

The Trouble with Authenticity: Backwardness, Imitation, and the Politics of Art in Late Imperial Russia*

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Almost every work on the history of the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (now the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts) starts with the same famous quotation from the memoirs of Russia's greatest poetess, Marina Tsvetaeva: "The bells were ringing for the deceased Emperor Alexander III, and at that very moment an old woman from Moscow was dying. And, hearing the bells, she said: 'I want the money that I leave behind to go to a charitable institution in memory of the late emperor.'" ¹ The executors of this lady's will donated 150,000 rubles to the construction of the Museum of Fine Arts, a cause to which Marina's father, Ivan Tsvetaev, professor of art history at Moscow University, dedicated two decades of his life, until his death in 1913.

The inversion of (human) death and (art's) life evident in this passage is manifested even more vividly in another fragment of Tsvetaeva's memoir. Her grotesque description of the museum's opening ceremony—an event that took place in 1912 and was attended by the emperor Nicholas II and his daughters—pictures a parade of "marble" grand dukes and "plaster" dignitaries: rigid, hollow, and filled with "mortal lime," the threefold whiteness of walls, old men's hair, and women's dresses. Tsvetaeva noted the glaring, dazzling incompatibility of the "new" museum and the decrepitude of these human bodies, the soullessness of

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¹ "Marina Tsvetaeva, "Muzei Aleksandra III," in *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, ed. A. A. Demaskaia and L. M. Smimova (Moscow, 1995), 393. Originally published in *Poslednie Novosti* (Paris) in 1933.

men and the vivacity of the young statues: “the statues on that first day of the museum’s existence seemed more alive than the people.”²

Tsvetaeva’s attempts to present statues as living souls could have simply been a tribute to the memory of her father, who had breathed new life into the works of art (although she did not like sculpture).³ Her text, written twenty years after the event in 1933, represents a snapshot of senses, a reminiscence of impressions. And yet, had it been written in 1912 or 1913, it would have been perceived as an apologia, since rebukes for the “lifelessness” of this new institution were often addressed to Ivan Tsvetaev. The Museum of Fine Arts opened with triumph in 1912 in a new building—Russia’s biggest and most luxuriously decorated museum building—filled with hundreds of plaster casts, copies of the world’s famous statues (fig. 1). To call the establishment a “marble box with plaster figures” was a common joke of the time, and one that Tsvetaev ignored with dignity and confidence.

In the fin de siècle world of art collecting, the “question of casts” was the subject of great controversy. The heyday of museums of casts in Europe had already passed: large collections of plaster copies compiled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came under severe criticism by those who championed original artworks.⁴ Casts were “misleading, . . . dull and mechanical in comparison with originals,” lacking “the individual touch of the artists, . . . cold and dead,” said the report of the Art Gallery Committee of the City of Manchester in 1905.⁵ The last surge of interest in plaster casts in the United States in the 1890s was followed by a dramatic turn in the museum ideology of the early twentieth century, when many existing cast collections were dismantled, vacating space for original works of art. Casts now served strictly educational purposes, and only university museums were deemed appropriate for holding copies. The idea of opening a national museum of casts, which had circulated widely

² Marina Tsvetaeva, “Otkrytie muzeia” (1933), quoted from “The Opening of the Museum,” in Tsvetaeva, *A Captive Spirit: Selected Prose* (London, 1983), 202. First published in *Vstrechi* (Paris) in 1934.

³ Marina Tsvetaeva, “Charlottenburg,” quoted from *Captive Spirit*, 192. Originally written in French in 1936 and published in Russian translation in 1970.

⁴ The historiography of plaster casts is immense. See the most recent volumes: Rune Frederiksen and Eckart Marchand, eds., *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting, and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present* (Berlin, 2010), and Charlotte Schreiter, ed., *Gipsabgüsse und antike Skulpturen: Präsentation und Kontext* (Berlin, 2012). On the technique of casting, see Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen, *Meisterwerke der Gipsformerei: Kunstmanufaktur der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin seit 1819* (Berlin, 2012).

⁵ Diane Bilbey and Marjorie Trusted, “The Question of Casts,” in Frederiksen and Marchand, *Plaster Casts*, 469.



FIG. 1.—Alexander III Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Postcard, early twentieth century.

in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, had been entirely abandoned by the early 1900s.

Against this background, the celebration of the museum of casts, bearing the name of the deceased Tsar Alexander III and patronized by the ruling monarch Nicholas II, may have appeared deeply anachronistic. Tsvetaev's Museum of Fine Arts represented the first major public museum of non-Russian art in Russia—a counterbalance to the Imperial Hermitage, which, in law as well as in spirit, was the property of the Romanov dynasty. Therefore, the fact that the Moscow museum's collection consisted almost entirely of plaster casts suggests that this choice was not accidental. How can we explain these discrepancies? Was it just Russia persistently "lagging behind" the West, or should one look for other explanations of this phenomenon? Why, in the midst of a battle against art forgery and a broader pursuit of authenticity, did the imperial government and the tsar himself lend unconditional administrative and political support to a project criticized severely in Europe and the United States?

In this article, I will explain the rationale for Ivan Tsvetaev's museum of casts, one of the most successful and disputed cultural initiatives in modern Russian

history.⁶ I will argue that the project of displaying copies of world-famous works of art epitomized several important trends in culture, scholarship, and politics, some militantly modernist and others utterly conservative. Tsvetaev's attitude to imitations and his attempts to replace historical material authenticity with the scientific authenticity of his "mathematically" precise reproductions represented an important turn in the epistemology of the humanities, an attempt to introduce the principles of mechanical objectivity into the sphere of fine art. At the same time, his project betrayed a very particular attitude to cultural imports: it corresponded to the type of nationalism that endorsed the appropriation of both Western and Oriental art and the elaboration of Russia's own canon of world cultural heritage.

Tsvetaev's project stood in opposition to various currents in Russian fin de siècle artistic life and ideas of cultural education, including one exemplified by an unrealized museum project that focused on the emulation of foreign models in Russian art. A comparison of these two projects shows that Tsvetaev's casts were supposed to play a rather passive role as shapers of taste, whereas his opponents envisioned a more active engagement with artistic importation through emulation. This focus on appropriation, rather than adaptation, explains Nicholas II's eagerness to support Tsvetaev's endeavor: it aligned with the late Romanov Empire's vision of Europe as well as its view of itself in relation to Europe. Russia conceived of itself as a "European" power, but it was nonetheless reluctant to be subsumed into the European political space and saw itself as capable of producing its own "copy" of the world for internal consumption. The

⁶ On the history of the Museum of Fine Arts, see Iu. M. Kagan, *I. V. Tsvetaev: Zhizn', deiatel'nost', lichnost'* (Moscow, 1987); A. A. Demskaia, *Gosudarstvennyi muzei izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv im. A. S. Pushkina* (Moscow, 1979); *Sto let Gosudarstvennomu muzeiu izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv imeni A. S. Pushkina: Iubileinyi al'bom* (Moscow, 2012). For published collections of Tsvetaev's correspondence and other materials, see Demskaia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*; A. A. Demskaia and L. M. Smirnova, eds., *Istoriia sozdaniia muzeia v perepiske professora I. V. Tsvetaeva s arkhitektorem R. I. Kleinom i drugikh dokumentakh: 1896–1912*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1977); *"In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum erbauen": Iwan Zwetajew und Georg Treu im Briefwechsel (1881–1913)* (Cologne, 2006); and Tsvetaev's correspondence with Yurii Nechaev-Maltsov: A. N. Baranova and M. B. Aksenenko, eds., *I. V. Tsvetaev–Iu. S. Nechaev-Mal'tsov: Perepiska 1897–1912*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 2008–11). On the role of museums in Russian public culture, see Katia Dianina, "The Return of History: Museum, Heritage, and National Identity in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2010): 111–18; Dianina, "Museum and Message: Writing Public Culture in Imperial Russia," *Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 2 (2012): 173–95; Dianina, "Museum and Society in Imperial Russia: An Introduction," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 12 (2008).

story of the Museum of Fine Arts and its public perception explains the role and the specifics of imitation in Russian reforms and politics.⁷

Tsvetaev's museum was not, of course, unique in its undisguised ideological engagement: museums of casts gave a great deal of freedom to their founders and curators, and, due to the artificiality of their emergence, displayed artistic tastes and political preferences more distinctly than museums of originals. Most museums of casts shared a common belief in the development of public taste and artistic education through the contemplation of the "classics" of art.⁸ In its general contours, Tsvetaev's initial project to build or, more precisely, to enlarge the existing collection of casts at Moscow University followed European models and practices, as well as the ideas of aesthetic education that had circulated in Russian society starting in the 1830s.⁹ Tsvetaev tried to reenact the idea of the "aesthetic education" of the *sans-culottes* ("sans-caloche" or "beskaloshnaia publika," in Tsvetaev's expression) and the "ennoblement of their tastes."¹⁰ At first, Tsvetaev aimed to build a university museum of antique art for strictly educational purposes. Yet this idea very soon developed into a colossal project for a national museum of European and Oriental art dating from antiquity to the early modern age. Indeed, Tsvetaev and his collaborators nurtured even more ambitious plans that included the extension of the collection into the modern era.

⁷ On mimesis as a "way of thinking" in art as well as in politics, see Karl F. Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West* (Princeton, NJ, 1982); and the classic work of Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 2013). On the role of "transfers" in Russian history, see a collection of case-study essays: *Imperium Inter Pares: Rol' transferov v istorii Rossiiskoi Imperii (1700–1917)*, ed. Martin Aust, Rikarda Vulpius, and Aleksei Miller (Moscow, 2010).

⁸ Yet there was a substantial variety in the ideological underpinnings expressed in the architectural design of the museum buildings, as well as the ways the copies were chosen and displayed. The comparative history of museums of casts vividly demonstrates this diversity. See, among others, Anna Tietze, "Classical Casts and Colonial Galleries: The Life and Afterlife of the 1908 Beit Gift to the National Gallery of Cape Town," *South African Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (1998): 70–90; Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst, MA, 1998), 46.

⁹ Tsvetaev repeatedly referred to his predecessor, Princess Zinaida Volkonskaia, and her project of the "aesthetic museum" (1831) deemed to systematically represent the history of world art, in originals and copies, and inculcate in "the people [*narod*] the aesthetic sense." Dem'skaia, *Gosudarstvennyi muzei izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv*, 10; Rosalind P. Blakesley, "Art, Nationhood, and Display: Zinaida Volkonskaia and Russia's Quest for a National Museum of Art," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (2008): 912–33.

¹⁰ I. V. Tsvetaev to Iu. S. Nechaev-Mal'tsov, December 8, 1902, in Baranov and Aksenenko, *I. V. Tsvetaev–Iu. S. Nechaev-Mal'tsov*, 2:124, 1:78. References to the letters compiled in this volume will be cited below as *Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Mal'tsov*.

CASTS: NATIONALISM AND *RESSENTIMENT*

To justify his choice of plaster casts, Tsvetaev often emphasized “the exceptional scarcity of the monuments of antiquity in Russia.”¹¹ The rationale behind Tsvetaev’s decision to fill the museum with copies was not as self-evident as he suggested: the Imperial Hermitage possessed an impressive collection of Greek, Roman, medieval, and early modern European and Oriental art, a significant portion of which remained in storage due to lack of space. More importantly, the construction of Tsvetaev’s museum unfolded in parallel with the intensive development of archaeology in Russia. “Russian” antiquity differed from the classical antiquity of mainland Greece or Rome, but this quality made it all the more attractive for many scholars in Europe, as well as in Russia.

Russia also participated in the export of artifacts from the Ottoman Empire, but on a more modest scale, which reflected its secondary role in the region’s geopolitics. Tsvetaev wanted to turn this deficiency into a virtue. Quite characteristically, considering the museum’s new ideology, N. I. Romanov wrote in 1909 that collections of originals bespoke the vanity of their owners—“conquerors, rulers, the powers that be”—and therefore lacked consistency. By contrast, a museum of copies would grow according to the professional needs of experts and the cultural demands of society.¹² For Tsvetaev and his collaborators, aesthetics had a very strong ethical connotation: art, especially that of classical antiquity, was supposed to perform an important educational and civilizing role.¹³

Positioning Russia on the periphery of the world art market opened new possibilities for drawing from the experience of Russia’s European counterparts while also establishing new standards and canons of art.¹⁴ Tsvetaev believed that

¹¹ See commentaries on Tsvetaev’s correspondence with Klein in Demskaia and Smirnova, *Istoriia sozdaniia muzeia v perepiske I. V. Tsvetaeva s R. I. Kleinom*, 2:167, 2:168. Further references to this correspondence will be cited below as *Tsvetaev–Klein*.

¹² N. I. Romanov, “Muzei Iziashchnykh Iskusstv v Moskve” (1909), in *GMII imeni A. S. Pushkina: Iz Imperatorskoi Rossii v SSSR*, ed. M. Ermakova, N. Morozova, and O. Khromov (Moscow, 2012), 95–97.

¹³ Kagan, *I. V. Tsvetaev*, 84.

¹⁴ One can explain Tsvetaev’s approach through Alexander Gerschenkron’s famous theory of economic backwardness: Gerschenkron suggested that latecomer countries enjoyed some benefits, above all the opportunity to copy technical inventions from the leaders of industrialization. Tsvetaev was not the first public figure to use “backwardness”—imagined or real—as a rhetorical lever to advance his project. Tsvetaev lived in the era of state-driven industrialization—a policy initiated by the minister of finance, Serguei Witte, who used the argument of Russia’s underdevelopment to convince Alexander III of the necessity of economic and social mobilization. Witte’s, as well as Tsvetaev’s, concept of backwardness offered a peculiar mélange of nationalism and cosmopolitanism: both assumed the primacy of national domestic interests and the country’s distinctiveness, while at the same time urging the importance of catching up with the leaders of economic

Russia and the United States, two latecomers to the market for antique goods, could turn their backwardness into an advantage by reshaping artistic canons, especially those of the medieval and Renaissance periods. As he observed, even if the canon of ancient Greek and Roman art (Tsvetaev called it a “codex”) had already been established, no such lists of “must haves” for later periods yet existed.¹⁵ European collections focused on their own national production, displaying artworks of domestic origin. “Our approach is completely different,” wrote Tsvetaev.¹⁶ His museum aimed, like its American counterparts, to choose the most prominent and characteristic examples from various countries: “While compiling the encyclopedia of art in monuments, we should be impartial to nationalities, choosing only the most necessary objects, without which the historical chain of art would be incomplete.”¹⁷ Therefore, the museums of outsider countries—which, in Tsvetaev’s mind, included Russia, the United States, and Hungary—needed to take on the task of elaborating the supranational canon of medieval and early modern art. “We should conclude an American-Russo-Hungarian union for the facilitation of this common task, to elaborate together an independent program for these departments [of the Middle Ages and Renaissance] of our museums,” wrote Tsvetaev in his diary.¹⁸ There was only one area in which Russian and American interests did not overlap: American museums, he wrote, though “colossal and numerous,” were not interested in Oriental art.¹⁹

and cultural growth. See Alexander Gerschenkron, “Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective” and “Russia: Patterns and Problems of Economic Development, 1861–1958,” in Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 1962). Witte’s main theoretical work on this subject is Serguei Witte, *Po povodu natsionalizma: Natsional’naia ekonomika i Friedrich List* (St. Petersburg, 1912). On Serguei Witte’s economic nationalism, see also Theodore von Laue, “The Industrialization of Russia in the Writings of Sergei Witte,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 10, no. 3 (October 1951): 177–90.

¹⁵ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Hildesheim, June 14, 1905, 3:228. On the role of plaster casts in shaping canons, see Charlotte Schreiter, “Gipsabgüsse und antike Skulpturen: ‘Aufstellung’ und ‘Ausstellung’ seit der Renaissance,” in *Gipsabgüsse und antike Skulpturen: Präsentation und Kontext*, ed. Charlotte Schreiter (Berlin, 2012), 12–14.

¹⁶ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, June 17, 1899, 1:136.

¹⁷ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, June 17, 1899, 1:136. Tsvetaev’s idea to illustrate the “historical chain” of art was very close to evolutionist concepts of that time. On the “chain of art” as a foundational principle, see Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum, 1800–1939* (London, 1992), 56–74.

¹⁸ Berlin, June 12, 1899. Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 6, op. 2, d. 18, ll. 303–4.

¹⁹ During his long trips to Europe, Tsvetaev bumped into his American colleagues at almost every destination—churches, monasteries, museums—where he looked for models for plaster casts. The itineraries of Russian and American museum directors often overlapped, although Tsvetaev’s financial means were much more limited and Americans made many more commissions (*Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, 3:237). (“American

Importing imitations not only allowed for the invention of a new canon but also created opportunities to domesticate these artworks in a new social and cultural environment more appropriate to Russian conditions. Casts, therefore, were first denationalized and then ascribed the nationality of the collector. Such “privatization” of European masterpieces also gave Tsvetaev the option of unfolding an unprecedented fundraising campaign. Most of the funds for the museum’s construction came from private donors, including more than two million rubles from industrialist Yurii Nechaev-Maltsov. Every hall of the museum bore someone’s name: Tsvetaev had invited potential sponsors to give money for the construction of one of the museum’s halls, with the possibility of naming it after their beloved relatives or, even more frequently, members of the imperial family, a perk that would enhance the benefits of such a contribution for the donor’s reputation.²⁰ This was a brilliant strategy that could work only in raising funds for a museum of casts, since the acquisition of copies did not depend on the vicissitudes of the art market, and only in Moscow—a city that boasted of its tradition of charity and art patronage. Merchants and entrepreneurs seeking honorable recognition of their contributions considered sponsorship a means of social promotion, while the practice of displaying the names of donors offered an easy and affordable way to broadcast their names and have them displayed in proximity to the names of the emperor’s relatives who had also contributed to the museum’s

museums are . . . extraordinarily rich, they pay whatever price is named.” *Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Maltsov*, Paris, May 22, 1904, 3:79.) Tsvetaev complained to Nechaev-Maltsov that he lived very modestly, in cheap hotels “with cold and damp rooms,” and took third-class trains, while his American colleague, a director of a certain American museum, lodged in grand hotels and traveled first class (*Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Maltsov*, Munich, April 25, 1904, 2:262). However, the competition for the best casts had the potential to grow into a process of collaboration, since multiple casts made from one mold were much cheaper than single casts. For example, when Tsvetaev commissioned casts of a corner of the Parthenon in Trocadero, Americans learned about it and ordered a second copy for a lower price. But the next time, as Tsvetaev noted, the Americans “pulled chestnuts out of the fire” for his museum: the Museum of Fine Arts in Pittsburgh, sponsored by Andrew Carnegie, commissioned the cast of the Porch of the Caryatids (Erechtheion), and Tsvetaev ordered a second cast from the same mold (*Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Maltsov*, Paris, June 18, 1905, 3:234).

²⁰ For instance, Moscow merchant and industrialist Stepan Protopopov, who had made his fortune on candle and wax production, sponsored the construction of the hall of Assyria and Babylon named after Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna. Ivan Rukavishnikov, a merchant from the Nizhny Novgorod, and the descendant of the famous Moscow merchant dynasty, sponsored the construction of two halls, both dedicated to the empresses: the Olympia Hall was named after the Empress Dowager Maria Fedorovna, Alexander III’s wife, while the hall of Pergamon was dedicated to Nicholas II’s wife, Alexandra. For the complete list of halls, see *Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Maltsov*, 4:447.

fund.²¹ At the same time, such practices of “adoption” stressed the displacement and the denationalization of casts, emphasizing the distance between the originals and their plaster reincarnations. The casts’ origins were not supposed to play any important role, as the plaster statues assumed new lives of their own.

The benefits of collecting casts with the help of fundraising were manifold. Even though some of the donors were themselves experienced art collectors, they did not intrude into the process of selecting casts and decorating the museum. (The only exception was Yurii Nechaev-Maltsov, who was notorious for his conservative taste.)²² These circumstances gave Tsvetaev a dazzling freedom of choice that only a museum of casts could offer. When considering the purchase of a copy of Andrea del Verrocchio’s *Colleoni*, for instance, Tsvetaev hoped that one of Moscow’s racehorse clubs might sponsor this acquisition: “I am ready to give a lecture [at a racehorse club] . . . only if the horse lovers (*loshadniki*) collect money for this sculpture”²³ (figs. 2, 3). The willingness of the public to donate money to the museum of casts appears all the more striking in light of the fact that no public campaign for the acquisition of genuine items could count on such success. For example, in 1899 Praskovia Uvarova, the head of the Moscow Archaeological Society, attempted to raise funds for archaeological excavations in Media.²⁴ Uvarova’s plan to raise money from private donors instead of the state was inspired in part by the success of Tsvetaev’s campaign. As she noted, “they had collected around one million rubles for the Museum of Fine Arts that would

²¹ On Moscow merchants and their cultural preferences, see William Craft Brumfield, “Aesthetics and Commerce: The Architecture of Merchant Moscow, 1890–1917,” Joseph C. Bradley, “Merchant Moscow After Hours: Voluntary Associations and Leisure,” and Edith W. Clowes, “Merchants on Stage and in Life: Theatricality and Public Consciousness,” in *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia’s Vanished Bourgeoisie*, ed. James L. West and Iurii A. Petrov. For his sponsorship, Yurii Nechaev-Maltsov was awarded the honorable court title of Ober-hofmeister. See *Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Maltsov*, 4:430. In contrast to the Moscow Museum of Fine Arts, the Imperial Hermitage museum bluntly denied donors’ requests to acknowledge gifts, therefore upholding its status as the tsar’s collection. On the Hermitage’s policy of accepting donations, see Ekaterina Pravilova, *A Public Empire: Property and the Quest for the Common Good in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ, 2014), 191–92; on the boom of museum donations in Moscow, see *ibid.*, 193–98.

²² Nechaev-Maltsov opposed the invitation of Russia’s leading artists Konstantin Korovin and Alexander Golovin, whom he viewed as “decadents,” to participate in the decoration of the museum halls. Morozova, “Zhivopisnoe oformlenie muzeiinykh interierov Rossii XIX—nachala XX vekov” (unpublished diss., Moscow, 2004), 177.

²³ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev-Maltsov*, Florence, January 14, 1903, 2:134.

²⁴ Praskovia Uvarova was the widow of the Archaeological Society’s founder, Alexei Uvarov, and the daughter-in-law of Serguei Uvarov, the minister of education at the court of Nicholas I and the author of the famous Official Nationality triad. Uvarova’s project was instigated by the proposal from the French government to the Ministry of Public Education to start excavations in Persia.



FIG. 2.—Andrea del Verrocchio, equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Plaster cast. Photo by Igor Khristoforov. Color version available as an online enhancement.

host only copies.”²⁵ Uvarova wholeheartedly supported Tsvetaev’s endeavor, but in her hierarchy of professional values, the museum of casts did not stand on the same level with an archaeological collection. Nevertheless, her project did not offer the same benefits of “privatizing” antiquity or the Renaissance and therefore was doomed to fail.

²⁵ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Moscow, April 8, 1899, 1:117.



FIG. 3.—Andrea del Verrocchio, equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni, Venice. Photo by Marina Pastore. Color version available as an online enhancement.

Similar motives—the appropriation of European art through copying, an opportunity to surpass existing collections of casts and probably even create the largest such collection in Europe—earned Tsvetaev the tsar’s unprecedented support. Even Tsvetaev’s humble origin as the son of a village priest did not prevent him from entering Nicholas II’s inner circle. The tsar’s patronage of the new museum was a great asset logistically as well as ideologically. Tsvetaev firmly believed that art could flourish only under monarchy, even though other regimes had made it more accessible for the masses. “Without monarchy, no Versailles, no Louvres and Vaticans would have been possible,” he proclaimed. “No republic, no strengthening of social-democratic ideology and its realization in the life of nations would give the world another Basilica of St. Peter.”²⁶ Tsvetaev hoped to marry democracy with autocratic government, an idea that perfectly fit the

²⁶ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, May 23, 1904, 3:80.

“people’s autocracy” doctrine of the reigns of Russia’s last two rulers. The museum bore the name of Alexander III (the initial project featured a special Hall of Glory with a monument to the deceased tsar), and its opening ceremony coincided with the opening of the monument to the previous ruler in front of the Church of Christ the Savior. Such a close alliance with the imperial family, however, repulsed many potential supporters and donors, most of all Moscow’s wealthy Old Believers.

Nicholas II’s support of Tsvetaev’s project may seem to contradict the nationalist spirit of his rule. As Richard Wortman’s magisterial study of the imperial scenarios of power has shown, the reign of the last two tsars was marked by a radical turn in the aesthetics of autocracy: Western symbols of imperial rule were replaced by national symbols and imageries associated with pre-Petrine Russia.²⁷ At the same time, fin de siècle Russia witnessed the revival of neoclassicism in architecture. Katerina Clark has characterized the relationship between these two retrospective models as a “battle of styles”²⁸—between neoclassical St. Petersburg and the Russian national style of Moscow and the provinces. She has also noted the ideological compatibility of the elitist neoclassical program with the cult of monarchal power. Yet classicism appeared in more than one form in Russia. Despite their common focus on classical art, the modernist neoclassicism of St. Petersburg’s artistic elite, which aimed to transform Russian culture through the evocation of the spirit of antiquity, was quite different from Tsvetaev’s imitative, populist pursuit of classical models. (Indeed, Alexander Benois, one of the main theoreticians of the neoclassical revival, was also an ardent critic of the Museum of Fine Arts.) And Tsvetaev’s project was the more compatible of the two with imperial aesthetics: it dovetailed with the pre-Petrine nationalist aesthetics into a coherent imperial retrospective project. The “West” that Tsvetaev had to offer to the tsar and the public bore no danger of impeding transformation; it had already been domesticated and “nationalized” by Russian admirers of classical, medieval, and early modern European forms.²⁹

²⁷ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2, *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pt. 2, 3.

²⁸ Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 58.

²⁹ One of the peculiarities of Russian would-be westernizers was that they were not usually interested in the importation of cutting-edge contemporary models and ideals, often choosing Western templates that had already been discarded as outdated. The same point is made in Rosalind P. Blakesley (Gray), “Promoting a Pan-European Art: Aleksei Bogolyubov as Artistic Mediator between East and West,” and Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, “Opening up to Europe: The Peredvizhniki and the Miriskusniki Respond to the West,” both in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (DeKalb, IL, 2007). Rosalind Gray has portrayed Alexei Bogolyubov, one of Tsvetaev’s predeces-

ART AND OBJECTIVITY

Tsvetaev's urge to create a Russian version of the Western artistic canon was accompanied by an almost obsessive imitation of European museums. Affinities were abundant: Tsvetaev borrowed the elements of museum organization from Europe so thoroughly that, as Benedicte Savoy and Sabine Skott have noticed, "some of its exhibition galleries . . . were almost twin copies of various European galleries," and "almost every single detail of the interior design and the architecture of the museum can be traced back to some European model."³⁰ There was nothing particularly exceptional in this imitation: the Museum of the School of Industrial Design in St. Petersburg, which had been founded by baron Alexander Stieglitz and built between 1885 and 1896, literally reproduced the interior decors of the most beautiful halls of European palaces, such as the Doge's Palace in Venice and the Châteaux of Anet and Fontainebleau. As Maria Maistrovskaia observes, the architects of the late nineteenth century did not "interpret" the styles of buildings they used as templates: they copied them exactly.³¹ In the case of Stieglitz's museum, the imitation was justified by the strictly educational purposes of the institution, which was meant to nurture the taste of future designers. However, the practices of imitation extended far beyond the realm of artistic education.

Olga Morozova's study of the interior decoration of Russian museums has shown that copies and imitations represented the most ubiquitous element of interior museum design in the 1870s to 1890s.³² Faithfully following the principles of imitation, the decorators of the Historical Museum in Moscow (built

sors in the role of promoter of Western art in Russia, as a person with "not particularly adventurous tastes" (Blakesley, "Promoting a Pan-European Art," 22). In 1881 Bogolyubov proposed creating a network of provincial art museums and filling them with the "excess" items from the Hermitage storerooms, as well as with copies of the most outstanding works of European art ("Ob ustroistve v Moskve i gubernskikh gorodakh khudozhestvennykh i istoricheskikh muzeev pri sodeistvii Ermitazha," The Hermitage Museum, Archive, f. 1, 1881, d. 5, on copies see ll. 4–9). Tsvetaev might have known about Bogolyubov's failed initiative: in 1899–1900, Bogolyubov's idea resurfaced in the discussion on provincial museums, again without success ("O predostavlenii v pol'zovanie provintsialnykh muzeev proizvedenii iz akademicheskikh kollektzii," Russian State Historical Archive (hereafter RGA), f. 789, op. 12, 1894, otd. "z." d. 15, l. 118; A. P. Sokolov was the author of the proposal). Tsvetaev chose not to mention Bogolyubov among his predecessors, probably trying to reboot the project with claims for novelty and originality.

³⁰ Benedicte Savoy and Sabine Skott, "A European Museum-Cocktail around 1900," in *The Museum Is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums, 1750–1940*, ed. Andrea Meyer and Benedicte Savoy (Berlin, 2014), 83–85.

³¹ M. T. Maistrovskaia, *Muzei kak ob'ekt kultury: Iskustvo ekspozitsionnogo ansambliia* (Moscow, 2015), 596, 598.

³² Olga Morozova, "Zhivopisnoe oformlenie muzeiinykh interierov Rossii 19–nachala 20 vekov: Peterburg, Moskva" (unpublished diss., Moscow, 2004), 44.

in 1875–83) reproduced on the walls of the museum’s halls “exact copies” of images from Russia’s medieval books, chronicles, and icons. As Morozova points out, the “exactness” of copies was compromised by the instruction to make changes in order to achieve “the correctness of figures.”³³ At the same time, with the exception of Vasily Vasnetsov’s mural *The Stone Age*, other paintings commissioned to Russia’s most prominent modernist artists, including Valentin Serov and Serguei Maliutin, were rejected because, ironically, they had failed the test of historical authenticity.

The founders of the Museum of Fine Arts elevated the principle of imitation to the status of ideology or belief. “Adherence to Greek style” in the museum’s decoration was an important element of its claim to authenticity.³⁴ Roman Klein, the museum’s architect, traveled to Greece to take exact measurements of the portico of Erechtheion to be used for the colonnade. At the same time, this claim was paired with infinite reproduction—of artworks, ideas, and practices. From the technical point of view, the architecture of the Museum of Fine Arts was flawless, and the imitation of classical models did not affect the quality of the construction. However, as Morozova suggests, the same reasons that had thwarted the collaboration between Russia’s leading artists and the administration of the Historical Museum ultimately ruined the initial plan to decorate the interior of Tsvetaev’s Museum of Fine Arts with the works of Valentin Serov, Alexander Golovin, and Vasily Polenov. The failure of collaboration between the artists and the museum highlights differences in their understanding of historical authenticity. In describing his work on *Odyssey and Nausicaa*, intended to decorate the hall of the museum on Volkhonka, Serov, a quintessential impressionist, repeated almost verbatim the principle of historical positivism as expressed by Leopold von Ranke: he wanted to paint Nausicaa “not as she is usually painted, but as she really was.” However, for Serov, authenticity consisted in expressing the spirit of Archaic Greece, rather than in following certain accepted canons of pseudoclassical painting.³⁵

Tsvetaev’s authenticity of forms drastically differed both from the ideal of historical authenticity pertinent to the collection of original antiquities and from Serov’s subjective authenticity of artistic impression. Casts had been intentionally disassociated from their originals, decontextualized, and placed into a new

³³ Morozova, “Zhivopisnoe oformlenie muzeinykh interierov Rossii,” 116.

³⁴ Brucciani, the official *formatore* of the British Museum, delivered plaster casts of 120 marble slabs from Parthenon for use in modeling the decoration of the museum’s frieze. Demskaiia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 123, 125.

³⁵ Morozova, “Zhivopisnoe oformlenie muzeinykh interierov Rossii,” 185. The administration reverted to the use of nearly invisible neoclassical ornaments (see more in *ibid.*, 197); Andrei Nikol’skii, “Neoklassicheskie tendentsii v monumental’no-dekorativnoi zhivopisi interierov Muzeiia iziashchnykh iskusstv v Moskve: Neizvestnye eskizy R. I. Kleina i I. I. Nivinskogo,” *Iskusstvoznanie*, no. 1 (2015), 114–41.

environment in which they assumed a new authenticity appropriate for the museum's mission.³⁶ For Tsvetaev, authenticity meant precision of reproduction and a superior quality of form. The casts of Michelangelo's sculptures at the Albertinum Museum in Dresden, which Tsvetaev identified as one of the models for his institution, were "thoroughly bad, made from worn-out threadbare molds," while the plasters commissioned for the Moscow museum were "sharp, crisp," and "pricelessly beautiful."³⁷ Precision, or sameness with the original, acquired a status equal or identical to that of originality. Tsvetaev worshipped the precision of forms; of all the human senses, he accentuated vision, in contrast to many experts of the time who claimed that one had to touch an artifact to evaluate its authenticity. In a short first paragraph of his 1898 memo to the tsar, intended to earn royal favor for the construction of the museum, Tsvetaev twice used the word "soul" to emphasize that the perception of forms goes deeper, while the word remains on the surface. In this ode to "visualization" (*nagliadnost'*), he put casts "made in the natural size of the originals with mathematical exactness" on the same level with the originals; form had nothing to do with historical authenticity.³⁸

As for the materials used for the production of casts, Tsvetaev valued plaster above all others, due to its incomparable receptivity (the only exception he made was for bronze, but he had to resort to plaster because of the high costs of bronze copies).³⁹ While considering the choice of material for the copy of Della Robbia's enameled terracotta, Tsvetaev ultimately settled on plaster: a model made of terracotta would have been more authentic, looked better, and lasted longer, but it would have lost some precision.⁴⁰ "Reliefs in plaster will be mathematically precise," commented Tsvetaev. And, as one of his collaborators explained, "Ivan

³⁶ For a similar interpretation of authenticity that is "separate from the history chronology, and the cultural context, that anchors them [objects] in . . . the museum's mission," see Michael Bernard-Donals's analysis of the debates on the choice of objects for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. The "authenticity of displacement" was contrasted to the "contextual authenticity" of the museum's exhibits. Michael Bernard-Donals, *Figures of Memory: The Rhetoric of Displacement at the United States Holocaust Museum* (Albany, NY, 2016), 60. I am grateful to Serguei Oushakine for the reference to this very relevant work.

³⁷ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Florence, December 3, 1902, 2:105; *ibid.*, Rome, March 3, 1903, 2:210. "Our copies are the best, the most precise in the world," *ibid.*, Rome, March 18, 1903, 2:233. Similarly, he wrote about copies of Egyptian art: "I visited all university museums of Germany, France, and England, and did not see such perfect copies," *ibid.*, Moscow, November 5, 1898, 1:98.

³⁸ I. V. Tsvetaev, *Zapiska o muzee iziashnykh iskusstv imeni imperatora Alexandra III pri Imperatorskom Moskovskom Universitete* (Moscow, 1898), 5–6.

³⁹ On receptivity of matter and minds, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York, 2010), 96.

⁴⁰ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Florence, January 12, 1903, 2:132.

Vladimirovich felt that in the plastic arts, form is the first and the most important element, and plaster conveys it in the purest and the most . . . abstract way, notwithstanding the features of the [original] material—stone, bronze or clay.” Plaster was “sharp,” “pure, although primitive,” the most susceptible to “artistic gaze,” and therefore perfect.⁴¹

Tsvetaev’s preoccupation with the casts’ “mathematical precision” could have been rooted in his professional training and background. Tsvetaev started his career with the study of Osco-Umbrian languages and ancient epigraphy. During his trips to Italy, he studied the technicalities of archaeological research: he learned how to make precise casts of ancient inscriptions (*estampages*) and spent many hours and days of his fieldwork tracing inscriptions from stones with the use of wet paper.⁴² Iudif Kagan, one of Tsvetaev’s first biographers, pointed out another connection between the study of language and his approach to materiality: the practice of textual analysis required withholding one’s subjective flair or intuition.⁴³ A positivist cult of precision developed fully in his work with copies. The development of technologies for reproduction (photography, electroplating, lithography, etc.) and “imitative industry”⁴⁴ allowed for making “mathematically precise” casts (his favorite definition) and withdrawing the human presence from the process of copying.⁴⁵ Tsvetaev lived in the age identified by Walter Benjamin as the “age of mechanical reproduction”⁴⁶ and, despite being a staunch conservative in life (the Tsvetaev home in Moscow had no electricity), he eagerly consumed the benefits of technological inventions (such as galvanoplastics and photography) if they concerned art.

An interesting episode described in an 1889 letter to Praskovia Uvarova demonstrates Tsvetaev’s departure from the tradition of subjective interpretation that he considered to be utterly unscientific. In that year, just before his appointment as the chair of the Fine Arts Department of Moscow University, Tsvetaev worked on the reproduction of frescoes from the catacombs of Rome. At his request, Russian artist Fedor Reiman made more than one hundred copies of the images. At first, they experimented with tracing frescoes on paper, and then switched to photographing the images, copying them onto cardboard, and then adding

⁴¹ A. V. Nazarevskii, “Iz vospominanii ob I. V. Tsvetaeve,” in Demskaia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 354.

⁴² I. V. Tsvetaev, “Puteshestvie po Italii v 1875 i 1880 gg.,” in Demskaia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 30, 49.

⁴³ Kagan, *I. V. Tsvetaev*, 24.

⁴⁴ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Florence, January 18, 1903, 2:142.

⁴⁵ On precision, see M. Norton Wise, ed., *The Values of Precision* (Princeton, NJ, 1994).

⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1968).

color.⁴⁷ Ecstatic about the results of this work, Tsvetaev wrote to Uvarova that the exactness of Reiman's copies had created a furor among Italian archaeologists and highlighted the falsity of all previous, nonmechanical reproductions.⁴⁸ With triumphal sarcasm, Tsvetaev described his skirmishes with Giovanni Battista de Rossi, the pioneer of the study of the Roman catacombs and the author of a five-volume edition of catacomb frescoes: de Rossi disliked the "literal exactness" of copies from the originals that had deprived them of living "spirit." An opponent of the use of photography, de Rossi stressed the value of subjective "interpretation" in reproduction. Striving to suppress subjectivism, Tsvetaev claimed that de Rossi's distorted perception had resulted in the production of "sugary" images appropriate only for the *bonbonnières* of confectioner Abrikosov.⁴⁹ The generational gap between the lifetime work of the "antiquarian" (as Tsvetaev called de Rossi) and Tsvetaev's approach to the objects of his study was glaring: "two-thirds of his life in catacombs passed [in the time] when nobody knew about photo-chromolithography," commented Tsvetaev.⁵⁰ Unlike careful, methodical de Rossi, Tsvetaev sought to apply new, fast, and, as he loved to stress, "mathematically precise" techniques for the reproduction of images, thus epitomizing the central conflict in the battle for scientific objectivity: the opposition of drawing and photography.⁵¹ Reiman's fresco copies eventually enriched the muse-

⁴⁷ T. Yu. Vorobieva has compared Reiman's use of photography with the technique of painting Russian icons with the use of templates (*prorisi*). Vorobieva, "I. V. Tsvetaev and F. P. Reiman: Iz istorii kopirovaniia rospisei rimskikh katakomb," *Iskusstvo Khristianskogo Mira*, no. 10 (2007), 527. On Reiman, see also M. B. Aksenenko, "Russkii khudozhnik Fedor Reiman," in *Vvedenie v khram*, ed L. I. Akimova (Moscow, 1998).

⁴⁸ Tsvetaev to Uvarova, March 7, 1889, State Historical Museum, Department of Manuscripts (OPI GIM), f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, ll. 377ob–378. Tsvetaev described the process of copying in his brochure *Rimskie katakomby: Iz izstorii izuchenii ikh* (Moscow, 1896).

⁴⁹ Alexei Abrikosov was the owner of a confectionary and tea trade firm and a network of pastry shops. These contradictions notwithstanding, Tsvetaev highly valued de Rossi's works and admitted that the quality of images in de Rossi's publication significantly exceeded the quality of all previous editions. Tsvetaev, *Rimskie katakomby*, 18–19. See also Tsvetaev's assessment of de Rossi's legacy in I. V. Tsvetaev, *Prazdnik khristianskoi arkheologii v Rime 20 apreliia i 25 apreliia 1892 g* (Moscow, 1893).

⁵⁰ Tsvetaev to Uvarova, May 7, 1889, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 383. It seems that after several months of work, Reiman and de Rossi were able to reconcile their disagreements. Reiman and Tsvetaev yielded to de Rossi's requests not to use camera flashes that could damage frescoes, while de Rossi finally admitted the supreme quality of Reiman's copies. Aksenenko, "Russkii khudozhnik Fedor Reiman," 597.

⁵¹ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 161–74. For archaeologists, the choice was often between the use of engravings and photographs. See, e.g., Elisabeth Decultot, "Salomon Reinach et l'archéologie classique allemande (1880–1920)," in *Les frères Reinach: Colloque réuni les 22 et 23 juin 2007 à l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, ed. Sophie Basch, Michel Espagne, and Jean Leclant (Paris, 2008), 193–97.

um's collection. However, sculpture, architectural decoration, jewelry, and other kinds of "plastic" or "spatial" art would remain the main focus of Tsvetaev's efforts, since only spatial objects could be reproduced mechanically through casting or electroplating, almost without the interference of human touch and vision. The only exception was made for monumental frescoes and mosaics.⁵²

Tsvetaev decried any subjective intrusion of copyists into the process of reproduction because he deemed his activity to be essentially scientific rather than artistic.⁵³ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, in their analysis of the emergence of scientific objectivity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have emphasized the gradual polarization of the two domains of art and sciences, the first represented by a "militantly subjective," "artistic self" and the second by an objective, "scientific self."⁵⁴ Tsvetaev's rejection of subjectivism and his reliance on mechanical methods of reproduction perfectly fit the idealized image of "mechanical objectivity" that Daston and Galison have described.⁵⁵ Yet in Tsvetaev's understanding, the principles of "scientific objectivity" did not contradict the "scientific" intrusion of a restorer: in order to provide the effect of full visibility, the Moscow museum displayed reconstructed models of sculptures and architectural elements. The original sculptures of the eastern and western pediments of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia missed most bodily parts, yet the visitors to the Moscow museum could see the entire ensemble reconstructed by Georg Treu, the director of the Albertinum Museum in Dresden and Tsvetaev's close

⁵² Shortly before the museum's opening, Tsvetaev discussed the idea of commissioning copies of Western paintings for the Museum of Fine Arts. This initiative came from historians Ivan Tolstoy and Nikodim Kondakov and was supported by two famous artists, Polenov and Vasnetsov. Tsvetaev reluctantly agreed to consider this idea, but he deemed it a project for the future ("I won't live that long," he wrote to Praskovia Uvarova). Tsvetaev to Uvarova, May 16, 1911, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 693.

⁵³ The popular museum guidebook published in 1915, after Tsvetaev's death, emphasized the difference between a "copy" and a "cast," giving priority to the latter, which contained "no artistic element." *Muzei iziashchnykh iskusstv imeni imperatora Aleksandra III v Moskve: Kratkii ilustrirovannyi putevoditel'*, chap. 1 (Moscow, 1915), 53–54.

⁵⁴ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 187, 246. Interestingly, in the early 1900s these two domains came to be seen as closely connected. A. N. Kremlev insisted that true art should be based on science. A. N. Kremlev, "Printsipy khudozhestvennogo vospitaniia naroda," in *Trudy Vserossiiskogo s'ezda khudozhnikov, dekabr' 1911–ianvar' 1912 g* (Petrograd, 1914), 3:12, and discussion on this question at the All-Russian Congress of Artists in *ibid.*, 1:122. Ian Jenkins has described the controversy between "conservative" aesthetes and "professional archaeologists influenced by Darwinian evolutionism and radical science" as the central conflict in the development of the British Museum sculpture collection. Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes: In the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum, 1800–1939* (London, 1992), 9.

⁵⁵ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 121.

advisor and collaborator.⁵⁶ However, while the restored parts of Treu's model sculptures in Dresden were marked by a different color to show the state of the original and the addition, the Moscow museum did not follow its example, even though Tsvetaev approved of this principle in theory.⁵⁷ The decision to display reconstructed sculptures without indicating the additions represents a major concession to the "scientific" subjectivism of restorers, which might have appeared to him less arbitrary than the "artistic" subjectivism of copyists (figs. 4, 5). At the same time, this decision complied with Tsvetaev's interpretation of casts as new originals, which had assumed an independent existence and a new role of educating people's eyes through the perception of perfect forms. An incomplete but historically and even scientifically accurate copy would fail to enchant the viewer. Since the museum was not supposed to produce new knowledge, the completeness of visual impression came to be more important than the scientific objectivism of copies.

Another feature of Tsvetaev's policy that might seem to be at odds with his belief in the virtues of mechanical reproduction in art and its popularization

⁵⁶ On the casts of pedimental sculptures from Olympia, see *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum erbauen*, 66, 116, 129, 130, 150, 152, and Treu's reconstruction in Ernst Curtius and Friedrich Adler, eds., *Olympia: Die Ergebnisse der von dem Deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabung*, vol. 3, Georg Treu, *Die Bildwerke von Olympia in Stein und Thon* (Berlin, 1897).

⁵⁷ See the image of Treu's reconstruction with colored additions in Kornelia Knoll, "Von der 'künstlerisch vollendeten' Aufstellung zum wissenschaftlich-didaktischen Abgussmuseum: Die Entwicklung der Dresdener Abguss-Sammlung im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Gipsabgüsse und antike Skulpturen: Präsentation und Kontext*, ed. Charlotte Schreiter (Berlin, 2012), 313, and in Kornelia Knoll, ed., *Das Albertinum vor 100 Jahren—die Skulpturensammlung Georg Treus* (Dresden, 1994), 72, 75, 76, 87. For Treu's work on the reconstruction of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia, see Ernst Curtius, *Olympia: Die Ergebnisse der von dem Deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabung, im Auftrage des Königlich Preussischen Ministers der Geistlicher, Unterrichts- und Medicinal-angelegenheiten*, vol. 3, Georg Treu, *Die Bildwerke von Olympia in Stein und Thon* (Berlin, 1897), 44–181. At the same time, Tsvetaev criticized restoration techniques used by the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, the main promoter of reconstructive restoration in early nineteenth-century Europe. He rejected Thorvaldsen's reconstruction of the pedimental sculptures from the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina and followed the layout adopted by the Museum of Strasbourg, with several alterations. For various reconstructions of the pediments, see Adolf Furtwaengler, *Aegina: Das Heiligtum der Aphaia* (Munich, 1906), 189. On Thorvaldsen's restoration, its critique, and the "derestoration" of 1966, see William J. Diebold, "The Politics of Derestoration: The Aegina Pediments and the German Confrontation with the Past," *Art Journal* 54, no. 2 (Conservation and Art History) (Summer 1995): 60–66. On the early nineteenth-century practices of restoration with additions, see Astrid Fendt, "Alte und neue 'Originale': Zu den Marmorergänzungen der Rauch-Werkstatt in der Berliner Antikensammlung," in *Das Originale der Kopie: Kopien als Produkte und Medien der Transformation von Antike*, ed. Tatjana Bartsch (Berlin, 2010), 165–90.



FIG. 4.—The Hall of Olympia, featuring a plaster cast of the western pediment of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia as reconstructed by Georg Treu. Alexander III Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Postcard, early twentieth century.

through casts was his preoccupation with the exclusivity of copies. Tsvetaev's correspondence with the main private donor to the museum's construction, Yurii Nechaev-Maltsov, evidences his peculiar pursuit of uniqueness. "The casts are being made exclusively for us, perhaps for the first time at all, as no other mu-

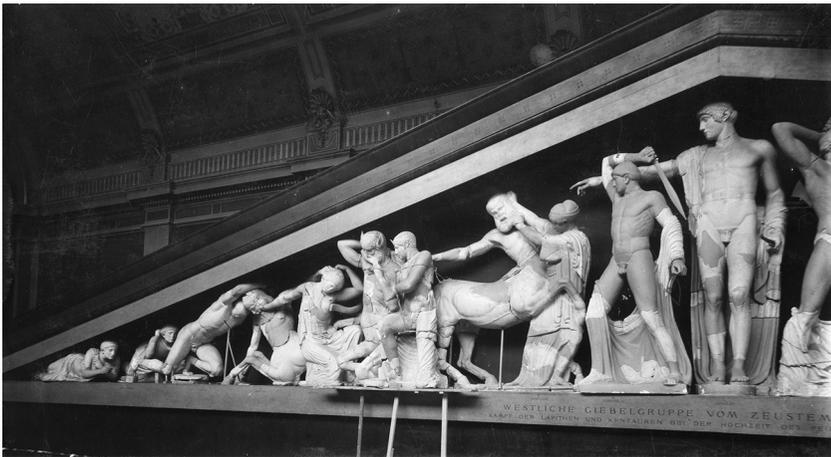


FIG. 5.—Western pediment of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia as reconstructed by Georg Treu. The Albertinum Museum, Dresden. Photograph taken by Hermann Krone in the 1890s, courtesy of Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

seum of Western Europe possesses these casts,”⁵⁸ commented Tsvetaev on the acquisition of copies of architectural details of the Erechtheion temple. Perhaps the most remarkable and unique items were the casts of Luca Della Robbia’s faience sculpture, which “no other museum in the *world* had even seen,” and the sculptures that Tsvetaev chose from the Vatican almost exclusively because, due to their size and price, they had never been copied before.⁵⁹ The uniqueness of casts could be a part of a bargain: one of the conditions imposed by the director of the Pinacoteca di Brera Corrado Ricci for making a cast of the throne of Maximilian in Ravenna was to destroy the mold after making the copy. “Only Moscow would have a copy,” wrote Tsvetaev ecstatically.⁶⁰ Such an attitude to casts as new originals certainly undermines Tsvetaev’s image as a radical innovator who disdained the values of authenticity. The pursuit of uniqueness suggests that the late nineteenth-century market for casts replicated the values and mechanisms of the market for originals. The scarcity of molds and casts increased their value, especially after the prohibitions imposed by major European museums under the influence of preservationists who contended that reproduction practices were harmful to the original statues. The Louvre and the British Museum banned the casting of their most precious sculptures, and all previously made molds had already been destroyed due to a lack of demand. In 1903 Italy prohibited casting altogether, but rumors about the imminent prohibition had already impacted the market.⁶¹ Tsvetaev wrote in January 1903: “We need to hurry up with obtaining the permission because the government is preparing a new, stricter law on copying,” and “once it passes the parliament, we won’t get anything.”⁶² After 1903, the price of existing plaster casts from Italian museums skyrocketed, and the museums came to value their casts as much as originals. In 1911 Tsvetaev requested that the administration of the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg make copies from the plaster casts of several statues, including the Farnese Hercules and Flora displayed on the stairs of the academy’s building. The academy denied this request, citing the value of their plasters, which had increased after the prohibition on new casts from the museum in Naples.⁶³

⁵⁸ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Moscow, October 22, 1900, 1:207.

⁵⁹ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Berlin, July 8, 1899, in Demskaia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 142; Tsvetaev’s diary, Berlin, June 10, 1899, Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 6, op. 2, d. 18, ll. 300–301; *Tsvetaev–Klein*, Naples, April 23, 1903, 1:131.

⁶⁰ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Milan, February 5, 1903, 2:177.

⁶¹ See Tsvetaev’s diary, November 11, 1898, Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 6, op. 2, d. 18, ll. 300–301, 159–60.

⁶² *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Florence, January 18, 1903, 2:146.

⁶³ RGIA, f. 789, op. 13, 1911, d. 203, ll. 4, 11.

IMITATION OR EMULATION?

Imitation can have various forms and meanings.⁶⁴ As we have seen, it can foster nationalism or promote cosmopolitanism; it can encourage creativity or preclude innovation. Fin de siècle European thought was marked by a rising interest in the processes of imitation and diffusion of knowledge and artistic form. This was exemplified most vividly in the work of the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, whose book *Les Lois de l'Imitation* (The laws of imitation, or *Zakony podrazhaniia* in Russian, 1890) offered a new, fairly radical interpretation of the laws of social development as equivalent to the processes of imitation and the diffusion of innovations. Although Tarde's work, due to its somewhat idiosyncratic and unorthodox stance, earned him a great deal of criticism, experts on "diffusions" continue to place him among the forefathers of contemporary comparative sociological theory.⁶⁵ Tarde's main accomplishment was explaining how and why societies accept some innovations and ideas but reject others, and how waves of "imitations" spread within and among national communities. Crafting a social model representing the process of social change, Tarde relied on the works of nineteenth-century comparative linguistics (most importantly the famous works of Jacob Grimm, which were hugely influential in Russia), and the laws of "artistic" and "literary" refraction, which explained the migration of words, images, plots, and myths. The main pieces of evidence supporting his argument were tangible, however, as he argued that archaeological artifacts visualized the diffusion of forms and their transformation in new settings.

It is doubtful that Tsvetaev ever read *Les Lois de l'Imitation*; Tarde's work merely verbalized and theorized the ideas of borrowing and imitation that had been in the air since the mid-nineteenth century. At almost the same time as Tarde, Tsvetaev's close colleague Nikodim Kondakov, a historian of Russian and Byzantine art, had developed a theory that described the role of borrowing in the development of art. Kondakov's analysis allowed him to strip away layers of artistic interpretation and additions to get at the "core," usually an element im-

⁶⁴ The view of imitation and emulation as two different epistemological mechanisms is a subject of recent works on Roman art, rhetoric, and pedagogical techniques. On that, see Ellen Perry, "Rhetoric, Literary Criticism, and the Roman Aesthetics of Artistic Imitation," in *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome: Supplementary Volumes*, vol. 1 (2002); Miranda Marvin, "Roman Sculptural Reproductions of Polykleitos: The Sequel," in *Sculpture and Its Reproductions*, ed. Anthony Hughes and Eirck Ranfft (1997); Elaine Gazda, ed., *The Ancient art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2002); Ellen Perry, *The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Visual Arts of Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁶⁵ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York, 1971); Jussi Kinnunen, "Gabriel Tarde as a Founding Father of Innovation Diffusion Research," *Acta Sociologica* 39, no. 4 (1996): 431–42.

ported from “abroad” and implanted in a new cultural environment.⁶⁶ Kondakov’s ideas about the circulation of plots and motifs and their adaptation in various cultures defied the existence of a pure, uncontaminated “national art.” Any work of art represented a result of borrowing, adaptation, and creative interpretation.

The ideas of emulation, borrowing, and comparison affected even museum practices. One of the most remarkable examples of this is the unrealized Russian National Museum project, dedicated to the tercentenary of Romanov rule (1913). It seems that the authors of the project attempted to create a counterbalance to Tsvetaev’s museum, which had opened a year earlier. They declared that this museum would hold only original artworks, “since copies, strictly speaking, cannot be considered as the products of artistic creativity.”⁶⁷ Exceptions were made, however, for copies and photographs of foreign artworks. Masterpieces of Russian art would appear in the cultural contexts of the eras when they had been created. As the project’s creators suggested, to “understand the meaning of Old Russian art . . . it is important to reveal its connections to the art of Byzantium, as well as its place among the parallel or kindred branches of Coptic and Syrian, late Greek [Hellenistic] and Italo-Greek art, the art of Southern Slavs, Georgia and Armenia, that had also developed under the influence of Byzantium.”⁶⁸ The development of Russian art during Peter the Great’s reign was supposed to be demonstrated through comparison with Italian, Flemish, Dutch, French, and German art. This method of display would reveal foreign “influences that Russian art experienced, as well as the traits of its originality.”⁶⁹

By contrast, Tsvetaev followed the traditional national/chronological principle in the arrangement and display of casts. His imitation was technical and passive, unlike the emulative cosmopolitan zeal of the unrealized museum of 1913. Tsvetaev’s museum “privatized” European and Oriental art by locking it in the museum halls on Volkhonka Street, whereas the 1913 museum plan offered to transcend national borders and place Russian artifacts in the company of their contemporaries. In this sense, Tsvetaev’s project was thoroughly nationalistic. The fact that he collected non-Russian art does not undermine this quality, be-

⁶⁶ Nikodim Kondakov, *Russkie klady: Issledovanie drevnostei velikokniazheskogo perioda* (St. Petersburg, 1896). See also the abstract of his speech at the VI Archaeological Congress: Kondakov, “Po voprosu o vlianii vizantiiskogo iskusstva,” *Referat zasedanii VI Archaeologicheskogo s’ezda v Odesse*, no. 7 (Odessa, 1884), 11.

⁶⁷ *Otdelenie iziashchnykh iskusstv (pri Natsional’nom vserossiiskom muzee v pamiat’ 300-letii doma Romanovykh): Proekt* (Moscow, 1913), 1.

⁶⁸ *Otdelenie iziashchnykh iskusstv (pri Natsional’nom vserossiiskom muzee v pamiat’ 300-letii doma Romanovykh): Proekt*, 4. The actual plan of the department of pre-Petrine art also included Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Persian carpets, ceramics, painting, engraving, etc. *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁹ *Otdelenie iziashchnykh iskusstv (pri Natsional’nom vserossiiskom muzee v pamiat’ 300-letii doma Romanovykh): Proekt*, 4–5.

cause, as Rupert Cox has noted, the commodification of imitations allowed for the breaking down of “the association of national identity and culture with the manufacture of things, as the sheer accumulation of things becomes a means of personal expression.”⁷⁰ The age of the Slavophile-westernizer debate—when participants equated borrowing with antinationalism and the refusal to borrow with traditionalism—had passed. The nationalism of Tsvetaev’s era could walk hand-in-hand with the cosmopolitan spirit of art collection. The main difference was in the way the imported art was used, that is, as an active agent of change or as a passive decoration.

This approach to nationality and art linked the Moscow Museum of Fine Arts to its main counterpoint and rival, the famous Tretyakov gallery, which contained mostly the works of the Russian realist school.⁷¹ Both museums pursued the mission of educating the masses by means of art. Both Pavel Tretyakov and Ivan Tsvetaev lived in the era that witnessed the transition from traditional artistic forms to the language of modernism, and both eschewed newer trends that rejected artistic ethnocentrism. Even though Tretyakov’s gallery had several Western paintings in its collection (Pavel Tretyakov’s brother Serguei had bequeathed them to the gallery), they were displayed separately from the main, Russian part. Similarly, Tsvetaev’s collection did not come to symbolize the radical westernization of Russian culture: the early twentieth-century rapprochement between Western and Russian art was associated with the group of the “World of Art” and symbolist circles, with Serguei Tschukin’s and Ivan Morozov’s collections of French impressionism, rather than the Museum of Fine Arts.

The similarity between the two seemingly opposite cultural enterprises of Tsvetaev and Tretyakov goes even deeper: both Tsvetaev’s imitation of classical

⁷⁰ Rupert Cox, introduction to *The Culture of Copying in Japan: Critical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Cox (New York, 2008), 9. A similar point on the “difficulties of conceptualizing ‘nationality’ within the structure of an art museum” is made in Rosalind P. Blakesley’s article on Zinaida Volkonskaia’s first project of the cast museum in Russia (Blakesley, “Art, Nationhood, and Display: Zinaida Volkonskaia and Russia’s Quest for a National Museum of Art,” *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 [2008]: 913). Katia Dianina also suggests that “national pride could be anchored in a world-class collection of non-Russian art” (Dianina, “The Museum and the Nation: The Imperial Hermitage in Russian Society,” in *The Collections of the Romanovs: European Art from the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg* [London, 2003], 42, quoted in Blakesley, “Art, Nationhood, and Display,” 932).

⁷¹ Ironically, the gallery’s founder, Pavel Tretyakov, had started his collection with the purchase of a few Western paintings and then, having realized that he was unable to distinguish originals from copies, resorted to Russian art that posed no problems of authenticity. John O. Norman, “Pavel Tretyakov and Merchant Art Patronage, 1850–1900,” in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West (Princeton, NJ, 1991), 95.

art and the tradition of realism fostered by Tretyakov assumed a particular attitude to reality, which in the early twentieth century appeared hopelessly outdated. As Carol Adlam has shown, the ideas of realistic representation emerged in Russian art criticism in the 1830s and 1840s in opposition to the practice of copying from classical models and casts. Proponents of the new, realist aesthetics claimed that the imitation of life, in contrast to the imitation of static models, represented a more nationally conscious and scientifically precise means of representation. The emphasis on scientific precision in early manifestos of Russian realism seems remarkably similar to Tsvetaev's attitude toward imitation, even though the theoreticians of early realism contrasted the mere "similitude" of classicist modeling with the "truth" of realist paintings. Notwithstanding this critique of the practices of copying, educating the artistic "eye," and memorizing the beauty of classical forms, however, the virtues of scientific precision and reason were first and foremost put in opposition to the "unruliness of the imagination." Nationalist realism, which had evolved in the 1860s as a revolt against classicism, gradually became a dogma, and the opposition between the imitation of models and the imitation of life became less pronounced than the conflict between these two "imitative" approaches to art, on the one hand, and the newer trend in modern art identified with Vladimir Solovyov's idea that the "'real' reality is beyond the world of concrete appearances," on the other.⁷² Imitation, realism, and nationalism run counter to fin de siècle modernist claims for imagination, imprecision, and cosmopolitanism. Tsvetaev called himself "a realist,"⁷³ and his attitude to the historical past and reality aligned him with Tretyakov and other representatives of the nationalist conservative trend.

In the early twentieth century, the conservatism of the Tretyakov gallery was already glaring. After Tretyakov's death in 1898, a special Council of the Gallery appointed by the Moscow City Duma for the collection's management undertook a gradual but significant reorganization of the collection, which sometimes required overcoming the veto imposed by Tretyakov's last will. The reform conducted in 1913–17 by Igor Grabar included both the enlargement of the existing collection and the rearrangement of artworks displayed in the gallery. Grabar arranged most artworks in a chronological order that reflected the logic and the main stages and schools in the development of Russian art and highlighted the works of the most prominent Russian artists. The rest of the collection was divided according to subjects: "landscapes," "genre and historical painting," and "the depic-

⁷² John Bowl, "The Moscow Art Market," in Clowes et al., *Between Tsar and People*, 114. On this shift in the representation of reality, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), chap. 20, "The Brown Stocking."

⁷³ Kagan, *I. V. Tsvetaev*, 87; Morozova, "Zhivopisnoe oformlenie muzeinykh interierov Rossii," 165.

tion of life and history of foreign countries.” The works of several artists were displayed separately, however, because they were seen either as not belonging to any of the major trends in the development of Russian art or as not sufficiently “Russian.” Grabar called these artists “Russian foreigners”—a category that included such prominent and famous artists as Alexander Ivanov, Nikolai Ge, Vasilii Polenov, and Vasilii Vereshchagin.⁷⁴ At the same time, the newly acquired paintings of French impressionists (Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, Auguste Renoir, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Edgar Degas, and others, donated by Margarita Morozova in 1910) were displayed in a separate room.⁷⁵ Thus the gallery remained faithful to the principle of nationality, avoiding the mingling of Russian artworks with Western art and carefully separating works in which the national spirit was not sufficiently visible. Nevertheless, even this fairly modest reform in the arrangement of paintings provoked heated debates in the press and attacks from right-wing nationalists.⁷⁶ The classification and display of artworks, therefore, was not seen as an innocent or neutral endeavor, and it seemed to define the museum’s concept. Other historical and archaeological museums of this period (1890s–1910s) also underwent the regrouping, reclassification, or rearrangement of their collections, reflecting scholars’ growing preoccupation with the problems of epistemology and the role of museums as the vocabularies of things and symbols.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ “Osnovnye polozheniia, kotorymi rukovodstvovalsia Sovet gorodskoi khudozhestvennoi galerei P. M. i S. M. Trekiakovykh pri proizvodstve predpriiatykh rabot po pereveske kartin galerei,” in *Gosudarstvennaia Tretiakovskaia Galereia: Ocherki istorii, 1856–1917* (Leningrad, 1981), 319. *Katalog khudozhestvennykh proizvedenii gorodskoi galerei Pavla i Sergueia Tretiakovykh: Izdanie 27* (Moscow, 1917). Compare this edition to previous editions to see the change in the arrangement.

⁷⁵ V. M. Volodarskii, “Tretiakovskaia galereia v 1913–1917 godakh,” in *Gosudarstvennaia Tretiakovskaia Galereia: Ocherki istorii, 1856–1917*, 256.

⁷⁶ Volodarskii, “Tretiakovskaia galereia v 1913–1917 godakh,” 259–62.

⁷⁷ For instance, in 1916, Vasilii Gorodtsov, a prominent archaeologist and the curator of the “pre-historical” collection of the Russian Historical Museum, suggested regrouping the objects of this collection according to their belonging to different “cultures” understood in the sense of “civilization” and expressing “knowledge, art, beliefs, morality, laws and customs as this all is reflected in the form of material and written monuments.” The classification by “cultures” was meant to replace an innocuous but not very informative grouping by river basins (that he had himself introduced in 1906) and eschewed the tensions of ethnic classification. As an alternative, Gorodtsov also considered arrangements of objects by types that reflected their functions (tools, religious objects, etc.) pertaining to the development of human activity. See “Mysli, kasaiushchiesia rasstanovki kollektzii muzeia po kul’turam,” 3 dekabria 1916. OPI GIM, f. 431, op. 1, d. 306, l. 31–31ob.; State Historical Museum Archive (Vedomstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskogo Istoricheskogo Muzeia), op. 1, Protokoly Soveta RIM, d. 88 (1905), 96 (1907), 97 (1908), 134 (1916).

On the classification of exhibits in the Russian Ethnographic Museum, see Roland Cvetkovski, “Empire Complex: Arrangements in the Russian Ethnographic Museum:

Even the Imperial Hermitage was not aloof to the new trends. Although the structuring of the museum into five departments (classical, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, paintings and engravings, numismatics, and, finally, the Russian department) had remained unchanged since the reform of 1885, the problem of classification came to the attention of the Hermitage curators and management several times between 1890 and 1912. Among other things, the debates on classification highlighted the conditionality of the existing separation between the “classical” period and the “Middle Ages,” especially in relation to the artifacts that originated from the territory of the Russian Empire (Caucasus, Siberia, and the Steppe region), and accentuated the need to reconcile decorative needs with the “scientific” principles of collecting. As Nikodim Kondakov pointed out, objects of the transitional period (4–9 centuries AD) that looked “oriental” and did not resemble classical models went to the department of Middle Ages, while the “more classical” and precious artworks of the same period (first of all, Scythian) ended up in the department of antiquity. To address the abnormality of this classification, Kondakov suggested that the museum avoid the pursuit of the “decorative effect of gold” and put exhibits of golden, bronze, and other metal objects from the same period in one department—either classical or medieval. According to Kondakov, the reclassification of objects would better serve the “scientific” purposes of the collection, even if it was at the expense of aesthetics.⁷⁸

Kondakov’s memo of 1892 echoed earlier debates of the 1890s on the question of what represented “art” and what should be related to “history,” and whether Russian art could (and should) be placed alongside contemporary objects from other countries without danger of highlighting its marginality. (As we know, the project of the Russian National Museum of 1913 had successfully resolved this dilemma.)⁷⁹ It also referred to the problems of the purity of styles and forms and of the conventionality of such definitions as “classical,” “barbarian,” “Russian,” and so on. In 1912 the management of the Imperial Hermitage once again considered recataloging and rearranging the exhibits of its classical collection: one of the suggestions involved rearranging the artifacts according to the places of their discovery (graves, troves, collections), which would mean sacrificing aesthetics in favor of scientific principles.⁸⁰

1910,” in *An Empire of Others: Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, ed. Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister (Budapest, 2014).

⁷⁸ The Hermitage Museum, Archive, f. 1, op. 5, 1892, d. 33, ll 1–2ob.

⁷⁹ The Institute of the History of Material Culture, Archive (Institut Istorii Materialnoi Kultury, Arkhiv), f. 1, op. 1, 1887, d. 69, l. 221–221b ob., 235–40.

⁸⁰ Protokoly zasedanii soveshchaniia khranitelei: 14 ianvaria 1912. The Hermitage Museum, Archive, f. 1, op. 5, 1912, d. 37, l. 16ob.

It was at the moment when the traditional categories were called into question that Tsvetaev started collecting the casts of classical, medieval, and early modern art. Cast collecting created room for experimentation not only in choosing the objects but also in arranging them as freely as one could imagine (some collectors of casts even experimented with interchanging different parts of sculptures), and in the context of early twentieth-century innovations in classifying and cataloging objects such an experiment would have been welcomed. The classificatory zeal of Russian scholars and museum managers indicated their awareness of the conditionality of authenticity in the context of a museum: artifacts acted as signs, which, on the one hand, stood for certain artistic or historical concepts but, on the other, were put in communication with each other. The intention to move things around suggested that the horizontal ties between museum objects were seen as no less important than the already broken ties with the past and the place of origin. This view was somewhat consonant with the ideas that Ferdinand de Saussure laid out in his *Course in General Linguistics* delivered between 1906 and 1911 and later developed by Russian linguists. According to Saussure, “on the one hand, the concept seems to be a counterpart of the sound-image [i.e., a word], and on the other hand, the sign itself is in turn the counterpart of the other signs of language.” Therefore, the value of terms “results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others.”⁸¹ Saussure’s emphasis on the interaction between words was meant to dehistoricize language, just as the new classification of objects in museums emphasized the role of their contemporary context over their ties to the past. Plaster casts, with their emphasis on form rather than content, possessed more than any other museum objects this semiotic quality of signifiers, and therefore their arrangement was both more meaningful for the museum and less restrained by conventionalities. Tsvetaev, however, bypassed the opportunity to reveal and accentuate previously unseen links between objects and chose to follow the traditional historical and national layout of sculptures in the way they were usually presented in textbooks and art museums. The early twentieth-century burst of epistemological thought was wasted on the institution on the Volkhonka street. As a result, the casts played the role of the signifiers of the original objects displayed in other art institutions, and the Museum of Fine Arts constituted a giant museum of museums.

SCIENTIFIC AUTHENTICITY AND THE POLITICS OF VALUE

Despite his political and ideological conservatism, Tsvetaev did try to overcome some of his contemporary society’s biases, at least in the beginning of

⁸¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York, 1967), 114. I am grateful to Serguei Oushakine for pointing out the parallel between the systematization of objects in museums and Saussure’s linguistics.

his long collecting campaign. At a time when paranoia about forgery gripped the European art world, he spoke against the obsession with historical material authenticity and offered an alternative: the scientific authenticity of copies.

In the 1880s–1900s none of the big European and American museums avoided the traps of forgers, and every discovery of a fake was unbearably embarrassing. Interestingly, museums of plaster casts were often created with the intention of avoiding fakes, as purchasing plaster casts always proved safer.⁸² In the prevailing hierarchy of authenticity, copies were worse than originals but better than fakes. Yet at least one institution in Russia, the Imperial Hermitage belonging to the ruling dynasty, was not supposed to possess anything but genuine articles. Maintaining this standard was not easy. Many fakes appeared in the Hermitage’s showcases alongside authentic items, and once in a while the museums’ curators had to review their holdings to purge phonies from the collection.

There were very few Russian national museums, and each had to define its status vis-à-vis the others and through its attitude toward the exigencies of authenticity. The Historical Museum in Moscow, very much like Tsvetaev’s institution, prioritized the visual perception (*nagliadnost’*) of history and the historical coherence of its collection. Casts, photographs, and copies were supposed to fill gaps in a timeline representing the history of Russia in original artifacts: out of 880 objects intended for display at the opening of the museum, there were 385 casts, 275 “photographs, drawings, plans,” 20 “architectural models,” and only 200 purportedly original archaeological items in the Christian department. The museum’s founder, Alexei Uvarov,⁸³ stressed the primacy of historical coherence over the originality of objects and defended this view from the criticism of other members of the museum’s council.⁸⁴ By the time of its official opening in 1883, the structure of the museum’s collection had changed. Archaeological artifacts, including a rich collection of Stone and Bronze Age objects, represented its most valuable part, while mostly copies and photographs filled the rooms dedicated to the medieval and early modern periods in Russian history. The archaeological profile of the Historical Museum, however, allowed no tolerance for fakes and required that its administration examine all items that

⁸² Pamela Born, “The Canon Is Cast: Plaster Casts in American Museum and University Collections,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries of North America* 21, no. 2 (2002): 8. As the Boston Museum report of 1886 stated, purchasing a collection of casts instead of originals secured against “any danger of wasting . . . money through mistakes of judgment.” Quoted in Betsy Fahlman, “A Plaster of Paris Antiquity: Nineteenth-Century Cast Collections,” *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 12, no. 1 (1991): 6.

⁸³ Praskovia Uvarova’s husband and the son of Serguei Uvarov, the ideologue of Nicholas I’s conservatism.

⁸⁴ Protokol zasedaniia Upravleniia istoricheskogo muzeia, November 12 1875, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 2, 12, 14.

appeared dubious or forged. The difference between forged items and copies was essential: this logic held that forgers intended to deceive buyers and therefore did not simply copy originals, but tried to create something new, thus producing an unsound impression about the development of art, crafts, and society.

Tsvetaev's attitude toward forgery was quite different.⁸⁵ He skillfully used the obsession of the Hermitage's curators with the originality of artworks to procure new items for his collection. In 1911 he addressed the Hermitage administration with a request that they donate to the Moscow museum all of the duplicates, copies, and fakes that would otherwise besmirch the royal collection's high status.⁸⁶ Curiously, while considering the transfer of "fakes and imitations" from the Hermitage to the Museum of Fine Arts, both the director of the Hermitage, Dmitry Tolstoy, and the curators of its departments observed that such an operation would have to be handled very cautiously, since it could "discredit the Hermitage."⁸⁷ Evgeny Lenz noted that the acquisition of forged artworks would incur serious criticisms of Tsvetaev's museum in the press and that the Hermitage would be blamed for providing fakes to this institution.⁸⁸ Eventually, it was decided that the responsibility for displaying copies and fakes would fall exclusively on the new museum, and the transfer was approved. Tsvetaev's museum received a few dozen items for new exhibits, including original artworks, galvanoplastic reproductions, modern "imitations," and fakes.⁸⁹

It might seem odd to find such an indifferent attitude toward originality at a time when the European community of historians and archaeologists hotly pursued forgers and fought to establish firm criteria for authenticity. Fascinated by the possibilities of imitation and the thinning of borders between copies, fakes, and originals, Tsvetaev himself enjoyed playing jokes on his colleagues and visitors, either by presenting copies as originals,⁹⁰ or, if this was not possible, by

⁸⁵ On various attitudes to historical authenticity, see Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (London, 1990); Sandor Radnoti, *The Fake: Forgery and Its Place in Art* (Lanham, MD, 1999); Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York, 1996).

⁸⁶ See Tsvetaev to the head of the Moscow education district (the museum's nominal supervisor), June 9, 1911, Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 1, d. 165, l. 6.

⁸⁷ Protokol zasedaniia soveta khranitelei, March 21, 1911, The Hermitage Museum, Archive, f. 1, op. 5, 1911, d. 38, ll. 13ob.–14.

⁸⁸ Protokol zasedaniia soveta khranitelei, November 1, 1910, The Hermitage Museum, Archive, f. 1, op. 5, 1910, d. 42, l. 190b.

⁸⁹ For instance, "Poddelka pod shirokii italianskii kinzhal 16 veka." On this transfer, see "O peredache dubletov iz Ermitazha," Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 1, d. 165; f. 2, op. 1, 1910/12, d. 348.

⁹⁰ *Russkoe Slovo*, March 23, 1911, accessed in Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 13, d. 1, l. 5ob.

claiming that the copies were exact replicas, not only in shape but also in material.⁹¹ Stories of ancient masterpieces that turned out to be fakes mesmerized him. The indistinguishability of originals and copies inspired him and justified the illusion of casting the past. In July 1910 Tsvetaev reported to his correspondent Praskovia Uvarova the details of a scandal around the acquisition of a wax bust of Flora by the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin. Wilhelm von Bode, the museum's director, attributed the bust to Leonardo da Vinci, although many experts questioned Leonardo's authorship.⁹² Despite serious doubts about its originality, Tsvetaev admired the beauty of this sculpture, which had been made in the manner of Leonardo. He even purchased a copy of it "in the size of the *original*" for the Moscow museum. "What is this Flora? The work of Leonardo, or a brilliant imitation of his style?" Tsvetaev could not tell: "Even if it is a fake, it is a work of knowledge and skill of a genius mystifier."⁹³ Tsvetaev thus seemed to lean toward the opinion that the quality of a work outweighed its authenticity. In the end, the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum kept the Flora bust and—as Tsvetaev remarked in a note to Uvarova written on a postcard carrying Flora's image—tried to publicize it as a remarkable addition to its collection⁹⁴ (figs. 6, 7).

In a letter to Nechaev-Maltsov, Tsvetaev referred to the famous story of Giovanni Bastianini, an Italian sculptor whose imitation of a sculpture by Verrocchio had been purchased by the Louvre, then unmasked as a modern piece by the art dealer who had sold it and removed from the collection.⁹⁵ The case of Bastianini produced heated debates in Europe: while French experts denied any value to a piece of modern forgery, Italians insisted on acknowledging its status as a contemporary masterpiece. As Carol Helstosky suggests, Bastianini's works, whether made with the intention to deceive or not, reflected the "Italian tradition of understanding art as perfect imitation." Learning the techniques of Renaissance sculpture formed a key component of professional

⁹¹ On the copy of the mosaics of Ravenna: "How many serious people and artists have been deceived by the assertion that these copies had been made from a piece of colored glass paste!" Tsvetaev to Uvarova, April 25, 1901, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 479.

⁹² The authorship of "Flora" is still contested: the Bode Museum (formerly the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum) displays the bust as the work of Richard Cockle Lucas, whose son A. D. Lucas claimed that his father had made it upon a request of an art dealer in 1846. However, Lucas's description of the molding process contradicts the result of a technical examination. Mark Jones, ed., *Fake?: The Art of Deception* (London, 1990), 303–7.

⁹³ Tsvetaev to Uvarova, Berlin, July 12, 1910, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 656.

⁹⁴ Tsvetaev to Uvarova, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 714. Postcard titled "Farbige Wachs buste von Leonardo da Vinci. Kaiser Friedrich Museum zu Berlin."

⁹⁵ In his letter to Uvarova, Tsvetaev even mentioned that he had known Bastianini, although this could not be true, since Bastianini died in 1868. In a letter to Nechaev-Maltsov, Tsvetaev referred to one *formatore* who had known Bastianini personally. Tsvetaev to Uvarova, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 717.



FIG. 6.—Postcard with an image of Flora, farbige Wachsüste von Leonardo da Vinci, Kaiser Friedrich Museum zu Berlin. Copyright Russian Historical Museum, Moscow. OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 714. Color version available as an online enhancement.

training, while the consistently growing demand for ancient and Renaissance art (and the lack of interest in modern artworks) strengthened the trend of imitation.⁹⁶ This attitude toward art as imitation, and the disappearance of the borders between old and new, was very much in tune with Tsvetaev's vision. His assessment of Bastianini's work betrayed not a hint of criticism or accusa-

⁹⁶ Carol Helstosky, "Giovanni Bastianini, Art Forgery, and the Market in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 4 (2009): 798, 803, 808. On Bastianini, see also Anita Fiderer Moskowitz, *Forging Authenticity: Bastianini and the Neo-Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Florence* (Florence, 2013).

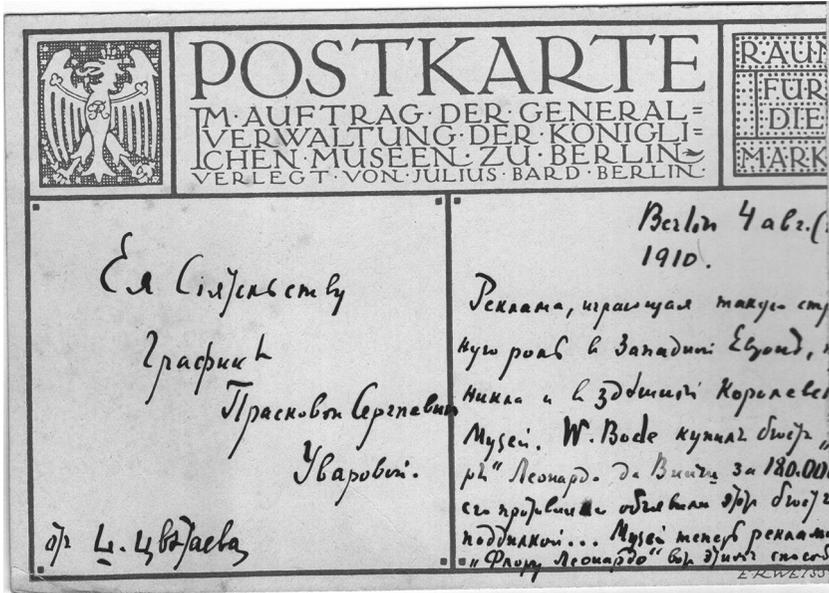


FIG. 7.—Ivan Tsvetaev, handwritten note to Praskovia Uvarova, verso of postcard with an image of Flora in fig. 6. Copyright Russian Historical Museum, Moscow. OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, l. 714. Color version available as an online enhancement.

tion. To the contrary: he perceived Bastianini's mastery as proof of the professionalism of copyists.⁹⁷

How can we reconcile Tsvetaev's leniency toward fakes with his positivist beliefs in objectivity and precision? In addition to his personal interest in imitation and his perception of fakes as works of art, the emergence of a new historical understanding of the authenticity of sources may have also played a role. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, methods of source criticism underwent a significant transformation as historians questioned the direct association between evidence and historical reality that had dominated earlier historiography.⁹⁸ Early nineteenth-century rules of source criticism assumed that unreliable sources had to be ignored and dismissed. Historical skepticism even led some scholars to suggest that the entire early history of Russia was a myth because Russian medieval chronicles had survived only in later copies.⁹⁹ The epistemological turn of the

⁹⁷ Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov, Florence, January 17–18, 1903, 2:143.

⁹⁸ On this subject, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Autumn 1991): 83.

⁹⁹ On this subject see, e.g., V. G. Vovina-Lebedeva, *Shkoly issledovaniia russkikh letopisei, XIX–XX vv* (St. Petersburg, 2011).

mid- and late nineteenth century eliminated the strictures of the “formal theory” of evidence in historiography, allowing historians to address sources that had been considered bad, biased, or even forged and to unearth hidden layers of truth. As a result, several categories of sources were exculpated, and historians learned how to use the methods of textual or stylistic analysis to reconstruct an original text out of fragmented and distorted copies, or to reveal the intentions of authors whose testimonies had been affected by external influences.¹⁰⁰ Authenticity ceased to be associated merely with physical originality. Moreover, it appeared no longer as an inherent quality, but rather as a state or condition that could be restored by skillful scholarly analysis.

Of course, historians did not intend to ignore the difference between “fake” and “original.” Instead, they felt more confident in their ability to use both kinds of sources in various ways. Tsvetaev, a historian and epigraphist by training, may very well have been sympathetic to these views. Further, we can be certain that by the turn of the century the interpretative frameworks of historical studies had become much more sophisticated, allowing historians more freedom in their choice of sources, physical originality notwithstanding.

AUTOCRACY AND AUTHENTICITY

In the world of art collecting, Tsvetaev’s tolerance toward forged artifacts was rather unique. He recognized the aversion among the Russian public and the academic community to fakes and tried to satisfy their lust for authenticity with the objective precision of artistic forms and the systematic coherence of his collection. For many, however, “scientific authenticity” did not sound like a viable alternative to originality. One of the reasons why Tsvetaev’s copies continued to be evaluated and perceived within the old paradigm is that he failed to create an appropriate architectural and, more importantly, ideological and political environment for his project.

The museum’s large, expensive, even luxurious building set off the specific quality of its collection. While the rooms of the Hermitage (as well as those of the Historical Museum in Moscow) were submerged in darkness, especially during Petersburg’s long winters, the new museum in Moscow would boast spacious, light-filled galleries. The natural marble and granite decorating its façade came from the Ural Mountains, Norway, Hungary, Greece, and Belgium.¹⁰¹ Ger-

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., Alexei Shakhmatov’s reconstruction of the original Primary Chronicle in *Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia*, vols. 1–2 (St. Petersburg, 2002), and Alexander Onu’s work on the *cahiers de doléances*, the mandates of the Third Estates that had been previously dismissed as unrepresentative and biased documents: Alexander Onu, *Iybory 1789 goda vo Frantsii i nakazy tretiego sosloviia* (St. Petersburg, 1908).

¹⁰¹ Valeria Tsvetaeva, “Moskva devianostykh i deviatistykh godov,” in Demaskaia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 380.

man sculptors and Italian marble masons worked on the construction of this palace of art. A magnificent staircase with twenty-four columns made of monolith marble decorated the entrance to the museum. As Tsvetaev proudly declared, “even the Hermitage with its jasper columns will now have to yield its supremacy to the Moscow Museum.”¹⁰² Conceived as a modest educational institution, the museum grew into a colossal structure worth several million rubles. The contrast between “the excessive luxury of the . . . building and the relative scarcity of what is to be displayed behind the marble walls,” in D. A. Khomiakov’s words, could not go unnoticed.¹⁰³

Criticism for collecting plaster casts haunted Tsvetaev throughout the period of the museum’s construction and especially after its opening. To Prince V. M. Golitsyn’s remark that he was “building a plaster institution,” Tsvetaev responded, “such sarcasms may become successful in public by virtue of being trenchant and senseless.”¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the project’s scale and status, on the one hand, and the nature of its exhibits, on the other, began to bother him more toward the end of the collecting period. After visiting the Louvre in 1904, Tsvetaev wrote, “such is the power of the works of art perceived immediately, in originals: they consecrate an observer to previously unknown feelings and senses, and shed the aura of sweet satisfaction. Copies, as in the Trocadero Museum, Ecole des Beaux Arts, [and] our museum, inculcate the desire to see the originals; they . . . encourage curiosity, strengthen the intensity of aspiration, but they do not bring real satisfaction, do not soothe.”¹⁰⁵ “Mathematical precision” could not compensate for the lack of an “aura.”¹⁰⁶

Despite being proud of his endeavor and confident in the importance of collecting casts, a few years before the opening of the museum Tsvetaev started making efforts to acquire original works of art in addition to copies. It is unclear whether his closeness to the imperial court and Nicholas II’s benevolent disposition toward the new museum functioned as an incentive for the decision to procure authentic things or as a form of leverage he could use in this pursuit, or both. In 1909 it helped him obtain the magnificent collection of Egyptian art purchased by the government from its owner, Vladimir Golenishchev. Although in Russia the emperor had the prerogative to decide which museum would receive treasures and artifacts, whether purchased or discovered, the decision to place the collection in the Moscow Museum instead of the Hermitage, which held the largest collec-

¹⁰² “Iz rechi proiznesennoi v godichnom zasedanii Komiteta muzeia 20 fevralia 1902 g. professorom I. V. Tsvetaevym (1902),” in Demskaiia and Smimova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 167.

¹⁰³ *GMII im A. S. Pushkina iz imperatorskoi Rossii v SSSR*, 102.

¹⁰⁴ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Berlin, July 13, 1899, 1:139.

¹⁰⁵ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Paris, May 20, 1904, 3:77.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1968).

tion of antique art (and an authentic one), appeared to violate established norms. The director of the Hermitage, Ivan Vsevolozhskii, was outraged by this turn of events, even though the situation at the Hermitage—an institution poorly managed and overflowing with artworks—also played a role in the decision to send the collection to Moscow.¹⁰⁷

Did the recognition of the value of original artworks represent a retreat from Tsvetaev's concept of scientific authenticity? Or was it rather a concession to the political and ideological exigencies of his milieu? While commenting on the value of Golenishchev's collection, Tsvetaev admitted that it did not perfectly fit the profile of his museum. He commented, "this material is more antiquarian rather than artistic; it perfectly works for the study of religion and everyday life of Egyptians, but does not, in the same way, demonstrate the state of sculpture, architecture and . . . painting."¹⁰⁸ The acquisition of the Golenishchev collection, therefore, represented an attempt to improve the status of the new institution.

Possessing original artworks was both valuable and awkward, since it threw into sharp relief the contrast between genuine items and casts. After 1911, Tsvetaev formulated a new goal for the development of the museum: "to increase the importance of the collection by attracting here a number of originals."¹⁰⁹ He rightly guessed that devoted monarchists might find it inappropriate that a museum bearing the name of the deceased tsar possessed only copies.¹¹⁰ In 1912, *The Government's Herald* (*Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*) announced the creation of the Society of the Museum's Friends, which aimed to collect money for the purchase of original works of art.¹¹¹ That same year Tsvetaev addressed the emperor with a request for the allocation of half of the acquisitions of the Imperial Archaeological Commission for his collection; essentially he asked that the Moscow Historical Museum be bypassed in the sequence of the distribution of artifacts. Although he never received his desired share of the exhibits, the Museum of Fine Arts acquired the magnificent Bronze Age trove (the Bessarabian treasure) in 1913. According to Tsvetaev, Nicholas II had been impressed by the popularity of the museum, which "pacified the youth."¹¹² This time it was the deputy president of the Historical Museum in Moscow who protested against the donation of the trove to a museum for which it would represent merely "a *bibelot*

¹⁰⁷ *Tsvetaev-Klein*, St. Petersburg, June 25, 1909, 1:272.

¹⁰⁸ *Tsvetaev-Klein*, St. Petersburg, June 7, 1909, 1:274.

¹⁰⁹ Tsvetaev, "Zapiska" (1911), *Tsvetaev-Klein*, 2:170. In 1911, Tsvetaev managed to procure for the museum the official status of "state institution," with state-approved staff and an annual allowance for the purchase of artifacts.

¹¹⁰ P. Nilus, "Moskovskie vpechatleniia," *Odesskii listok*, no. 290, July 2, 1913. Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 13, d. 2, l. 4.

¹¹¹ *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik*, September 8, 1912. Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 13, d. 1b, l. 28.

¹¹² Tsvetaev to Uvarova, December 11, 1912, OPI GIM, f. 17, op. 1, d. 576, ll. 763–64.

[trinket] or *object d'art*," arguing that this was an affront to its historical value.¹¹³ Tsvetaev's request had violated the unspoken rule of classification that distinguished between "historical" objects and works of art and determined the museums that could lay claim to them; this separation had given rise to numerous conflicts in Russia's small museum world.

Tsvetaev's hesitations, the monarchists' zeal to fill the museum with original artworks, and, at the same time, the imperial court's support of the museum of casts suggest profound confusion in the Russian elite's thinking about authenticity. The political crisis of the early twentieth century questioned the legitimacy of autocratic power and, ultimately, the authenticity of the ruling family's rights. Monarchal power rested on the assumption of an unquestioned dynastic, genetic, and political continuity, yet the ruling family's ties to their ancestors, the first Romanovs, came to be seen as feeble. Therefore the cultural symbolism of the imperial "scenarios of power"—court and public ceremonies and the aesthetics of monarchal rule—visually stressed the link between the early years of the Romanovs' reign and the reign of the ruling tsar, helping to overcome the inferiority complex of foreignness.¹¹⁴ The lack of consistency, and the zig-zags of autocratic policy that oscillated between the embrace of Western forms and the most extreme nationalism, also subverted the authenticity of autocratic power. But even more important was the contradiction between the last ruler's claims that genuine monarchy tolerated no institutional restrictions and the political reality of post-1905 Russia. The internal crisis of authenticity had both political and aesthetic dimensions. Marina Tsvetaeva's portrayal of the museum's opening ceremony of 1912, depicting the absurd theatricality of imperial rituals attended by "plaster dignitaries," conveys the impression of inauthenticity and artificiality made by the display of monarchal power. Tsvetaeva contrasted the "living statues" with the "dolls" and "marionettes" attending the ceremony, although many contemporaries might have noticed a symbolic confluence of inauthentic art with inauthentic power.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

The tsar's benevolent attitude could not hide the discrepancy between the Russian monarchy's semantic claims to genuineness and Tsvetaev's interest in copies and reproductions. Tsvetaev and his supporters responded to the criticism of their opponents, who were unhappy with the plaster content of the museum, by referring to their institution's educational mission. The target audience of the museum was the "general public," particularly children, students, and those who

¹¹³ N. A. Tscherbatov to L. A. Kasso, February 28, 1913, RGIA, f. 733, op. 143, d. 62, ll. 157–58.

¹¹⁴ See Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 2, pt. 2, 3.

could not afford a ticket to Europe, or even to St. Petersburg, where they would have been able to glimpse original artworks.¹¹⁵

Tsvetaev's museum resembles many other populist projects of this period that aimed to create "common culture" as the ground for social integration. He strove to reconcile the high academic standards of "scientific authenticity" with the museum's populism, so that a schoolteacher, an artisan, an office clerk, and an artist could meet in the museum's halls and each would benefit from the encounter with art in his or her own way. This populism, however, turned out to be limited to the middle stratum of society: Tsvetaev famously took his yardman to the museum, only to have the poor boy, shocked by the abundance of nude figures, walk through the museum halls with his eyes closed.¹¹⁶ The problem was not simply in the nudity of classical statues: Tretyakov's rival gallery filled with icons and realist genre paintings also failed to reach the bottom of society, repeating the fate of other projects meant to create a common ground of culture for all strata of society.¹¹⁷ It is also doubtful that Tsvetaev truly believed he had helped deliver classical art to the masses, and that the masses really felt the need for it. Considering which part of Trajan's column ought to undergo casting, Tsvetaev settled on the images of barbarian slaves, proto-Slavic people who looked, as he sarcastically remarked, very much like his humble compatriots.¹¹⁸ It seems that Tsvetaev did not entertain any real hope that the simple folk would come to his museum and grow enlightened through the contemplation of sculptures. The museum did become an attraction in Moscow: it counted hundreds and sometimes even thousands of visitors daily, and special educational tours and lectures contributed to its popularity.¹¹⁹ Yet the number of visitors did not explain what made it so attractive: was it the splendor of the building, the public campaign, or the content of the galleries?

¹¹⁵ In 1913 the museum ordered galvanoplastic copies of golden artifacts from Scythian kurgans that had been put on display at the Hermitage. Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 1, d. 74, l. 1–10b.; Malmberg to Vladimir Vernadsky, April 19, 1914, *ibid.*, f. 5, op. 1, d. 74, l. 4.

¹¹⁶ Marina Tsvetaeva, "Lavrovyi venok," in Demskaia and Smirnova, *I. V. Tsvetaev sozdaet muzei*, 403. Mindful of the educational role of his museum, Tsvetaev refused to commission the cast from the sculpture of the sleeping hermaphrodite ("the frivolous creation of the unbrindled fantasy of Hellenistic genius should not be presented at an educational institution"). *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, 2:212.

¹¹⁷ Norman, "Pavel Tretyakov and Merchant Art Patronage," 96. See Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, NJ, 1985); E. Anthony Swift, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley, CA, 2002).

¹¹⁸ *Tsvetaev–Nechaev–Maltsov*, Rome, March 17, 1903, 2:232.

¹¹⁹ Tsvetaev himself was puzzled by the popularity of the museum among female students (*Kursistki*). See his letter to Treu, November 13, 1912, *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum erbauen*, 306–7.

Tsvetaev hoped that the availability of copies in the museum would indirectly contribute to the education of public taste by improving the training of artists and artisans. Like its European counterparts, the Moscow museum also offered plastic casts for sale, thereby multiplying the pedagogic potential of the collection. Copies of Western artworks had enjoyed popularity in Russian society since the dawn of cultural westernization in the early eighteenth century.¹²⁰ However, neither the “antique” figures that appeared in suburban gardens, so often made of bad marble and mislabeled, nor the serfs painted in white and made to stand on pedestals to imitate often-inaccessible statues on noble estates, likely changed their owners’ mindsets or aesthetic preferences.¹²¹

Antiquity continued to be associated with intellectual and political renaissance, and fin de siècle Russia witnessed a renewal of interest in Roman law, Greek philosophy, and ancient history. Needless to say, fin de siècle visions of antiquity differed from the academic classicism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Alison Hilton’s words, Russian artists, as well as their Western counterparts, “made use of motifs from ancient Greek and Roman art, not emulating classical models but mining antiquity for new kinds of imagery and new forms of expression.”¹²² The role of imitation and copying in professional education, as well as in the development of public taste, had also changed significantly by the early twentieth century. Alexander Benois contrasted the classical (and expensive) bas-reliefs of the Museum of Fine Arts building to an experimental “exhibit of bad taste” in Stuttgart that displayed examples of aesthetic pitfalls, “kitsch,” and fakes of different sorts (such as celluloid imitations of ivory).¹²³ These two cases demonstrated two drastically different modes of aesthetic education: one conservative and straightforward, and the other witty and practical. Tsvetaev’s *nagliadnost* (visuality) might have appeared archaic in comparison to other forms of cultural education evolving in Europe and Russia in the early twentieth century. However, it resembled educational and instructional models promoted by Tsvetaev’s colleagues and supported

¹²⁰ As the registration records of the Imperial Hermitage suggest, copies of European paintings made by serf artists at the request of their owners decorated the walls of many noble mansions across the empire. See O. V. Mikats, *Kopirovaniie v Ermitazhe kak shkola masterstva russkikh khudozhnikov*, St. Petersburg (St. Petersburg, 1996).

¹²¹ Marinus A. Wes, *Classics in Russia, 1700–1815: Between Two Bronze Horsemen* (Leiden, 1992), 59, 41.

¹²² Alison Hilton, “Serov, Bakst, and the Reinvention of Russia’s Classical Heritage,” in *From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture* (DeKalb, IL, 2014), 152.

¹²³ Aleksandr Nikolaevich Benois, “Muzei durnogo vkusa,” in *Khudozhestvennye pis’ma, 1908–1917: Gazeta “Rech’*,” *Peterburg*, vol. 1, 1908–1910 (St. Petersburg, 2006), 175. This letter originally appeared in the newspaper *Rech’* in July 1909.

by the tsar, such as the project of disseminating stencils of Orthodox icons among peasants in order to prevent the distortion of artistic and religious canons and discourage the proliferation of mass-produced, low-quality printed icons.¹²⁴ Tsvetaev's museum and the committee for the revival of icon painting pursued similar goals—to provide visual standards of beauty and help avoid any aesthetic or ideological deviations.

Pavel Muratov—a historian of art, contributor to Russia's leading artistic journal, *Apollo*, and one of the most ardent critics of Tsvetaev's creation—wittily pointed out the difference between the role of museums of casts in the West, which aimed at general education (*obrazovanie*), and that of the Moscow museum, which focused on the moral and ethical education (*vospitanie*) of spectators.¹²⁵ In his view, however, the kind of aesthetic taste and education that it aimed to inculcate with the help of plaster copies would hardly raise the cultural level of Russian society. Contrary to Tsvetaev's expectation, many visitors perceived the museum as an assault on public taste, rather than a shaper of taste; they found the practice of toning white plaster statues to imitate the color of old yellowish marble and greenish bronze repugnant and superfluous, since it strengthened the impression of deceit.¹²⁶ Plaster was also associated with mass-produced coarse and tasteless figurines sold on the streets.¹²⁷ The Russian art world split over assessments of Tsvetaev's creation. While some considered the museum the quintessence of “bourgeois, low taste,” others enjoyed the

¹²⁴ The committee for the revival of icon painting was set up in 1901 under Nicholas II's patronage. One result of the society's activity was the publication of a volume, *Illustrated Iconographical Script [Litsevoi ikonopisnyi podlinnik]*, with stencils of images based on old Russian and Byzantine models (Nikodim Kondakov, *Litsevoi ikonopisnyi podlinnik* [St. Petersburg, 1905]). See more in Robert L. Nichols, “The Icon and the Machine in Russia's Religious Renaissance, 1900–1909,” in *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, ed. William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic (Cambridge, 1991), 131–44; Andrew Jenks, *Iconography, Power, and Expertise in Imperial Russia* (Seattle, 2004); Oleg Yu. Tarasov, *Ikona i blagochestie: Ocherki ikonogo dela v Imperatorskoi Rossii* (Moscow, 1995), 253–71.

¹²⁵ The role of art in education and moral *Bildung* was a subject of debate in the early 1900s. See, e.g., the debate between A. N. Kremlev and K. S. Petrov-Vodkin: *Trudy Vserossiiskogo s'ezda khudozhnikov, dekabr 1911–ianvar' 1912 g.* (Petrograd, 1914), 3:11–15. See also a series of papers on the problems of “aesthetic education” at the All-Russian Congress of Artists: *ibid.*, 1:117–335.

¹²⁶ N. Kravchenko, “Moskovskie vpechatleniia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 16, 1912, accessed in Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. XIII, d. 1b, l. 26.

¹²⁷ A Russian revolutionary recalled that they used these hollow figurines to smuggle illegal literature from abroad. E. D. Stasova, “Kak my poluchali i rasprostraniali nelegal'nuu literaturu,” in *Iz istorii nelegal'nykh bibliotek revoliutsionnykh organizatsii v tsarskoi Rossii: Sbornik materialov*, ed. E. D. Stasova (Moscow, 1956), 17. I am grateful to Karen Rosenberg for pointing out this fact to me.

beauty of the forms on display, regardless of the manner in which they had been made.¹²⁸

MODERNISM, MODERNITY, AND IMITATION

While answering the question of why Silver Age Russia “needed a museum of casts, that had departed from educational purposes and acquired national importance,” Liudmila Akimova asserts the intrinsic compatibility of fin de siècle culture with the practice of collecting and displaying plaster models.¹²⁹ In her interpretation, it was a culture of masks and shadows, bereft of the weight of full flesh, an age of dolls and mannequins. “The original was spiritually alien” to it, while “the cast, or the mold, was another matter,” since it represented a “ghost who only gives a hint of authenticity, it forces one to look through, mentally recovering one’s sight and restoring the truth.” Stylization and the denial of materiality represented quintessential principles at the turn of the century, symbolizing the departure from realism.¹³⁰

This interpretation highlights only one of many aspects of fin de siècle culture, while also muting the significant discontent that Tsvetaev’s creation evoked. I would argue that “modernism”—if one can consider it as a more or less homogeneous cultural phenomenon—could not have formed a single attitude toward authenticity and copies. Tsvetaev planned to extend his collection of casts by adding models of modern sculptural masterpieces, including the works of Auguste Rodin. Perhaps he knew or intuited that Rodin’s works were intended for reproduction.¹³¹ Rosalind Krauss has claimed that for Rodin, the concept of an “authentic bronze cast” made as little sense as the authentic print for photographers.¹³² And yet, Rodin himself “invited” the development of the “cult of originality” by courting perceptions “of himself as form giver, creator, crucible of originality.”¹³³ Krauss asserts that modernism created the discourse of originality that permeated all spheres of the artistic world; it could generate an illusion of spontaneity even where spontaneity was absent. We can rephrase this dictum and suggest that originality and authenticity could take many shapes: as the authenticity of form, impression, material, and so on. In this sense, Tsvetaev’s project was in tune with

¹²⁸ Igor Grabar, in his letter to Alexander Benois, commented on the snobbism of intelligentsia, as quoted in Kagan, *I. V. Tsvetaev*, 129.

¹²⁹ *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum erbauen*, 73.

¹³⁰ *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum erbauen*, 74–75.

¹³¹ It is also possible that Tsvetaev picked up the idea from Georg Treu, who had collected the plaster casts of Rodin’s sculpture at Albertinum. Claude Keishe, “Georg Treu und Rodin,” in *Das Albertinum vor 100 Jahren—die Skulpturensammlung Georg Treu*, 218–27.

¹³² Rosalind Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition,” *October* 18 (1981): 49.

¹³³ Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde.”

some modernist trends, while remaining utterly conservative in terms of its goals and implications.

Contemporary artists did not recognize in this museum the signs of modernism or an attempt to subvert the traditional standards and practices of displaying art. Plaster casts embodied the embarrassment of technical imitation, the antipode of spontaneous creativity. Plaster, also used to make death masks, evoked very strong, even eerie connotations.¹³⁴ (As Tsvetaev himself reported, one “simple woman” (*prostoliudinka*) exclaimed upon entering the museum hall, “It’s so scary! There are so many corpses!”)¹³⁵ At the same time, the Darwinian rigor of Tsvetaev’s collection, which was meant to stress the evolution of artistic forms, made it remarkably similar to zoological museums, which pursued the goals of authenticity in taxidermy.¹³⁶ Paradoxically, the scientism of Tsvetaev’s project failed to clothe it with the aura of modernity.

What could have been done instead? This question emerged in all assessments of the new museum, critical as well as sympathetic. Artists lamented that millions of rubles went into the construction of a museum of casts, while the works of contemporary masters, in the absence of a special museum of modern art, remained scattered among private galleries.¹³⁷ Would it have been possible to spend the funds Tsvetaev raised on the purchase of fewer original works of art? As Muratov suggested, could the museum space instead have featured the antiquities of Southern Russia, which went “straight to the curiosity shops of foreign antiquarians” rather than being sent to national museums?¹³⁸ Could the galleries have proudly displayed masterpieces of Russian art, from medieval icons to contemporary works? Or might the museum have rescued original archaeological artifacts doomed to oblivion in the dark rooms of the Historical Museum? The long list of alternatives to the museum of casts laid bare the variety of cultural projects and the multitude of ways the Russian public thought about art and its role in society.

Let us now come back to the initial question of this article: what does the story of the museum of casts say about Russian politics, attitudes to Europe, and the possibilities for reforms? Tsvetaev’s project is especially interesting because of its ambivalence. Tsvetaev tried to marry positivism and uncertainty (expressed

¹³⁴ Jenifer Presto, “Uncanny Excavations: Khodasevich, Pompeii, and Remains of the Past,” *Russian Review* 74 (2015): 278.

¹³⁵ Liudmia Akimova, “Drezdednskii Albertinum i ego moskovskii ‘syn,’” in *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum erbauen*, 77, n. 34.

¹³⁶ Along with taxidermy, a practice developed of making “authentic” models of animals. See Michael Rossi, “Fabricating Authenticity: Modeling a Whale at the American Museum of Natural History, 1906–1974,” *Isis* 101, no. 2 (June 2010): 338–61.

¹³⁷ Mikhail Larionov, interview with *Golos Moskvy*, June 3, 1912, accessed in Museum of Fine Arts, Archive, f. 5, op. 13, d. 1b, l. 13ob.

¹³⁸ Pavel Muratov, “Muzei Iziashchnykh Iskusstv v Moskve,” *Apollon*, no. 9 (1912).

in his denial of the possibility of distinguishing originals from fakes), technical reproduction and the uniqueness of copies, cosmopolitanism and nationalism. His desire to reinvent the standards of value by replacing historical authenticity with mathematically precise forms was essentially new and modern, even in comparison to its European predecessors. As we have seen, in the dispute between the upholders of beauty—regardless of its youth or antiquity—and authenticity, Tsvetaev took the side of the revisionists, who criticized the worship of originals. The decision to display copies made a powerful statement against individualism (masterpieces gathered in one room had to mute their claims for uniqueness¹³⁹) and, in this sense, Tsvetaev's project aligned with certain contemporary artistic ideals.¹⁴⁰ The new idea required, however, the construction of a museum of a new type, as it presupposed new canons and a new architectural environment, perhaps even a different, experimental treatment of objects.¹⁴¹ Yet Tsvetaev coupled the modern idea of reproduction with a conservative pedagogical paradigm, essentially destroying the creative and experimental potential of his project. For Russian society, fixated on the problem of national character and the roles of West and East in the making of modern Russia, the import of imitations might have seemed unsatisfactory: it did not explain anything, and it offered neither a model for emulation nor a point of comparison. More importantly, a modern museum would have needed different political patrons. The alliance with the autocracy and its populist projects imposed very particular standards of size, wealth, and decor; it even shook Tsvetaev's belief in the self-sufficiency of copies. The stylistic discrepancies among the modern ideas of reproduction, nationalism, imperial entourage, and populist intentions left an impression of tastelessness and artificial assemblage.

Tsvetaev's project thus perfectly reflects the intellectual, cultural, and political status of prerevolutionary Russia—a country that was engaged in processes of modernity and modernism and yet remained deeply traditional and premodern in many respects. The Russian elites' obsession with catching up with other countries was combined with the sense of Russia's distinctiveness and superiority, producing a peculiar example of what historians have called “uneven modernity.”¹⁴² Imitation represented the key method of transformation, yet while bor-

¹³⁹ V. [Wilhelm] Klein, *O zadachakh muzeia slepkov* (Moscow, 1916), 27. Originally published in German in 1912 as *Die Aufgaben unserer Gipsabguss-Sammlungen*.

¹⁴⁰ See Pravilova, *A Public Empire*, chap. 5.

¹⁴¹ Klein, *O zadachakh muzeia slepkov*, 32.

¹⁴² I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for highlighting the importance of this case for the discussion of “uneven” and “entangled” modernity. For more on the historiographical debates on this subject, see Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Ongoing Debates in Russian and Soviet History,” in *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, 2015).

rowing some models (often not the most recent ones) from the West, Russian rulers and cultural reformers also tried to surpass and transform the original templates and thereby distance themselves from the rest of the world. Like the rulers who patronized the foundation of the museum, Tsvetaev tried to overcome Russia's backwardness with the help of the most advanced technologies and the grandeur of his collection, but in the end the museum looked like a belated response to a nineteenth-century European fashion.