В. И. Зарубин и его картина «Пейзаж с рекой и рыбаками» (1917) в собрании Государственного художественного музея Алтайского края

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Аннотация. Целью настоящей статьи является реконструкция биографии и анализ творчества одного из малоизученных художников рубежа XIX-XX вв. В. И. Зарубина, выпускника Российской академии художеств по мастерской А. И. Куинджи, одаренного и яркого живописца, академика Российской академии художеств. Новизна исследования заключается в том, что в статье использованы малоизученные архивные документы, как опубликованные, так и неопубликованные; впервые также осуществляется развернутый анализ одного из крупных его произведений «Пейзаж с рекой и рыбаками». Кроме этого, дан обзор исследований, посвященных художнику, а также его произведений, хранящихся в региональных музеях. Результатами работы стали введение в научный оборот новых биографических материалов, что позволило реконструировать биографию художника; представление основных этапов его творчества, в особенности в Петербурге, в Российской академии художеств в мастерской А. И. Куинджи; выявление влияния школы Куинджи на становление В. И. Зарубина как живописца, а также предложенный подход к анализу и интерпретации одного из самых значительных его произведений.

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V. I. Zarubin and His Painting “Landscape with River and Fishermen” (1917) in the Collection of the State Art Museum of the Altai Territory

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Abstract. The paper aims to reconstruct the biography and to analyze the creative work of V. I. Zarubin, a little-known artist of the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, a graduate of the Russian Academy of Arts (workshop of A. I. Kuindzhi – a brilliant painter, Academician of the Russian Academy of Arts). The researchers introduce into scientific circulation poorly investigated archival materials, including the unpublished ones, for the first time provide a comprehensive analysis of V. I. Zarubin’s large-scale painting “Landscape with River and Fishermen”, and herein lies scientific originality of the study. The article presents a survey of publications dedicated to V. I. Zarubin, provides a brief description of his works stored in regional museum collections. The research findings are as follows: the authors introduce into scientific circulation previously unpublished biographical materials, describe the basic stages of V. I. Zarubin’s creative work (in particular, Petersburg period when he studied at the Russian Academy of Arts), identify the influence of A. I. Kuindzhi’s school on his formation as a painter, propose an approach to interpreting his most significant painting.

Introduction

A characteristic feature of modern art history research is the appeal to the collections of regional art museums and galleries, which sometimes store unique works of art. This opens up good prospects for reconstructing the creative path of certain artists, filling the gaps in their biography.

In addition, some successful creative works of masters can become reference points for systematic studies of their heritage. This article is dedicated to a remarkable painter of the turn of the 19th-20th centuries Viktor Ivanovich Zarubin. His name was mentioned in reviews of exhibitions of that period, his works were highly estimated by art critics, he reached the maximum in terms of creative growth having become an Academician of the Imperial Academy of Arts, but then he practically disappeared from the field of view of researchers. Interest in his creative work appeared again thanks to the exhibition in the State Russian Museum and the publication of the album “Kuindzhi and His School” by the remarkable art critic V. S. Manin.
The fact that V. I. Zarubin’s painting “Landscape with River and Fishermen” (1917) from the collection of the State Art Museum of the Altai Territory (SAMAT) is insufficiently studied and unknown to the art history community gave cause for considering the artist’s heritage and analysing the work itself. This determines the relevance of the publication, which for the first time introduces some previously unpublished documents relating to the artist’s life into scientific circulation, and carries out an art history analysis of the work itself, which can be considered one of the key ones in V. I. Zarubin’s creativity.

The research methodology is complex and combines the methods of archival research with connoisseur, formal-stylistic and art history interpretation approaches. In theoretical terms, the study was based on the works of the prominent art critics M. V. Alpatov, G. Yu. Sternin, D. V. Sarabyanov and others who made a great contribution to the study of the Russian art of the turn of the 19th-20th centuries.

Results and Discussion

In the collection of the State Art Museum of the Altai Territory, in the section "Art of the Turn of the 19th-20th Centuries", a very representative collection of “Kuindzhist” artists is being formed. This term is assigned to a pleiad of gifted masters who studied at the Russian Academy of Arts in Arkhip Ivanovich Kuindzhi’s workshop or were associated with it for some time. The most complete monograph about the creative work is V. S. Manin’s book “Kuindzhi and His School” published in 1987.

Kuindzhi’s workshop was numerous. In his study, V. S. Manin attributes the artists A. A. Rylov, N. K. Roerich, N. P. Krymov, K. F. Bogaevsky, A. A. Borisov, F. E. Ruschits, V. I. Zarubin, K. Kh. Vroblevsky, N. P. Himona, E. I. Stolitsa, V. G. Purvit to it. The SAMAT has N. P. Himona’s work “The Hermit on the Steps of the Temple” – a large-scale, completed canvas, which, according to experts, can be considered as a standard for this artist. K. Kh. Vroblevsky is represented by the picturesque sketch “Vyshevetsky Castle” (1912), N. K. Roerich – by the sketch from his early period “At the Monastery Wall”. In addition, the SAMAT stores A. A. Rylov’s work “The Slavyanka River. Pavlovsk”, N. P. Krymov’s “Landscape of Tarusa” and “Gullies near Tarusa” (1917), A. A. Borisov’s “Mouth of the Chirikina River” (1896), “Chum by the River” (1906); there is also one large-scale painting by Viktor Ivanovich Zarubin “Landscape with River and Fishermen” (1917), to which the article is dedicated.

Viktor Ivanovich Zarubin (1866-1928) is mentioned in very few publications (Биографический словарь..., 1905; Кондаков, 1915; Петрова, 2021; Манин, 1987). One of the earliest is the “Biographical Dictionary of Former Pupils of the First Kharkov Gymnasium from 1805 to 1905” (1905) compiled by N. A. Chekanov. It contains a bibliographical note about the artist, as well as a list of his works from the exhibition in Paris in 1896 and the International Exhibition in Munich in 1901. There is just a brief note about V. I. Zarubin in the “Jubilee Reference Book of the Imperial Academy of Arts. 1764-1914” (Kon’kov, 1915). We also find a mention of the artist in the essay “Kuindzhi’s Workshop” which was written by his fellow student N. K. Roerich (Peprik, 1990) far away from the homeland, in the Himalayas, in 1936. It is just a phrase full of the warmth of friendly recollections: “The memory of the Teacher is inviolably preserved by all the scattered students who have consolidated their names on the pages of art history… Viktor Zarubin gave his beloved Ukraine, Kharkov region, Mezhyhirya with carts, pilgrims, expanses full of his mood. Wanderers go behind the hills, steppe rivers shine, mounds lie in hiding, and dark pine forests whisper. Greetings to Zarubin” (p. 78).

As it was already mentioned, the artist’s creative work and life are briefly presented in V. S. Manin’s album. But these are only two paragraphs which list a number of his works, emphasize the connection with A. I. Kuindzhi’s coloristic search, democratism of plots, attention to nature. This edition was timed to the exhibition “A. I. Kuindzhi and His School” and it caused some interest in V. I. Zarubin. Notes in reference books (Красилин, 1990; Каталог изобразительного искусства... 2015) are also dedicated to the artist’s creative work, repeat the same factors of his biography mentioning that his creative work is still little studied. V. N. Petrova sees one of the reasons for this “in the absence of a sufficient number of works in museum collections: for example, only 9 paintings and 2 drawings are stored in the Russian Museum. Today, in connection with the development of the antique market, V. I. Zarubin’s paintings have become very popular. Over the past few years, the Russian Museum has received 35 works by Zarubin from private collections for examination”.

Now we’ll try, relying on archival sources and other reference publications, to present the most significant events in V. I. Zarubin’s life. The future artist was born in Kharkov in the family of the famous doctor Ivan Kondratievich Zarubin (1835-1904). He was a well-known person in Ukraine with the high rank of the acting state councillor. Ivan Kondratievich was a surgeon, the dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Kharkiv University, he did a lot for public health, contributed to the opening of a hospital for the poor and was not only a practicing doctor, but honoured professor, he published several serious books on surgery (Календарь знаменательных..., 2014). Little is known about the artist’s mother: her name was Ekaterina Vasil’evna, she passed away in 1909 and was buried near her husband.

V. I. Zarubin received his education at Kharkov First Gymnasium, then, in 1885, he entered the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of Kharkov University. In 1891, he began his career in Kharkov State Chamber as a supernumerary official for special missions. As evidenced by his petition, he was dismissed from service in 1893 because of situation on his place. According to the documents of the Russian State Historical Archives, where the certificate issued to the artist by Kharkov State Chamber is stored, he was “married by the first marriage to the girl Zinaida Karlovna. He has a son, Ivan, who was born on May 8, 1889”. From the memoirs of V. I. Zarubin’s fellow students, we learn that his wife’s name was Elena Karlovnna, as N. K. Roerich points out in his letter (http://lebedigide-ethik.net/index.php/eriikhovedenie/151-pisma-n-k-erikha-s-nemetskogo-kurorta-bad-noenar) and A. A. Rylov recollects (Рылов, 1940): “Arkhip Ivanovich
asked me to give Zarubin an envelope with money... Elena Karlovna, a beautiful and slender blonde with blue eyes, opened the door for me. She invited me into the room with a friendly, soft voice. I handed her the envelope and left after five minutes. I was completely delighted by the charming, modest, quiet woman”. It can be assumed that Zinaida Karlovna was called Elena at home, and therefore Zarubin’s fellow students knew her as Elena Karlovna. Based on these data, we have managed to find information that Zinaida (Elena) Karlovna, born in 1865, died in besieged Leningrad in 1942 and was buried at the Serafimovskoe cemetery (http://visz.nlr.ru/blockade/show/1527891).

Information about the artist’s son Ivan Viktorovich Zarubin (born in 1889) is even scarcer. We find the only mention in the “Alphabetical Index of Petrograd Residents for 1917”: “Zarubin Ivan Viktorovich. Born in the 1880s (father, Zarubin Viktor Ivanovich, is a hereditary nobleman, Academician of painting). In 1877, he graduated from Imperial Moscow Technical School, served as a construction mechanic in the institutions of St. Petersburg – Petrograd – Leningrad. In the 1930s, he was seriously engaged in singing, worked in the state folk house, and was training to enter the opera; he was also interested in higher philosophy and theosophy. On March 31, 1935, he was arrested in Leningrad on a group case of theosophists (a library with books of theosophical content was confiscated during a search), sentenced to 3 years of exile in Western Siberia and sent to Taras on May 7, where he died in January, 1935” (http://pkk.memo.ru/page%202/KNIGA/Z_kn.html#z.40). It can be assumed that it is about the artist’s son, but the year of birth and the time of study are confused; other data may be reliable, for example, passion for music and philosophy. This is confirmed by an extract from Zarubin’s letter to Roerich dated July 8, 1915, which mentions Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy: “A ghost has appeared in our apartment; my wife and Vanya say that it walks, fingers notes, curtains in Vanya’s room, I have not seen or heard it yet, but they assure me it exists... Vanya advises reading ‘From the Chronicle of the World’ by Steiner” (http://rerich9.sitecity.ru/ltext_0204010156.phtml?pid=text_0204010156,p.2801085508).

Judging by various kinds of testimonies, V. I. Zarubin had an early interest in fine arts. It is known that as a student at Kharkov University, the artist attended the studio of the Ukrainian artist, teacher, founder of one of the first art schools in Kharkov, Yegor Yegorovich Schreider (1844-1922). He was an interesting person passionate about art, he had been educated in St. Petersburg as an external student at St. Petersburg Academy of Arts (1868-1870), he received a minor promotional medal in 1872 and the title of the class artist of the 3rd degree in landscape painting in 1874 (http://www.korners.kiev.ua/painter/33044/).

Apparently, notable successes in creative work and a passionate desire to devote himself to this field led to the fact that Zarubin went abroad in 1893 in order to get acquainted with the collections of European museums, and most importantly, to get an education. Like many aspiring artists from Russia, his search led him to Paris, to one of the most famous educational institutions – the private Academy of Rodolfo Julian, where he studied under the supervision of J. Lefebvre (1856-1911) and A. Robert-Fleury (1857-1911).

This Academy played a decisive role in the fate of many artists, and V. I. Zarubin acquired fundamental academic skills in art there. In the spring of 1896, he was admitted to the “Salondes Champs Elysees” exhibition, where he exhibited the painting “Soiren Normandie” (“From the Nature of Normandy”) for the first time. He spent his summers sketching in Normandy and Brittany (РГИА, ф. 789, оп. 12г1896, д. 40 (№ 17/22)). Upon returning to the homeland, the painter entered St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, where A. I. Kuindzhi and then A. A. Kiselev became his teachers.

At the competitive exhibition of 1898, V. I. Zarubin exhibited his works and was awarded the title of artist for the paintings “Evening Accord” and “House of God”. Since 1897, he participated in spring exhibitions in the halls of the Imperial Academy of Arts, as well as in foreign exhibitions in Munich, Vienna, etc. At the all-Russian competition of the Imperial Society for Promotion of Arts in 1905, he was awarded a landscape prize for the painting “Fishermen”. At the competition of “A. I. Kuindzhi’s Society” in 1906, he was awarded the 4th prize for the painting “Armenian Monastery”; in 1908 – the 4th prize for the painting “In the Fields”; in 1909 – the 2nd prize for the painting “Rain”. In 1909, he received the title of the Academician of the Imperial Academy of Arts (РТИА, ф. 789, оп. 12r1896, д. 40 (№ 17/22)).

During the years of Soviet power, the artist was engaged in the design of revolutionary holidays, organization of exhibitions of Leningrad artists and illustrated children’s books. From Zarubin’s letter to Roerich: “Dear Kolya! I have received your letter. You are writing about your works. There is no time for work here. Can our work come to mind in such a great time that Russia is going through? You live not your own life, but the life of the whole nation, and you feel the grandeur of the events, which we are happy to witness. You have to be here all this time to understand everything and feel this uprise of the people’s soul. It’s impossible to describe everything – you have to see it” (http://rerich9.sitecity.ru/ltext_0204010156.phtml?pid=text_0204010156,p.2801085508).

Norman motifs and Ukrainian landscapes with white huts and peasant women’s figures as well as monastic landscapes filled with silence and harmony, with lonely figures of monks, are most often found in the artist’s heritage. They are repeated throughout his creative work in various versions. Decorative understanding of color and generalization of forms can be traced in the master’s artistic manner; the influence of Art Nouveau is felt in the intricately curved crowns and tree trunks. One of the characteristic features in Zarubin’s landscapes is a well-distinguished short textured stroke made with a wide semi-dry brush, which leaves deep grooves in the paint layer. Such an expressive texture of painting is characteristic of the best artist’s works (Ilerpoma, 2021).

Zarubin’s fellowship with Kuindzhi’s school is primarily reflected in the coloristic solution of his paintings. In some works, the decorative possibilities of color are effectively used, for example, in the work “Evening Landscape” (1901), which fully corresponds to the style of romantic art. The artist loves to convey unusual states of nature, in which his own mood can be traced. The color system of Zarubin’s works and their tonality are close to those of Rylov and Vroblevsky (Манин, 1987).
Let us now dwell on V. I. Zarubin’s painting “Landscape with River and Fishermen” (see Ill. 1). The work was received by the SAMAT in 1988, it is made in oil on the canvas, has the author’s signature and date: 1917. Before the work was received by the museum, it had passed an expertise at the State Tretyakov Gallery. This is a large-scale work with the size of 99x131, and, of course, it occupies one of the central places in the artist’s creative work.

Illustration 1. V. I. Zarubin. Landscape with River and Fishermen. 1917. Canvas, oil. 99x131. SAMAT

It is better to start the analysis of the painting with determining its place in the SAMAT collection. It happened historically that the landscape is one of the main genres for this museum not only because it is one of the most popular genres in the Russian school of art. In the Altai region, the foundations of professional art were laid by two outstanding landscape painters – I. I. Shishkin’s student G. I. Gurkin (Гончарик, 2015) and the graduate of A. L. Stieglitz School Andrei Osipovich Nikulin, who then continued to improve his skills in Paris at Julian Academy (Башина, 2016). He brought the traditions of impressionism to the Altai region, and G.I. Gurkin combined the art of Altai with the Peredvizhniks’ painting.

Zarubin, Himona, Rylov and Roerich represent the third line of landscape painting which is significant for the art of Russia and is associated with A. I. Kuindzhi’s name. It was characterized by the search for new forms, decorative color solutions of paintings, symbolism. The appearance of V. I. Zarubin’s painting in the museum exposition expands the understanding of the landscape of the turn of the 19th-20th centuries. Moreover, due to the dramatic circumstances of the revolutionary time, A. N. Borisov, who was a graduate of the School for Promotion of Arts in Petrograd and a student of Kuindzhi’s pupils – N. K. Roerich, N. P. Himona, A. A. Rylov, turned out to be in the Altai region. The SAMAT has a unique collection of A. N. Borisov’s works and it opens up a great opportunity not only to present the creative work of the artists of A. I. Kuindzhi’s workshop, but one of the students as well (Дарыус, 2015). Thus, the “Kuindzhist” line in the landscape in the SAMAT exposition has a full-fledged representation.

An important advantage of the painting “Landscape with River and Fishermen” is the author’s dating of 1917. Looking at the canvas and imagining the time when it was created or completed, its compositional and figurative solution seems strange. The revolutionary struggle was raging in Petrograd streets, deep passions were arousing, terrible news were coming from the fronts, and a calm and idyllic, in a sense, picture appeared in Zarubin’s studio. It suggests that the artist chose the path of internal emigration, isolated himself from the world in an “ivory tower”. There are many examples of such an attitude towards the revolutionary events. But this is not true, and even vice versa – one has only to re-read the above mentioned excited letter from V. I. Zarubin to N. K. Roerich. The artist was deeply shocked by the events in Russia, he was trying to comprehend them and form his position.

At the same time, the picture is strikingly different from those created earlier in emotional terms. They were full of tension, outward excitement of the characters (“Pilgrims” (1903); “Landscape with Fishermen” (1906)). The artist sought to bring the characters as close to the cut of the canvas as possible, to hold the gaze on facial expressions, gestures, to convey bubbling energy in the movement of color masses in them.

The picture from the SAMAT contrasts markedly. The calm landscape is depicted with small hills, high sky and figures of people slowly walking towards the river. Restrained color scheme, smooth outlines of landscape, measured movement of fishermen convey the state of peace and silence. One may even get the impression that it was this peace that was the goal of the picture. The artist’s soul and headdress in the raging sea of the revolutionary struggle and violence that had already begun, of course, wanted just such a kind and serene view of nature.

But the picture hints at something more, primarily due to its size. V. I. Zarubin could have conveyed the state of peace by more stingy means and a smaller size of the canvas. He had enough experience: let us at least recall the previous canvas “Voice of Silence” (1916) stored in Sevastopol Museum, which depicts the monks sitting and peacefully talking against the background of a high cliff, behind which a river and a plain open. Then, if we compare the painting from the SAMAT and the landscape “Evening. A Cloud Has Come”, dated back to the same year and stored in Irkutsk Art Museum, it is clearly seen that the artist reflected the changeable state of nature in it. The work “Voice of Silence” is philosophical and full of thoughts, and the work from Irkutsk Museum conveys the artist’s excitement. It is obvious, given the time of their creation, that both the picture from the SAMAT and the work from Irkutsk Museum reflect a spiritual response to what was happening in the country. But which one?
Conclusion

Let us summarize our reasoning. Firstly, we have managed to more fully restore V. I. Zarubin’s life path through archival research and the analysis of the already known sources. A. I. Kuindzhi’s decisive role in his development as an artist and close relationship with other students of this outstanding painter and teacher were confirmed. Secondly, the analysis of the painting “Landscape with River and Fishermen” not only introduced one of the author’s major works of his art in expositions and excursions for the SAMAT and other museums where his works are stored. A clue in this regard appears in the comparison of the fishermen depicted in this canvas and in other paintings. If earlier the artist had painted the workers of the sea of Normandy, which he loved, or, later, of Russia monumentally, then in the Altai painting, they are extremely small, most likely they play a staffing role. In the composition, the sky clearly dominates. It occupies the largest space, it is painted very subtly, with blue value. Small clouds run along it right at the viewer, forming a beautiful rhythmic game. The hills in the painting have a different artistic movement. Following their contour lines, one can feel the measured rhythm of seemingly calm waves smoothly running past the viewer. Thus, a tense knot of two compositional movements arises, and their intersection, the greatest conjugation, occurs exactly where the figures of the people appear. The earth and the sky act as the main characters in the picture, and the people spiritualize the landscape and at the same time show how great and eternal the forces of nature are and how small a person is against the background of these vast and eternal spaces.

The feeling that they witnessed a tectonic break during the revolution was characteristic of many artists of that time. B. M. Kustodiev paints the picture “Bolshevik” (1920) with a huge figure with a red banner walking right through the city, K. F. Yuon paints the picture “New Planet” (1921) with small figures of people on the earth surface and cosmic mystery in the sky. V. I. Zarubin in the picture under examination continues the line of his teacher’s symbolism. It is not a man who is great in his deeds, and it is not the universe that endlessly dominates a man with its rhythms, but only the unity of a man with the world can be considered the desired goal and good. Similar ideas in one form or another manifested themselves among other A. I. Kuindzhi’s students, especially vividly – in N. K. Roerich’s works. And the fishermen themselves in V. I. Zarubin’s picture are perceived in this case both in the everyday plane of life – people going to fish and in the biblical sense, as “fishers of men” for blessing and judgment. Further analysis of V. I. Zarubin’s creative work can show to what extent such an interpretation is right, but at the moment the picture occupies one of the key places in his heritage.

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