Arctic region of Russia at the 1900 World Exhibition

V Serkova¹, V Lobastova², T Simonenko² and O Samylov³

¹Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, St. Petersburg, Russia,
²St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia
³St. Petersburg University of railway transport of Emperor Alexander I, St. Petersburg, Russia

beshent@bk.ru

Abstract. Russia's participation in the World Exhibitions reflected the self-identification of Russia and expressed the desire to present the country as a strong power, inscribed in the context of World development and interaction. Of particular importance for the demonstration of the technical power of Russia and its achievements in various areas of culture was the World Exhibition of 1900 in Paris. One of the central pavilions of the Russian department of the exhibition was the Pavilion of the Russian outskirts devoted to various topics from the life of the peoples of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, and the development of the Far North. This article discusses the features of the exhibition, representing the uniqueness of the North, its nature, ancient monuments, and the life of the northern peoples of the Russian Empire. It was represented by the huge panels made by Russian artist Konstantin Korovin. At the turn of the century, at the time of heightened interest in the Arctic from scientists, researchers, writers and artists, Korovin repeatedly made trips to the Russian North, which every time made a huge impression on him, which radically changed the artist’s stylistic style, allowed him to improve the technique of creating extensive panel, to prove himself as a decorative artist. The article concludes that the participation of Konstantin Korovin in the organization of the exhibition not only brought great benefits in the organization of the World Exhibition in Paris, but also turned out to be his greatest creative success. The exhibition in Paris in 1900 testified that Russia was developing rapidly at the time; it ceased to be exotic and incomprehensible and revealed its national identity.

1. Introduction

Recently, the Arctic region has attracted the attention of researchers from various fields of knowledge. Basically, the interest in it is explained by the economic, political, environmental interests of Russia in this region of the world, long established by Russian pioneers, and then by the entrepreneurs industrialists. Lately, the interest of Russian scientists in the Arctic has increased due to the increased political opposition between Western countries and Russia and the associated pressure on the traditional areas of its influence. The Arctic turned out to be one of the centers of intersecting interests of Russia and the Western world. In this regard, the status of the “Arctic theme” in the academic world has grown, evidenced by many conferences, round tables and numerous papers on the Arctic and affecting the widest range of interests. In particular, we should stress the articles by S V Kulik, N I Didenko [1], K N Kikkas, [2], E A Samylovskaya, D F Skripnuk [3], E A Kudryavtseva, K Yu Eidemiller [4], and other researchers raising various problems of the Arctic territory. One of the most important issues of this problem is the history of the development of the Arctic space and the inclusion of the Arctic in the sphere of economic and political interests of Russia, in particular, the appearance of the Arctic theme in the exposition of the World Exhibitions.
Russia began participating in World Exhibitions since 1851, the year of their first organization. The policy of the exhibition was aimed at presenting the country as a strong power, inscribed in the context of world development and interaction. The peculiarity of Russia has always manifested itself in its enormous scale and diversity of inhabiting it peoples and their cultures. The culture of the peoples of the northern regions of Russia was represented by exhibits related to their activities. The Arctic includes not only uninhabited virgin territories, but also lands that have long been inhabited by northerners. The world of the peoples of the Russian North is the world of a complex ancient culture, the active study of which began in the XIX century with the development of ethnography, ethnology, local history, and archeology. Interest in the culture of the northern peoples, linked, of course, to the economic interests of the Russian Empire in the North and in the Arctic, is reflected in the layout of the Russian pavilions of the World Exhibitions. Initially, the northern territories showed up at these exhibitions as a supplier of furs, precious and semiprecious stones, like the world of exotics, almost uninhabited, commercial, and tradable. It is not by chance that the first prize at the first World Exhibition in London, exhibits of which were presented in the Crystal Palace, received a jasper vase, created by Yekaterinburg masters. In general, at the first exhibitions Russia made expression of a country of “terems”, booths and tents. The demonstration of Russian exotics was the basis of the exposition policy.

With the development of industry and capital in Russia, the form of its self-identification at international exhibitions also changed. Very different exhibits appeared. Thus, at the exhibition in 1878 for the first time electric arc lamps of Yablochkov (“Russian light”) were demonstrated. The following year they lightened the streets of Saint Petersburg, Paris and London.

Russia’s participation in the world exhibition in 1900 in Paris ended with a triumph. This exhibition was special in many respects. It ended the 19th century, which was the beginning of the industrial development of many world powers. France, the host country, in the center of its capital, prepared the exhibition grounds. Especially for the exhibition the tower of Eiffel and the bridge of Alexander III was built.

2. Russian pavilions in Paris

Russia, which was not for some reason provided with exhibition pavilions, built the entire Russian town in the place allotted for its expositions. The exhibition was overseen by the chairman of the commission for the participation of Russia in the World Exhibition V.I. Kovalevsky; prince V.N. Tenishev, general commissioner of the Russian department and professor of St. Petersburg State University D.P. Konовалов, authorized by the Minister of Finance to organize an examination of the Russian Department of Expertise [5, p. 123]. D.I. Mendeleev accepted active role in the organization of the exhibition, he was vice-president of the jury of the exhibition. The genius of the architect R.F. Meltzer expressed was shown at the exhibition, who presented a thoughtful, complex and an effective architectural program. He supervised the construction of “Russian Avenue” in Paris.

The Imperial Pavilion which served as the residence of the royal family was built in the Old Russian style, and its reception halls faced the facade of the Pavilion of the Russian Outskirts, in which the main Russian exhibits of the Paris exhibition were presented.

The Pavilion of the Russian Outskirts, built in the style of the Moscow and Kazan Kremlin, reflected the completely bizarre and scope of the style of historicism, originality and variety of forms and details of the “Russian style”. The huge cast-iron gates of Kasli casting led to the pavilion, which eventually won the Grand Prix of the World Paris Exhibition. The architect I.E. Bondarenko has built the “Russian Village”, consisting of small quaint pavilions in the architectural style of the Russian North which housed an exposition of the handicraft department. Many exhibits of this department also received gold medals at the Grand Prix exhibition. It was a gold embroidery, lace, tulle, made by the craftsmen of the Mariinsky Practical School under the auspices of the Empress Maria Feodorovna, the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Gold Production, the tulle factory in St. Petersburg, the Muravevsk embroidery workshop of Maria Nikolaevna, the Helsingfors school of manual labor, the school of Ms. Kolpenskaya, Kukarskaya and Kholunitskaya lace schools of Vyatka province, the school of Princess Lvova of the Moscow province, the Moscow Lace Factory, nuns and novices of Russian monasteries and individual artisans.

The locomotive with wagons included in the “Panorama of the Siberian Railway, the work of Dr. Piasetsky” caused the general enthusiasm of the visitors [5, p. 123]. This panorama represented a journey
through the stations of the Siberian Railway and was interspersed with pictures of Russian landscapes. The Russian department began its work only on April 17, two days after the opening of the exhibition. Of the 18 thematic departments represented at the exhibition, Russia did not participate in only one – in the colonization department [6].

3. Konstantin Korovin and Russian North

Exposition of the pavilion of the Russian Outskirts was dedicated to the Caucasus, Siberia, Central Asia and the regions of the Far North. The Russian artist Konstantin Korovin worked on the exposition of this pavilion. Korovin's contribution to the overall organization of the exhibition cannot be overemphasized. He performed, in fact, the functions of the architect, the artist-decorator, and the artist-performer. Evaluating his contribution to the organization of the World Exhibition, N.V. Vekhov wrote: “Konstantin Alekseevich fulfilled a variety of duties already by the very position of the artist, attached to the General Commissariat of the exhibition, reporting to Prince Vyacheslav Nikolaevich Tenishev, in fact answering for its external appearance. On the instructions of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, Korovin made a design of the handicraft department of the Russian Pavilion of the exhibition. Having shown his outstanding organizational skills, initiative, ingenuity in solving sometimes-desperate situations, resourcefulness and subtle artistic taste, Korovin was literally irreplaceable during the many months of organizational fever” [7]. About thirty huge panels made by Konstantin Korovin were used specially for this exhibition. Thereby the panel with images of the northern nature came with a whole frieze, divided by narrow white frames.

Most of the panels devoted to the north were drawn from the exposition of the 14th All-Russian Industrial and Art Exhibition in Nizhny Novgorod, which took place in 1896. To make sketches for the exhibition in Nizhny Novgorod, and then in Paris, Korovin undertook several trips to the north of Russia. Konstantin Korovin visited the territories of the Russian North several times – in 1894, in 1897 and in 1898-1899. The patron and friend of the artist S. Mamontov initiated the first trip. Thanks to his protection, Korovin was commissioned to make sketches for the pavilion of the “Far North” in Nizhny Novgorod. The trip was fantastic, from Vologda through Sukhon, Northern Dvina, White and Barents seas and then to the Arctic Ocean. On the same trip, they visited Novaya Zemlya, then Norway and Sweden. This was not the first trip, inspired and sponsored by S.I. Mamontov. In 1888, they traveled together in Italy, in 1889 made a trip to the Caucasus. Korovin goes to his northern journey immediately after his stay in Paris, breathing in its air and imbued with artistic impressions from the courageous experiments of the French Impressionists. This could not but reflect on his creative manner. Not only the sumptuous nature of the French south became a source of impressions for Korovin, the Russian North became equally important for the formation of his artistic style and bold picturesque impressionistic experiments for him.

This journey lasted for two months and had remarkable results – about 30 works: “Arkhangelsk”, “Fish Quay in Arkhangelsk”, “The Arkhangelsk Port on the Dvina”, “The White World”, “In the North”, “A Full Moon on Murman”, “Witte Island”, “Teriberka on Murman”, “The mouth of the river Teriberka”, “Cod and halibut”, “The Kildin Island”, “The Ekaterininskaya harbor”, “The Church and cemetery in the Yeretiki”, “Murmansk fishing in tiers in the sea”, “The shores of Murman (Pomeranian crosses)”, “Fishing in the Murmansk Sea”, “September in Pechenga”, “In the Far North”, “Winter in Lapland”, “Stream of St. Trifon”, “Waterfall of St. Trifon”, “Norwegian house on Pechenga”, “Church on Pazreka”, “Lapland farmer – the owner of reindeer herds”, “Hammerfest. Northern Lights”, “North Cape”, “White Night in Northern Norway”, “Harbor in Norway. We also have the remarkable diaries of Korovin, based on his trip [7, pp. 60-63].

For an exhibition in Nizhny Novgorod, Korovin sketched the pavilion of the Far North and drew monumental panels that were exhibited in Paris at a world exhibition, and then used to decorate the interiors of the Yaroslavsky Railway Station after the close of the exhibition: “The Northern Lights”, “The first steps of exploration in the tundra”, “Construction of narrow-gauge railway in the tundra”, “Commercial revival at the pier in Arkhangelsk”, “Ekaterininskaya harbor of the Murmansk coast”, “Seal fishing on the White Sea”, “Factory at Murman”, “Fish halibut”, “Pomors”, “Fat removal from the whale”, “Fishing for cod and other fish”, “Walrus hunt”, “Polar bears”, “Tundra with deer”, “Monastery on Pechenga”. As N. Vekhov writes, about the exposition of the Far North department: Korovin's panel “played the role of windows in that unknown world, from which all this wealth was brought” [10. p. 74]
The depiction of the Russian North radically changes the graphic stylistic manner of Konstantin Korovin. In the artistic thinking of the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, radical and, as it turned out, irreversible changes occur in painting. Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism – many of these artistic styles were born from the denial of what was achieved in European realistic and academic art. The apogee of realism was the 17th century, when the genius of such artists as Velasquez, Hals, Rembrandt, Vermeer Delft, and Rubens manifested itself in Europe. Artists, so called “small Dutch”, presented realistic art of the highest level. Later, realism is affirmed in European academies and becomes the style standard of a professional artist. However, from the second half of the 19th century, the most sophisticated stylistic delights in European painting were the result of a departure from the realistic tradition and in many respects fed from non-European artistic sources. At the same time, the update went along the lines of cultural inversion, “artistic appeal” to the unrecognized, not official, non-salon, non-academic, not classical examples of national art. From the sources of non-European “cultural marginals” – Japanese, Chinese, Africans, Haitians, Indians and representatives of other “exotic” countries, many origins of the European avant-garde originate. Realism has become one of the possible ways of the artistic embodiment of the world. The same artist could cultivate different artistic styles for solving various visual tasks. This also applies to the artistic experiments of Konstantin Korovin [9]. For many reasons his panel go beyond the impressionistic manner, so masterly applied in his easel works due to the scope of the tasks which confront him as a design artist who had to take into account the perception of paintings from a great distance. The contrast of Korovin the easel and the Korovin-monumentalist is quite clearly manifested in his northern series. The northern nature, which he depicts in his easel works, does not lose its “impressionistic redundancy” in picturesque. It all represents that strange and outlandish beauty that is generated by the weak and uneven illumination emanating from the Moon.

The absence of a bright sun does not cancel the gleams of light, with which all the small details of the northern landscape depicted by Korovin are saturated. Perhaps, like no other artist Korovin could express the air spanned by this light. Light becomes an independent element in the painting of this artist, visible and incredibly picturesque. For Korovin, as a true impressionist, it is important to create the flesh of things flickering and vibrating from the light. The natural elements – water, earth and light as a combination of heavenly fire and air – are among all impressionists, and in Korovin, in particular, – the basis of their artistic cosmography. The light in his canvases is a peculiar and revealing inception of all the objects depicted.

Korovin paints scanty species paintings of the Far North, so unlike any of the St. Petersburg landscape, nor, especially, on the nature of the southern belts, creating a luminiferous environment in the space of his canvases. The northern views of his easel works are definitely picturesque masterpieces. In a certain respect, the northern nature enabled Korovin to convey the “sense of Russia”. That is why Korovin was only once in the work “Hammerfest. Northern Lights” depicted the northern lights. The light-bearing environment of the northern territories is not for him not so much an extravaganza, special effects; it is all the metamorphoses of the northern luminary.

Quite different pictorial logic was the world that opened in large formats. It is no accident that they are sometimes mistakenly called “frescoes”. The contrast of northern species depicted on the panel is striking: there is no light in them. These are two divided worlds. Korovin invented a “different reality”. His manner changes, which, it would seem, is inseparable from his artistic consciousness. It is picturequely different worlds. In the paintings, there is an impressionistic world, still filled with warmth and light. In addition, the kinds opening in a panel are the world, bound by a lifeless cold. In the northern panels, the image plane is separated into large, dull planes that are poorly reflecting the color. Panel, in fact, are the ultimate frontier, keeping life forms on the other side of which – cold, darkness and deadening cold. Everything that was realized with the help of impressionistic means in its northern paintings – glare, shadows, vibrations of light, color, constantly changing in sunshine, all fading in large wall compositions. S.I. Mamontov vaguely felt this difference, when he expressed his impressions of the living pictures of the north. In his letter he exclaimed: “What a terrible mistake to look for French tones when there is such a charm” [10, p. 259] Pictures of Korovin and Serov were supplied with a report on the journeys of S.I. Mamontov and S.Y. Witte along the Kola Peninsula in 1894 [8, p. 142] The participation of Konstantin Korovin turned out to be the greatest success in his career as an artist and brought immense benefit to the organization of the World Exhibition in Paris.
Personal merits of Korovin for organizing and participating in the world exhibition were highly appreciated. In total, he received 11 awards, two gold and nine silver medals, the French Order of the Legion of Honor and the Russian Order of St. Stanislav III degree [7, p. 62].

In total, Russia has collected a record number of awards this year – 1589, of which 212 Grand prix and 370 gold awards. Several of them were received for technical achievements (for success in the field of radio communications A. Popov, L. Proskuryakov for the project of the Krasnoyarsk bridge across the Yenisei). The Grand Prix was awarded to engineer and artist P.Y. Piasetsky.

This exhibition in many respects can be compared with the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937 in terms of abundance of awards received by Russian participants and its success with visitors, the level of organization of the exposition, and the achievement of the integrity of the exhibition space. It was the exhibition where was the struggle not only for the awards, but also for the status of the most developing industrial power in Europe.

4. Conclusion

Russia's participation in the Paris World Exhibition in 1900 was a triumph of the country, successfully combining in its exposition logic the demonstration of the distinctiveness of Russian culture, both in artistic and industrial activities. Russia developed rapidly at the time and Russian Avenue at the Paris exhibition reflected this development. Talents and the genius of Russian architects, artists, engineers and applied arts masters brought the country an unprecedented number of high awards. The face of the country changed, it ceased to be an exotic and incomprehensible country, an “Asian-European village”, without losing its national identity.

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