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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

THE PORTRAITS OF VALENTIN SEROV

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INTRODUCTION.

I am a painter mostly interested in figurative work; more particularly portraiture. Over the past four years I have completed many commissioned portraits while painting other portraits that show my own subjective concern. It is for this reason that I have paid great attention to the work of other portrait painters.

The great Russian painter Valentin Serov is the best I have seen. Serov's subjects included members of the nobility, artists, composers, singers, actors, actresses and society belles. His paintings of children are especially charming. Serov possessed a style that was unique. His portraits captured the emotions and likeness of his subjects in a way that had more freedom than the method employed by other portraitists of the same period. The people he painted were never trapped in rigid poses, something that was so common a feature in much of 19th century portraiture. His subjects were uninhibited; everything looks so natural and so easy, but not so. His excellence as a painter, portraitist was the fruition of many years of very hard work. Serov's talent was undeniable and was so from a very early age but his success as a painter is owed to the fact that above all he was a toiler.

Serov was concerned about the state of Art in his country and the country's political state. In Russia at this time there was a new trend in progress. This trend moved towards the establishment of a Russian artistic culture that would reflect and share itself with the common man. Serov was part of this cause, a cause that created a political attitude in Russia every bit as much as an artistic one. Before this however the cultural arrangement was different. It began after Peter the Great's return from his visit to

Western Europe in 1697 when he set up a massive Europeanisation programme which he organised. Before this Russian Art was of a folk nature. Russia's artistic beginnings lay in the response of a newly settled people to the impact of Christianity and the Byzantine Empire. In the first centuries the art flourished and developed in the independent states and principalities, but gradually native schools in centres like Novograd and Kiev gave way to centralisation based on Moscow.

Peter the Great stopped this from developing further. His plan to open Russia to a Western European influence was a decision based on three considerations; the creation of a government which could negotiate on an equal base with the European Powers; Free and frequent trade with the West; the creation of a social order in Russia that would be compatible with that of Europe creating ideas that would be effective for the national life. His plan meant a revolution in Russian life and because of it, those more conservative members of society looked on him as an Anti-Christ or false Tzar. The work for his Europeanisation of Russians continued for the next two centuries and Russia was thus a member of the European family of nations. THE city of St. Petersburg was founded by Peter and named after him as a Practical and symbolic demonstration of his political, social and cultural concepts. No other city grew as fast as it did. As a City it was designed principally for artistic reforms undertaken by Peter the Great himself and his successors. St. Petersburg was established as the Capital in 1712. The City's students usually studied under foreign artists, a state of affairs that alienated Russian people from the Arts. Students were usually encouraged to follow the Academics pseudoclassicist art, choosing subjects that were for the most part Biblical, Scenes from Classical or European History and Mythology, Greek or Italian Landscapes or formal portraits. Students were also encouraged to find inspiration abroad instead of in Russia.¹

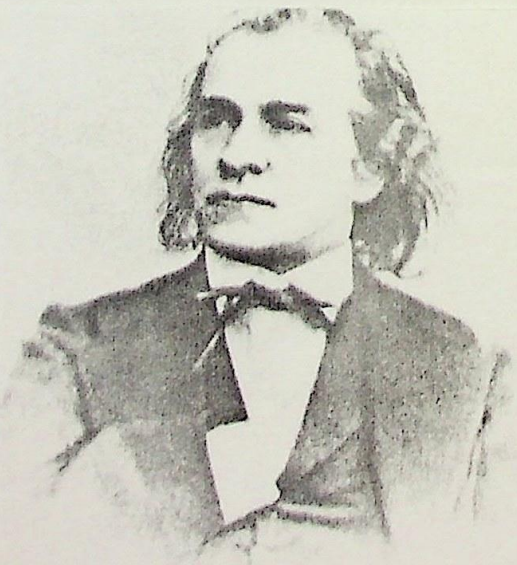
Serovs -
Background and
Influences.



(1)

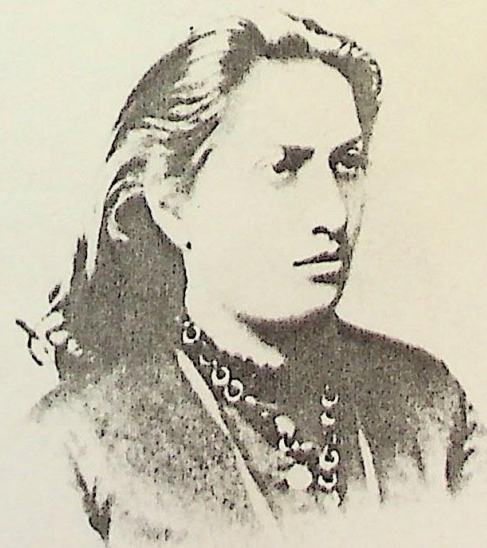
SEROV
VALENTIN ALEXANDROVICH
1865—1911

Valentin Alexandrovich Serov was born on the 7th January 1865 in St. Petersburg. He was born into an artistic family, as both his parents were musicians. His father was Alexander Serov, a composer and music critic, while his mother Valentina Serov, nee Bergman, was a pianist, and later a composer. She advocated music for the masses. Indeed on one occasion the family paid a visit abroad to meet the great composer Richard Wagner in Lucerne. Before Serov's father died in 1871 their apartment in St. Petersburg was a popular meeting place for famous painters and sculptors, contacts who later continued abroad. In this respect Serov was most fortunate to have been immersed in so great an artistic environment from childhood.²



(2)

Alexander Serov



(3)

Valentina Serova

Serov was a pace setter and is responsible for much that is best in Russian 20th century art. He bridged the gap between two traditions 19th and 20th century art. As a pupil of the foremost Russian Painter Ilya Repin, Serov mastered 19th century genre painting, but abandoned it to pursue his own personal style, to convey the Russian landscape and Russian personages on canvas. One can notice traces of the impressionist movement in his work. Serov travelled in Western Europe and participated in many European exhibitions and societies. He participated in the Russian artistic colony in Paris but his real love was his own country - Russia. Serov along with many other artists had a determination to create a new Russian culture. He was aware of the political situation in his country and thus produced some political paintings. Like his tutor Repin he was involved with a group called the Wanderers, a group who opposed the elitist St. Petersburg Academy.

In the later part of the 19th century many Russian artists were turning to find something national in Art that would replace the established artistic culture which only imitated the culture of Western Europe. This searching turned to Moscow and thus the city became the centre of a nationalist movement which lay at the base of the modern movement in Russian art.

The movement needed finance and got it from the merchants in Moscow. The most important of these merchant patrons was Savva Mamontov, a man who played an important role in the earlier part of Serov's life. Mamontov had acquired his wealth as the builder of the pioneer railroad that brought coal to the north. He was also a singer, sculptor, stage decorator and dramatist. He founded the first Russian Opera Company. Mamontov had also helped three successive generations of painters.³



(4) (Savva Mamontov on left of picture with hand on hip)
(Valentin Serov on right of picture)

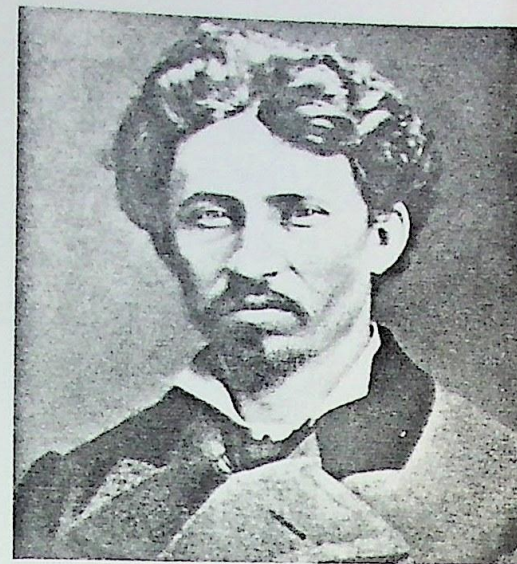
Before Serov's father died he had been a close friend and colleague of Mamontov and so with typical generosity Mamontov invited the widow and the nine year old Serov to come and live with him at his estate at Aibramtsevo.⁴ Serov spent a good deal of his childhood at this place thus growing up in an atmosphere of constant creative activity. Abramtsevo housed a colony of artists who came to be called "Mamontov's circle" which was made up of painters, composers, singers, architects, art historians, archaeologists, writers and actors. They posed a noble challenge to the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts. This circle grew from a group of artists who resigned from the Academy of Art in 1863 forfeiting their Diplomas, a gesture which meant economic suicide for all those concerned. They called themselves the "Wanderers". These rebels wanted to make their art useful to society. Their work depicted the plight of the poor and the corruption of the autocratic regime that ruled Russia. The members of the group were all put under covert police surveillance.⁵

They wanted to make their art accessible to the people and to do this they took exhibitions throughout the countryside. Before this art exhibitions had been inaccessible to the poorer members of society. The "Wanderers" believed that the Academy's main concern was art for art's sake, an idea they repudiated. Instead they believed that art should be subordinate to reality, reality they believed was more beautiful than its representation in art. Since Peter the Great's Europeanisation of Russia, everything Russian had been dismissed as barbarous and boorish and culture had come to mean something essentially foreign. The "Wanderers" on the other hand wished to revive that which was truly Russian and also to arouse a sympathy and compassion for the common man in the cause of social reform.



(5) Valentin Serov (standing left) and members of the Abramtsevo artistic circle. 1886

Serov was given drawing lessons at a very early age, first in Munich where he had gone with his mother after his father's death and then in Paris, on the advice of Mark Antolsky, a painter, he was placed into the hands of Repin. ⁶



REPIN

ILYA YEFIMOVICH

1844—1930

(6)

Ilya Yetimovich Repin was born in 1844 in Chuguyev in the Kharkov province into the family of a serviceman. His family background was less fortunate than Serovs, in fact his family were very poor. Repin was an artist who epitomised 19th century Russian painting. His manifold talent and scope of vision made his work a landmark in Russian painting. Repin was a popular portraitist. He painted writers, scientists and many outstanding intellectuals but his best works were on the theme of revolutionary struggle against the corrupt autocracy that ruled Russia at the time. Paintings like the "Volga Boatmen" a work which criticised the social conditions which allowed brutal human exploitation to take place, and "Religious Procession in Kursk Province 1880-83" which illustrated the individual problems of society, the poverty, the oppression, the hypocrisy etc. It is a broad picture of pre-revolutionary Russian life. It has to be an important masterpiece for its sheer outspokenness. It ranks amongst the very best of the work produced by the "Wanderers". Indeed Repin, the Mamontovs and Serovs mother all had a very strong social ethos.⁷

Repin was very fond of the young Serov who showed himself to be a precocious draughtsman from a very early age. Serov had a talent for capturing the likeness of a model more quickly and accurately than the older artists in the drawing competitions that were a part of life at Abramtsevo, Repin taught Serov to perceive nature by training his eye and hand to capture on canvas objects differing in form, texture and colour. Repin did not want to mould Serov's talent with rules. They simply worked side by side, Serov learning by watching and helping. Sometimes they worked on the same model. Serov would assist Repin on his larger compositions, such as the "Zaporozhye Cossacks". Serov helped Repin collect material for this work, he even painted one of the figures in the actual painting. When Repin had given Serov everything he had to offer he sent him to St. Petersburg to Pavel Chitiakov, a former teacher of Repin, a man who was a brilliant systematic interpreter and teacher of the laws of form in painting and drawing.

This man instilled in Serov a love of professional skill which was to become the basis of Serov's art. The young artist worked tirelessly painting nude models, his friends, scenes of nature, in short everything that was around him. He perfected his skills of draughtsmanship, learning a lot from Chistiakov whose drawing system was strict and constructive.

The rigid formality that existed in the Academy was something new and strange for Serov. He was very critical of the Academy's established system of teaching. The only thing that kept him going was his faith in Chistiakov. In a letter to his fiancée (1885) he wrote: "I am very happy to be able to disregard their medals (you have no idea how pernicious are all these stratagems, all this chasing after medals). I can work on my own in any way I please entrusting myself only to Repin and Chistiakov".⁸

In late September 1885 Serov left the Academy. This action filled him with a sense of freedom as he was no longer bound by its rules and regulations. He travelled abroad to see the works of the great Dutch, Italian and Spanish Masters. Having seen them he was inspired to pay more attention to high craftsmanship which was the hallmark of their work.⁹

Serov wanted to portray the beauty of mankind and to express his love of life. The environment at Abramtsevo added to this excitement. The wonderful Russian landscape which surrounded Abramtsevo was a source of inspiration for Serov. He loved these landscapes, the rural scenes and plain peasant faces. Another haven of refuge for the young artist was Domotkanova in Tvar province. This was the estate of Vladimar Derviz, an academy friend who had married Serov's cousin.¹⁰ Serov liked this place for its landscapes. Both places gave him the feeling for his earliest pieces. In fact these works were considered masterpieces. They were "Girl with Peaches" (pl. 7) 1887 and "Girl in Sunlight" (pl. 8) 1888. In fact the subject for "Girl with Peaches" was Savva Mamontov's twelve year old daughter Vera. Serov did not intend these works to be portraits, he was interested in the overall programme which was to capture faithfully what he saw before him. The models are inseparable from their surroundings. Placed in any other surroundings the works would have carried different messages. Serov worked on these paintings for many hours but never lost sight of the initial impression that he got from his subjects. They are filled with a sense of youthful blitheness. There is a hint of impressionism about them. Backgrounds are not just backdrops or an accompaniment to the main theme. Serov did experiment with impressionism though it was different from that of the french painters. His work has been compared to that of Renoir and Seargent.¹¹ He liked the french painter Bastien Lapage who was not an impressionist in the strictest sense of the word. Serov's paintings were not high in key from the use of large amounts of white paint, he even used black



(7)

"Girl with Peaches" Portrait of Vera Savvishna Mamontova. 1887
Oil on Canvas. 91 x 85 cm.



(8)

"Girl in Sunlight"

Portrait of Maria Yakovlevna Simonovich. 1888

Oil on canvas.

89.5 x 71 cm.

a colour which the Impressionists did their best to avoid. Serovs experimentation with impressionisms is most obvious in "Girl with Peaches". The scene is filled with light. The head is painted with tenuous strokes. In this painting form and colour coincide completely but not in the blouse and bow. He has not adhered to strictly impressionist rules. Repin and some other Russian painters had been experimenting with nature and light. They opened up new possibilities for the younger artists, but Serov and his friend Korovin did not emulate their elders but instead forged ahead towards a new system. Along with some other contemporaries they were the founders of early Russian impressionism.

At this point Serov had not broken away as a portrait painter. He believed that every part of a painting should receive the same amount of attention. He did not see how a face could be given emphasis over any other component of a work. This changed with maturity. He later discovered that in fact he could use many devices to capture the essence of a subject, devices that exposed more than a mere likeness of a subject. Thus the joyful youthfulness that had filled his earlier works came to an end making way for a more mature calculated approach, also his palette became more monochromatic.

SEROV - HIS PORTRAITS.

THE PERFORMERS.

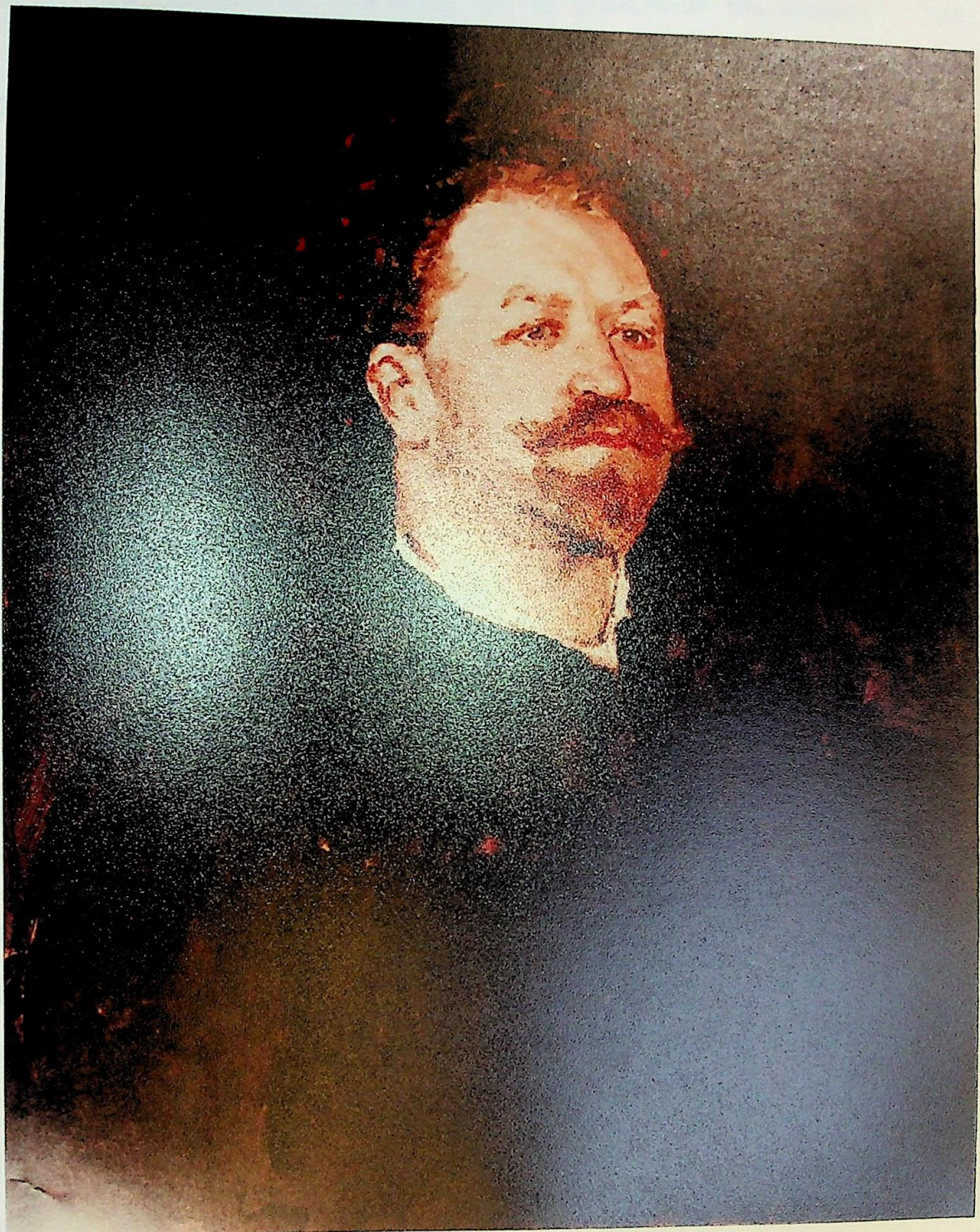
Serov really became a portraitist in the 1890's and he was undoubtedly a very fashionable one. He was a good judge of human types, depicting his subjects as no one else could. He would work on a portrait slowly, tediously. He once said that each portrait was an illness that had to be got rid of.¹² Serov meant that the effort or part of himself that he would put into a portrait was a colossal expenditure of his spiritual powers. Indeed for any painter to produce something that is worthwhile requires a lot of humility and hard work regardless of the extent of his or her talent. The new Serov began his portrait painting career by depicting actors and artists. He approached each task with new principles, never allowing himself to be swamped by reality. He did not respond with a spontaneous perception of nature, rejecting all fortuitous elements in the models aspect and avoiding any haphazard combinations, compositional or colour arrangements. The feeling of freedom, artistry and effortless ease that was the hallmark of his art was in fact the result of computation, construction and well thought out organisation. This attitude or concept never left him.

All of Serovs subjects represent various social groups and professions. To some of these he applied a more formal approach while with others he demonstrated his own subjective concerns. He was always more interested in painting the popular personality like opera singers, actors and actresses, generally people who attracted public attention, for instance people like the singer Angelo Mansini.¹³ Angelo Mansini was a famous Italian singer then touring Russia with considerable success.¹³ Serov was interested in him as a subject because of the singer's artistic appearance and his easy public manner.



(9)

Portrait of "Angelo Masini. 1890
Oil on canvas 89 x 70 cm.



(10)

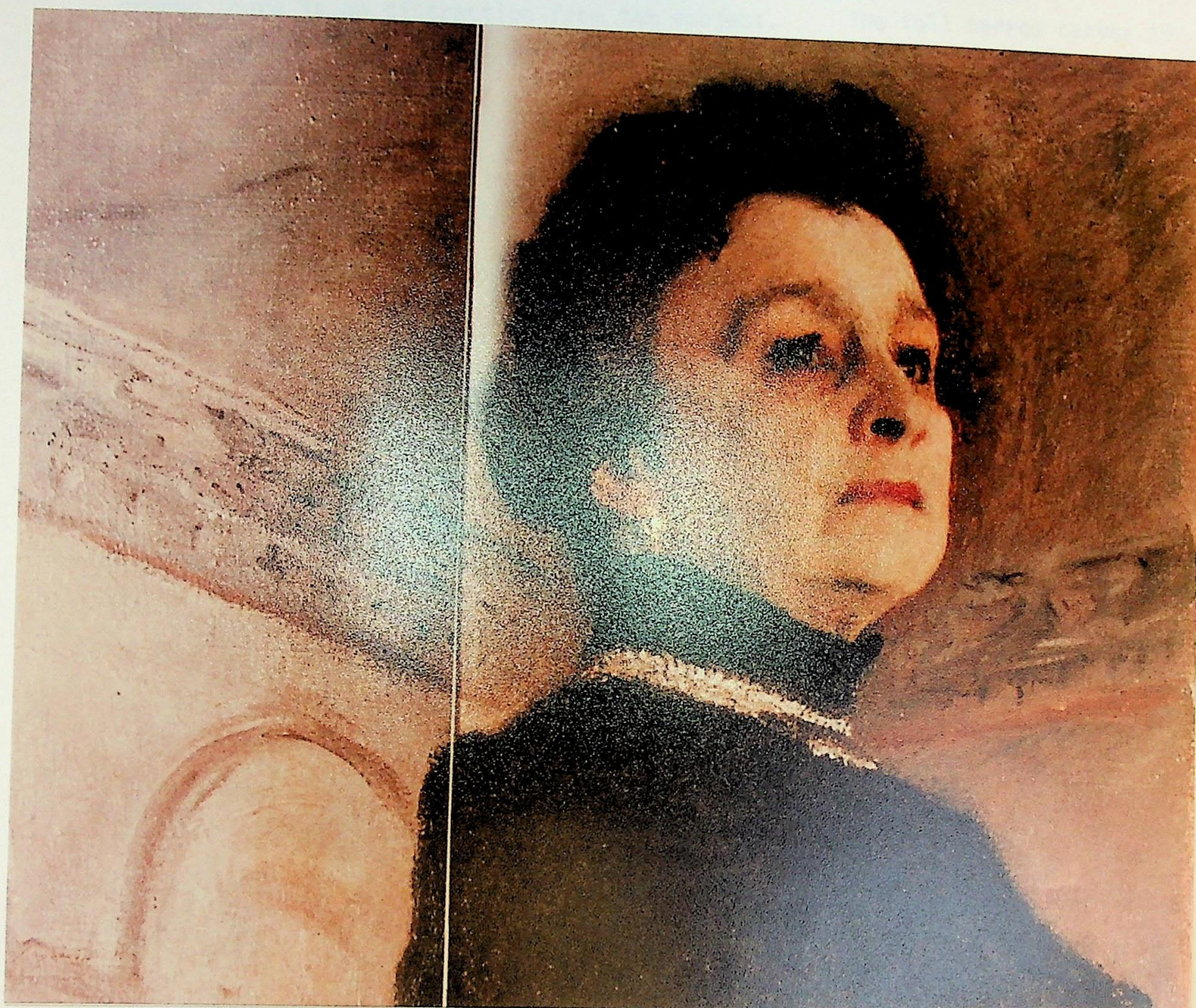
Portrait of Francesco Tamagno. 1891
Oil on canvas 78.3 x 69.2 cm.

Mansini was pampered by the public, he was a spoiled man. Serov has painted him with an expression that lies somewhere between pride and sadness or maybe self pity. He is a tragic looking man one could feel sorry for him, maybe Serov did. He reflects on something and is unaware of the viewer. Was this man so wrapped up in himself that he always wore the expression of a sorrowful introvert. In some ways he wears the expression of a child who cannot get his way. One can identify the artist in him straight away. There is nothing commonplace about the man, he has a presence that is strong. Serov has made him look as one who stands alone, as he did, as an idol of his fans. This is made clear by the strong robust pose Serov chose to have him in, he stands with shoulders back and hands in pockets, it is a proud pose. This is an example of the way in which Serov uses devices to explain something about a subject. The man^{is} depicted as a figure of strength, which is carefully balanced against a rather weak aspect, that thrives on being pampered by public adulation. The choice of lighting tells us something, the face is luminous against a dark background that lightens slightly where it touches Mansini's outline creating a very dramatic effect. This spotlighting of the face forces us to think about this neatly dressed, rugged faced but civilised looking man. Serov has given the face predominance over every other component of the painting, a consideration that would not have applied when Serov painted his earliest pieces. Serov has used brush strokes that are freer and broader than usual. His palette is limited to black and grey tones.

Francesco Tamagno is yet another of Serov's subjects who attracted public interest (pl. 10) Tamagno was also an Italian Singer who captivated the Moscow audiences of that time.¹⁴ Everything in Tamagno betrays the artist in him. In the portrait his head is raised in creative concentration, his throat bare, exhibiting that transmitter of a superbly rich, typically Italian voice. Serov has left his throat bare to demonstrate his powerful instrument.

The background is the same as that used in Mansini's Portrait. It is dark while the face is lit. Tamagno also has an artistic appearance but more so than Mansini. He is not facing the viewer in a state of reflection as Mansini was but instead he looks to the right avoiding the possibility of any contact with the viewer, it almost suggests a hint of pomposity, as if he could not be bothered too much by anyone who would choose to watch him. Serov has shown us that this man was very confident. His gaze is very serious, stern and very nearly aggressive. His face looks pale and around his eyes are dark as if he was wearing theatrical makeup. He is wearing what seems like a medieval or renaissance headress or something of that kind and his coat seems of the same period, perhaps he was about to begin a performance. Of course the clothing would give him away as an artist. Both Mansini and Tamagno wear similar moustaches, perhaps it was fashionable for those who wished to feel they played the part as artists.

One of Serov's most popular portraits is that of the Russian actress "Maria Yermolova" 1905 (pl. 11/12). It is undoubtedly one of Serov's masterpieces. This actress stands in a pose that would befit someone standing before an audience, with her head proudly tilted upwards. Her facial expression is very proud and composed but underneath there is a mind burning with life. She is the great tragic actress and remains an actress right to the end. She looks as if she is trying to hold on to memories of past glory, as if she found it hard to give in to age, she is like the forgotten hero trying to piece together remnants of past glory. Even while she posed for Serov, she wore a touch of make-up and lipstick. Serov must have been delighted at this because it epitomises her personality, she is very much aware of herself. Even posing for her portrait was like an important public event because the attention was on her. This comes across powerfully in the picture.

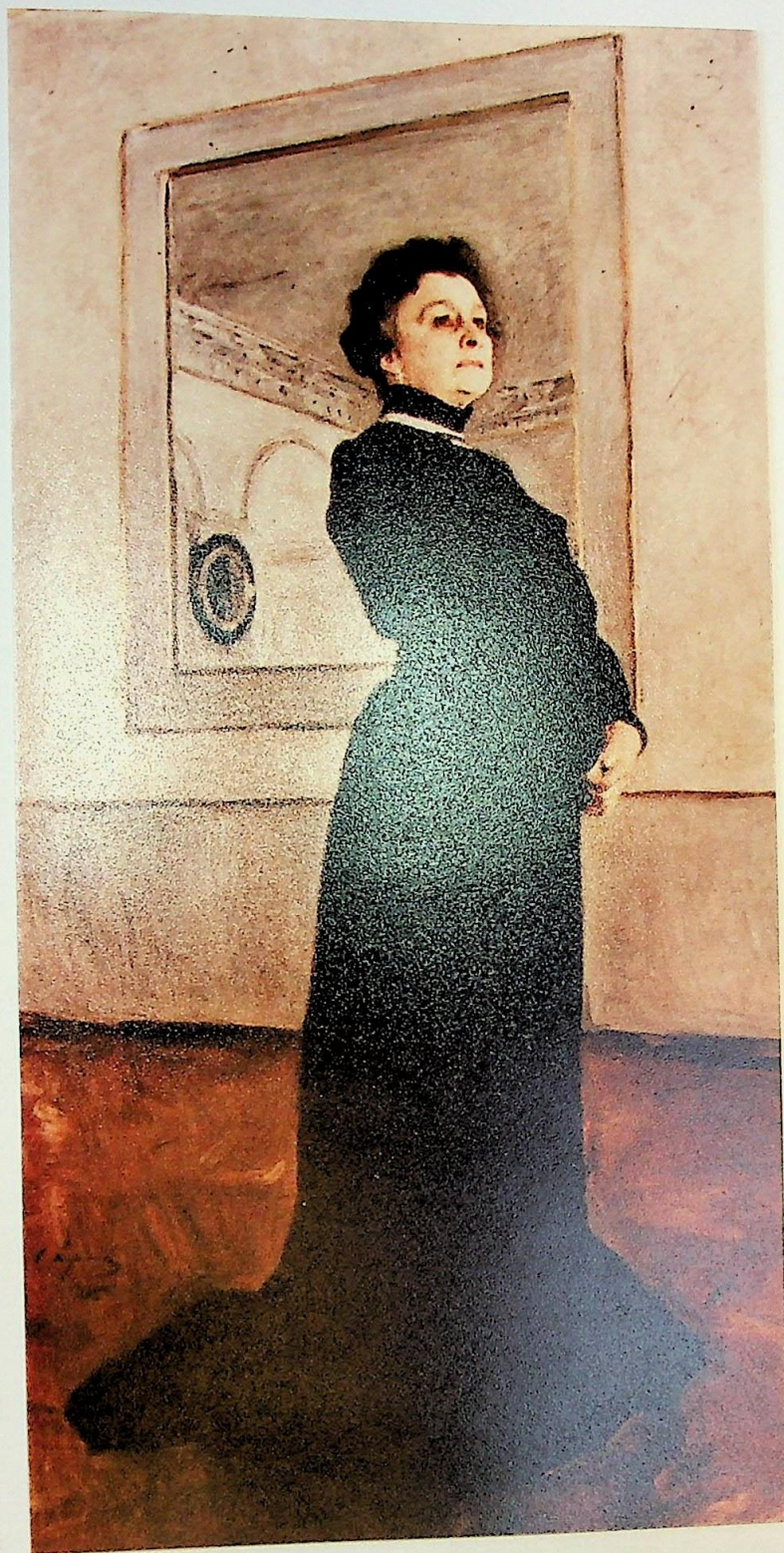


(11) Portrait of Maria Nikolayevna Yermolova. 1905
Oil on Canvas 224 x 120 cm.

The colours are restrained, grey, black and brown which are given life by barely noticeable hints of violet that appear throughout the background and her black dress. This restrained use of colour creates a serious mood in the scene. By the use of these rather flat colours in the background there is no distraction from the subject. The tall narrow canvas is the ideal shape to house her proud dominant figure. Serov has made perspective a device by which he can place emphasis on the figure. He uses line of perspective as lines of elevation. These lines of elevation lead towards the figure, upwardly and downwardly, pushing the actress forward as if she were some goddess or monument presented for worship. The fact that the gown is so dark strengthens the dominance of her person against a rather background.

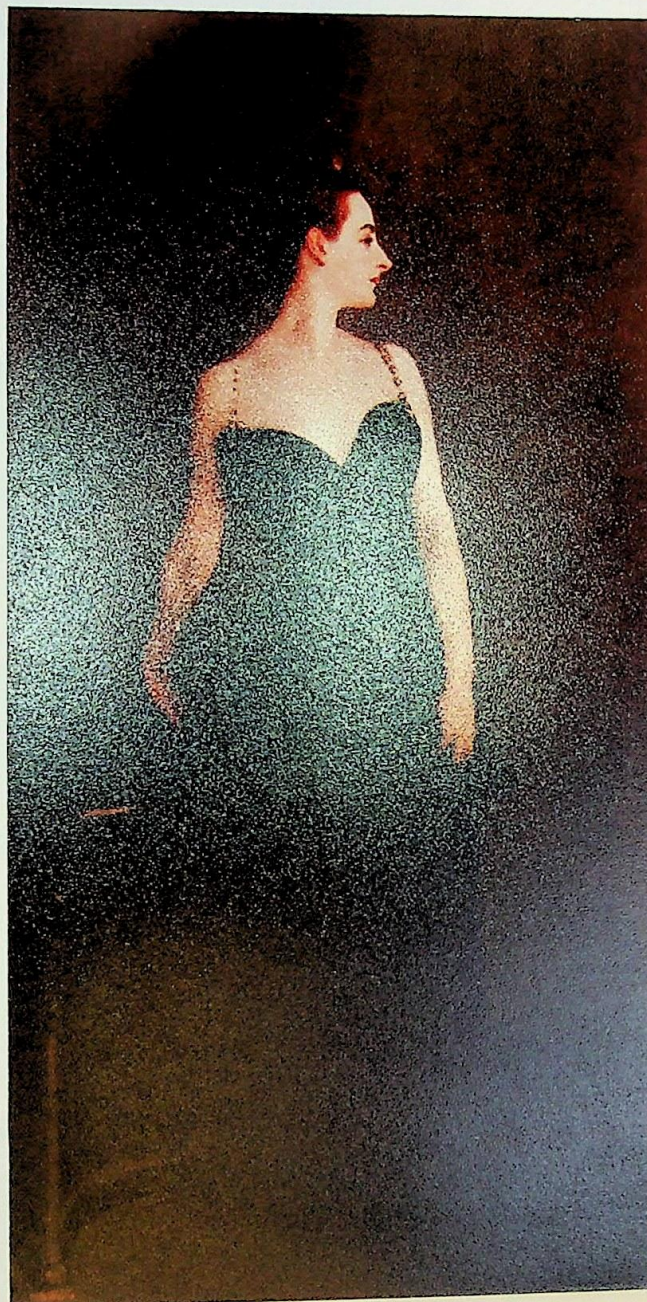
The modelling of Yermolova's face is superb for its subtlety. The head is painted in a way that gives it great strength and dimension. Serov has managed this not by using strong light and shade around her features but by having captured almost every slight of colour and tone that existed in the woman's face. This is the most outstanding part of the picture. Naturally the quality of any portrait depends on what the face has to offer visually, after all that is what portrait painting is about, but in this work the technical quality is absolutely superb which is essential as every perspective and compositional device leads the eye to her face.

This painting can be compared to the work of another portraitist in Western Europe, John Singer Sargent's "Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau) (pl. 13) 1884" Oil on canvas. This woman was a society beauty, wife of a French businessman. She was setting new fashions with her Greek classical look. Admirers likened her to a classical statue.¹⁵ She stands in a strained pose. Like Yermolova she was obviously very aware of her appearance. She dressed to be seen. This woman is also used to public adulation and knows she is the centre of attention.



(12)

Portrait of Maria Nikolayevna Yermolova. 1905
Oil on canvas 224 x 120 cm.



(13)

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)

Portrait of Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau) 1884

Oil on canvas 208.6 x 109.9 cm.

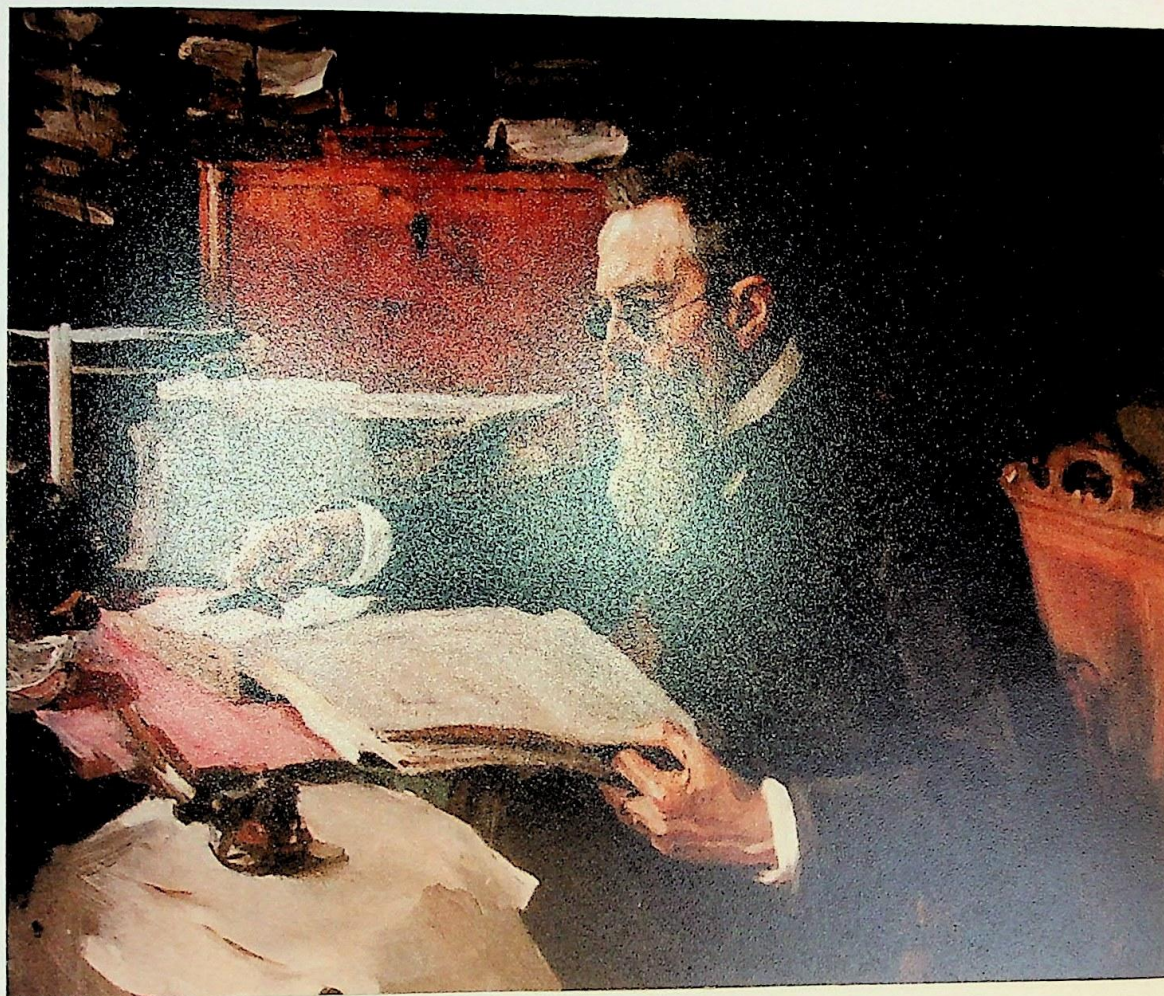
Though younger than Yermolova she also plays the part. Yet Serovs portrait is more classical, there is a greater atmosphere contained in it, a more dramatic lighting, a greater air of expectancy. Seargents portrait is more formal, it demonstrates this womans character and her sexuality in a fixed pose, but with Serovs we can imagine the subjects next move, there is no fixation of the transient. This is because of the life and expressiveness that is contained in Yermolovas face.

It seems that the way these women are painted in these tall canvasses would have been the fashionable format. The proportions of both canvasses are almost identical.

I will now turn my attention to Serov's portrait of composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov 1844/1908 (pl. 14). This man had an interesting background. He was born in Tikhvin near Novgorod on 18th March 1844. His father was a government official of liberal views, his mother was a well educated woman and a musician. Oddly enough this man went through a naval academy, he even took command of a ship before he finally settled to composing music. He had associations with the famous Russian composer Tchaikovsky but most important of all he had a sort of compatibility with Serov and the "Wanderers". At the time a music critic by the name of Vladimir Stasov proudly proclaimed that Russia had its own "might little heap" of native composers. This title caught on quickly and found its way into the history books. One book in particular specifically mentioned Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Aleksandr Borodin, Cesar Cui, and Modest Mussorgsky. They became known as the five and their aim was to assert the musical independence of Russia from the West. Their ideal ran parallel with that of the "Wanderers" who I mentioned earlier. Indeed Rimsky-Korsakov contributed to the creation of an age of nationalism in music and is recognised in musical literature as having done so.

Serov was well aware of this mans reputation and he sought to capture some of it on canvas. Rimsky-Korsakov is not painted alone in the canvas like Mansini or Tamagno but instead Serov has included books and papers all around the composer, items that were obviously connected with his musical work. Serov did something similar in Konstantin Korovins portrait where he presented the artist to the viewer surrounded by a box of paints and paintings done by Korovin hanging on the wall behind him.

There is a feeling of activity in the scene, the composer looks as if he is in command of this scene. He stares down at the book before him with an intense almost angry expression with pen in hand seemingly pointing out some item of interest. This creates an air of urgency in the canvas as if Serov



(14)

Portrait of Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov. 1898
Oil on canvas 94 x 111 cm.

wanted to make Rimsky-Korsakov look as one who had a task before him, a task that would seek to establish a Russian musical culture independent of Western Europe.

Unfortunately the painting adheres to the 19th Century portrait painting technique. The composer is captured in a pose that is unusual for Serov. The work could have been titled "The Writer" or "The Composer" instead of it being titled portrait of Rimsky-Korsakov. This is because we cannot see enough of his face and expression, as his head is in profile and hidden under a beard. Nevertheless we can see that the composer is in a state of concentration. His eyes are sharply focussed on the book in front of him, they are alert, filled with wisdom and intensity. Serov must have felt that this expression epitomised the mans creative intellect.

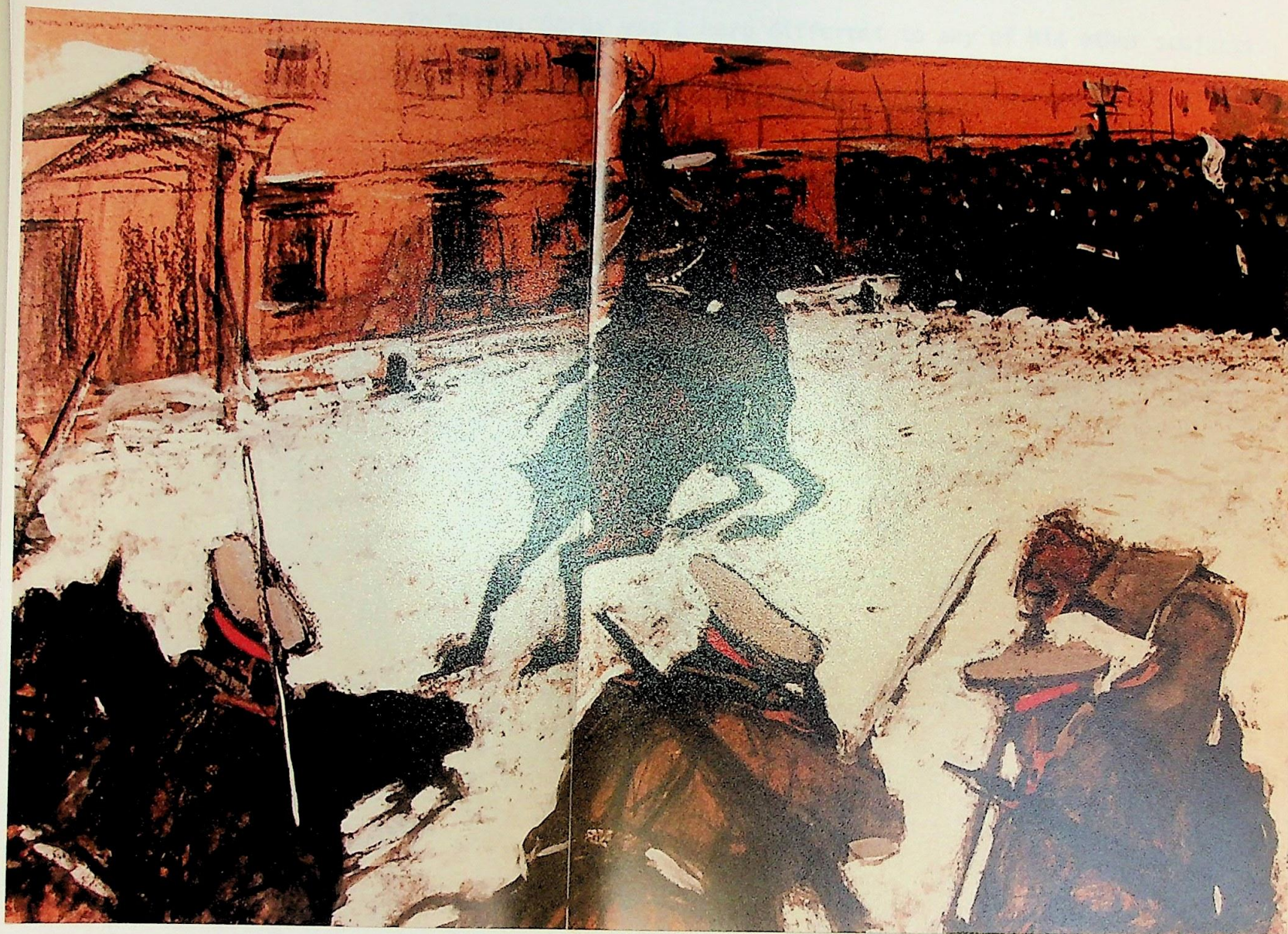
In this work Serov has not demonstrated his love for paint since all the colours used are quite flat. The subject is not painted with the same regard for colour and form that Serov demonstrated in his portraits of two other creative persons, the artist Konstantin Korovin and the writer Maxim Gorky. Korovins portrait is alive with colour which accentuates Korovins presence as he was a man very much alive in mind and spirit. Gorky's spirit is made clear by strong lighting on the face, making his form very clear, which demonstrates to the viewer the power of this writer.

Rimsky-Korsakov is presented in a dark environment, there is little colour to be seen anywhere in the canvas. The modelling his face shows a lack of colour and form, it is cast by a greyish dullness. It is not one of Serovs best works in my opinion. Rimsky Korsakovs portrait is housed in the Tretyakov Museum, Moscow.

I feel that Serov had a particular sympathy for Maxim Gorky because he was a man like many others who played a part in pre-revolution Russia. Maxim Gorky (real name Aleksey Maksimovich) was born on March 28th 1868 in Nizhny Novograd (now called Gorky). He was a naturalist, short story writer and novelist who formed a bridge between the generation of Chekhov and Tolstoy and the new generation of Soviet writers.

In his masterpiece the autobiographical trilogy Childhood (1913-14) he was really describing the bitter poverty of his own childhood and adolescence. Gorky first attracted attention in the 1890's with his stories of tramps and social outcasts. He was a proletarian writer whose stories portrayed the bitterness of poverty and unemployment. His writings are qualified because he suffered and experienced personally that which he wrote about.

Serov probably met Maxim Gorky for the first time in December 1902. In 1905 Serov became an eye witness of the massacre of a peaceful demonstration of workers by Czarist troops in St. Petersburg. Serov together with fellow artist Vasily Polenov sent a letter to the board of the Academy of Arts in which they accused the Grand Duke Vladimir, President of the Academy of being one of the organisers of the massacre. In protest at the massacre Serov put in an application for resignation from the Academy. In the same year Serov started drawing political caricatures for the newly established satirical magazine Zhupel. It was also the same year he started work on Maxim Gorky's portrait and this was no coincidence. The political situation in Russia drew him to Gorky. Serov participated in a meeting of staff of the satirical magazine Zhalo at Maxim Gorky's apartment. Serov's very political drawing "Soldiers, Soldiers, Heroes Every One" (p1.15) was published in the first issue of Zhupel a different magazine.¹⁶ Serov was not



(15) "Soldiers, Soldiers, Heroes Every One..." 1905

Tempera and charcoal on cardboard

47.5 x 71.5 cm.

blind to happenings in Russia, he was definitely concerned.

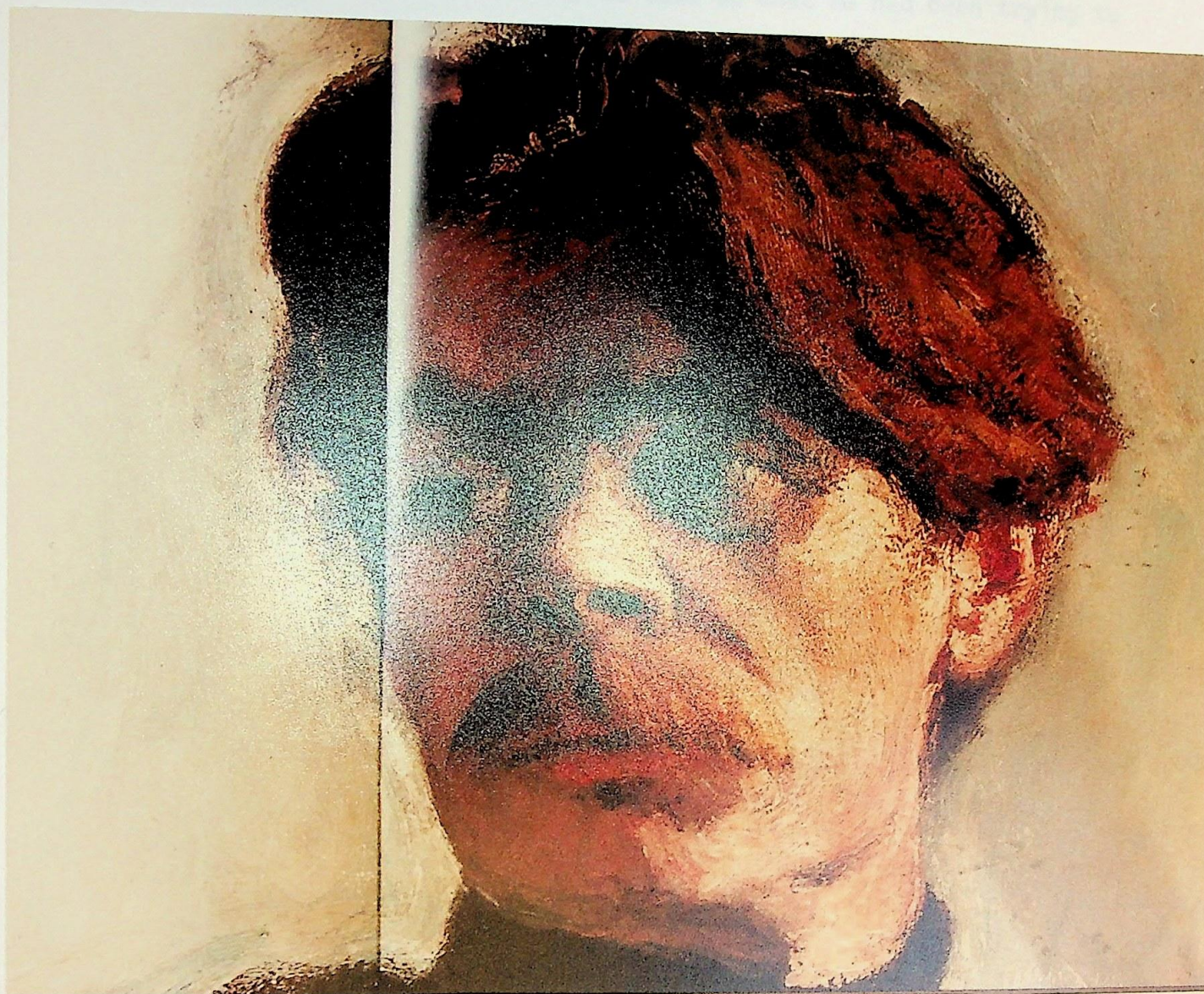
It is easy to see why he would have chosen Maxim Gorky as a subject in the light of what was happening in pre-revolutionary Russia. Maxim Gorky was for Serov one of the makers of the Revolution, a leader of the people. To Serov, Gorky was a hero different to any of his other subjects. This is obvious by the way he has presented Gorky. The writer's dark silhouette is placed against a bright spacious background, making his posture well defined as it would say a lot about the writer's character, making Gorky look like a patriot which he was. The painting of Gorky was in essence a political portrait since Serov has painted him almost as if he was an idol. It is a dramatic pose, the painting goes beyond a realistic representation and takes on a symbolic quality. Gorky has been presented as a symbol of great grief and moral power, a heroic figure in Serov's eyes and also one who could arouse sympathy. This sympathy is written on his face. Serov could have chosen to represent him with a little more formality as he did with his portrait of "Maria Yermolova" but instead he has painted a picture of a man who could be any worker or layperson. There is nothing lavish or exclusive about his person, his whole aspect is that of the common man. Even the painting technique carries this message for it is broad and free. Serov's brushstrokes are not delicate, he has not tried to hide the fact that he modelled the paint rigorously with a brush. Each stroke represents subtle colour and tonal transitions that must have been faithful to reality. There is method to these marks, where the brushmarks come down from Gorky's cheek bone towards his chin there is a flow, they follow a curve. The same thing happens around the eye sockets. This requires modelling of paint which is rigorous against finer strokes all within the one painted surface. Serov can adopt any technique to suit the task at hand. There is nothing pretentious about the brushmarks, they are broad but strong as was Gorky.



(16)

Portrait of Maxim Gorky. 1905

Oil on canvas 124 x 80 cm.



(17) Portrait of Maxim Gorky. 1905

Gorky's posture and gaze are unusual. The writer sits on a stool, with his legs crossed and his face turned away towards something unseen. There is a movement in the pose, the hand is held out as if to express something by gesture, while the head looks away as if the writer has paused to think, leaving his hand out ready to take up what he had been trying to communicate.

His gaze is calm and meditative, there is a saintly look about his face, a look of resolve. Gorky was a man who was socially minded, a man very much aware of the atrocities that the poor were forced to accept under Czarist rule. He was a man prepared to take up the banner on behalf of the oppressed. Serov wants to show the viewer a hero of the masses, this is why he has used such dramatic lighting on the face and in the background.

In this portrait Serov demonstrated that he was moving forward toward something new. His earlier portraits, for instance that of Levitan in many ways conformed to the 19th century salon format but this is new because it demonstrates that Serov has discovered new compositional devices and a stronger more spontaneous handling of paint. He has also learned how to use pose and lighting to make statements about his subject. By painting someone like Gorky he is not afraid to voice his own political opinions in spite of the fact that it could come against him financially.

Serov has used different devices to attract our attention and lead it to areas of interest and to make statements about his subject. There is movement in Gorky's pose, his head looks one way, his body remaining in the same position while his legs are crossed. The pose creates a sort of twisting motion. It also creates a sort of tension as it would have been an awkward pose to hold. Serov might have wanted us to feel tension when viewing this work as Gorky was tense, a man restricted by the events in Russia.

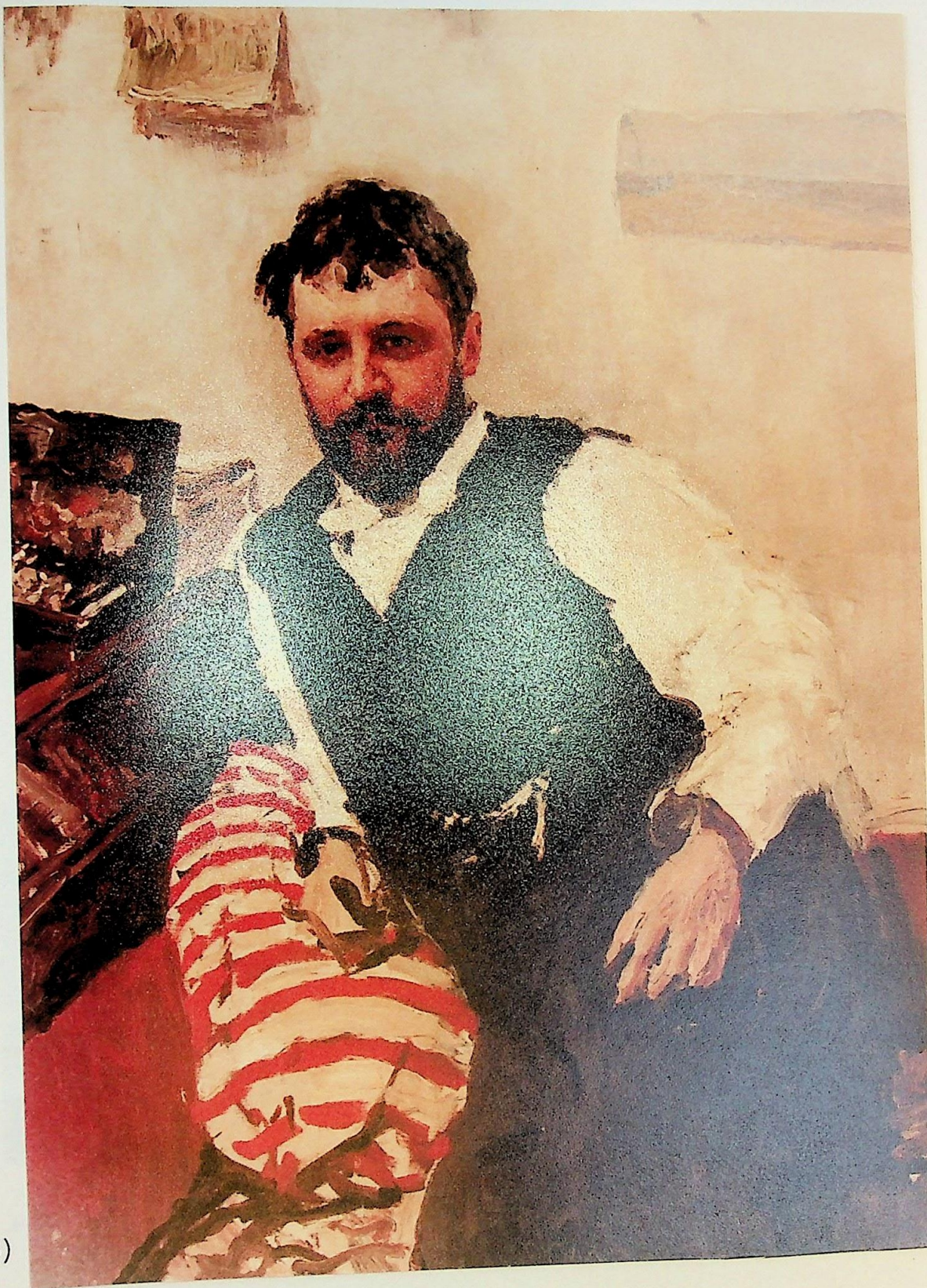
Other devices are used to create movement, for instance our eyes are taken down from Gorky's left shoulder along his outline and up to his hand, which attracts our attention because it is illuminated against his very dark clothing and because it is opened expressively. From the hand our eye is led up to the face. We first see the hand and wonder at its gesture and then we look for the reason in his face. The strokes that define Gorky's arm and break up the darkness of his black clothing are curved, they have a flow which is repeated in the writer's hair, the way it flows down across his face. All this movement keeps us in expectation.

The lighting in the work is most dramatic. The portrait would not have had the same impact had Gorky's face been fully lit with a softer light, there would have been less drama surrounding the writer. The lighting is similar to the famous lighting that Rembrandt used and since Serov did witness the work of Rembrandt when he visited Europe it is possible that something of the initial impression he got from the work of this old master has manifested itself here. The light that falls on his face attracts our attention and leads it to Gorky's eyes forcing us to look at them more closely. They are saddened eyes, those of a worried man. What is on his mind? Perhaps Gorky knew the fate that was to befall Russia, indeed he left Russia before the actual revolution in 1906 and lived in exile in Italy until he was persuaded to return to the Soviet Union in 1928 which he did and he became

the first President of the Soviet Writers Union in 1934. Serov was a good judge of human types and he knew Gorky, where his sympathies lay and what his thoughts were on the politics of the Russian situation and Serov might have had similar ideas as to what would happen. Serov could therefore have chosen to include something of this in the writers expression, after all there is a feeling of mystery created in the portrait. Gorky has taken on the persona of a prophet, one who stands alone, in the face of ignorance, oppression and darkness.

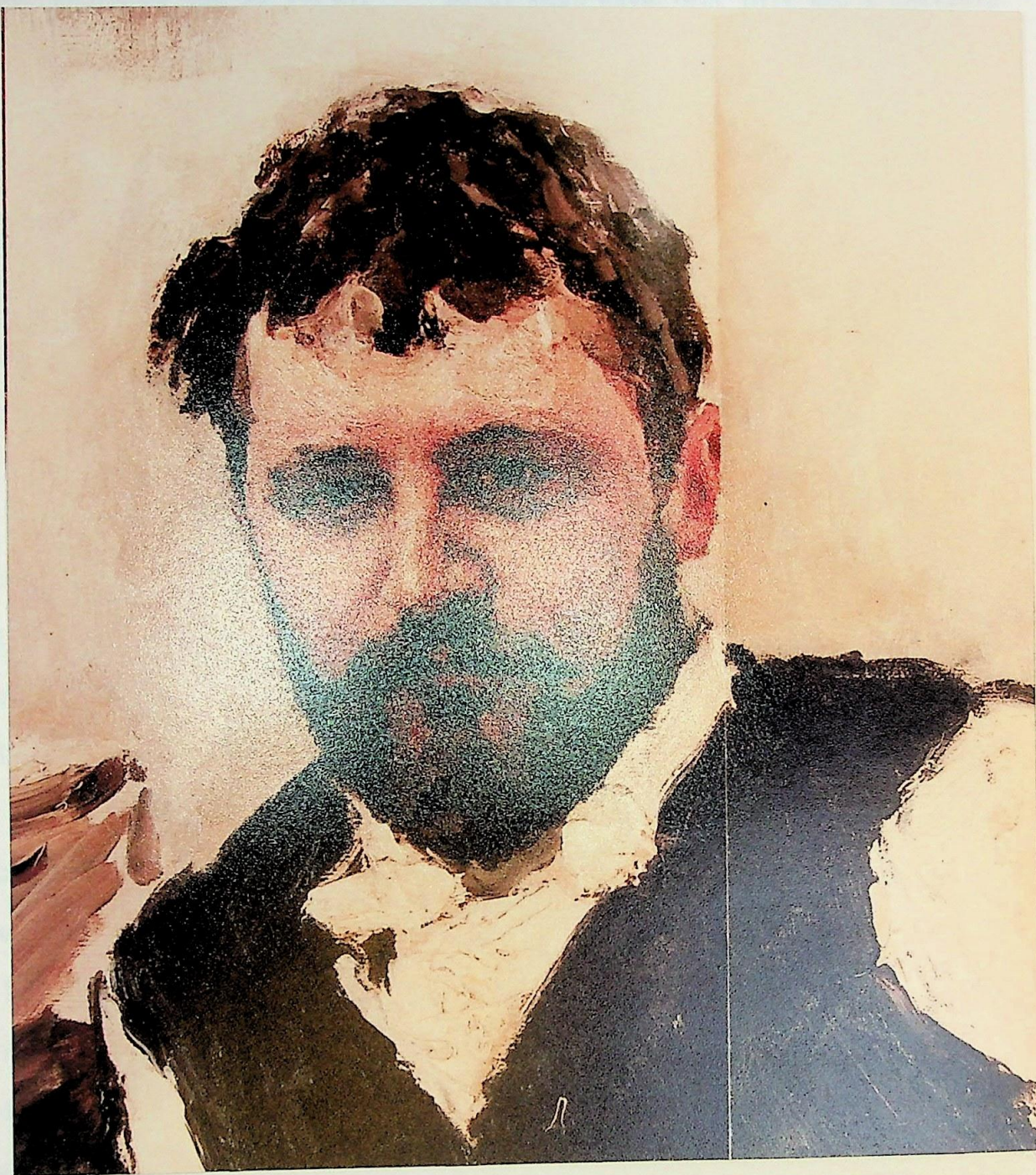
The next subject in Serovs selection of creative types is Konstantin Koravin (1861-1939 (pl. 18/19). Korovin was a fellow artist and close friend of Serov, a painter who was one of the most brilliant representatives of impressionism in Russia at the time.¹⁷ He was a carefree man who tripped lightly through life. Serov has made his respect and admiration for Korovin quite clear in the portrait by the way he has used colour with such vitality. Obviously Serov found this painting very exciting. He has experimented with enthusiasm and has tried things that he would never have been able to do in his commissioned works. Everything about the work betrays the subject as being an artist and a friend, the pictures on the wall, the open box of paints on the surface to Korovins right, his bohemian dress and the relaxed casual pose. But what is more important than these things is the very painterly sweep that makes this work stand apart from many of Serovs other portraits. There is no pretence about the way it is painted, everything has been handled with confidence, with a painterly sweep that is more spontaneous and which shows more freedom than before.

The figure has been established solidly in front of us. There is nothing flat about it. Even the black waistcoat has been given life by hints of blue and violet. The hands are probably the most noteworthy components of this



(18)

Portrait of Konstantin Alexeyevich Korovin. 1891
Oil on canvas 69 x 64 cm.



(19)

Portrait of Konstantin Alexeyevich Korovin 1891

work. They are broadly represented indeed Korovins right hand ^{is} barely suggested. He has laid the paint on rigorously, having almost modelled the paint as a sculptor would model clay. Scratches on the paint surface denote knuckles and so forth. Serov must have felt this was a suitable treatment of the subject as it would have been very much in keeping with Korovins very free approach to painting. The work seems to have been carried out under artificial light. This seems to be the case because of the lighting across the face which seems to shine down on Korovins head casting shadow across his eyes, sockets, beneath his nose and neck. The skin tones are also evidence of this because they are warm as if luminated by a softer warmer light, indicative of artificial lighting.

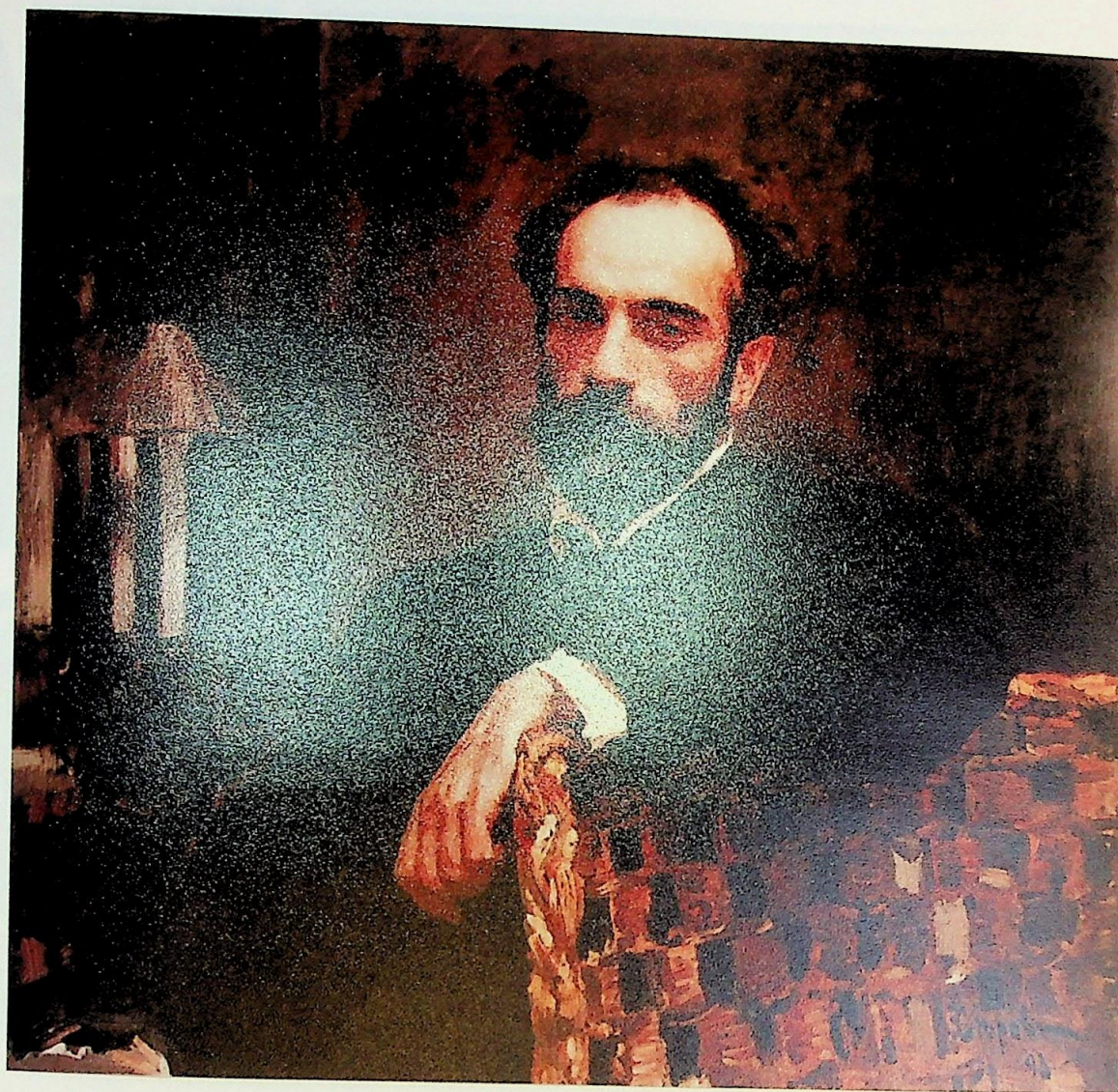
Korovins expression is calm but his eyes seize the viewer and hold attention. They are the observant eyes of a painter. Korovin has been presented to us as a man who is physically strong and spiritually sound, a man in love with life, immersed in an atmosphere of creative work. This calm is also evident in the pose. Korovin has not made particular effort to dress for the occasion of his portrait being painted and both artist and subject would have preferred it this way. He sits for Serov in his ordinary everyday clothing. Korovin looks very much aware of what Serov is doing. All the colours in the painting are warm, the colours of the wall, the red striped cushion on which the artist is leaning, the colour of his shirt but most of all the skin tones in the face and hands. The tones in his face contain lots of yellows, reds and madders. Korovin has a ruddy complexion a complexion which is very much alive, he looks like a hardy sort of fellow, an easy going man. The flesh tones are similar to those used in Mansini's portrait although the way in which Mansini's face has been painted is much tighter with finer strokes. Korovins face has been rendered with much broader strokes but it has a greater strength and presence, it is closer to reality though brushmarks are obvious throughout the picture surface.

There is an anarchy in the whole compositional arrangement of this painting. Objects are painted broadly with slightly incorrect perspective. This combined with the painting of the hands and the broad technique, give this work a modern flavour that was not really repeated except possibly in Maxim Gorkys portrait.

In this portrait Serov demonstrates that he was getting on to something very new, discovering new things in a painterly technique, in style and composition. It is most appropriate that this experimenting should have been employed in the painting of an artist who was himself discovering new things in 19th century Russian painting. Both Serov and Korovin were painters, they could understand each other. Possibly Serov knew so much about Korovin that he could paint that facet of his friends character that epitomised his artistic presence. This painting is very strong, there is great harmony of colour and a very powerful feeling of depth in the work.

In contrast to this work is the portrait of Isaac Levitan 1861-1900 (pl. 20). Levitan like Serov was also a member of the Wanderers and exhibited with them quite a lot. He was the most outstanding landscape painter of the 19th century. He became head of the landscape class at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture.¹⁸

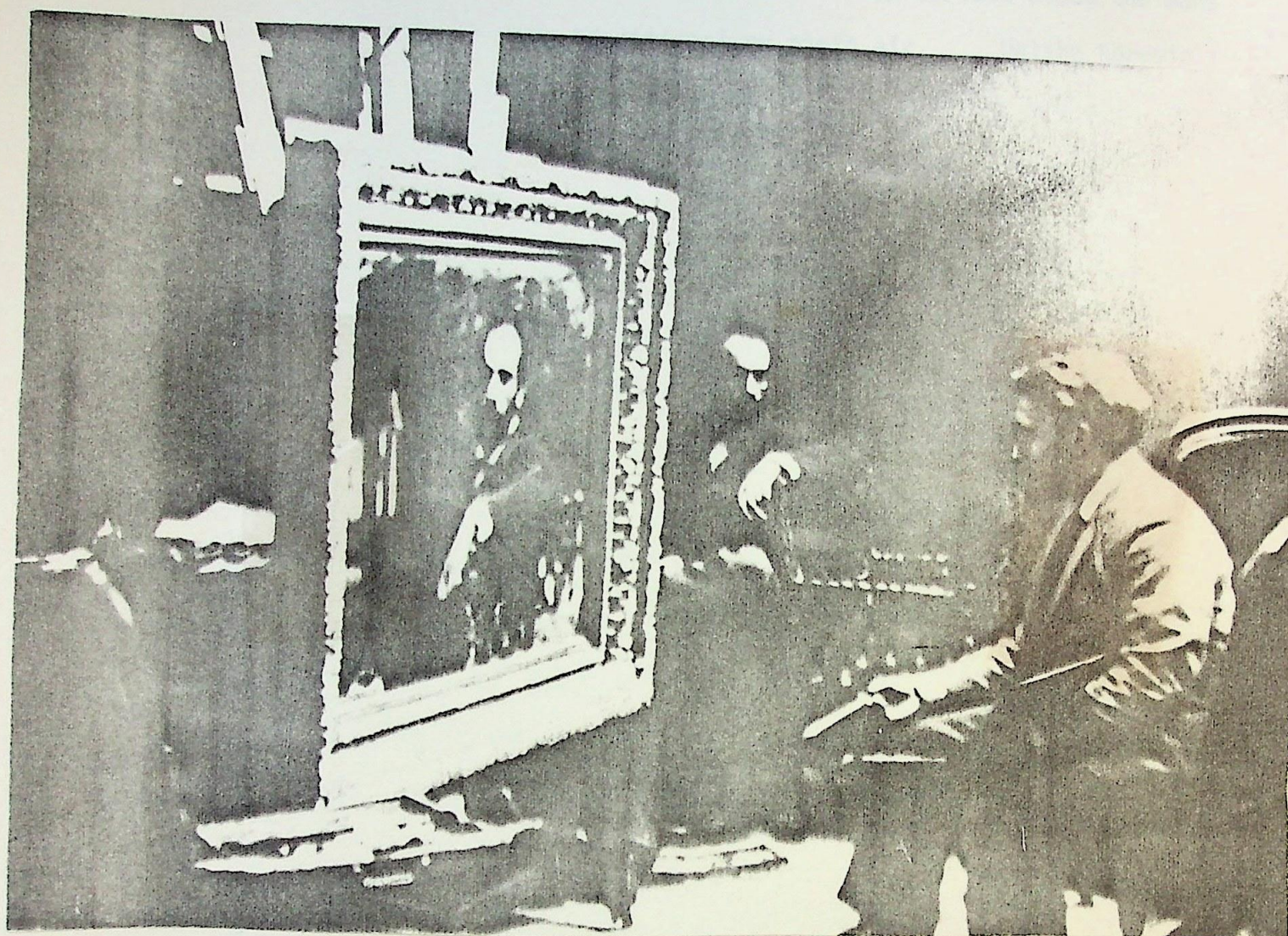
The technique Serov uses in this portrait is similar to Repins (who as a portraitist was not as versatile or interesting). Levitans portrait adheres to a more traditional format unlike Korovins which is free of almost anything academic or traditional, showing a joy in the use of colour. In Levitans portrait it is not the models character that interests Serov but his emotional state.



(20)

Portrait of Isaac Ilyich Levitan 1893

Oil on canvas 82 x 86 cm.



Serov painting the portrait of Isaac Leviton 1893.

(20a)

... is presented in a state of introspective meditation, his gaze going beyond the viewer.

Levitan like Korovin was a fellow artist of Serovs but yet Serov has chosen to represent him differently. Perhaps Serov felt justified painting him in a more traditional way which was appropriate since the man's work was, in its essence, very traditional or plein air. Unlike Korovin this man does not appear to be an artist although something melancholy in his expression gives him away as being a little different.

In a drawing done by Serov seven years later Levitan still portrayed the same sad introspective expression. Did Levitan possess a melancholy, a romantic ideal of beauty that always reflected itself in his expression. Indeed he painted scenes that were melancholy, tranquil and romantic. He painted realistically scenes like "Evening on the Volga" 1886-88 oil on canvas and "Deep Water" 1892 oil on canvas.¹⁹ Serov painted Levitan in a dull surround which adds to the lonely look on his face. Levitan died when he was only 40, perhaps he was inflicted with illness during his life and that is the reason for his tired expression since his expression does look beset by some problem or tragedy.

Again Serov has demonstrated his flexibility as a portraitist, he even could change his technique to suit the subject if he thought it would make a statement about the person being painted. He could use the background and lighting to make us question the subject.

Levitan's softly highlighted features against the dark background arouses the viewer's attention. Serov has suggested items in the background and lightened an area on the artist's right side to suggest a wall which does a great deal to boost the spatial feeling of the work. Manin's and Tomagno's portraits have similar dark background but in them Serov has decided not to create as much of a feeling of space as he has done in Levitan's.

Perhaps it was necessary in this work because Levitan's face was not painted with the same detail but with the aim of capturing atmosphere in the scene. The darkness helps to establish mystery around the subject, forcing us to look beyond his head and back to his face, giving motion to the way we view the work. We can see the lighting that was in Serov's studio in a photograph taken while Levitan sat for Serov in 1893.

Levitan does not look stiff, though he is in a rather traditional posture. There is a feeling of relaxation about the pose, it has a flow that soothes the eye. Our eyes are attracted to his hand (hands are always an important feature in portrait painting as they can determine a lot about a person's character. Many painters found them to be a problem, that is why they often deserve as much attention as would be required when painting a face). They then follow the arm around his shoulder to his face, our attention then moves down his right arm and back to the hand in a sort of circular movement. This movement flows easily and gives the viewer an unconscious feeling of relaxation when viewing the portrait.

Levitan looks as one beset by tragedy, he almost looks as if he has lost interest in living, he does not seem to be aware of Serov at all, he looks bored. This is what creates mystery in the scene and a feeling of gloom.

THE SOCIETY PEOPLE.

Serovs range of subjects represented almost every social group in Russian society. I have already discussed the performers and the creative personalities, I will turn my attention to the portraits of two society belles, Sophia Botkina and Zinaida Yusopova. Serov would not have chosen them as subjects, they were commissions. Both were the wives of wealthy husbands and it only takes a single glance at the portraits to see this. Serov was restricted when painting these portraits, the subjects would have demanded that Serov obeyed certain considerations that they had imposed on him.

They probably wanted their portraits to conform with the fashion, which was a traditional format something on the style of John Singer Seargents work. Both subjects are dressed exquisitely, seated on very splendid sofas in wealthy interiors. Both subjects have dogs, it is as if Botkina had heard about and seen the portrait of Yusopova and decided to keep up with the newly set fashion by doing the same almost to the very last detail. Serov has painted two very different individuals in similar situations. In Botkinas portrait we see a woman enslaved by her wealth while Yusopova's portrait we see a woman proud to fly the colours of the lifestyle she leads.

I will first discuss the portrait of Sophia Botkina 1899 (pl. 21). This woman was the wife of a rich Moscow merchant and most probably that was the only reason why her image ever found its way onto canvas.²⁰ She is an attractive woman but her beauty looks enslaved, she looks intimidated by her lifestyle. It is as if she had been captured and forced to play a part, in return for some sort of exclusive lifestyle.

Serov must have felt this about the woman's situation but he has not tried to exaggerate the situation in order to make her look foolish because of what she represents instead Serov wants us to understand that she is a



(21)

Portrait of Sophia Mikhailovna Botkina. 1899

Oil on canvas 189 x 139.5 cm.

person aware of her ridiculous image, one who is suppressed. This is written in her expression which shows kindness but which is shadowed by sadness and boredom. She looks at the viewer but her gaze is that of one who has been resolved to accept their fate. Of course the woman's life was not all that bad indeed many people in Russia at that time would have gladly put up with many things just to eat but this woman probably never knew poverty, she may have even been ignorant of what was really going on in Russia.

Serov felt sorry for his subject and has tried to explain her rather than condemn her. She looks small in this canvas, the detail of the sofa has received the same attention as her dress, she looks small and lonely sitting in it, we could imagine it swallowing her up. She is not relaxed in her seated position but instead she looks slightly awkward by the way her back is stiffened while her head is tilted slightly in an effort to make the pose look natural or casual. Her tiny little dog looks so fragile, it looks vulnerable as she does in these surroundings. Serov has chosen to use a softer light in this portrait than the lighting in the portrait of Yusopova. This light creates greater atmosphere, but more importantly it accentuates the deep sallow complexion of his subject which is warm, full of feeling. Even the slight darkness around her eyes, combined with the dramatic high-lighting of the eyes, displays emotion. Serov has arranged the focussing of each eye to give her face an expression that would display the woman's emotion. If we cover the right side of the Botkina face (her right hand side) we can see that the left side is lit by the subtle hint of a seductive smile. This is because the eye is wide open and looks straight at us. The corner of her lip on the right hand side of her face points ever so slightly upwards creating a very slight smile. Her eyebrow is raised on this side too but less than the other eyebrow. If the side I have discussed is covered one will discover a very different expression. This time the eyelid does not open as much, the gaze of the eye does not contact the viewer, but is vacant. There is tiredness or tragedy about her eyes. The way in which the eyebrow

is raised enhances this effect, as does the way the left lip remains expressionless, unlike the other side. On this side of the face her expression is of helplessness and apathy. It also looks much older than the other side. When we look at her face we are aware of these things subconsciously, they cause us to wonder as to just what is her expression, we cannot pinpoint what it is but we can feel it.

From painting portraits myself, I would be aware of something like this and I am certain Serov was. With his superb talent I am sure that he would have exercised control over this knowledge.

It might look as though Serov did not experiment in this portrait since he had to adhere to a very traditional concept and technique but he has, in a very subtle way, by capturing a particular facet of her character and her emotional state. The quality of the expression in her face ranks with the portrait of Maria Yermolova. It really tells a story.

In the same vein as Botkina's portrait is the portrait of Zinaida Yusopova. In fact the two portraits almost form a set. (pl. 22)

This woman was a Princess and was a member of one of the wealthiest aristocratic families in pre-revolutionary Russia when she married Count Felix Felixovich Sumarokov-Elstone. He was a wealthy man and Governor General of Moscow. The Czar granted a special decree permitting him to adopt the title and maiden name of his wife.²¹ This wedding would have been a marriage of different interests as opposed to the joining of two people, a typical royal wedding. If Serov was indifferent to Sophia Botkina he still tried to understand the woman and express his findings in her portrait but with Yusopova he is truly indifferent. He has portrayed a confident woman, possibly arrogant. There is no story in her expression, it ends there. Unlike Botkina she is not lost in the canvas, this woman dominates the picture. She fits into her surroundings perfectly. She is not out of



(22)

Portrait of Zinaida Nikolayevna Yusupova. 1900-2
Oil on canvas 181.5 x 133 cm.

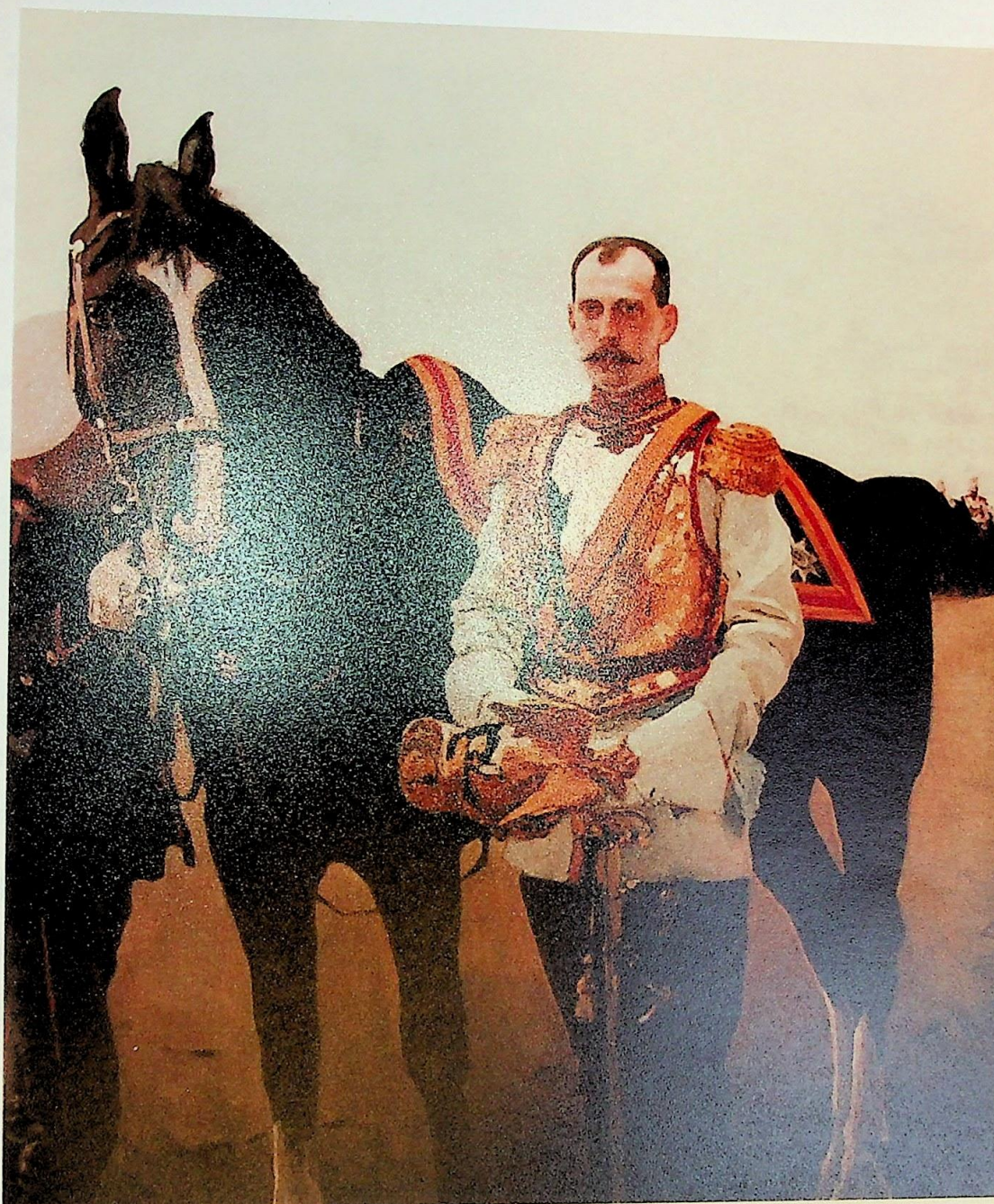
place, even the pattern on her dress is similar to that of the sofa on which she is seated and similar to the wall behind her. She is a part of the room almost inseparable from it. As with the portrait of Botkina, Yusopova's hand leans on her lap perhaps Serov wanted to break up the large area of dress but in this case it looks contrived, a little bit stiff, the woman is obviously posing for Serov. Botkina was painted in a subdued light which helped to create a mystery about the subject but this scene is full of brightness even the dog is white, in fact her skin is very bright and pale, a similar colour to her dress and the wall.

Her eyes do not really contact the viewer, her expression seems to be that of a woman who has no time to waste. It befits her pose which is not at all natural. There is the hint of a confident smile in her face which befits her station. She looks like a harder person than Botkina, she does not feel enslaved by the role she plays. Serov has recognised this, she enjoys it. If one examines her expression by blocking off each side of the face as done previously with Botkina's face, one will notice that there is hardly any difference on either side or at least the difference is slight. This woman really is the typical bourgeois lady. It seems that Serov did not enjoy painting her though he fulfilled his commission.

Despite the fact that Serov may not have been too interested in the type of person he painted it is still a fine example of the traditional portrait. Though the subject and scene are contrived it bears a similarity to his earliest piece "Girl in Sunlight" (pl. 8) as he has paid attention to the whole scene giving every component the same attention unlike his portrait of "Mansini" where he isolated the figure from its background.

Another of Serovs formal portraits is that of "Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich" 1897 (pl. 23). For this painting Serov was awarded an honorary medal (the highest distinction) at the Paris World Fair in 1900. It was hailed as a marvellous portrait at the time but I do not think it deserved the praise.²² The entire painted surface is flat as if Serov had painted it with watercolour instead of oil. It is more like an illustration for a book on military history than a portrait. Though formal portraits are restricted because their purpose is usually to record a person for reasons of posterity however this work has gone too far. It is merely a painting of a man in ceremonial dress standing by a horse. Any interest in this work would only have been aroused by the fact that this man was a member of the Russian Royal Family.

Serov has painted a man who is expressionless if that is possible. The Duke's eyes are dead and his pose lifeless. One imagines that if he were pushed he might fall over and be smashed to pieces like a piece of crockery. Serovs portraits are great because he would spotlight a persons character and even pick out the most appropriate facet of that character but with the Duke he has done neither. There is more expression and character in the horse's face and in the face of the man holding the horse. It is possible that Serov was making his own private statement, it seems that Serov found the man boring and expressionless, more a symbol of autocracy than a real person. It seems that at that time it was fashionable for male members of the aristocracy to have their portraits painted while including their horse. Serov also did this in his portrait of Felix Yusopov who is painted on horseback.²³



(23)

Portrait of Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich 1897
Oil on canvas 168 x 151 cm.

HIS CHILD PORTRAITS.

Serovs paintings of children demonstrate further the extent of the artists ability. Painting children would present problems for any portraitist because they move constantly. For Serov there is no fixation of the transient, one can almost predict his subjects next movement.

In the portrait of "Mika Morozov 1901 " (pl. ²⁴) son of a Russian art critic, Serov has captured the young child about to move from the chair, aroused by something unseen. The child is inquisitive and unaware of the viewer which is typical of children, they are excitable and live in a world of their own. Indeed it would be hard to imagine this child sitting calmly looking at Serov while being painted. It is likely that Serov would have much of the visual information for the portrait by making many sketches and he would have relied on them more heavily than when painting any of his adult subjects.

The innocence of this little boy is enhanced by his white clothing, it acts as a perfect contrast to the colour of his skin, making obvious the fragility of the childs unblemished complexion. His clothing also stands out against the background forcing us to focus on him. The background has no real interest but it creates sufficient feeling of space. The chair is a good setting for the portrait because it makes us realise just how small the child is, he is almost swallowed up by it. This would have been intended by Serov.

The painting of the childs head and the expression are superb. Indeed this portrait would have demanded a lot from Serov. The artist was faced with the problem of painting a subject who would not and could not pose. Even if the child had it would not have looked natural.



(24)

Portrait of Mikhail Mikhailovich Morozov

1901 (Mika Morozov)

Oil on canvas 62.3 x 70.6 cm.

Serov came forth with the idea of capturing the very essence of the little boy by choosing to paint the child's expression of surprise. This surprise has caused the child's face to light up, there is a flame burning in his wide innocent eyes. It is not just a painting of this young boy but it is the epitome of a child portrait. Serov has used every device possible, the child's eyebrow raised in curiosity, his eyes dramatically highlighted, making obvious their innocence and the uncorrupted mind that lies behind them. The child's lips are open showing no tension in the face but instead surprise. Even the hands remind us of his youth and innocence, they are awkward, so small and delicate. Serov has captured the child's physical beauty and the beauty of innocence. One look at the subject and the viewer's heart is won.

The size of the canvas is unusual. Its horizontal length is greater than its height. This has the effect of making the child look small simply because usually the format for portraits is that the height of a canvas exceeds the horizontal length.

Technically the painting is superb. The background is given a little life by the inclusion of some obscure colour pattern though it is for the most part flat. The child's clothing shows rigorous brushmarks which suit the portrait, as the freedom of brushmarks parallels the child's freedom. The flesh tones have been given extra attention because he could not take advantage of any prominent features (features and lines of character that exist in an adult face but not in a young child's face) to bring out character and to give form. Basically it is the superb skill employed in the handling of the skin tones that makes this work successful. These tones are warm, indicative of youth and energy.

The next work that I shall discuss is a double portrait of Serovs two sons titled "The Children" Sasha and Yura Serov 1899 (pl. 25). Serov painted this work on the veranda of his Dacha near the Gulf of Finland.²⁵ He was painting out of doors. Serov captures his two sons at a moment when they are not even thinking of what he is doing. The child nearest the viewer is leaning on the wooden ballustrade contemplating the boundless sea, while the other child's head is turned towards the viewer. He has an introspective look in his eyes. This child is the centre of attraction in the portrait because he looks in the general direction of the viewer, he is in the centre of the canvas and because he stands at the corner of the veranda. The perspective of the floor as it recedes into the distance leads our eye towards him as does the ballustrade. His thoughts are in the direction of the viewer, this is why he has been singled out by Serov. The artist is as inquisitive as his son as he wants to know what is on his ^{son's} mind, Serov cannot find out for certain so he has put the spotlight on his son to let the viewer question and decide.

They are typical children. Their poses show this. They are carefree, their bodies hang loosely almost lazily. Unlike adults they do not really care how they appear. While their father was busy painting them they sought interest elsewhere and so their minds simply took off into worlds of their own. Serov has captured the bond between these two little brothers not merely because they are dressed the same but because their poses show a close awareness of each other. They are at ease beside each other as only close people could be. Serov has captured the innocence of the two boys and shown his bemusement at them and portrayed his affection.

The skin tones are almost the same as the colours of the sand. There is not the same degree of colour in the faces that is evident in the face of Mika Morozov. The same is true of the background. In a sense the



(25)

"THE CHILDREN" · Sasha and Yura · Serov · 1899

Oil on canvas · 71 x 54 cm.

work looks more like an oil sketch for a later painting that was to be more accomplished but then again the fact that it is like an oil sketch gives it a unique effect. This is something different. The atmosphere in the portrait is fresh. The surroundings are natural and rugged. We can almost feel a sea breeze on the boys faces. The colours in the painting help this effect. In the background the sky is overcast and the sea and sky are composed of cold blues and steel grey. Indeed this steel grey colour the floor of the veranda and is reflected in their shirts. These are the fresh colours of a windswept beach.

AND
CONCLUSION.

I started this Essay by giving an outline of the state of the arts in Russia coming up to Serov's time, and the opposition to these established Art Institutions that was starting to grow. I then discussed the artists background and some of his influences like the great Russian painter Ilya Repin who taught Serov a great deal. This man influenced Serov's beliefs, as did Serov's mother, so when we look at his political work "Soldiers, Soldiers, Heroes Everyone" (which I used in discussing Gorky's portrait) one can guess as to where he derived his sympathies from. This sympathy with the common man is a great thing and undoubtedly arouses greater admiration for Serov from us the viewer.

I then started to discuss his portraits starting with the performers, those personalities used to attracting the public's attention, next the creative personalities, many of whom were fellow artists, then I spoke about the society people, those members of the aristocracy who represented in a sense the oppression that autocracy caused in Russia at the time and finally I discussed two of his child portraits, one of which was a double portrait of Serov's two young sons.

Over the years I have paid attention to the works of portraitists like our own "William Orpen", the very international "John Singer Sargent", the American painter "Thomas Eakins" to name only a few. These men were undoubtedly excellent portraitists but I feel that none of them were quite as good or original as Serov. In Serov's portraits we see the work of one who understood colour and loved to use it, a man who experimented with portrait painting and took it forward. His painting technique had a modern flavour to it. Works that illustrate this best are "Girl with Peaches " (pl. 7), his portrait of fellow artist "Konstantin Korovin (pl. 18/19) the actress "Maria Yermolova (pl. 11/12) and portrait of the famous Russian writer Maxim Gorky. These works are without the deadness of colour and the stiffness that was common to a lot of 19th century portraiture. They are instead very much alive in colour and originality.

In "Girl with Peaches" Serov was not entirely concerned with creating a portrait. He was interested in the whole scene and because of this concern he has created a portrait that is very modern. It is full of colour and light. The colours used have not been made dull by too much mixing on the palette, they have great vitality, they seem almost pure. Even something like this makes a statement about the girl. She is young, pure, bright and cheerful as was the scene and Serov's use of paint. Indeed to have painted the girl in any dark formal setting would have been a gross misrepresentation of her. I have not experienced another portraitist who could exercise these sort of considerations in their work that Serov has demonstrated here and in many of his later works. There is a similar freedom in the use of paint in his portrait of Konstantin Korovin but in this portrait the same technique has matured and there is greater evidence of experimentation. The composition in Korovin's painting suited the free painterly manner. The components in the background like dressers etc, are distorted creating a movement in the work. Serov developed his own method of spotlighting a person's character. He could capture that facet of a person's character or the emotional state that told a story, that facet which was most appropriate to the very essence of the subject. This developed as the artist matured. Two works that illustrate this are "Marie Yermolova" and "Maxim Gorky". His portrait of Yermolova is monumental. He has painted a story on the actresses face, a story of greatness, pride and tragedy. In Gorky's portrait Serov has captured his subject in a most dramatic pose, which causes the writer's representation on canvas to take on a symbolic role. He is almost a prophet, a hero of the common people. By representing Gorky in this way Serov has voiced his own political opinions. Painting people like "Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich" and later Maxim Gorky shows a massive contrast in choice of subjects. Serov did protest against the massacre of innocent demonstrators by demanding the resignation of a member of the Royal Family from the Academy (it was always a tradition in Russia that a member of the Royal Family should be President of the Academy) so therefore we can see how

Serov would have chosen to paint Gorky since this man would have represented opposition to the type of behaviour that was being dished out by the Rulers of Russia. It is confusing to learn though that Serov painted a portrait of another member of the Royal Family after Gorkys portrait, that of "Princess Olga Orlova" 1911 after painting Gorkys portrait and having been involved with a magazine Zhupel that was in essence political! Had Serov changed his views or did he choose not to blame her as an individual for what the Rulers of Russia were doing! He may have been afraid of being ostracised and therefore his family suffering as a result.

Serovs portraits are even more exciting when we consider that they represented the Russian culture of the latter half of the 19th Century right up to the revolution. As soon as the revolution had succeeded, this culture vanished, many of the Royalty that Serov painted would have either fled the country, been imprisoned or executed. He has painted a cross section of a society that disappeared almost without trace.

In Serovs time Russia had a great artistic tradition and a large amount of excellent Russian realist painters. This art culture compared nobly with the painting traditions of Europe and America. Serov was a member of this nationalist realist movement of painters and unfortunately there is so very little known about them, more importantly there is very little known about Serov in the West. Apart from an occasional tiny mention in books on Russian art, (which give only a very broad description of painting in Russia) Serov is unknown. However, the realist tradition did survive in Russia until at least 1923. In a book titled "The Itinerants" which is written and published in Leningrad this is discussed but the book contains hints of prejudism though it provides some interesting information on Russian paintings of the 19th and early 20th century and some interesting colour plates.

...the reason why there is hardly any worthwhile information on Russian Art is because of the lack of communication between East and West since they formation of the Soviet Union. I sincerely hope that this will change and that in the West we learn more about this great Master of Portrait Painting Valentin Serov.

We in the West would be very much the wiser, enlightened to an artist whose works have a tremendous amount to offer.

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE.

- 1865 On the 7th January Serov was born in St. Petersburg.
- 1869 Serov and his parents visit Richard Wagner in Lucerne.
- 1871 On the 20th January his father dies in St. Petersburg.
His mother goes to Munich to continue her musical training
and Serov stays with Drutsky-Sokolinsky family in Nikolskoye
in the Smolensk Province.
- 1872 He is taken to his mother in Munich.
- 1873 Meets Karl Kopping the German Etcher and Engraver.
- 1874 Serov and his mother leave Munich and settle in Paris.
Visits the studio of Repin frequently drawing from plaster
casts and still lifes. Participates in the activities of
the Russian artistic colony in Paris. Meets the writer Ivan
Turgenev.
- 1875 Returns with his mother to Russia and settle at Abramtsevo,
Savva Mamontovs estate. They become close friends of the
Mamontovs, a friendship that lasts throughout their lives.
- 1876 Spend the summer with his mother at the estate of Doctor V. Neinchinov,
his mother's common law husband. Prepares for high school.
- 1877 Attends the drawing school of Nikolai Murashko.
- 1878 Resumes systematic art training with Repin in Moscow.
- 1879 Settles with Repin and prepares for the Academy of Arts; works at
Abramtsevo with Repin. In the Autumn he accompanies Repin on
a trip to St. Petersburg.
- 1880 Executes a drawing "After A Fire" from the window of Repins apartment.
May - July ; accompanies Repin who is collecting material for his
painting "The Zaphorozhye Cossacks".
August ; he goes to St. Petersburg and takes the Entrance Examination

- at the Academy of Arts (he is admitted as a free attendant)
Meets Mikail Vrubel. Joined the private studio of Professor Chistiakov.
- 1881 March ; He draws a portrait of Chistiakov.
- 1883 He is promoted from free "attendant" to "Academist". Attends water colour classes at Repin's studio.
- 1883 Together with Vladimir Derviz makes a trip to Caucasus.
- 1884 Paints a portrait of the sculptor Mark Antokolsky.
- 1885 Travels abroad with his mother. At the Pinakothek in Munich he copies a portrait by Velasques. In Belgium and Holland he studies paintings by the Flemish and Dutch Old Masters. Lives and works at Abramtsevo and Moscow. He goes to Moscow to paint a portrait of the Italian Singer Antonio d'Andrade. Paints a portrait of Olga Trubnikova his Fiancee.
- 1886 2nd January partakes in the 5th Periodical Exhibition of the Moscow Society of Art Lovers, the first show that Serov ever took part in. September ; he goes to St. Petersburg to confirm his retirement from the Academy. Paints the study "Autumn Evening". That winter he sketches at Abramtsevo.
- 1887 Paints a portrait of Savvo Mamontov. Together with Ostroutkhov and the brothers Mikail and Yury Mamontov makes a trip to Venice, Florence and Milan visiting Vienna on the way. Paints a portrait of Vera Mamontova (Girl with Peaches) Savva Mamontov's daughter.
- 1888 Paints Maria Simonovich (Girl in Sunlight). Paints the "The Overgrown Pond" at Domotkanova. He collects material for a portrait of his father.
- December ; he is awarded a first prize for his painting of Vera Mamontova (Girl with Peaches) at the competition organised by the Moscow Society of Art Lovers.

- 1889 On the 29th of January he marries Olga Trubnikova in St. Petersburg. Settles at No. 11 Mikhailovskaya Square. Works on a portrait of his father. Friendship with Vrubel and Konstantin Korovin.
- 1890 January ; March - he paints a portrait of Italian singer Angelo Mansini, which was commissioned by Savvo Mamontova. February ; his daughter Olga is born. 11th February - 20th March, St. Petersburg; 31st March - 22nd April; Moscow he exhibits in the 18th Exhibition of the Itinerant Society (Wanderers) this was the first time Serov ever exhibited with them. He is awarded a first prize for his portrait of Angelo Mansini at a competition organised by the Moscow Society of Art Lovers; he shows this portrait at the 10th Periodical Exhibition of the Society.
- 1891 Winter: paints a portrait of Italian Opera Singer Francesco Tamagno. Autumn: he paints Korovins portrait.
- 1892 Receives a commission from the nobility of Kharkov to paint Alexander 111 with his Family. Paints a portrait of Repin in St. Petersburg. Partakes in the 12th Periodical Exhibition of the Moscow Society of Art Lovers. His son Alexander is born.
- 1893 Winter: completes his portrait of Isaac Levitan. 15th February - 21st March, St. Petersburg; 29th March - 9th May, Moscow; he shows his work at the 21st Exhibition of the Itinerant Society (Wanderers). Contributes three oils to the 13th Periodical Exhibition of the Moscow Society of Art Lovers.
- 1894 Shows work at the 22nd Exhibition of the Itinerant Society (Wanderers). June; goes to Kharkov and Borki to complete the work commissioned by the nobility. His son George is born.
- 1895 Shows at the 23rd Exhibition of the Itinerants Society (Wanderers). Takes part in the 15th Periodical of the Moscow Society of Art Lovers.

- 1896 His son Mikhail is born. Exhibits at the 24th Exhibition of the Itinerant Society (Wanderers). Contributes to the 16th Periodical of the Moscow Society of Art Lovers.
- 1897 Works on his portrait of Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich. Exhibits in the 25th Exhibition of the Itinerant Society. Begins teaching at the Moscow School of Painting Sculpture and Architecture. Takes part in the 17th Exhibition of the Moscow Society of Art Lovers.
- 1898 Takes part in the Exhibition of the Russian and Flemish painters organised by Diaghilev in St. Petersburg. End of Winter ; paints a portrait of the composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg. Shows his work at the 26th Exhibition of the Itinerant Society. He is elected a member of the Verein Bildender Kunsler (Munich Secession)
- 1899 January - February ; he shows his work at the 1st International Exhibition of Paintings organised by Mir Iskusstva Magazine in St. Petersburg. Contributes to the 27th Exhibition of the Itinerant Society, the last Itinerants Exhibition to show works by Serov. Early June ; is elected a member of the Council of the Tretyakov Gallery, remains in this position for the rest of his life. He paints "The Children".
- 1900 Works on his portraits of Nicholas II and Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolayevich in St. Petersburg. Contributes to the 2nd Exhibition of Paintings organised by the Mir Iskusstva Magazine. August ; he participates in the Paris World Exhibition and receives the highest award (Grand Medaille d'Honneur) for his portrait of Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich.
- 1901 Takes part in the 3rd Exhibition of paintings organised by the Mir Iskusstva Magazine in St. Petersburg. December ; Serov turns down a commission to paint the Czar's portrait.
- 1902 Takes part in the 1st Exhibition of the Thirty-six Painters Society in Moscow. Contributes to the 4th Exhibition of Paintings

- Janised by the Mir Iskusstva Magazine in St. Petersburg.
Paints his portrait of Mikail Morozov in Moscow. Alexander
Benois publishes a history of Russian Paintings in the 19th
century with a few pages devoted to Serov. Completes work on
illustrations for the book "Royal Hunting in Russia".
Early December ; he meets the writer Maxim Gorky in Moscow
(probably for the first time).
- 1903
Takes part in hthe 5th Exhibition of the paintings organised by
Mir Iskusstva Magazine in St. Petersburg. On the 21st April
Serov is elected Professor, Head of a studio of the Higher Art
School of the Academy of Arts at a session of the Academy.
Early October ; Serov falls ill.
25th November ; he is operated on at the hospital of Dr.Chegodayev.
- 1904
13th January ; leaves the hospital.
April - May ; he tours Italy with his wife, visiting Rome, Venice,
Naples, Padua and Ravenna.
- 1905
Paints a portrait of Maria Yermolova, commissioned by the Moscow
Circle of Literature and Art.
On the 9th January Serov becomes an eye witness to the massacre of
a peaceful demonstration of workers by Czarists troops in St.Petersburg.
On 18th February he reacts by sending a letter, together with
Vasily Polenov, to the Board of the Academy of Arts, in which they
accuse the Grand Duke Vladimir, President of the Academy, of being
one of the organisers of the massacre.
10th March ; also in protest against the massacre he puts in an
application of resignation from the Imperial Academy of Arts.
March - April ; Serov takes part in the Exhibition of Russian
Portraits arranged by Diaghilex at the Tauride Palace in St.Petersburg.
September ; works on a portrait of Maxim Gorky.
Participates in a meeting of the staff of the satirical magazine

Zhalo at Maxim Gorky's apartment.

Serovs drawing "Soldiers, Soldiers, Heroes Every One" is published in the first issue of Zhupel.

1906 Moves to a new apartment in Golofteyevs house near the Church of Our Saviour in Moscow. Participates in the Exhibition of Russian Art at the Salon d'Autonne in Paris and in the Exhibition of Russian Art in Berlin. Shows work at the 3rd Exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists in Moscow.

1907 Contributes to the 4th Exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists in Moscow. Travels to Greece with the purpose of (according to Bakst) finding a modern manner of representation. Executes a great number of watercolours and sketches among them a first version of "The Rape of Europa". Works on painting of Peter the Great. His works are shown at the International Art Exhibition in Venice and at the 5th Exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists in Moscow.

1908 His work is shown at the 5th Exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists in St. Petersburg and at the 6th in Moscow.

His daughter Natalia is born.

1909 January - resigns his teaching job at the Moscow School of painting. February - contributes to the Exhibition of Painting, Architecture, Sculpture and Graphics (the "Salon") in St. Petersburg. Begins his portrait of Princess Orlova in St. Petersburg. Exhibits at the 6th Exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists in St. Petersburg and the 7th in Moscow also at the 10th International Secession Exhibition in Munich.

1910 His works are shown at the Exhibition of Contemporary Russian Female portraits organised by the Apollo Magazine in St. Petersburg.

Early May - makes a trip to Italy visiting Rome, Sienna, Orvieto and Genoa.

1911

May ; lives with Yefimovas in Paris.

July ; He is commissioned by the Italian Ministry of Popular Education to paint a self portrait for the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Early December ; works in Paris. Contributes to the 7th Exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists in St. Petersburg.

Participates in the first Exhibition of the re-established World of Art Society in St. Petersburg.

February ; completes his portrait of Princess Orlova.

7th April - 4th May ; visits Rome with his wife to attend the International Art Exhibition where his work is shown in a special room.

End of June ; visits London to attend the Russian Ballet Seasons.

Early November ; meets Henri Matisse while Matisse was visiting Moscow.

13th November ; The 12th Lemerrier Gallery Exhibition open in St. Petersburg, which includes works by Serov. World of Art Society Exhibition opens in Moscow. It includes works by Serov.

Works on portraits of Henrietta Girshman, Polina Shcherbatova, Nadezhda Lamanova and Konstantin Stanislavsky.

On 22nd November 1911 Valentin Serov dies in Moscow.

- (1) Valentin Serov 1865 / 1911 page no. 3
- (2) Alexander Serov (Father) page no. 3
- (3) Valentina Serova (Mother) page no. 3
- (4) Valentin Serov (extreme right) at a party given by Savva Mamontov
(extreme left) in ABramtsevo 1888 page no. 5
- (5) Valentin Serov (standing left) and members of the Abramtsevo artistic
circle 1886. page no. 6
- (6) His Tutor - Ilya Repin 1844-1930 page no. 7
- (7) "Girl with Peaches" Portrait of Vera Savvishna Mamontova 1887
(Savva Mamontov's young daughter) page no. 10
- (8) "Girl in Sunlight" Portrait of Maria Yakovlevna Simonovich 1888
page no. 11
- (9) Portrait of Angelo Masini 1890 page no. 14
- (10) Portrait of Francesco Tamagno 1891 page no. 15
- (11) Portrait of Maria Nikolayevna Yermolova 1905
- (12) page no. 18
- (13) John Singer Sargent (1856-1925
Portrait of Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau 1884 page no. 21
- (14) Portrait of Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov 1898 page no. 24
- (15) "Soldiers, Soldiers, Heroes Every One... 1905 page no. 27
- (16/17) Portrait of Maxim Gorky 1905 page nos. 29/30
- (18/19) Portrait of Konstantin Alexeyevich Korovin 1891 page nos. 34/35
- (20) Portrait of Isaac Ilyich Levitan 1893 page no. 38
- (20a) Serov painting Levitan 1893 page no. 38(a)
- (21) Portrait of Sophia Mikhailovna Botkina 1899 page no. 42
- (22) Portrait of Zinaida Nikolayevna Yusupova 1900-2 page no. 45

Continued.....

- (23) Portrait of Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich 1897 page no. 48
- (24) Portrait of Mikhail Mikhailovich Morozov 1901 page no. 50
(Mika Morozov)
- (25) "The Children" Sasha and Yura Serov 1899 page no. 53

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FOOTNOTES.

1. George Heard Hamilton (The Art and Architecture of Russia)
p.175, 176.
2. Harry N. Abrams
Valentin Serov Introduction by Dmitry Sarabyanov
p.266
3. Camilla Gray The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922
p. 9, 10,11.
4. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p. 267
5. Pan Books The Itinerants p. 8 (top of page)
6. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p. 9
7. Pan Books The Itinerants p. 125
8. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.10
9. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.11
10. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.11
11. Geraldine Norman Nineteenth Century Painters and Painting:
a Dictionary p. 193
12. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p. 13
13. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.14
14. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.14
15. Theodore E.Stebbins, Fr., Carol Troyen, Trevor F. Fairbrother.
A New World p. 300
16. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.274
17. Harry N. Abrams Valentin Serov p.299 Cat.No.180
18. Pan Books The Itinerants p.78

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|-----|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 19. | Pan Books | The Itinerants | p. 78 |
| 20. | Harry N. Abrams | Valentin Serov | p.320 Cat.No.338 |
| 21. | Harry N. Abrams | Valentin Serov | p.328 Cat.No.403 |
| 22. | Harry N. Abrams | Valentin Serov | p.13 |
| 23. | Harry N. Abrams | Valentin Serov | p.123, 124. |
| 24. | Harry N. Abrams | Valentin Serov | p.325 Cat.No.384 |

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