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Curating Russia: The Shchukin Collection, The Nation, and Border Crossing Across Regimes

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Abstract

Russia's place in the world endured dramatic shocks over transitions between tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet regimes. Questions of identity and nation consumed cultural and political elites alike. Art plays a critical role within the state not only for its financial value, but also as a source of power. This article investigates how the Russian Federation employs this artistic cultural heritage through its use and displays of the collection of late tsarist Moscow merchant Sergei Shchukin. These holdings enable the Russian state and cultural leaders to participate in an increasingly globalized art world. Leading Western museums compete to exhibit Henri Matisse's pivotal painting, *Dance*, commissioned by Shchukin and remaining in Russia throughout the tsarist and Soviet periods, ending up in the Hermitage Museum. Throughout Russian and Soviet history, Western European art has served as a cultural legitimizing force that ties both the country and its history to the artistic traditions of the West, which retains a dominant position in the global art world.

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Introduction

Speaking to author Pavel Buryshkin from exile in Paris in the 1930s, Sergei Shchukin relayed "I have not been collecting only for myself and all for myself but also for my country and my nation. Whatever happens in our country, my collection should stay there…" (cited in Boguslavskij 1995, 328). Nation has been invoked across Russian regimes as a critical concept in Russia's self-identity and its global interactions with the West. In recent years, the cultural diplomatic efforts of the Russian Federation have increased, reflecting its desire to showcase its national patrimony and inclusion as a European state. This article traces Henri Matisse's *Dance*, commissioned by Moscow merchant and art collector Sergei Shchukin in 1909. It highlights important themes in Russian art, culture, and transnational relations to understand how the art of one nation can become central to the national patrimony of another.

The arrival of Matisse's canvas in Moscow, with its bright, illuminated nude figures, served to liberate Russian avant-garde artists from the bounds of European convention and tradition, linking their peripheral city to the French artistic core. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, the canvas that marked a turning point in the history of modern art was retained and nationalized by the Soviet state and would, over the course of the twentieth century, be subject to the restrictive legislations of a regime that sought strict control over cultural goods. *Dance*'s movement through the Soviet era nonetheless endowed it with accumulated meaning both in its place and power within a Soviet Russian cultural patrimony. *Dance*'s re-emergence in the West following the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) became a significant global cultural event. Century-long contestations over its presence and place within the Russian national patrimony deepened in the post-Soviet era as challenges were launched against the 1917 nationalization decrees that had inducted *Dance* into both the national heritage and the state's currency reserves.

Art plays a critical role in discourses of national culture. Multiple nations and regimes have staked claims to *Dance* as part of their national patrimony including those of tsarist Russia, the USSR, the Russian Federation, France, and Europe more broadly. Matisse is considered to play a defining role in the course of the history of modern art. *Dance* gained prominence over time as it was subject to the will of the state and was celebrated by educated societies in Russia and abroad and coveted by those who sought to retrieve and view it. As a result of art's ability to cross borders and take residency within national institutions, multiple claims could co-exist as to the place of *Dance* within national patrimonies. From 1991, close to a century after Sergei Shchukin commissioned *Dance* and hung it in the staircase of his Moscow home, the Russian Federation has taken extraordinary measures to protect its prized possession. Whereas Russia recognizes and defends the place of *Dance* within its borders and patrimony, seeking to challenge the power mechanisms of core-peripheral culture relations, Western exhibitions claim it singularly as a product of France, of the West, ignoring its duality and celebrating its return. The relationship between national and transnational emerges as a complicated yet critical pathway to understanding the importance of *Dance* and the complexity of Russian national culture and its place within global pantheons of art.

This article uses *Dance* to support and extend to the present Homi Bhabha's view that "in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit, where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1994, 2). The production and relations of power complicate this transit, with a clear European center that leaves Russia on its artistic margins and a peripheralized national patrimony. Edith Clowes argues that Russian ideas of self and other in the post-Soviet era remain a work in progress. Russians at once consider Russia as a global cultural center but recognize that it is not

seen that way in the West (Clowes 2011). Russian and Soviet views, the Western gaze, and ideas of national patrimony have evolved across time and regimes. Chike C. Aniakor writes that "[a]rt objects are historical documents. They reflect the social and historical conditions of their creation…" (1995, 436). This article argues that the moment of creation is complicated and cannot be seen as stagnant. Aniakor challenges us to consider the intertwined historical, societal, and political context of works of art. This article follows Hannah Barbosa Cesnik in "[r]ecognizing cultural patrimony as active rather than passive opens the possibility of ownership to something beyond constructed national borders but less than a global-free for all" (2021). Finally, I recognize important recent work that places collectors at the center of moving art across borders (Quodbach 2020). This article argues that Sergei Shchukin—even as a collector on the periphery— played a singularly important role in building the patrimonies of Western Europe and Russia as well as propelling Russian art in new directions. These directions continue to gain international recognition nearly a century after Joseph Stalin stopped the innovations of the avant-garde in their tracks.

This article culminates in the 2008 *From Russia: French and Russian Master Paintings* exhibit at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, moving through time and space to see how *Dance* and related works were understood and identified with over a century. An interview conducted with co-curator of *From Russia*, Ann Dumas, offers insight into the legal and cultural environment of the exhibit. This article also uses Hermitage Director Mikhail Piotrovsky's memoir and a work co-authored by Shchukin's grandson, André-Marc Delocque. I seek to determine the value that modern French art has come to develop within the Russian patrimony—how the national and transnational blend and how pre-revolutionary modern art survived multiple controversies to emerge as a strong symbol of Russian heritage.

Collecting the Nation

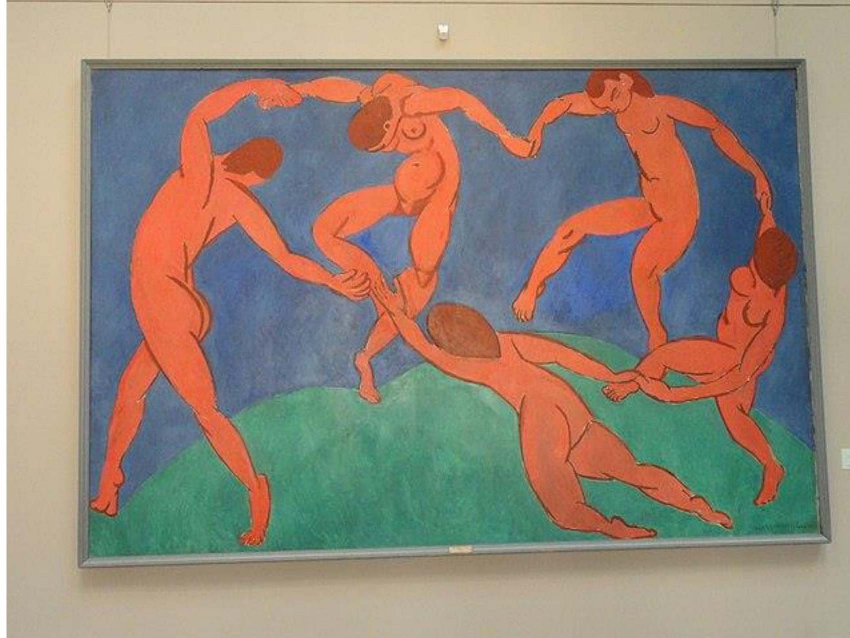
Sergei Shchukin's purchase of a landscape by Claude Monet from French art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel in 1898 marked a "decisive breakthrough in the Russian art world's relationship to modern Western art" (Dorontchenkov 2009, 1). Before this point, Russian artists and collectors had seen Russian art as separate from Europe; now, with Shchukin's purchase and the "drive towards the West" of Sergei Diaghilev and the artists from the World of Art collective (1898-9), Russian art redefined itself within a wider European art pantheon.

Shchukin and his contemporary, Ivan Morozov, both textile merchants from Moscow and outsiders to the Russian art world, turned to the West, to the art of France for their market. They rapidly earned international acclaim for their eye and approach in amassing two of the "best and largest collections of contemporary French art in all of Europe" (Dorontchenkov 2009, 77). Each encountered broad resistance as they collected contemporary and provocative works of art. Shchukin continued his focus on French art, setting as his goal to assemble one of the most significant, transnational collections anywhere in Europe. In doing so he would place Russia squarely at the forefront of collecting practices and a modern artistic world.

Shchukin's early collecting was defined by the canvases of Paul Gauguin, Claude Monet, and Vincent Van Gogh. He collected Impressionists until 1904 before turning to post-Impressionism. In 1903, Shchukin brought to Russia the work of Paul Cézanne, an artist who would become revered by the Russian avant-garde and whose influence on the Russian art scene endured through the Soviet era (Reid 2001, 153-184). Shchukin's tastes were fluid, responding quickly to European tides and advancements in contemporary art, which he began purchasing in 1906 with his first

work by Henri Matisse. Shchukin's singular focus on the future led Matisse's *Dance* to cross Russia's borders and become a central piece in its national patrimony and achieve a critical, enduring role in the global history of modern art.

Figure 1: Henri Matisse, 1909, Dance II



Henri Matisse, 1909, *Dance II*. Collection of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Wikimedia Commons. Accessed April 18, 2022.

Public resistance to Shchukin's collections mounted as artists found inspiration in the influx of French art fresh from the studio. The foreignness of his canvasses jolted visitors who toured the collections in his home, which he opened to the public on Sundays beginning in 1909. One of Shchukin's guests "marked up the painting of C. Monet with a pencil in protest against the Impressionists" (Shchukin 1913, 38). Such intense reactions from visitors demonstrated that while the pieces earned the Russian collectors a privileged place on the world stage, sections of the Russian public did not accept the paintings. As in Europe, impressionist art faced hostility to its challenges of accepted styles and perhaps, in the case of Russia, patriotic feelings.

Shchukin's home emerged nonetheless as an ersatz academy of modern art, attracting students and members of the educated public and inspiring Russia's own modernist turn through galleries that captured in their entirety the development of select artists. In 1909, Shchukin commissioned the first of two works from Henri Matisse, at the time a relatively unknown artist amongst the European avant-garde. Shchukin reveled in how his role as a collector enabled him to enter the Paris studios and galleries to discover artists and elevate their careers (Armand Hammer Foundation, 1986). *Dance*, a large-scale mural, was slated for the staircase of Shchukin's home. Matisse's *Dance* represented his mastery of colour as he balanced a near imperceptible sophistication overridden by the primitive, almost barbaric, scene captured in his pivotal work. The naked figures in *Dance* caused a scandal when first publicly displayed at the Salon d'Automne in 1910 as they confronted and drastically altered not only the proportions of the human form but also represented complete physical abandonment in their hypnotic dance. The Russian critic of the newspaper *Odessky Listok* (Odessa News) described the scene in Paris:

> Explosions of indignation, anger and raillery are incessant around these pictures. In effect, their toxic colours give the impression of a demonic cacophony, whilst the lines, which are simplified to such a point that they almost disappear, and the astonishingly ugly shapes, express the painter's idea in a way that is both rash and insistent. The world created by Matisse in his naively cannibalistic panels is, I have to say, frankly distasteful. (cited in Semenova and Delocque 2018, 174)

Shchukin himself initially recoiled at the painting's apparent barbaric nature, nearly cancelling the commission out of fear of public opinion and the attention it would draw upon its transport to Moscow. He shook off fears of offending the Russian Orthodox Church and other conservative elements in Moscow, writing to Matisse: "I find your panel Dance of such nobility that I am resolved to brave our bourgeois opinion and to hang on my staircase a subject with nudes" (Kostenevich 1990, 39). For artists in Russia, *Dance* both symbolized and enabled their emancipation. The artists who had emerged out of Moscow's studios during these years—Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Vasily Kandinsky, and Marc Chagall— still worked to evoke a sense of Russianness through established tradition in works they exported to the West and had yet to challenge French artists' technical mastery. In the free forms of Matisse's dancing figures, the conventions that had governed modern art were dismantled. Russian artists, no longer bound by European criteria to create within the realms or "isms" characterizing the European avant-garde, moved to infiltrate the European-dominated scene (Dorontchenkov 2009).

Alexandre Benois captured this dynamic in an article written for *Rech'* (Speech) in 1911 where he wrote that while it is possible for artists to learn or achieve "perfection" through imitation, they "cannot learn something in order to unlearn it" (Benois 2009, 104-105). In other words, the creativity and ingenuity required to achieve the success of the French could not be attained by the Russians if they continued to merely mimic and avoid necessary experimentation on the canvas. However, the import of *Dance*, its crudeness and simplicity, offered a path other than mimicry and the efforts to raise themselves and Russian art to the caliber of the French. Benois elaborates on the freedoms attained in Matisse's work:

> When you recall all the crudeness, provincialism, and absurdity there is in [Russian] art you can become frightened and begin to share in the general alarm that the Parisian example will muddle our very uncultured artistic youth. But now there is also hope. What if it is this crudeness and simplicity that Matisse wants to acquire by force and that we already have that will save us by creating in us that desirable "childlike disposition" out of which new art is to emerge? (Benois 2009, 104-105)

Through these primitive forms, Matisse made the modern art world accessible to Russian artists. It allowed them to bypass the technical mastery that earlier modern art forms had seemingly required, even with their looser strokes. In the same way that Matisse wanted to be seen as "worthy of creating his own new traditions, of starting anew," (Benois 2009, 104-105) so did the Russian avant-garde who took from him, from Shchukin's panels, permission to break free and carve their place on the global stage.

Shchukin had captured and imported works from the west before the paint was even dry with the express purpose of exposing Russian artists to the bold strokes of the French avant-garde and their new definitions of art. Shchukin sought to inspire and expose, and leave the artists to form their own mind, their own response, more directly and concurrently than had previously been possible

because of Russia's distance from the ateliers of Paris. However, Shchukin's singular focus on the French scene evoked disdain, even from those who benefitted from his collections.

Vasily Kandinsky, who in 1908 was the first artist to write about the descent into pure abstraction, grew increasingly annoyed with Shchukin's disinterest in what he considered the equally innovative and inspired works of the Russian avant-garde. Convinced his abstracts were "just as good" as Matisse's, Kandinsky wrote to his friend Gabriele Munter:

> Shchukin never buys anything from me. He is a long way from sharing our ideas. I think that only artists who have been hugely successful in Paris can awaken his interest. But where is such success to be found today? He believes that the two greatest contemporary artists are Matisse and Picasso. Apparently, he doesn't think about me, truly. Nevertheless, my composition 2 and 5 would fit in very nicely at this place: I can see them there already. (cited in Semenova and Delocque 2018, 221)

This ambivalence proliferated among Russian artists, whose works were left unpurchased by Shchukin and therefore remained unrepresented on the walls of his home, which had gained recognition as a temple of modernity. Questions of patriotism, nationality, and a national patrimony remained open and controversial. Did Shchukin's commissions, as a Russian citizen, entrench these works as Russian? This question of what makes a piece of art national remains unclear in art history even today.

Shchukin's collection resonated within and beyond Russia's borders for its ability to break down the barriers to the contemporary art scene that resulted from the country's distance from Europe. The art of the commission itself speaks to a creativity, a boldness, and an active participation in the creation of a work that, this article argues, makes the commissioner an actor in its production. If we take this to be the case, then Shchukin's commissions, most particularly that of *Dance* and *Music*, can be labelled or considered as Russian artistic productions, in line with those produced by Russian artists even as the artist is himself French. The placement of the works in Shchukin's house and their visibility to both artists and the public alike sparked a wave of creative innovation that remains recognized as critical to Russian national culture over a century later.

The First World War stopped Shchukin's activity as a collector; however, he assumed the role of mentor, commentator, and guide for Russian artists and sought to act as an enlightener of Moscow's public. Leaders of the artistic scene in Russia considered Shchukin as "one of their number" even as his colleague Ivan Morozov, who collected the works of Russians, was not (Semenova and Delocque 2018, 221). In the first seventeen years of the twentieth century, Shchukin's collecting had easily outpaced collectors in Europe as well as Russia. He had collected works snubbed by the then major art institutions and galleries of the West. The war and the subsequent 1917 Bolshevik Revolution scarred Shchukin, whose tastes and position in society were under threat by new State ideologies. Uncertain of a Bolshevik future, Shchukin left the country shortly after the Revolution. In his wake he was forced to abandon his business and holdings, including his art collection, which had grown to 225 works by the First World War, consisting mainly of prominent French artists. By this time, Shchukin's efforts had already succeeded in closing the gap between a European artistic core and a Russian periphery. Though he would never again collect art with the same frenzied passion exhibited in his Moscow assemblage, Shchukin, prior to his death in Paris in 1936, fervently believed that the works he left behind should ultimately remain within Russian borders (cited in Boguslavskij 1995, 328).

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Patrimony and Isolation in Soviet Russia

The value and power that *Dance* had gained from its place within Shchukin's home and the wider Russian art community earned it a critical role within a Russian national patrimony, which endured throughout the Soviet period. The Bolsheviks acknowledged the place of the painting and works collected by Shchukin and Morozov, nationalizing them and realizing their monetary value. In the post-Stalin era, the state turned to art for its power to legitimize both the USSR's superpower status and ostensibly global culture. Despite the Soviet state's systematic removal of Shchukin's name and that of his legendary collection from public memory in Russia and abroad, its prominence remained in the eyes of the educated elite both inside and beyond state borders, where these featured works retained their place within the Western art pantheon.

Vladimir Lenin signed a decree on October 29, 1918 to nationalize the Shchukin collection, reframing it as one of state-led national and world importance. The decree read:

> Considering the national importance of the Shchukin's Art Gallery, being the exceptional collection of the great European – predominantly French – masters of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century and recognizing its significance in the field of national education, the Soviet of People's Commissioners decrees…the Nationalization of the Shchukin's Art Gallery. (cited in Boguslavskij 1995, 326)

The decree, which also nationalized Morozov's collections, brought them and their properties under the All-Russian Collegium for the Affairs of Museums and the Protection of Monuments of Art and Antiquity (*Vserossiĭskaia kollegiia po delam muzeev i okhrane pamiatnikov iskusstva i stariny)*, a branch of the People's Commissariat for Education (*Narodnyĭ komissariat prosveshcheniia*), on December 19, 1918. Nationalizing the collection confirmed the place that Shchukin's art had earned in the national— and now Soviet— patrimony in its education of the public and ability to propel avant-garde artists who largely supported Bolshevik rule and provided creative support.

Inventoried, the Morozov and Shchukin collections remained intact at their respective residences, the palaces being renamed The State Museum of New Western Art No. 1 and 2 respectively (*Muzeĭ novoĭ zapadnoĭ zhivopisi, MNZZh* 1 and 2). The museums were amalgamated into the former Morozov residence and renamed the State Museum of New Western Art (*Gosudarstvennyĭ muzeĭ novogo zapadnogo iskusstva, GMNZI*) in 1923.[2] The creation of a museum dedicated solely to the exhibition of modernist works was revolutionary. It stood as the first museum of modern art in the world, preceding by six years New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).[3] GMNZI reflected the Bolshevik belief of the power of this art to attack Western bourgeois conventions and simultaneously showcase Soviet Russia's ability to capture and display works of global importance at a time when Soviet innovation was the subject of Western fascination. Nevertheless, the museum also appeared to the public as one that highlighted Western decadence, producing art of

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[2] There is some confusion with the dates of this preliminary stage of the amalgamation. Some sources quote 1922 and some as 1923 for the year that the collections were administratively merged. At which time the museum's abbreviation changed from MNZZh 1 and 2, to GMNZI. The amalgamation in different sources cites 1923 and 1928 as the possible dates of the physical amalgamation of the collections. This paper uses 1923 as the date.
[3] The revolutionary nature of the State Museum of New Western Art stood in its collections of European modernist works. Though other establishments, including the Vienna Secession, had been exhibiting and introducing new movements including the modernists since the turn of the century, the establishment of a museum dedicated solely to modern art is what contributed to the distinction of the GMNZI.

such abstraction that it was seemingly divorced from social reality as it had been purchased by wealthy Russian collectors. The Communist leadership nonetheless refused calls to divide these works among state museums or to remove them from the public eye, seeing the potential of GMNZI to rival the Hermitage in global importance (Mileeva 2013).

The Soviet regime under Stalin was desperate for revenue to finance economic modernization and turned to these impressive works of art as sources of income. Works recognized as some of the most significant in the lives of select artists, including Cézanne and van Gogh, were sold off and would go on to reside in some of the world's most prestigious institutions.[4] An intense campaign to save *Dance* from suffering the fate of many of its contemporaries succeeded through emphasizing the work's intrinsic and symbolic value to the State (NeWestMuseum). Despite the occasional sales of valued art, GMNZI, and the collections housed there, survived the 1930s and gained a certain notoriety as they were sent, along with most of the prominent museum collections of the state, to the Urals prior to the Nazi invasion during the Second World War. This shift in *Dance* from being recognized under Lenin as a work of national importance within a new Socialist patrimony to being seen under Stalin for its monetary potential shifted its power from national education and pride to the national currency reserves.

In 1946, the USSR launched campaigns against cosmopolitanism and formalism to blunt perceived dangers of Western influence after the wartime alliance to defeat Germany crumbled and the Cold War began. GMNZI was closed, its collections divided between the Pushkin Museum in Moscow and the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad (present-day Saint Petersburg). Artworks once praised for their high quality and educational importance were now proclaimed as socially and dangerously destructive in the Soviet Council of Ministers decree 672 on March 6, 1948:

> The formalist collections belonging to the Museum of Modern Western Art, bought in the countries of Western Europe by Muscovite capitalists in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, have spread formalist views and the veneration of decadent bourgeois imperialist culture, causing severe damage to the development of Russian Soviet Art... the Council of Ministers hereby decrees the full liquidation of the Moscow State Museum of Modern Western Art. (cited in Semenova and Delocque 2018, 246)

Matisse's *Dance,* considered a subversion of bourgeois values four decades earlier, was now itself labeled as bourgeois. In challenging convention, the painting's bright, joyous, and ambiguous figures appeared to threaten the cultural stability of Stalin's regime. Labelled as alien, unknown, or even hostile, this art loomed over new Soviet ideas even though their very existence had served to challenge former conventions of Western art.

Dance and other works in Shchukin's collection left Moscow for the "cultural capital" of Leningrad. It was placed in storage in the State Hermitage Museum, out of view from the public in compliance with state orders. Hidden away, this work became cemented in the Soviet currency reserves. Curators and liberal segments of the educated public considered this a dark turn in what they saw as a declining appreciation for culture and the simple tragedy of removing these works from the public eye (Iavorskaia 2009, 307-309).

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[4] Four of the most significant works sold during this period included Cézanne's *Portrait of Madame Cézanne in the Greenhouse;* van Gogh's *Night Café* from the Morozov collection; Degas' *The Singer from the Café Concert;* Renoir's *The Maid*. The decree of the sale, dated May 9, 1933, was signed by the deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars V.V. Kuibuster (NeWest Museum, n.d.).

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The forced assimilation in the 1930s of Soviet Russian artists into Socialist Realism, a propagandistic style of art that stripped away individual advancements to the global field, had monumental repercussions for Soviet culture. The assimilation effectively removed Soviet Russia from transnational conversations required to continue placing Soviet art into the prominent place it held in the early Bolshevik years and Soviet art became othered in the global art world.

Stalin's death and the subsequent de-Stalinization echoed throughout the museums and galleries of the Soviet Union. The Soviet government became dependent on pre-revolutionary Western (predominantly French) art collected by Morozov and Shchukin to highlight their importance within the global realms of culture and art as befitting a postwar, post-Stalinist superpower. Works of modern art which had remained hidden following the decrees of the 1940s gradually emerged from museum storerooms. Conventional, realist art arrived first, followed in the mid-1950s by the works of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. *Dance* once more assumed pride of place alongside its companion *Music* in Leningrad's Hermitage Museum. The re-emergence of what many recognized to be a prized collection generated significant excitement, as the current Director of the Hermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky, recalled: "As [Khrushchev-era] political freedom grew, so did the radical nature of the paintings on show from Sisley to Picasso. For many it was a turning point in their understanding of art in general" (Piotrovsky 2015, 238).

Just as they did prior to 1917, the cubist forms of Picasso, the nude figures of Gauguin, and the exaggerated forms of Matisse sparked controversy amongst patrons who gathered in the exhibition halls on the Hermitage's third floor, which had become synonymous with modern art in the 1950s (Piotrovsky 2015, 238). In the Hermitage, the resistance to the restoration of modern art was led by artists and art historians clinging to Stalinist ideology. They condemned both the prominent placement of works of Matisse and others at the Hermitage and the sending of select pieces abroad as part of pan-European art retrospectives. Operating within the still-strict confines of the state's cultural directives, museum staff, seeking political cover, claimed that these works displayed how Western culture had degraded and fallen from the ideals of classicism praised in the Soviet Union. For some time, this logic, along with the powerful support the pieces received among members of the educated elite who recognized their global value, subdued opposition.

In his memoir, Piotrovsky (2015) highlighted an incident in 1963 when an angry commission from the Academy of Arts descended upon the Hermitage, outraged by their presentation and hanging of the "barbaric" modern pieces (238). Antonina Izergina, the curator of French painting at the Hermitage and the widow of late museum director Iosif Orbeli, stood before the commission and praised the significance of the Shchukin collection in educating the masses. Piotrovsky (2015) recalled the crowd being outraged by Izergina's words that culminated with her reading the decree signed in 1918 that had nationalized the Shchukin collection and ended with the words "V.I. Lenin" (242). The commission's efforts to remove the paintings from public view and subsequent opposition failed, allowing these works to remain as critical touchstones for debate on not only the value and role of modernist art but also their place within a national museum. Piotrovsky cites this as a point where these paintings assumed a solid place within Russian national identity both in spite and because of their controversial nature (2015, 242).

Alongside these Soviet internal debates, the artistic works that composed the Shchukin and Morozov collections remained vital measures of modernism in Europe. After the re-emergence of these paintings to the Hermitage, Western institutions placed them high on their wish lists to be displayed in international exhibitions (WNET and Alvin H. Perlmutter Inc 1973). In 1954, 54 Picasso works from the Shchukin and Morozov collections were loaned to France for an exhibition

in Paris entitled "Picasso from the Museums of Leningrad and Moscow and Parisian collections," even as the works remained prohibited from view in the Soviet Union. The Soviet government used *Dance* and related works to present themselves as a European civilization. Through invoking them once more into the global canon, the Soviet Union could advance an image that would portray it in an enlightened light.

The Paris exhibition faced an immediate and unexpected intervention from the heirs of Sergei Shchukin who resided in France and who challenged the legality of the Soviet state's ownership of works that had once belonged to their family. They claimed that the works were taken illegally under Lenin's nationalization decrees and without compensation (Boguslavskij 1995, 325-341). The Paris exhibition organizers took immediate action, removing works that pertained to the suit. They were rushed to the Soviet Embassy to protect them from any legal proceedings and the risk of confiscation. This legal threat circumscribed Soviet desires to exhibit works of European importance—*Dance* was never sent abroad despite multiple requests—and promote the state's place as an advanced culture. Several potential exchanges were negotiated throughout the 1950s and thereafter including between American and Soviet institutions headed by the MoMA. Alfred H. Barr Jr, the MoMA director who had published on Matisse, undertook years of close talks to uncover the "hidden masterpieces" of the Soviet state through displays in several US museums (Mikkonen 2013, 57-76). Soviet officials refused Barr's request when he could not provide guarantees that any works loaned would be returned to the USSR at the exhibit's end.

Dance dually functioned as part of a Soviet and Russian patrimony in the eyes of vanguard intellectuals and cultural bureaucrats as well as an object of currency and a tool of cultural diplomacy. The Soviet-era erasure of Shchukin's name from the works he commissioned and collected enabled *Dance* and others to be seen, however, primarily as Western creations, representative of those systems. It would only be after the end of the Soviet Union—in part due to the lawsuits that had come to highlight this very erasure—that Shchukin's name was reinstated and became embedded in a now post-Soviet Russian national patrimony. The effort taken by Soviet officials to protect these paintings from civil actions was a direct result of their desire to secure for the state a power and legitimate position as a global cultural actor. In the post-Soviet period, the motivation for this protection transformed to one sparked by the painting's place within the national cultural identity of the Russian state.

Matisse and the other European modernists form the foundation for contemporary art and artists who still respond to the movements set in motion a century earlier. Matisse's work inspired American artists throughout the twentieth century; his influence was notably revived and recognized in the experiments of colour and abstraction in the works of Mark Rothko and Roy Lichtenstein as explored in the *After Matisse* exhibition that began at the Queens Museum of Art and travelled throughout the United States from 1986-1988. *Dance* remained a critical work in the global trajectory of modern art even as it remained behind the borders of the Soviet Union until its collapse. Though 'dance' was a theme that carried into several of Matisse's canvases from 1905-1913, *Dance* or *Dance II*, as the Hermitage panel is known, stands apart from the other iterations of the painting for its boldness in both colour and scale.[5] Shchukin's commission holds a trance-

[5] Henri Matisse's panel *Dance* (La Danse) commissioned for Shchukin is also known in some contexts as *Dance II*. *Dance I*, a large-scale work that served as a preliminary sketch for Shchukin's panel, used paler colours for the dancing figures and has significantly less detail than the final work. *Dance I* resides in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City.

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like energy enabling the audience to see and feel the painting's movement, unique for its freedom of form and use of red instead of a light pink nude that lacks the same artistic depth.

Exhibiting Dance

As the Soviet Union collapsed and the Russian Federation emerged, *Dance* topped the wish lists of Western institutions that were hopeful it would be allowed to leave the country. Institutions were eager to be the first to bring it outside of Russia/Soviet Union since it left France in 1910. From September 24, 1992 to January 19, 1993, selected Matisse works including *Dance* travelled to the MoMA in New York City to take part in *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective.* The most comprehensive exhibition assembled on the French master comprised 400 works, carefully curated to explore the range and depth of the artist, offering an opportunity to reassess the role his pieces play in the history of twentieth-century art. It marked the first time the works from the Hermitage and Pushkin Museum had been exhibited in the United States – a point of pride detailed within the MoMA's exhibition materials. The retrospective's curator, John Elderfield, defines Matisse's impact in the exhibition catalog writing that "[Matisse] altered painting so decisively…that our experience of any painting must be affected by what he achieved" (Elderfield 1992, 14).

As *Dance* gained international popularity, issues of nationalization and ownership jeopardized its place within a renewed Russian national patrimony. The indoctrination of the 1918 nationalization decrees into Russian law and Soviet caution in transnational lending had diminished legal threats from Shchukin's heirs, but the heirs saw a weakened state under Boris Yeltsin and a prime opportunity to challenge nationalization. In 1993, legal action was launched in French courts against the Pushkin Museum, the State Hermitage Museum, the Pompidou Centre in Paris, and by extension, the Russian Federation, concerning the loan of certain paintings to the Paris gallery (Boguslavskij 1995, 325). The suit claimed that Lenin's decree, which ostensibly brought the paintings into the legal possession of the Soviet Union and, later, the contemporary Russian state, could not be considered valid in France as French law dictated the necessity of compensation for confiscated property. Shchukin's heirs demanded the return of the collection to its "rightful" owner – Irina Shchukina, Shchukin's youngest daughter.

The Russian government responded on multiple fronts to protect artistic treasures considered as valuable national property. Expecting support from European governments in the post-Cold War era, Yeltsin's officials wrote to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs referring to the principle of state immunity, which they claimed was inherent in international law. The Russian Embassy in France took an active role "in the legal preparations of Russian museums and assisted in ensuring that the directors of the museums involved could take part in the trial" (Boguslavskij 1995, 329). An effective challenge to the Shchukin family's claims in court would allow the portrayal of the new Russia as a deserved home for these paintings of national and global significance.

For their part, the claimants highlighted moral and ethical issues that dated from the tsarist empire and the USSR, citing the UN Declaration of Human Rights in their opening arguments. The suit emphasized the difficult fate of Russian emigrants such as Shchukin and the oblivion surrounding his name in Russia. Where the claimants appealed to emotion, the defendants clung to international law. On June 16, 1993, the verdict absolved the Russian Federation of the responsibility for repatriation of Shchukin's collected works to his heirs. The verdict further absolved the Russian government of any monetary compensation to Shchukina as generally dictated under French law for confiscation of personal property by a state, recognizing Lenin's nationalization of the

collection and later indoctrination into the constitution of the Russian Federation as legitimate. Shchukina's claims were dismissed.

The victory launched new initiatives to advance transnational exhibitions between European and Russian museums even as underlying legal issues remained unsettled. The Shchukin and Morozov collections were treated with particular care. Russian museums also continued to face severe financial constraints as state funding had dropped precipitously in the 1990s and the threat of needing to sell important artworks to survive loomed (Cameron and Lapierre 2007, 65-77).

To the curators at the Royal Academy of Art in London (RA), bringing *Dance* to the United Kingdom and Germany was the foundation of what would become "From Russia: French and Russian Master Painting from Moscow and Leningrad 1870-1925" (Ann Dumas, unpublished interview by author, May 7, 2021). A joint venture with the Museum Kunstpalast in Dusseldorf, the exhibition – which had been in planning for over five years – would unite the modernist collections of Russia's four primary art institutions. For the first time, it would introduce this critical period in the development of the modern art in both Russia and abroad through 120 paintings by Russian and French artists (Dumas and Rosenthal 2008). Ann Dumas and Sir Norman Rosenthal, curators at the Royal Academy, worked closely with the Russian institutions who presented them with a selection of works available for their venture. They agreed that the exhibition would be staged around *Dance*.

The official catalogue called the exhibition "a testimony to the glorious history of Russian collecting and Russia's influence in the development of modern art" (Dumas and Rosenthal 2007, 5). However, it was nearly cancelled just months before its anticipated opening. Russia faced renewed threats of seizure of their assets abroad in the early years of the 2000s by other individuals and entities seeking to recover imperial and Soviet-era debts. In 2005, the State Hermitage Museum threatened a moratorium on overseas loans following the temporary capture of 54 paintings of Picasso, Matisse, and Cézanne at the Swiss border. Piotrovksy claimed that "works of art are now being used as hostages in trade disputes" (O'Connell 2008, 2). The dispute was resolved quickly in Russia's favour by the Swiss Federal Council but produced new Russian demands for legal guarantees of immunity from seizure for future exhibitions. Such laws were already on their way to becoming commonplace, with several states already adopting protections. However, the United Kingdom State Immunity Act of 1978 proved insufficient for Russia. Russia argued that the 1978 Act needed updating to explicitly include items owned by national museums, not just property owned by a foreign state (O'Connell 2008, 2). This grey area would have been sufficient for Russia to pull the plug on the exhibit.

The threat to withhold loans from Russian museums launched the Royal Academy and UK legislators alike to push updated laws through parliament prior to the slated arrival of the Russian collections. Anticipation over "From Russia" had built for years, culminating in an extensive media campaign that left the promise of substantial crowds for the blockbuster exhibition. The Russian state's decision to prevent the export of the promised paintings in the fall of 2007 shifted media coverage to negotiations between states and the respective museums. The exhibition's prestige led former British Prime Minister Tony Blair to "len[d] his support at a decisive moment in the negotiations" (Dumas and Rosenthal 2007, 5) as the British government passed the Tribunals,

Courts, and Enforcements Act of 2007 (Arts Council England, 2007).[6] "From Russia" opened at the Royal Academy on January 26, 2008.

"From Russia," curated by Ann Dumas and Sir Norman Rosenthal, presented a specific narrative or perception of Russia's place within the European art world and of Russian national identity within the nine galleries devoted to the exhibition. Chosen from lists presented by the Russian museums partaking in the transnational exchange, the RA curators opted to segregate works painted in France that comprised the Shchukin and Morozov collections from those created by Russian artists in the same period. Divisions were maintained, even as the rooms were meant to explore the "interaction between Russian and French art from the last third of the nineteenth century" (Dumas and Rosenthal 2008). Dumas later stated that she felt placing the accomplishments of the Russian artists from the turn of the twentieth century next to those of the French masters would do the Russians a disservice as they are incomparable in terms of technical capabilities and subject matter (Ann Dumas, unpublished interview by author, May 7, 2021).

Walking from one gallery of the "From Russia" exhibit to the next, a viewer sees the undeniable influence of renowned modernist paintings but misses the transnational influences and the impact of Shchukin's French pieces that allowed Russian artists to come into their own. *Dance* sits in a gallery that overwhelms its audience with the abundant wealth of the French collections. Masterpiece after masterpiece, visitors are compelled to stop in their tracks. Only in subsequent galleries do curators draw attention to European artistic influences on Russia. An educated viewer would see the effects of Parisian studios that would have been experienced vicariously by many of the artists represented in Sunday tours of Shchukin's home. Moments of ingenuity and a Russian style might mix with French influences in the visitor's mind from previous galleries. Europe's recognition of *Dance* and the curatorial decisions to separate it from Russian art symbolizes both the extent and the limits of Russia's successful contributions to the global artistic pantheon.

"From Russia" demonstrated the lengths that the Russian state would go to protect these masterpieces that played a significant role in defining Russian modernism and that have, over time, regimes, and space earned pride of place within the national patrimony and the national culture of the contemporary Russian state. The exhibition, however, curated through a Western lens, challenges this central place for Russia in modernist art and the dual nationality of its central work. In separating the French works from those of Russia, the curators perpetuated a core-peripheral model of art history. The segregated approach of "From Russia" enforced a perspective of French works as dominant and fully European, ignoring the role of collectors such as Shchukin and giving the impression that they are isolated from Russia and from the margins of the art world. It is true that the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Modernists, and others retain a privileged, almost unassailable place among viewing audiences as representing the power of France and Western Europe in the artistic world. In considering pieces only at the point of the artist's conception, the exhibit negated at once the role of the collector and the accumulated meaning of a work, which, in the case of French art, was their direct impact on Russian modernism. While the curation potentially sought to reflect the collection as it hung in Russia's ersatz academies and former museums of modern art, themselves segregated prior to and just following the Bolshevik Revolution, it ignored the impact and meaning that has accumulated through these canvases, which placed them securely within a Russian national heritage.

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[6] The Tribunals, Courts, and Enforcements Act 2007 provided immunity from seizure for cultural objects being loaned from overseas to temporary public exhibitions in approved museums or galleries in the United Kingdom.

"From Russia" functioned as an act of cultural diplomacy between British and Russian governments. At the same time, it enforced a historical perspective that dissimulates the transnational provenance of *Dance*. I argue that the commissioning of *Dance* endowed it with dual citizenship in both France and Russia as it traveled from Matisse's studio in 1910 to its place in Moscow and then as it evolved to gain its contemporary identity and place within the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The exhibition demonstrates the difficulties for Russia, as a peripheralized nation, to overcome barriers to have paintings in its national patrimony recognized as such in the global art world in a manner that stretches beyond the artists but also includes collectors, curators, and other critical figures central to these dialogues. Outside of the realm of cultural diplomacy, the case of *Dance* connects Russia and the broader Soviet sphere to calls to decolonize Western-centric models of history. The region's removal from the global art world throughout most of the twentieth century, followed by the tumultuous experience of transformations to market-type economies, rendered it vulnerable to powerful cultural actors and institutions in North America and Western Europe.

The lack of transnational recognition of *Dance* and other European art commissioned and purchased by Shchukin and Morozov began with the abrupt Stalin-era turn to Socialist Realism and their subsequent absence from the international stage. This very absence has contributed to the significance that comes from displaying them internationally in this post-Soviet age as the popularity of "From Russia" demonstrates. We see this also in the Louis Vuitton Foundation exhibitions that, in 2016-2017 and 2021-2022 respectively, displayed the Shchukin and Morozov collections separately. *The Art Newspaper* reported that the blockbuster show in 2016-17 attracted a record number of visitors to the exhibition which signified the "symbolic unification of the Shchukin collection" (Kishkovsky 2019a). The collectors' names and accomplishments, suppressed in the Soviet period, now form part of the excitement in international exhibitions. Exhibits now include pieces of the Russian avant-garde also loaned by Russian museums that seek to show their own vision of a national cultural identity.

Conclusion

On June 13, 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin granted Russian citizenship to Sergei Shchukin's grandson, André-Marc Delocque, more than a century after his family went into exile (Kishkovsky 2019b). The citizenship ceremony coincided with the opening of "Shchukin: Biography of a Collection," an exhibition that reunited Shchukin's collection inside Russia's borders for the first time since they were divided between the Pushkin and Hermitage museums in 1948. Delocque's legal suits launched against the Russian Federation had forced the state to face the question of the legality of Lenin's decrees that were indoctrinated into the constitution in 1991. Yet, in the same moment that they evoked questions of monetary repatriations and debates which commonly plague contemporary museums, the lawsuits demonstrated the valued place and protections that these paintings evoke by virtue of their history. Their meaning in Russia developed over the course of the modern age as a result of their direct influence on the Russian avant-garde. This meaning was expanded through the Soviet era for the ability of Shchukin's collection to communicate across borders, both in its art and collecting practices, within these global pantheons that have historically been dominated by the legitimizing force of Western Europe as the cultural core.

Shchukin's collecting practices were inspired by the nationalism embedded in the collection of the renowned Pavel Tretyakov, who accumulated Russian art beginning in 1856. Shchukin's eye

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enabled the Russian vanguard to reach new heights as it bridged artists to the burgeoning Western scene at the turn of the twentieth century. The importance of these paintings by European masters captured in the collection, their survival through the Soviet period, reinstatement as critical cultural and national touchstones, thereafter sealed their place as central pieces of Russian art. In his commission of *Dance* and the history that has come to define it in the post-modern era—as it moved between institutions that stood for Soviet openness to the rolled-up confines of the Urals during the Second World War and as its "formalist" fate was contested in the years that followed—Shchukin assisted in creating a piece that, in spite of its Western origins in the studios of France, would come to symbolize the fragmented and divided foundations of Russian national identity. Considered one of the key paintings of the twentieth century, *Dance* has been inculcated into Russia's national cultural heritage and now hangs in the State Hermitage Museum.

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