

events, and mundane domestic products. This book, illustrated lavishly in colour and black-and-white, was originally conceived as a catalogue for an exhibition in the USA of about 100 works borrowed from the National Library of Russia and the Research Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg. Some other works came from the Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, the New York Public Library, and other private and public collections. Alla Rosenfeld, Curator of Russian and Soviet Nonconformist Art at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, traces the development of this branch of the visual arts from the explosion of artistic expression so often personified by Diaghilev, to its more or less complete suppression when Stalin decreed in 1934 that Socialist Realism was to be the only acceptable artistic form. Diaghilev, says Rosenfeld, was not himself a performer, artist or designer, yet it was via his influence that the performing and visual arts were transformed in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, and exported to Western Europe and thence to the entire world. Whereas previous books have concentrated on this forty-year period's fine arts or performing arts – especially painting, costume and stage design – this book is devoted to the graphic arts as tools of commerce and/or politics, and as aesthetic objects in their own right. The chapters show how Russia's national identity in this artistic sphere had its origins in earlier periods, such as the *lubki* (popular prints and woodcuts) and how the cataclysmic events of the time – First World War, Revolution, Civil War – were reflected in the graphic arts which were assimilated increasingly into the Soviet propaganda machine after the Bolshevik Revolution. Well-known artists such as El Lissitzky were persuaded to make the ideas of the Revolution accessible to the masses by means of bold and striking futuristic imagery. Book design, posters, costumes, and periodicals such as the influential turn-of-the-century *World of Art* journal are all explored for their contribution to the development and consolidation of modernist styles. Children's books are another area covered.

The theme of advertising is rather an interesting one in this book, given that commercial advertising belongs to the earlier part of the period covered, and thus is reminiscent of the graceful and complex designs we are accustomed to from the Western European Art Nouveau tradition. The Russian version of Art Nouveau, 'Style Moderne', was inevitably closely derived from the cross-fertilisation of artistic movements which was sweeping Europe at the time, but distinctively Russian elements were incorporated too. In addition, of course, advertising for purely commercial purposes was interrupted in its development for over seventy years; subsequently, post-Soviet Russian advertising became homogenised and standardised in accordance with the demands of multinational big business. But the authentically Russian quality of pre-revolutionary advertising can be seen in this book, with artists of calibre such as Bilibin being represented. Not that the international influence was entirely confined to one part of the globe; one charming picture reveals Bilibin's take on the famous painting of a wave by the Japanese artist Hokusai. This book as a whole is a

clear and informative exposition of the graphic art and design of the era, which at the same time links artistic developments with those in politics and society.

NEW IN PAPERBACK

Cambridge University Press have issued the paperback edition of **Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment**, edited by John E Bowl and Olga Matich. ISBN 08047 3652 9. £11.95. (Reviewed in the December 1996 Journal)

HISTORY

Rethinking Central Asia: Non-Eurocentric Studies in History, Social Structure and Identity. Edited by Korkut A Erturk. Ithaca Press, Reading, 1999. £35.

Central Asia, at least that part of it which was governed by the Soviets for around seventy years and prior to that from the mid-nineteenth century by the Russian Tsar, has mostly been considered from a European point of view and in terms of European history and politics. This led to it being seen as very much a peripheral area, an underdeveloped supplier of raw materials to the imperial power. Only in post-Soviet times, given previous difficulties of access and communications, has it been fruitful to assess and study the area in its own right.

This book is far more than a historical study; it covers the development of social structures, politics, culture (in particular oral epic literature), gender relations, the relationships of Central Asian states to their neighbours, and much more. To include it with 'History' books, therefore, is merely for convenience. There is quite a pan-Turkic feel to this book, with contributions on such matters as "Patterns of Legitimization of Rule in the History of the Turks", which is not surprising considering that some of the authors are based at Ankara University, and others are of Turkic origin although at US universities. One of the most useful additions to the understanding of present-day Central Asian political and social life is the examination of the clan structure. One of the papers takes a look at tribe, confederation and state among the Altaic nomads of the Asian steppes; despite the fact that Altai lies outside Central Asia as a political entity, modern borders do not take account of the ancient mixing of nomadic peoples and their migrations far from their ancestors' homelands. This same paper, by Sharon Bastug of Ankara University, explains in detail the complex clan system – the Segmentary Lineage System – which is quite baffling to a European. Another paper, by Isenbike Togan (also of Ankara University) tries to escape from the usual study generalisations of 'Muslim Women', to compare periods in the history of women in Central Asia when patriarchy has been reinforced (e.g. at times of executions of queens). This reinforcement is shown to be not necessarily a *prima facie* result of Islam. However, this sociological-anthropological study, although on one hand perhaps benefiting from comparisons with different parts of

the world, also dilutes analysis of the Central Asian experience and comes across as too narrowly academic. One factor that does not surprise us is the greater independence of nomadic women such as the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz compared with sedentary women; the nomadic inhabitants of Central Asia could be compared with the Cossacks in this respect. Another very interesting observation is the influence of the (ungendered) Turkic languages on gender relations.

Perhaps the most far-reaching essay, in terms of history and international relations, is by Gunder Frank: "ReOrient: From the Centrality of Central Asia to China's Middle Kingdom". This argues that contrary to popular opinion Central Asia did not go into terminal economic decline after the opening of East-West trade routes around the Cape of Good Hope, and that it enjoyed periods of resurgence even up to the beginning of the 20th century, and only the Eurocentric obsession with European colonial expansion into Asia prevented a recognition of the fact that Asian countries (China and India in particular) remained dominant in world trade until the Industrial Revolution and rise of the European imperialist powers. Papers of great interest to students of the former Soviet Union are those by Mardin and Cecen, which focus on the difficult questions of national identity and nationalist politics, both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution.

It could be said that this book looks at Central Asia from inside out: its history is considered from earliest origins, as is the region's contribution to world culture (see also the article "An Uzbek Scientist who Surprised the World" in the April 1999 issue of the Journal). Another factor of increasing importance in this day and age is the expansion of links with China and the Middle East, particularly where trade is concerned; this too points to the lessening of 'Eurocentrism', which in itself seems to indicate that more studies of this nature will be appearing in future.

Russia: An Illustrated History. Joel Carmichael. Hippocrene Books, New York, 1999. £11.99 hardback. Available from: Gazelle, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster LA1 1RN. Tel: 01524 68765; fax: 01524 63232; e-mail: gazelle4go@aol.com. Web:

www.gazellebooks.co.uk

This is a potted, whistle-stop tour through Russian history from its earliest beginnings. As an introduction to Russian history, its compactness (252 pages) and relatively small size would make it useful for non-specialist students and general readers, although it should not be taken as 'gospel'; indeed, it should be taken with a large pinch of salt. The author's style is florid and eccentric in many parts, which perhaps helps to make history palatable for the casual reader. The Purges of the late 1930s, for example, are called the Deep Comb-Out, which is harmless enough and merely idiosyncratic. The author also has strong opinions about many of history's subjects and characters, and there are, of course, many characters in Russian history who are "larger than life". Peter the Great lends himself to purple prose at the drop of a hat: "Peter was very free-and-easy in his manner, with a peculiar sense of humor. On noticing his friends' disgust during a visit to an anatomical laboratory in Holland, he made them tear a corpse to shreds with their bare teeth."

Rather than a purely chronological account, certain predominant themes are tackled in sequence: Peter the Great and Catherine the Great have chapters to themselves, as do the intelligentsia, and the reform and revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century. Disconcertingly, there is no index; therefore one cannot check that the name of Yeltsin really does appear nowhere in the book. The fairly straightforward account of Russian history is ruined by the appalling last two chapters, dealing with the post-war Soviet Union, entitled "The Neo-Bolshevik State" and "The New Course". When I turned to the latter chapter, I expected an account, however brief, of the Gorbachev years and developments since 1991. After all, this book was published in 1999, it is not a lavish publication despite being well bound in hardback, and so recent events could, one might suppose, have been included. But the brief final chapters are used as polemic, and an excuse to air the most hawkish and isolationist US-centred views. "The New Course" concentrates more on Soviet attempts to harness rebel movements in the Third World (and is totally dismissive of movements such as Liberation Theology, for instance) than on what

Autumn Programme of Talks at the Centre

- 29 September: Siberia: A Traveller's View – Colin Thubron
- 14 October: The Russian Economy: Is the Bear out of the Woods? – Liam Halligan
- 21 October: Annual General Meeting (Members Only)
- 28 October: The Russian Elections – Elizabeth Teague
- 3 November: New Patterns of National Ideology in Uzbekistan – Hamid Ismail
- 10 November: Alexander Pushkin: Icon or Encyclopaedia of Russian Life? – Elena Denezhkina [IN RUSSIAN]
- 18 November: Prokofiev – Noëlle Mann
- 1 December: Vasily Kandinsky: Russian at Home and Abroad – John Russell Taylor
- 15 December: Russian Folk Music – Bibs Ekkel and Sergei Pashin