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THE EARLY TCHELITCHEW

BERLIN...1923

In December of 1922 I arrived in Berlin, Germany, to rejoin a friend George Antheil and to further pursue my music studies. A letter of introduction to a young Russian stage designer who was working there with considerable success, initiated an acquaintance that eventually ripened into friendship. And as living conditions in the German city were becoming more difficult, we resolved to go to Paris and look things over, while at the same time attending the June Season of the Ballets Russes. My friend Pavel Tchelitchev hoped also to renew acquaintance with Sergei Diaghileff who had seen his work, expressed interest and held out promise of a ballet, should the painter show the progress expected of him. He had also strongly advised Tchelitchev to come to Paris, where he would find the highest incentive towards artistic development...." a spiritual shower bath!" had exclaimed the fabled Impresario. Having discerned the magic of Paris, and of one of its preeminent magicians Diaghileff, we concluded that good fortune was indeed guiding Tchelitchev into the path of progress; accordingly, we returned to Germany, packed our trunks and said good-bye to F.W.Murnau and other German friends, and were soon on our way again towards France.

From this Berlin period, a large brush and pen portrait-sketch done in the summer of 1924, in which the painter's sharp brisk drawing and broad conception are apparent, is fortunately present in this Exhibition.

PARIS...1923-24

Paris did not fail to bestow upon Tchelitchev its special and diverse gifts so vital to the refining-process. Losing no time, he plunged into the hard-routine of daily study in the Academies, expanding his knowledge of the human form. Sketching and drawing not only there but everywhere, anything anywhere, the scratch of his pen on the pad was endless. It was a kind of "aesthetic novitiate" in terms of an almost Spartan rigor. Soon the evolving artist broke the cocoon, emerged and stepped out into an angle of new vision. "I am ready to paint your portrait!" he exclaimed suddenly one day. And so this became the portrait, his first "Parisian" portrait in oil, in a palette startlingly restricted to black white and red that was to make his colleagues the future Neo-Romantics gasp and start a

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revolution in color, by pursuing this newly-evolved ratio in simplicity. Shortly afterwards Miss Jane Heap of "The Little Review" brought Miss Gertrude Stein to see his work. And, without further ado, there soon was a party at 27 rue de Fleurus at which Miss Stein, secretly and mischievously exultant, bantered her guests most of them famous painters, with the astonishing sight of monochromatic multiple-image portraits hanging upon those walls where, until then, only Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse and Gris had dared to hang!

By now Tchelitchew's output had become large and varied, his creative energy spurred on by new freedom and great innovative curiosity, served by an acute and restless imagination. A large portrait in tempera done in the Fall of 1925, solidly drawn and composed, reveals in gentle beiges browns and burnt-orange an inner concentration of the sitter in rather autumnal mood. From a weekend in Mme. Schiaparelli's house in the Vallee de la Chevreuse came a delicate nacreous pastel of the room in which he slept and worked. A poster, a rare indulgence of his, sketched in roll-licking fashion as a "Bon Voyage valentine" for Miss Heap and undelivered because of her cancelled departure, shows her three friends Tchelitchew Antheil and Tanner saluting her as "Gay Hussars", The musical fanfare is in Antheil's hand. A short sojourn to the Cotes du Nord, Brittany in the late Spring of 1925 suggested a landscape in tempera on black paper depicting with vigorous brush-strokes and sashing color, the quaintly tottering aspect of that countryside. In Fontainebleau, 1925, he had already captured on brown paper the true Isle de France with its rambling roads, hobbled walls and evanescent clouds. An india-ink sketch Paris 1927 is perhaps a rather unique example of a moment when, hardly aware, one's musical activity was seized and perpetuated by the artists eager hand. In 1929 there were brush-drawings portraying peoples' dramatic moods; and sketches of friends reading while the painter summons up additionally the head of a friend Mrs. Mary Widney.

GUERMANTES...1927

With the inescapable fatigue of Winters in Paris, Tchelitchew began to long for a place in the country... "a miniature Doubrovka" (his Father's

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estate in southern Russia) where he could work and live close to the peasantry and Nature. A friend, Mrs. Ford Madox Ford made this a reality by offering two adjoining houses completely furnished, with garden and orchard, if only we would rent it off her hands. In the summer of 1927 we settled into a hamlet called Guermantes, Seine et Marne, thirty-eight kilometers out of Paris, where we remained until 1934, the year of our departure for America. While not the Guermantes of Proust....it was a delightful countryside rolling and verdant, where we followed gratefully Miss Stein's favorite prescription for bucolic beatitude: "sitting serenely in the landscape".

From Guermantes we see in the collection shown here: friends, peasants, large straw hats like inverted Chinese rice-bowls, trees, flowers (his own which he raised with enthusiasm) people lying in a brightly-colored hammock or reading in shadowy studio-corners; a musician's piano-playing hands fluttering like birds (a device afterwards resorted to in his ballet "St. Francis")..... anyone mending, sewing, sleeping or talking. All this was subject-matter to Tchelitchev and in all mediums except perhaps oil, much of which he reserved for the more temperate light of the Parisian Winter. Here in Guermantes was begun also an aesthetic procedure he developed and expanded with rich imagination and invention: a curious harmony and rapport within the anomalous. And from which the path towards the tropne-l'oeil and metamorphic composition was but a direct and logical one.

"ODE"...PARIS, 1928

The fulfillment of Diaghileff's promise! A ballet so revolutionary that it still seems far beyond its time! And it was created almost entirely by on-site planning and discussion! At that time Tchelitchev was fascinated by the idea of the duality of objects in light by their shadow, and accordingly man and his shadow was expanded into ideas incorporated into "ODE", of which the drawing shown here is an excellent example.

LONDON....1929-32

His artistic maturity and continental renown at a peak, Tchelitchev's

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activities were to expand further, into a wider range of international interest. This was made no less expeditious by the appearance in his life of a majestic figure of a woman, one of England's best poets, and surely one of its best friends! Her name was Edith Sitwell. With a striking resemblance to portraits of Elizabeth the first, and with Plantagenet blood in her own veins, she took up the cudgels of great blood and noble spirit and did battle for the cause of his work, as Elizabeth had once battled for England! And she helped him win artistic victories as thorough as those the formidable Queen had enjoyed over the vanquished Armada! Her fiery altruism helped hasten the higher ascent of the painters star towards the firmament which awaited it and to which genius had destined it. Such ideal friendship brought a moral sustenance that bred not only hope, but helped secure also the inevitability of the rewards. These came increasingly in the form of commissions for important portraits and invitations to exhibit in the greatest Galleries of London, many works created concurrently with those to be seen in the present Exhibition.

From the year 1930 the panel of a reclining nude is of the "red series" of "La Loge" , The closely contrasted hues of reds, strong and often dark as well, held for Tchelitchev great potency for the expression of dramatic mood and atmosphere. Two reclining nudes, one in sepia, the other aquarelle, are the inception of what became a long preoccupation with fore-shortened perspective, while the ink sketch of "Man reading" is the more primary aspect of close perspective.

ALLEN TANNER

NEW YORK, 1963