

The Pilgrim's Almanac: Russians in New York 1925-1926

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Introduction

After the Russian revolution Russian art was introduced to America by Christian Brinton. It is difficult to overrate his influence in this matter. Boris Anisfeld (1918), Nicholas Roerich (1920), Ilya Repin (1921), Natalya Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov (1922), Boris Grigoriev, Savely Sorin and Seraphim Sudbinin (1923), to name a few, all were first introduced to the American public in exhibitions organized by Brinton.¹ In 1923 it was also Brinton who, together with William Fox, director of the Brooklyn Museum, organized the Russian Art exhibition. Robert C. Williams was the first to open this chapter for research in 1980.² More recently an increase of attention is paid to this important American promoter of Russian art.³ This paper will deal with an aspect of Russian art in America in which Brinton had no involvement though, an aspect which until recently did not get any attention in literature.⁴

In 1923 around the American artist Robert W. Chanler (1872-1930), descendant of a wealthy family, gathered a group of young artists. In this group mainly artists of Russian origin were united. Included were Constantin Aladjalov (1900-1987), Vladimir Bobritsky (1898-1986), and Nikolai Cickovsky (1894-1984), but also the somewhat older David Buriuk (1882-1967). Their first co-operation was the performance of a play entitled *The Skygirl, a mimodrama in three acts on a star with prologue and epilogue on Earth, 3 scenes on a star*, written by the Russian (Latvian) émigré and (eclectic) writer Ivan Narodny (1870-1953). On July 8, 1923 the play in fact was performed by the American and Russian artists who also designed the scenery and costumes. David Burliuk, who designed the first scene, played the part of Luna. Vladimir Bobritsky, who designed some of the costumes, had the part of Chronos. *The New York Herald* ran an extensive review of the performance the following day.⁵ The magazine *Musical America* favourably reviewed it a week later.⁶ The play, a monodrama in the tradition of Evreinoff, was not available in print at the time. Only two years later, in September 1925, it appeared as a book, after it had been published in parts in *The Pilgrims Almanach* earlier that year.⁷

The Contents

In the tradition of the famous American magazine *Broom* (published by Harold Loeb in Rome and Berlin, 1921-1924) the "bohemian magazine" *The Pilgrims Almanach* was set up as a private enterprise by Narodny, backed by Chanler's fortune.⁸ Only five issues were published even though, from the second issue onward, it was announced as a series of 12 at the price

of \$1 per issue or \$10 for the series of twelve. Among the contributing artists were Aladjalov, Bobritsky, Burluik and Cickovsky who had worked with Narodny on the performance of his play *The Skygirl* in 1923 (for a full listing of the content of all issues published see Appendix II for the texts and Appendix III for the illustrations). Robert W. Chanler, David Burluik and John D. Williams were in changing combinations mentioned as co-editors, next to Ivan Narodny. The magazine, however, was mainly Narodny's effort. His eclecticism can well be seen in the contents of this journal. The first three issues, all published in 1925, mainly focussed on the publication of his play *The Skygirl*.

The first issue, with a reproduction of a work by Chanler on the cover, opened with a programmatic text by Narodny explaining what the journal was all about. This was followed another text by his hand. If this was not enough, almost half of the issue was dedicated to the prologue of *The Skygirl*, including two plates by Burluik. Only two entries of poetry were not written by Narodny but by the American author of fantastic fiction and one of the best paid journalists of his time Abraham Merrit (1884-1943) and by Harold S. Spencer. Next to Burluik illustrations by Soudeikine, Cikovsky, and the Americans Chanler and Louis Eilshemius (1864-1941), were included.

The second issue was less of a one-man-show. At least, the name of Narodny appeared less frequently. Whether texts were written under aliases such as Dr. Sorcebus or Jenghis Khan remains a question for further research, but for sure neither Harold S. Spencer nor later co-editor John D. Williams are one of them. Other artists contributing illustrations were the same as in the first issue, apart from Eilshemius who was replaced by Aladjalov. The cover was a special design by Soudeikine, similar to the designs he made for Balieff's *Chauve Souris* programs. In the issue again attention is focussed on *The Skygirl*, which was going to be published "*In four instalments: The Prologue was published in Volume I; Act II will be published in the next issue; Act III and the Epilogue in the Fourth*".⁹

Despite this announcement the last parts of the play: Acts II and III as well as the Epilogue were published in the third issue. Even though this meant over fifty pages were dedicated to the play it again was a varied issue with contributions by both Americans and Russians, including texts by Harold S. Spencer, Nicolas Roerich (1874-1947) and poetry by the English poet and actress Iris Tree (1897–1968) and the journalist and author Benjamin de Casseres (1873-1945). The cover is a design by Bobritsky, influenced both by Art Deco and elements of linear Constructivism.

Bobritsky also designed the cover for the fourth issue, published in 1926. This design is more reminiscent of the illustrations by Frans Masereel. In it can be found some new futuristic tales written by Narodny. More important is the inclusion of a brief report by Katherine Dreier (1877-1952) on the activities of the *Société Anonyme* as it connects the artists of the *Artel*

with the Museum of Modern Art, Inc. At that time Dreier was putting on a show of modern art as part of the Sesqui-Centennial exhibition in Philadelphia for which she published, together with Christian Brinton, a booklet with a cover design by Aladjalov. Later that year, in November-December 1926, she would organize the famous exhibition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum, with its monumental accompanying book again designed by Aladjalov. The fifth and final issue, with a cover by Donald Corley, presented the artists as the Artel of Arts (artel khudozhnikov) with a new programmatic text. Despite it being the final issue the Artel's program for the 1926-1927 season was included.

Conclusion

The Pilgrims Almanach is a printed memory of the activities of artists involved in Robert W. Chanlers circle. It shows the acquaintances of these artists with some of the modern trends in American art. In the research of Russian artists in America it must not be overlooked as some of the foremost representatives briefly or over a longer period contributed to the periodical. Among the other contributors of illustrations can be found Russian artists such as Constantin Aladjalov, Vladimir Bobritsky, David Burluk, Nikolai Cickovsky, and Serge Soudeikine. Also works of Boris Aronson, Serge Konenkov, and Nikolai Roerich are depicted. Most of these artists arrived in New York in the period 1922-1923.¹⁰ It shows how such a circle coinciding with other circles (Christian Brinton, Katherine Dreier) made it possible for Russian artists to get involved in the American art world and art market.

Complete Index of Texts published in *The Pilgrims Almanach 1925-1926*

Author	Title	Volume, Page(s)
[-]	Art, Stage and Altar	Vol. IV, pp. 3-10
[-]	Benjamin de Casseres	Vol. III, p. 92
[-]	David Burliuk	Vol. III, p. 91
[-]	Fornaro	Vol. III, p. 91
[-]	Harold Sherwood Spencer	Vol. III, p. 92
[-]	Life on trial	Vol. III, pp. 3-13
[-]	Manifesto	Vol. II, pp. 3-4
[-]	The Artel of Arts	Vol. IV, pp. 30-40
[-]	The Artel of Arts	Vol. V, pp. 7-14
[-]	The Pilgrim Players	Vol. V, pp. 41-42
[-]	The Success Machine	Vol. II, p. 6
Benjamin de Casseres	Sea Mania	Vol. III, p. 37
Robert W. Chanler	The Contributor's Morgue	Vol. III, pp. 89-90
Katherine Dreier	The Societe Anonyme	Vol. IV, pp. 24-29
Nicholas Evreinov	To my God - Theatrarch	Vol. V, pp. 17-18
Clifton Joseph Furness	The Lost Land	Vol. V, pp. 19-29
Frances R. Grant	Roerich Goes Eastward	Vol. IV, pp. 10-17
Jenghis Khan jr.	The song of the Wheel	Vol. II, p. 16
A. Merritt	Madonna	Vol. I, pp. 17-18
Ivan Narodny	068G A Timeland Tale	Vol. IV, pp. 41-46
Ivan Narodny	Among ourselves	Vol. I, pp. 6-9
Ivan Narodny	Lenine and Wilson	Vol. IV, pp. 47-51
Ivan Narodny	On Staging the Astral Acts	Vol. II, pp. 26-29
Ivan Narodny	The Crucified New Yorker	Vol. IV, pp. 18-23
Ivan Narodny	The Key of Time	Vol. V, pp. 43-48
Ivan Narodny	The Revolt of Man against Machine	Vol. V, pp. 30-38
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl	Vol. II, p. 25
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl ¹¹	Vol. III, p. 38
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl - Act I	Vol. II, pp. 29-48
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl - Act II	Vol. III, pp. 39-62
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl - Act III	Vol. III, pp. 62-85
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl - Epilogue	Vol. III, pp. 85-88
Ivan Narodny	The Skygirl - Prologue	Vol. I, pp. 20-37
Ivan Narodny	What is it all about	Vol. I, pp. 3-5
P.	The Russians of Themselves	Vol. I, pp. 9-14
Dr. Paracelsus	An Open Letter to Myself	Vol. V, pp. 3-4
Nicholas Roerich	Praise to the enemies	Vol. III, pp. 26-28
Dr. I. Sorcebus	The curse of Reason	Vol. II, pp. 19-24
Harold S. Spencer	"In Excelsis"	Vol. I, pp. 38-40
Harold S. Spencer	Gobineau, Pilgrim and Prophet	Vol. II, p. 5
Harold S. Spencer	Nicolson's Verlaine	Vol. III, pp. 15-25
Arthur Symons	An Adventure in Images	Vol. IV, p. 29
Iris Tree	Changing Mirrors	Vol. III, p. 31
John D. Williams	The Con-Cave Woman	Vol. III, pp. 33-34
John D. Williams	When Celt meets Celt	Vol. II, pp. 9-15

Complete Index of Illustrations published in *The Pilgrims Almanach 1925-1926*

Artist	Title	Volume, Page
[Photograph]	Nicholas Roerich and his Son	Vol. IV, p. 11
[Photograph]	The Hand of Dr. William Mc-Dowell	Vol. V, p. 45
[Photograph]	The Legend of Life	Vol. II, p. 21
Constantine Aladjalov	The City Spook	Vol. IV, p. 43
Constantine Aladjalov	The Oil Game	Vol. II, p. 43
Boris Aronson	The Highway of Life	Vol. I, p. 15
Vladimir Bobritsky	Cover No.3	Vol. III, Cover
Vladimir Bobritsky	Cover No.4	Vol. IV, Cover
Vladimir Bobritsky	Paracelsus in "The Skygirl"	Vol. III, p. 73
Vladimir Bobritsky	The Crucified New Yorker	Vol. IV, p. 19
Vladimir Bobritsky	The Poet in "The Skygirl"	Vol. III, p. 51
Vladimir Bobritsky	The Success Machine	Vol. II, p. 7
David Burliuk	"The Skygirl" - Act I	Vol. II, p. 27
David Burliuk	"The Skygirl" Act II	Vol. III, p. 41
David Burliuk	Back-cover No.3	Vol. III, Cover
David Burliuk	Chronos in "The Skygirl"	Vol. I, p. 27
David Burliuk	Chronos in "The Skygirl" ¹²	Vol. III, p. 83
David Burliuk	Dr. Deimos in "The Skygirl"	Vol. I, p. 23
David Burliuk	Dr. Phoebos in "The Skygirl"	Vol. II, p. 33
David Burliuk	Helia in "The Skygirl"	Vol. III, p. 57
David Burliuk	Japanese Temple	Vol. III, p. 25
David Burliuk	Portrait of Ivan Narodny & his other Selves	Vol. V, p. 39
David Burliuk	Sketch	Vol. III, p. 13
David Burliuk	Tellusia in "The Skygirl"	Vol. III, p. 63
David Burliuk	The Gentlemen of the Coming Civilization	Vol. V, p. 31
David Burliuk	The Jinrichsha	Vol. III, p. 34
David Burliuk	The Radio Storm	Vol. IV, p. 25
David Burliuk	The song of the Wheel	Vol. II, p. 17
David Burliuk	Time and Destiny	Vol. III, p. 2
David Burliuk	Verlaine	Vol. III, p. 14
Robert W. Chanler	[Decoration] ¹³	Vol. III, p. 90
Robert W. Chanler	[end-piece]	Vol. II, p. 15
Robert W. Chanler	[end-piece]	Vol. II, p. 48
Robert W. Chanler	Back-cover No.2	Vol. II, Cover
Robert W. Chanler	Cover No.1	Vol. I, Cover
Robert W. Chanler	Leopold Stokowski	Vol. II, p. 11
Robert W. Chanler	The Con-Cave Woman	Vol. III, p. 35
Robert W. Chanler	The Dance of Life	Vol. V, p. 2
Robert W. Chanler	The Hetaira	Vol. III, p. 7
Robert W. Chanler	The Humoresque	Vol. IV, p. 49
Robert W. Chanler	The Knight of the Turnip	Vol. I, p. 7
Robert W. Chanler	The Knight of the Turnip ¹⁴	Vol. III, p. 23
Robert W. Chanler	The Phantasmogoria	Vol. IV, p. 5
Nikolai Cickovsky	Art, Stage and Altar	Vol. IV, p. 8
Nikolai Cickovsky	Jazz Band	Vol. I, p. 31
Nikolai Cickovsky	The Dawn of a New Civilization	Vol. V, p. 11
Nikolai Cickovsky	The Scenery for Music etc.	Vol. IV, p. 2
Nikolai Cickovsky	The Scenery of "The Pyramid"	Vol. IV, p. 37
Donald Corley	[end piece]	Vol. V, p. 48
Donald Corley	Cover No.5	Vol. V, Cover
Donald Corley	Sonnet Making	Vol. V, p. 5
Donald Corley	The Lost Land	Vol. V, p. 21

Donald Corley	The Tower of Ivory	Vol. V, p. 15
Louis M. Eilshemius	Reverie	Vol. I, p. 14
Fornaro	[Benjamin de Casseres]	Vol. III, p. 92
Fornaro	[David Burliuk]	Vol. III, p. 91
Fornaro	[Harold Sherwood Spencer]	Vol. III, p. 92
Fornaro	Wohlheim	Vol. III, p. 32
Frueh	[Fornaro]	Vol. III, p. 91
Serge Konenkov	The Sylvian Tramp	Vol. IV, p. 31
Guy Père du Bois	Robert W. Chanler	Vol. III, p. 89
Nicholas Roerich	The King of the World	Vol. III, p. 29
Serge Soudeikine	Cover No.2	Vol. II, Cover
Serge Soudeikine	The Hours	Vol. III, p. 17
Serge Soudeikine	The Kiss	Vol. II, p. 1
Serge Soudeikine	The Money-Made	Vol. I, p. 19
Nicholas Vassilieff	The Modern Icon	Vol. IV, p. 15

Notes

¹ *The Boris Anisfeld Exhibition*, New York: Redfield-Kendrick-Odell, 1918; *The Nicolas Roerich Exhibition*, New York: Redfield-Kendrick-Odell, 1918; *The Ilya Repin Exhibition*, New York: The Kingore Gallery, 1921; *The Goncharova-Larionov Exhibition*, New York: The Kingore Gallery, 1922; *Paintings & Drawings by Boris Grigoriev*, New York: The New Gallery, 1923; Exhibition of Portraits by Savely Sorin, New York: Knoedler, 1923; *Seraphim Sudbinin*, New York: The Kingore Gallery, 1923.

² Robert C. Williams, *Russian Art and American Money 1900-1940*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

³ Marie Turbow Lampard, 'Russian Artists in New York', in: Marie Turbow Lampard, John E. Bowlt, Wendy R. Salmond (eds.), *The Uncommon Vision of Sergei Konenkov 1874-1971. A Russian Sculptor and his Times*, New Brunswick NJ and London: Rutgers University Press / The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 2001, pp. 161-171; Tamara Galeeva presented a paper on the subject during the "Boris Grigoriev"-conference held in Moscow, 1-2 November 2006.

⁴ Albert Lemmens, Serge-Aljosja Stommels, *Russian Book Art 1904-2005*, Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2005, Cat. 107, p. 150.

⁵ Cited in: Ivan Narodny, *The Skygirl, a mimodrama in three acts on a star with prologue and epilogue on Earth*, New York: The Britons, s.a. [1925].

⁶ A. H., 'Narodny's 'Skygirl' proves a colorful fantasy', in: *Musical America* (July 14, 1923), p. 5.

⁷ Narodny published 14 designs and drawings in the book, all by Russian artists even though American artists had contributed to the original play as well. In *The Pilgrims Almanach* only 9 different designs by Burliuk and Bobritsky were published (see: Appendix III):

-*The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol.I:

1. D. Burliuk: *Dr. Deimos* in "the Skygirl";

2. D. Burliuk: *Chronos* in "The Skygirl" (1923)

-*The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol.II:

3. D. Burliuk: "The Skygirl" – Act I.;

4. D. Burliuk: *Doctor Phoebos* in "The Skygirl" (1922)

-*The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol.III:

5. David Burliuk: "The Skygirl" – Act II.

6. Vladimir Bobritsky: *The Poet* in "The Skygirl"

7. David Burliuk: *Helia* in "The Skygirl" (1925)

8. Vladimir Bobritsky: *Telluria* in "The Skygirl"

9. Vladimir Bobritsky: *Paracelsus* in "The Skygirl"

2. David Burliuk: *Chronos* in "The Skygirl" (1923)

⁸ As can be read in the dedication on the cover of issue No.4 in the LS collection, Nijmegen: “Mr & Mrs. W.B. Nauts, w. compliments I. Narodny, former editor of this N.Y. Bohemian mag.”

⁹ See: *The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol. 2, p. 25.

¹⁰ David Burluk and Serge Soudeikine arrived in New York in September 1922, Vladimir Bobritsky in January 1923, Constantin Aladjalov and Nikolai Cickovsky both in 1923.

¹¹ List of characters of the play “The Skygirl” the same as published in: *The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol. II, p.25.

¹² The same picture as published in: *The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol. I, p. 27.

¹³ The same picture as published on the Back-cover of issue No.2: *The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol. II, Cover.

¹⁴ The same picture as published in: *The Pilgrims Almanach* Vol. I, p. 7.