

# No Meeting is a Coincidence

Julia Repina (Russia)

I am constantly amazed at the mysteries permeating our world.

In arts, for instance, cultural phenomena interweave each other to various degrees. In the Renaissance and Baroque eras, clear-cut schools were the norm, with very strict teacher-student relationships. Centuries later, experts still argue which paintings are truly Rembrandt's and which are to be attributed to his milieu. The same is true about Rubens and many other artists. Some examples are as recent as the 20th century, including the Masters of Analytical Art School established by the outstanding Russian avant-garde artist Pavel Filonov (1883-1941). Some paintings of the school's students (especially graphical ones) are exceptionally similar to each other, which is understandable given that the old master often took a pencil to his students' paintings.

I've had my share of artistic influences too. Here are few meetings that have influenced me and my artistic path in one way or another.

I entered the Ceramics and Glass department of Saint Petersburg State Art and Industry Academy in 1988, and graduated in 1993. This notorious perestroika period led to the collapse of one system and the birth of another, completely different one. In the ironic words of the poet Gleb Gorbovsky, "We lifted the elbow to one government and chased it down with a pickle to another." Russian avant-garde art began to attract enormous interest, with new creative associations being established everywhere. Neither students nor professors failed to be affected.

One of the most fascinating artists and instructors of the department was Vladimir Sergeevich Vasilkovsky (1921-2002). An architect by training, he built bridges connecting the past to the present, both literally and figuratively. The well-known artist I. Y. Bilibin, once a member of World of Art, a Russian magazine and artistic movement of the early 20th century, once told him: "You're the last of us world-of-artists!" Vasilkovsky could draw like no one else, and he had an unequalled feeling of architectural shapes. These unique skills allowed him to become the founding father of artistic ceramics, the way we now know it in Russia. His composition Herd won the Gold Medal at the 1962 Prague Exhibition and became a symbol of the period. His other renowned works include Reading Omar Hayama, Captain's Daughter and more.

Vasilkovsky was immensely popular with students, and his wit, irony and wisdom are still the subject of many stories. He's remembered for his broad range of interests, intellect and creativity. All in all, he is the single strongest influence on the contemporary ceramics of St. Petersburg.

When I defended my graduation work The Decameron 1993, Vasilkovsky was my adviser and Inna Olevskaya my reviewer.

While Vasilkovski was intrinsically academic, the works of Inna Olevskaya are deeply theatrical—in a good sense. She is a natural porcelainist. For many years she has worked for the Imperial Porcelain Factory, whose traditions of porcelain painting go way back to the 18th century. Masters like K. Malevich, A. Shchekatina-Pototskaya, A. Vorobiovsky, V. Gorodetsky and A. Leporskaya shined there in the 20th century. It was through Leporskaya that Olevskaya inherited the suprematist art traditions of the 1920s. However, Olevskaya's works are not typically abstract, but figurative. All her compositions have a certain dramatic subtext. Cases in point are her works Masquerade and Legion, dedicated to the contemporary youth culture Antigirl. Some of Inna's works evidently tend to conceptualism, for example, the noteworthy composition Let's have a smoke. It features a pack of Belomorkanal cigarettes, a box of matches with the label Have you signed up as a volunteer?, a peculiar cigarette with the traces of someone's teeth, and a patch torn out of a Pravda newspaper

— all made of porcelain with incredible accuracy. It is an ironic and sad monument to the Soviet epoch. Her proficiency in this field is so high that I consider it a benchmark for all other porcelainists.

Our painting instructor was Kirill Aleksandrovich Gushchin, a one of a kind tutor. He was highly considerate of each student: never pushed his students, never told them to do things a certain way—only warned them how NOT to do something. To illustrate his ideas, he often brought us albums of his favorite masters such as Rouault, Matisse, Morandi, and icon-painting albums.

Much later I happened to visit an exhibition of K. I. Gushchin at the Russian State Museum—and was impressed by a variety of totally contemporary, fine, poetic paintings. There is always a mystery in his works, Mystery with a capital M, which is so often absent in the creations of many other authors despite being indispensable in any art. More recently, in 2011, I also participated in a large exhibition called Kirill Gushin and his students, which took place in the halls my alma mater.

Another remarkable person I met in college was my fellow student Ekaterina Sukhareva (née Zadorina). Born to a family of rich cultural traditions, she came out of the shadow of her renowned parents, the ceramists A. Zadorin and N. Savinova, to become an interesting artist with her own identity. She often works with both majolica and overglaze porcelain painting. Ekaterina's view of the world resembles that of Alice from Alice in Wonderland — she takes delight in the fantastic and the unfamiliar. She is fascinated by 'bird people' and 'butterfly people,' a world where a Red Fox carries an elf rider on his back while a biologist passionately examines a ladybug through his wheel-sized magnifying glass. I consider Ekaterina Sukhareva my best friend and highly value her professional opinion.

During my freshman year I also met Alexander Gushchin, the son of Kirill Gushchin. Several years my senior, he was already working on his master's thesis. We quickly became friends. Alex is an interesting and somewhat eccentric person. He can call me and say "I have painted three genius pictures today!" and I can never tell if he is joking or dead serious. Since his younger years Alexander has kept in close touch with the underground of Leningrad. I've always adored his unconventional selection of colors and themes. In 2002, he and I organized a large joint exhibition in the halls of the International Artists Federation. Alex's paintings and my ceramics proved to be an intriguing and curious artistic combination.

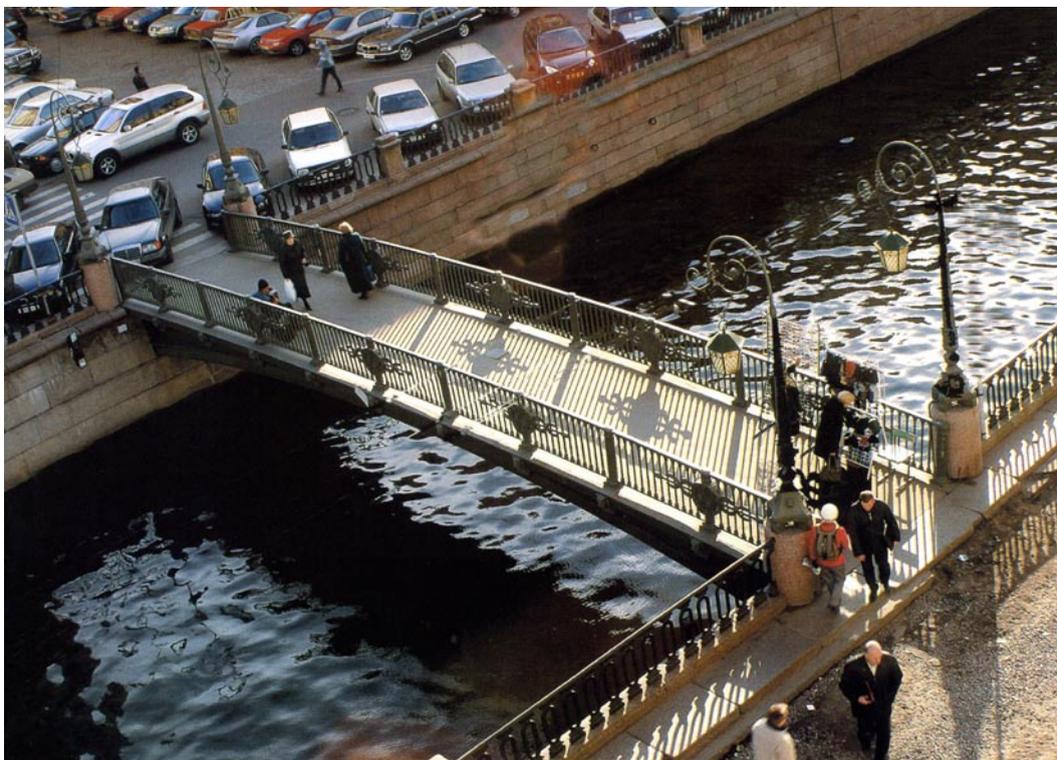
In conclusion, let me quote my friend and colleague Alexander Gushchin: "People are like landscapes. Some we shudder to recall, like a horrible nightmare; some give us food for thought; some leave us utterly indifferent; yet a select few make us feel like we're on the threshold to paradise."

There was a reason these people came into my life, because no meeting is ever a coincidence.

Julia Repina 2012

Images

Vladimir Vasilkovsky



Vailkovsky\_ItalianBrige



VladimirVasilkovsky\_Plates\_PeterI\_CatherineI

Inna Olevskaya



Inna Olevskaya\_Dialogues



Inna Olevskaya\_Phaedra

Ekaterina Sukhareva



EkaterinaSukhareva\_ChineseBoy



EkaterinaSukhareva\_Burden\_Teapot

Alexander Gushchin



Alexander1 Gushchin\_City

Kirill Gushchin



Kiril Gushchin\_HolidayNight