

the crowd. He recorded many sequences of pioneers, sports, parades, extreme viewpoints, building projects, street life, architecture, and industry.

Glebova maintains exquisite control in her analysis of Rodchenko's achievements using various techniques psychologically, in terms of persuasion, and in the materialist world of collective life. In this way his photography of the Vladimir Shchusev Radio tower in Moscow was promoted as an imagery of electrical, engineering, military, and police power.

Glebova's book is precisely argued and unique in its properties. Rodchenko was the leading portrait photographer of many important figures in Soviet culture, including Vladimir Maiakovskii and the theatre director Vsevolod Meierhol'd. After the death of Lenin in 1924, his image became multiplied in repeated devotional images. Devotion to Lenin was sustained by Stalin, to preserve the cult. In 1925 Rodchenko commemorated the image of Lenin, set up in Konstantin Mel'nikov's red *Workers' Club* erected in Paris.

For most of their career, Varvara Stepanova and Rodchenko lived and worked in the *Vkhutemas* [the Higher Technical Studios] in Moscow while their works could be seen in book stands, on stage, in standard clothing, in exhibitions, and many other outlets. Rodchenko remained highly visible. Alongside these photomontages, dynamic lettering, posters, periodicals, and mechanistic constructions embodied the power of political mass movements. Looking down from the studio and living space, an intense concentration recorded photographs of *Looking Down into the Courtyard* and *Gathering for a Demonstration*.

Demands in the State Publishing Houses for serial snapshots, fragments of observation, and images of industrialization served to accelerate further Stalin's first Five-Year Plan. Later, large government sponsored albums were devoted to Stalin's achievement in creating canals in the *White Sea and Baltic Sea*, built with slave and prison labor. It was among the first prison camps photographed in December 1933. While Rodchenko survived the commission, the White Sea canal proved fatal to 175,000 prisoners and 25,000 workers.

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Nicholas Roerich: The Artist who would be King. By John McCannon. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022. ix, 616 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Plates. \$50.00, hard bound.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.77

It takes stamina to navigate the reams of records that capture a career ranging from bust-ups with members of the Ballets Russes to suspicions of espionage and expeditions by horse and yak through China, Mongolia, and Tibet. Equally challenging is the need to parse the pantheistic mysticism that became a lodestar of Nicholas Roerich's life. John McCannon is more than up to the task, devoting some twenty years to dispel the myths (often self-generated) that accrue to this indefatigable, contradictory, shape-shifting artist, and produce a meticulously evidenced narrative that will be hard to dethrone as the definite account.

The structure of this leviathan endeavor is dictated by the historical record. Sparse information dictates just nine pages on Roerich's first nineteen years. Yet the chapters that follow each cover at most eight years of his life and at times dissect with forensic precision the events that unfold in as few as two. The density of detail would threaten to overwhelm were it not for McCannon's eye for the enlivening moment. We read of

Sergei Diaghilev squeezing into Konstantin Korovin's tuxedo jacket when unexpectedly obliged to greet the tsar; of Marc Chagall groveling for Roerich's support to avoid military conscription despite lambasting his obliging teacher's "unreadable poems" and "mechanical" smiles (104). We appreciate Tamara Karsavina's description of Roerich as "a prophet of impeded speech" (122), and McCannon's own assessment of "interwar America's bottomless thirst for exotic-seeming profundities unmoored from traditional dogmas" (218) that led moneyed disciples to offer the Russian artist their credulous support. When Roerich suggested that he place a holy casket of Indian soil in Lenin's mausoleum in 1926, McCannon dryly observes that "the Central Committee opted to leave their leader's rest undisturbed" (304).

If this wry commentary keeps the pages turning, McCannon does not shy away from more unpalatable behaviors: Roerich's casual antisemitic language, willful ignorance of political repression, and early condescension of women (an attitude that his forceful, occultist wife Helena, fount of "the family's most outsized ambitions" (81), would soon dispel). Worse still is the couple's imperialist conviction that, with their heightened sensibility to Buddhist doctrine, they could rally the people of Asia to a pan-Buddhist union and instruct them in their own religions. Such was Roerich's determination to prove his Eurasian significance that, when sitting for a portrait by Aleksandr Golovin, he urged the artist to bring anything Asiatic about his appearance to the fore.

For all this self-promotion, one cannot deny the scale of Roerich's endeavors and the impression these made. A drop curtain he designed for a Diaghilev ballet had to be raised and lowered twelve times before an enraptured Parisian audience quelled their applause. Two thousand people visited his inaugural American exhibition, on Fifth Avenue in New York, during its first two days alone (the exhibition then crossed the continent). Underappreciated achievements are redressed as well, as in McCannon's measured case to recognize Roerich as a co-creator of *The Rite of Spring*, rather than its librettist and scenarist alone.

Most incredible of all, the couple's peripatetic, émigré existence in western Europe, the US, and Asia is their 34-month, 8,000-mile expedition that extended through Ladakh, Chinese Turkestan, Mongolia, Siberia, and Tibet. Roerich's less-than-candid submissions to various authorities and a lack of communication between them enabled an unscheduled detour to Moscow, where he and Helena argued for a syncretism between Buddhist values and communist ideology that would realign Asiatic geopolitics in favor of the USSR. Suchchutzpah is all the more remarkable for the fact that Roerich had earlier deemed Bolshevism "the impertinent monster that lies to humankind" (199), published a manifesto against Lenin called "Violators of Art," and been citizen-less since emigrating in 1918, holding only a French passport that had been issued for travel alone.

Perhaps inevitably in a book of this scope, there is the occasional misstep. In an informative chapter on Roerich's time at St. Petersburg's Academy of Arts, McCannon confuses its fourteen secessionists in 1863 with the Peredvizhniki who formed seven years later, rehearsing a narrative of seamless succession that suited Soviet-era accounts but has long been overturned. The emphasis on their civic activism is likewise overstated and illuminated with reference to Il'ia Repin's *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, despite the fact that this was commissioned by the tsar's son and completed five years before Repin joined the Peredvizhniki. The painterly qualities of Roerich's art are almost entirely neglected in favor of iconographical readings, and this history of visual intrigue is served by just forty images clustered in three groups. Roerich is nonetheless here finally granted a biography whose ambitions match his own.

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