian avant-garde art, but this diversity is multiplied even more as soon as artists previously relegated to the status of “secondary” or the implementers of ideas discovered by the “leaders” are moved from the “second echelon” into the first. Nina Gurianova’s book vividly illustrates that considerable progress has been made lately in this redistribution of “ranks.”

The author beautifully integrates new material from archives, private collections, and early-twentieth-century periodicals into her subtle and penetrating analyses and intelligent discussion of Russian art as a whole during this period. This universalism I consider to be her principal merit. Using new archival materials, she not only presents Rozanova’s complete biography and artistic legacy, but also sketches the human face of the artist in a way that allows us to sense the organic nature of her life and work. We think of Russian avant-garde art as the product of “Supermen” such as Malevich or Filonov, who performed feats beyond the reach of others, spoke their own special language, and created incredible intellectual constructions. Rozanova, by contrast, lived an ordinary life, constantly working, experiencing the most common everyday difficulties, “ailing” from ordinary love, seeing dreams that to her appeared prophetic. Yet at the same time she created extraordinary works that penetrated a mysterious world and radically transformed reality. It is this combination of ordinary and extraordinary that makes her achievement particularly attractive.

The artist has served the scholar as a model. As she collects, describes, and revises Rozanova's artistic routine, Gurianova penetrates the very essence of the phenomenon of art with remarks that are keen yet unostentatious, and are presented as the result of a calm observation of a natural artistic process. An example of such an approach is what the author says about the romantic variant of avant-garde art. This notion can be developed and extrapolated onto the work of certain other masters, or it may even be seen to underlie more general observations on the Russian avant-garde.

Another example deserving particular attention is Gurianova's account of Rozanova's path to "nonobjectness." From Gurianova's analysis emerges an important conclusion: in her collages, Rozanova arrives on her own at forms of abstract art that may parallel Malevich's suprematism. Worth taking into account in this connection is the process by which different variants of abstract art were established in the work of Russian artists in this century's second decade. Kandinsky was followed by Larionov's rayism. The baton was then seized by Natalia Goncharova, who in works such as *Empty Space* (1913–1914) advanced her own special variety of abstract painting. The early death of Elena Guro—another of Gurianova's heroines—prevented her from doing the same. In 1914, Tatlin exhibited his counter-reliefs, which, although they cannot serve as examples of abstract painting, do introduce us to the abstract paradigm. Then came Malevich, and then together with him Rozanova. The question arises whether she was not followed by someone other than the familiar artists, such as Mikhail Matiushin.

The author, of course, has not neglected to touch upon the interrelationship of painting and poetry. She was encouraged to do so by various factors, including Rozanova's own poetic works, her long collaboration with Aleksei Kruchenykh, and her successes in the genre of the lithographed book. Although this theme has been fairly completely illuminated in the literature, Gurianova has discovered certain new and interesting aspects. Some of the most intriguing passages of the book are to be found in her interpretation of Rozanova's and Kruchenykh's album *War* and her analysis of *Game in Hell*.

There is no need to list all the merits of a book that is available to readers capable of discovering them for themselves. My task here has been to point out some of the qualities that make this first monograph on Olga Rozanova a valuable contribution to the study of the art of the Russian avant-garde.

—Dmitrii V. Sarabianov

# translator's note

The transliteration of Russian names into English presents special difficulties, as several systems are currently in use. As this is a scholarly text, it follows the more accurate and formal Library of Congress system. Some Russians in the arts, on the other hand, are better known by the Westernized spellings, or certain self-chosen spellings, of their names. In these cases, the more popular spelling has been used; for example, Wassily Kandinsky, Aleksandr Scriabin, Leo Tolstoy.

A further difficulty has to do with the fact that a number of artists in Russia became known in the West under their original, non-Russian names. In these cases the non-Russian variant is used, with the Russian transliteration indicated parenthetically at first usage; for example, Pougny (Puni), Benois (Benua).

In some instances, a Russian term or title may be open to interpretability in its translation to English—that is, it may bear more than one possible translation. When this is the case, the original Russian will parenthetically follow the term, or title's English translation.

The Russian transition to the Gregorian calendar, which has been widely used in Europe since the 1500s, did not occur until after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. As such, there are a few places in this volume where dates are given according to the Julian calendar (and so noted), or according to both the Julian and the Gregorian calendars, with the latter date parenthetically following the former.

—Charles Rougle



# PART I





*QUEEN OF SPADES. FROM THE SERIES PLAYING CARDS, C. 1915.*

OIL ON CANVAS. 77.5 × 61.5 CM. COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, SIMBIRSK.

# CONTEXT

## olga rozanova and the early russian avant-garde



Olga Rozanova belonged to that new race of twentieth-century artists who “came from afar, from the outside, when the rebellion was already under way; no one knew their faces or names, these junior officers and privates. But come they did, pure as a glacial lake and hard as the granite cliffs surrounding it, and threw the rebels into confusion. That is why Futurism found itself at an impasse and became overheated, as it were.”<sup>1</sup> In the categorical statement of Kazimir Malevich, these artists came “to purge the personality of academic clutter, burn out the mold of the past in the brain and establish time, space, tempos and rhythm, movement—the foundations of the present day.”<sup>2</sup>

Rozanova’s independent concept of art and her development as an artist were as intimately connected with her stimulating environment as they were shaped by her extraordinary personality and her exceptional talent as a painter. Links of friendship and collaboration bound her to Mikhail Matiushin and Elena Guro, Nikolai Kulbin and Aleksei Kruchenykh, Pavel Filonov and Velimir Khlebnikov, Kazimir Malevich,

1. I. Zdanevich, *Okrast iskusstva* (1917), OR GRM, f. 177. 37.

2. K. Malevich, “Nashi zadachi,” *Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), 28.

Ivan Pougny (Puni), and Aleksander Rodchenko. A continual search for a new expressiveness and consistent innovation were natural and regular processes in her art, and this may be why it immediately defies all attempts to enclose it within the bounds of any single tendency or group. Rozanova cannot be “assigned” only to the Union of Youth or, say, to Malevich’s group, for her art is so whole and unique that it breaks all such boundaries. Her career reflects in miniature the fate of the early Russian avant-garde, which was driven by an inexorable and constant striving for renewal and a denial of previous achievements. She perceived the meaning of art in the necessity of this movement, remarking in one of her essays that “There is nothing more awful in the World than an artist’s immutable Face . . . only those who have a presentiment of themselves as new can create.”<sup>3</sup> Paraphrasing Nikolai Berdiaev’s remark about Aleksander Scriabin one might say that her development as an artist was “an amazing manifestation of the creative evolution of an individual. This creative evolution sweeps aside art in the old sense of the word, which seemed eternal.”<sup>4</sup>

As a kind of contrast with Rozanova’s rich inner evolution and the striking intensity with which her talent developed (her entire mature artistic life spanned less than nine years, between 1910 and 1918), her biography seems ordinary and not very eventful. Only a page or two are devoted to her in the entry compiled for a never-published encyclopedia of the visual arts by her contemporary, the artist Varvara Stepanova:

Rozanova, Olga Vladimirovna.

Innovative painter, one of abstractionist members of the Union of Youth, Jack of Diamonds, Supremus, Left Federation of the Professional Union of Artist-Painters.

Received her training as an artist in private schools in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

All her life Rozanova championed radical new ideas in art, for which her works are especially valuable. Her highest achievements were in abstract painting (suprematism and *tsvetopis'* [literally, “color painting”; see chapter 4 of this volume—*N. G.*]), which afforded her an ample scope to ambitious use of color. Color was enormously important in her art and constitutes the foundation of her painting. Besides painting, Rozanova wrote essays on art for the journals *Supremus* and *The Union of Youth* and the newspaper *Anarchy* and composed futurist and abstract poetry. She collaborated with the poet Kruchenykh on a number of interesting books to which she contributed drawings; some of these books were printed by hand and had wood and linoleum engravings. She worked a great deal in decorative art, in which area she also demonstrated considerable accomplishment.

3.

O. Rozanova, “The Bases of the New Creation and the Reasons Why It Is Misunderstood,” in this volume, 193.

4.

N. Berdiaev, *Krizis iskusstva* (Moscow, 1990; reprint of 1918 edition), 6.

At the height of her creative powers, Rozanova died in 1918 from diphtheria following a cold she had contracted while working at an airport on preparations for the first anniversary of the October Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

The sudden death of the thirty-two-year-old artist came as a shock to her fellow leftist artists, underlining even more forcibly the uniqueness, authenticity, and value of everything she created. Her few extant letters convey the sincerity, charm, and gentle irony of her person—the same features that account for the immediate fascination with her work.

A daring and brilliant artist, Olga Rozanova was incredibly helpless in practical, everyday matters, and she was constantly forced to steal time from her painting to do boring office work to support herself. “I have a job,” she bitterly mocked herself, “which to me amounts to firewood and a bowl of porridge.” There were times when she literally did not have money for paint and canvas, when “all my doubts grow into a tangle of immense proportions. . . .”<sup>6</sup> But all this in some sense belonged to another life that she refused to take seriously (“Don’t complain of anything; complaining is a return to the past, while the future is bright,” as the self-named “futurians” believed).<sup>7</sup> In the “furious struggle” of theories and tendencies, amid everyday cares and all those things usually referred to as “the tribulations of war and the first years of the Revolution,” she managed to preserve her inner freedom and a romantic outlook on life that was alien to sentimental rapture or obtuse bitterness. For her, truth and reality consisted of everything she understood by the notion of art, by which she meant the source of joy and the will to live: “The world is a piece of raw material—for the unreceptive soul it is the back of a mirror, but for reflective souls it is a mirror of images appearing continually.”<sup>8</sup> This is also evidenced in her correspondence: “I would like to paint big pictures, but I am waiting to get the time, for there is no point in painting in fits and starts. I only like doing things if I enjoy them! And unexpected, accidental interruptions in my work torment me and disrupt the integrity of my ideas. Speaking generally, I want to be an artist first and only then all the rest . . . I want as soon as possible to paint pictures and write articles, and I am absolutely convinced that this is what I must do!”<sup>9</sup>

Because her personal archive is scattered and very little of it has survived, there are almost no factual records of Rozanova’s early “apprenticeship” period as an artist. For this reason, newly discovered family documents and visual materials from her brother’s collection (now in the private collection of Aleksander Fedorovsky, Berlin) are

5.  
V. Stepanova, “Biograficheskaia zametka o Rozanovoi” [1919]. A. Rodchenko and V. Stepanova archive, Moscow.

6.  
Letter of O. Rozanova to A. Kruchenykh [1913].  
RGALI, f. 134. 1. 190.

7.  
A. Kruchenykh, V. Khlebnikov, E. Guro, *Træ* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 40.

8.  
Rozanova, “Bases,”  
in this volume, 187.

9.  
Letter of O. Rozanova to A. Shemshurin, July 1917. OR GBL, f. 339. 5. 14. 11. 34, 37.

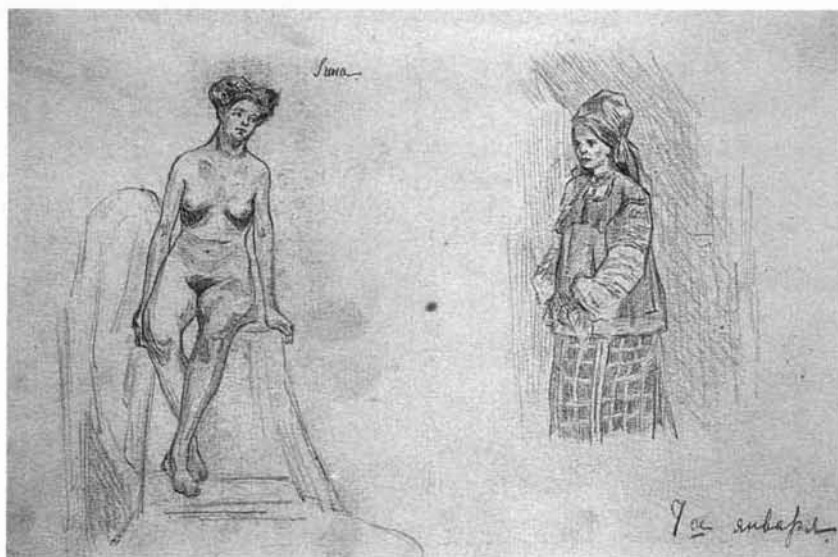
especially valuable. Of particular note are her early sketch pads of drawings in pencil and ink from her Vladimir period and her time at Anatolii Bolshakov's school and with Konstantin Iuon in Moscow (1906–1907). There are also albums with pencil and watercolor drafts done in 1913 and watercolor Suprematist sketches for the *Verbovka* exhibition of decorative art in 1916 and 1917.<sup>10</sup> In 1904, at the age of eighteen, she graduated from school in Vladimir, where she had grown up, and went to Moscow to study painting. She began in Bolshakov's art school, where she worked under Nikolai Ulianov and the sculptor Andrei Matveev, and in the private studio of then popular landscape artist Iuon, who worked in an impressionist mode. The nude studies and landscape sketches in her early notebooks date from that period. It is only her unusual approach to the model that distinguishes her pencil drawings of nudes from many such works by other students. In contrast to the usual distance between artist and model, which causes the human body to be treated as a thing or artistic object, she injects into each drawing an individual, personal element of portraiture and indicates on every page not only the exact date, but also the name of the model, often in a friendly, diminutive nickname such as "Shura," "Sania," and so on (figure 1). Bolshakov's and Iuon's studios, where the atmosphere was fairly democratic and free from ossified dogmas, became the first serious school for many young artists who had come from the provinces to take the entrance examinations for the art colleges. As Iuon recalled later of his classes, "What did I mainly teach? I believed least of all in study that amounted to a review of current work and instructions to the students as to what should be added and deleted, precisely what had to be changed, made redder, more yellow, and so on. I always thought that above all students needed to be taught the ability to see and study the laws of the visual world."<sup>11</sup>

10. Besides two notebooks with sketches of models (1906–1907) and early drawings of flowers collected in a separate album (1904–1906), Fedorovsky's collection includes two early albums with views of Melenki (pencil, ink) in the neoprimitivist style, and two notebooks with sketches done in 1913 and 1917. The main part of these consists of colored suprematist sketches in gouache and watercolors for the *Verbovka* exhibition of embroideries and appliqué. The collection also contains scattered sheets with suprematist sketches (1916–1917), early journal graphics in pencil and ink (circa 1907–1909), and also several futurist compositions dated 1913 to 1914. Of special note in the later sheets is a sketch of a self-portrait in red chalk (1917), evidently a preparatory composition for a self-portrait [private archive, Moscow, (figure 39)].

11. K. F. Iuon, *Ob iskusstve*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1959), 211–12.

By 1907–10 the group studying drawing and painting included Rozanova's future comrades in the Supremus group, Liubov Popova, Nadezhda Udaltsova, Aleksei Kruchenykh and Serge Charchoune, and between 1911 and 1915, Varvara Stepanova. Rozanova also audited classes at the Imperial Stroganov Institute, but this was merely a brief episode in her artistic biography.

The years 1907 to 1910 may be viewed as a distinct "first Moscow" period in Rozanova's career; they were significant years in the formation of her individuality as an artist and in the laying of the foundations of her future concepts of art. It was then that she developed an



1. STUDIES OF A NUDE AND A WOMAN IN A RUSSIAN FOLK DRESS, 1906.

PENCIL. 14.3 x 20.5 CM. INSCRIBED IN PENCIL: ZINA 7 JANUARY.

VERSO: NUDE WITH A VIOLIN.

COURTESY OF ALEKSANDR FEDOROVSKY, BERLIN.

affinity for genres such as the urban landscape, the portrait, and the still life. All of these genres are dominated by a vivid still life vision, a heightened sense of the object close to the "orthodox" style of the Jack of Diamonds (who as a group held their first exhibition in Moscow in late 1910). The first profound influence on Rozanova was the Moscow school of painting, in which an emphasis on color and a tendency toward decorativeness were transformed in accordance with the national reception of impressionism and the work of Paul Cézanne.<sup>12</sup> Her connection to the Moscow school marks some of her 1906 to 1909 studies, mostly nudes and landscapes now in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg. Evidently the earliest of these is the sketch *ANun* (c. 1907. Oil on canvas, 75.5 x 53 cm), now in the Tretyakov Gallery. The motif has no analogues in Rozanova's mature work. The fashionable turn-of-the-century theme of old Russia is treated descriptively, even naively: a girl dressed in a Russian *sarafan* sitting on a trunk holding a candle. Her forehead is nearly covered by her black shawl so that her facial features are barely visible. The entire effect lies in the reflection of the orange flame of the candle on the white sleeves of her dress. The technique is sparse and timid, and the entire composition is within the tradition of Viktor Vasnetsov, or Mikhail Nesterov, an artist working in the art

12.

Gleb Pospelov has the following interesting and detailed remark on the difference between the Moscow and St. Petersburg schools and the dominant role of Moscow in the artistic life of this period:

In the early twentieth century Moscow was already very clearly distinguished from St. Petersburg by its vigorous tradition in painting. It was there that the most important artists—Surikov and Serov, Korovin and Vrubel—were working at the turn of the century. Also connected with Moscow was the work of Borisov-Musatov, which in the first decade became a banner of the young artists. . . . To the "graphicness" of the "World of Art" group and later even to the "incorporeal spirituality" of Matiushin and Filonov, the Moscow masters contrasted their energetic, straightforward *tsvetopis'* and their gravitation toward painterly freedom. In this first decade, as well, Moscow boasted an elevated, more "sensitive" picturesqueness, a dedication to the body of things and color. (G. G. Pospelov, *Bubnovyi valet* [Moscow, 1990], 4–5.



2. GRAPHIC DESIGN FOR A MAGAZINE, C. 1907–1908.  
 BLACK INK, PENCIL, BRONZE PAINT. 21.3 × 13.5 CM.  
 COURTESY OF ALEKSANDR FEDOROVSKY. BERLIN.

nouveau style who had a very successful exhibition in Moscow in 1907. In her studies of nudes there is a certain stiffness and lack of academic precision. Some of the sketches in the Fedorovsky collection (Berlin) also fall into this category. The soft chiaroscuro modeling serves less to convey volume than to create a decorative painterly surface. The wash of lilac pink, lemon, and light blue hues creates the impression of a smooth, light-bearing texture. In the early study *House Corner and Bullfinches in Tree. Winter* (c. 1906–1908. Oil on cardboard, 63 x 50 cm, Tretyakov Gallery) the impasto is denser, and one senses Luon's characteristic postimpressionist treatment of light and space, particularly his favorite "effect" of snow in colored reflections of sunlight. Here, with the possible exception of the color scale based on a dominance of bright and warm tones, are none of the qualities of the later Rozanova. In another early landscape study in the Fedorovsky collection, pure saturated light acquires a certain significance together with bright, contrasting shades subordinated to an alternation of colors.

All of Rozanova's early works show a sensitive reverence for, and active interest in nature. Common to all of her still lifes is the painterly theme, which consists in an attempt to reflect the typical and inherently valuable, inimitable quality of each object, and to designate each thing

by combining its physical nature and its overall inner essence. Objects in these still lifes crowd out space, and impasto imparts to them an almost physical tangibility, earthliness, and body. The poetics of her early works bears comparison with the "organic" works of Guro and Matiushin, especially the latter's ideas about organic art.

Rozanova's early impressionist period determined a great deal in the evolution of her painting. As recent discoveries demonstrate, however, symbolism and art nouveau were equally important sources of her early poetics. Yet numerous unpublished sketches in pen, pencil, and watercolor from her 1906 and 1907 notebooks provide evidence of her interest in asymmetrical decorative motifs and a tendency toward stylization in her drawings, particularly in her early ink sketches to be used as journal graphics (figure 2). In the Fedorovsky collection are some 1907 to 1909 single-page studies of head-pieces and tail-pieces with figurative motifs inscribed in an oval or circle, ornamental motifs almost copied from the works of Aubrey Beardsley. They are certainly in the art nouveau style and follow the practice of book design as established by the World of Art group, Konstantin Somov, Mstislav Dobuzhinskii, and others. Stylistically related to these sketches is another group of ink drawings of flowers and leaves (Rozanova attended the so called flower class at the Bolshakov school), each drawing executed in an almost continuous line, producing a maximally stylized image transformed into an ornament.

In other albums with watercolors of flowers probably done earlier, in 1906, there is a different quality. Here we find the veneration of nature that characterizes all of Rozanova's early works, and constitutes the mechanism by which she perceived the visual world. Based on a rejection of abstract analytical cognition, this perception focuses instead on contemplative intuition and emotion: "The fascination of the visible, the charm of the spectacle, arrests the eye, and the artist's primary aspiration to create arises from this confrontation with nature. The desire to penetrate the World and, in reflecting it, to reflect oneself is an intuitive impulse that selects the Subject—this word being understood in its purely painterly meaning."<sup>13</sup> Even in her final, "abstract" period, Rozanova remained loyal to the momentary visual impression, that "charm of the visible" that provided the necessary impulse in the development of her extraordinary lyrical gift. At the same time, together with the suprematists she also painted what she called "real" pictures from life.

13.

Rozanova, "Bases,"  
in this volume, 188.



The foundations of Rozanova's concept of art, the logical conclusion of which was her discovery of *tsvetopis'*, were undoubtedly laid in her earliest period. Already then she was capable of firmly renouncing her own achievements (that is, "old ground" that risked becoming "devices" or clichés) in favor of the novel and experimental. She immediately reacted to all the latest accomplishments and new ideas, but never lapsed into sterile borrowing and imitation. On the contrary, it was her assimilation of the experience of others that provided the impulse for the development of her own individual and characteristic approach. Mikhail Larionov's and Natalia Goncharova's Russian neoprimitivism, the French fauvism of (especially) Henri Matisse, and the Italian futurism of Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini, and Giacomo Balla were all seminal influences that coincided with her own artistic aspirations.

This "everythingness" (*'vsechestvo'*) was in essence nothing other than a free choice of traditions: "We acknowledge all styles as suitable for the expression of our art, styles existing both yesterday and today."<sup>14</sup> The concept of everythingness, that is, the notion of feeling and encompassing everything, was introduced by Ilya Zdanevich, the theoretician of Larionov's group. Acknowledged by the neoprimitivists, it was typical of the new Russian art as a whole. The creative reception and often unexpected interpretation of foreign influences is among the distinguishing national features of Russian art, but it has rarely spilled over into direct stylization or the external imitation of form. As the neoprimitivist artist Aleksandr Grishchenko put it, "when the Russians took Western forms they introduced into them their own distinctive national spirit."<sup>15</sup>

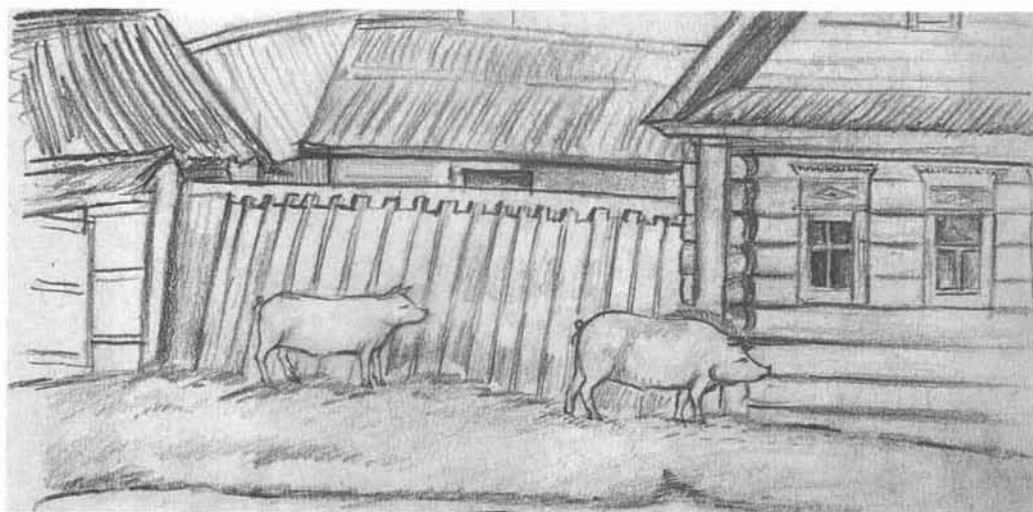
The end of this century's first decade in Moscow witnessed the formation of numerous currents and groupings in the new art. It is difficult to overestimate the role played by the exhibitions of the time in converting many young artists to the new artistic faith. The Moscow Association of Artists began showing the work of Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky. At the beginning of 1907, the *Blue Rose* exhibition was held in Moscow, and in December of that same year came *Stephanos-Wreath*, which included Larionov, David and Nikolai Burliuks, Aristarch Lentulov, and others. In April, 1908, the first *Golden Fleece Salon* opened with a French section exhibiting works by Matisse, Georges Braque, Paul Gauguin, Jean Metzinger, and Georges Rouault. Finally, Sergei Shchukin organized a unique collection of Western painting on which the young

14.

From the manifesto "Rayonists and Futurists," signed by Larionov, Goncharova, and other members of this group. [*Russian Art of the Avant Garde Theory and Criticism*, revised and enlarged edition, ed. and trans. by John E. Bowlt (New York, 1988) 90. Cf. the collection *Oslinyi khvost i misha*' (Moscow, 1913), 12.

15.

A. Grishchenko, *O sviazakh russkoi zhivopisi s Vizantiei i Zapadom XIII—XX vekov* (Moscow, 1913), 12.



3. MELENKI, HOUSE AND TWO PIGS, C. 1904–1905.

PENCIL, 13 x 25.6 CM.

COURTESY OF ALEKSANDR FEDOROVSKY, BERLIN.

artists were “raised.” The journal *The Golden Fleece* (no. 6, 1909) published Matisse’s manifesto “Notes of a Painter” (1908), in which he set forth the position of the innovative artist: “It is not possible for me to copy nature in a servile way. I am forced to interpret and submit it to the spirit of the picture. . . . My choice of colors does not rest on any scientific theory, it is based on observation, on feeling, on the experience of my sensibility.”<sup>16</sup> Many tenets of this essay clearly exerted an influence on the Russian avant-garde and specifically on Rozanova, who may in certain respects have been objecting to, and polemicizing with, them in her 1913 manifesto for the Union of Youth.

The years 1911 to 1914 (from the time she joined the Union until it broke up) were perhaps the four most intense and fruitful years in Rozanova’s life. This new, mature period of her work earned her a place in the history of Russian cubo-futurism, the style of the generation born in the late 1870s and 1880s that burst into art on the crest of the new century. The ambition and romanticism of its representatives and their confidence in their foreordained destiny can easily be read between the lines of Aleksei Kruchenykh’s reminiscence, *Our Arrival*:

We can often easily observe resemblances in the lives of the members of such groups, even among persons who grew up far away from one another, knew nothing of their future friends, and were not even aware that they were the founders of a particular movement.

When the evolution of one cycle of art concludes, the time comes for another to emerge. It is as if a drum is beating. . . . Gauguins seem to wake

16.  
*Matisse on art*, ed. and trans.  
Jack Flam (Berkeley, 1995),  
40–41.