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T O RUSSIAN ARTIST KONSTANTIN MAKOVSKY IN BOGOR

*T*he exhibition “The Necklace of the Equator. The Island of Bali” in April-May, 2010, was a notable event in the cultural life of Moscow. Works by Russian graphic, fine and applied art masters inspired by their stay in “Pulau Dewata” (Island of Gods), as this wonderful place is often called, were on display in the halls of the State Museum of the Orient for a month. Their trip was made possible thanks to the efforts of the Bureau of Creative Expeditions, which was set up in 1991 by Vladimir N. Anisimov, a Moscow artist and public figure, with a view to popularizing Russian art in the world and enriching Russians with knowledge about world culture. Working in constant contact with Russian diplomatic missions and foreign art workers, the Bureau arranges trips of Russian artists of various genres and trends to such countries as India, Afghanistan and Cuba. V. Anisimov and his colleagues have been closely connected with Indonesia. This article is about a memorable event which happened in that country.

Early in 2003 I had the privilege to prepare and open an exhibition of pictures of the “Russian Collection” at the National Gallery of Jakarta. It was timed to a visit to Russia by the President of Indonesia Megawati Sukarnoputri.

It was the fourth Russian art exhibition in Indonesia organized by the Bureau of Creative Expeditions, and also the fourth one visited by Megawati Sukarnoputri.



The younger daughter of the President Sukarno Sukmavati (center) and Vladimir N. Anisimov

After the round of the exhibition the President and persons accompanying her went to the reception room where a sumptuous lunch was served. Sitting at the table we talked of art and the stay of Russian artists in Indonesia. We told the head of state about our unforgettable impressions of travels around Sumatra, Java, Madura and Bali. And we felt that the President was very pleased with our words, for it was she who helped our expedition to take place.

During the lunch she said: “Bapak Vladimir,¹ many years ago, when I was still a girl, my father² visited the Soviet Union and your Premier Nikita Khrushchev presented him a picture by a well-known Russian artist. To our joy it appeared that my father’s close friends had bought another picture by the same artist from a private collection in Italy for decorating the residence of our head of state. It turned out that both pictures had been drawn by Konstantin Makovsky, and their style and even size were almost similar. On father’s instruction both pictures were hung at a special room at the Bogor palace,³ which since then has been called ‘Russian.’” On one of the canvases was an incomprehensible inscription, which she still remembered, and which was covered with paint during an unsuccessful restoration.

Megawati Sukarnoputri noted that she’d like to put the pictures in order and asked whether our experts could restore them, promising her support. That was how our work on the restoration of the pictures by Konstantin



"Spring Bacchanalia" by Konstantin Makovsky

Makovsky (1839-1915) began in Indonesia.⁴ Judging by the size of the canvases (close to 18 square meters each), this work was not an easy one.

At the preparatory stage my colleagues and I had to collect and study a lot of historical material. Unfortunately, we couldn't find documents pertaining to the picture presented to Sukarno in Moscow. Where it had been taken from and whom it had belonged to remained unknown. However, there was an eyewitness of the presentation ceremony in the Moscow Kremlin – Vladlen V. Sigayev, a veteran Soviet diplomat. In the latter half of the 1950s-the first half of the 1960s, when the Soviet-Indonesian relations were thriving and the two leaders – N.S. Khrushchev and Sukarno – met regularly, V.V. Sigayev was often present at their talks as the interpreter.

He remembered how in the morning of June 6, 1961, when President Sukarno was in Moscow (it was his third visit specially timed to his 60th birthday) Soviet leaders came to the residence in the Kremlin where he stayed to wish him many happy returns of the day. They also mentioned the birthday presents to be given to him: a female figure by the well-known sculptor Matvei Manizer and the "Chaika" limousine. The President was shown the photos of the 2-meter high sculpture and the car, which were delivered to Indonesia some time later.

As to the picture by Makovsky, it was presented at the end of the visit. On that day, having come out of his rooms President Sukarno saw a rather large



The painting "Sprinkling with hops" by Konstantin Makovsky dismantled for restoration

rectangular object covered with cloth. Nearby stood L.I. Brezhnev, Chairman of the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, A.I. Mikoyan, first deputy of the Chairman of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers, V.P. Yelyutin, Minister of Higher Education, and N.A. Mikhailov, the Soviet Ambassador to Indonesia. The interpreter V.V. Sigayev was there, too.

"Dear Comrade Sukarno," Anastas Mikoyan addressed the distinguished guest. "On behalf of the government of the Soviet Union and our entire people we sincerely congratulate you on your Birthday. Please, accept this gift, which could occupy a worthy place in your unique collection." The cloth was then removed and the President saw a grand canvas stretched on props without frame.

Sukarno was struck dumb, most probably, by the actual size of the work. He sat down on a chair to observe the picture more closely as a connoisseur. The wedding ceremony depicted on the canvas was taking place in a mansion very much like the palace in the Kremlin where a dinner in his honor was given on the previous day. It seemed that entire Boyar Rus in a festive attire embroidered with silver and gold was looking from that picture at the guest from faraway lands.

Breaking prolonged silence Sukarno asked about the epoch which was depicted on the canvas. The first to speak was the Indonesian Ambassador to Moscow Adam Malik, who was followed by N.A. Mikhailov and V.P. Yelyutin.



Restorers council before "the fight" (Vladimir Anisimov – second on the left)

While listening to their explanations the President stood up, walked along the picture, still looking at it closely, and then expressed his profound gratitude for the lavish gift. Nothing was said about the origin of the picture or the place it had been taken from. There were no questions on the subject from the Indonesians accompanying President Sukarno either.

The latter was soon joined by another member of his delegation, the Minister of Defense General A. Nasution, one of the leaders of Indonesia. He was also struck by what he saw. In the conversation between the general and the President one could often hear the exclamation "Bagus!" (Magnificent!).

"What are they whispering about?" A.I. Mikoyan asked the interpreter. V.V. Sigayev answered that they were discussing the way to transport it. "Tell them we're making this present with home delivery." Indeed, in two months' time the picture and other presents arrived in Jakarta by sea. It was felt that the picture by K. Makovsky presented to Sukarno as a gift was not mentioned in the mass media on purpose.

How come that N.S. Khrushchev and his consultants learned that it was precisely a work by Makovsky that should have been presented to Sukarno? Moreover, that it had to be about the same size of the one that had been bought for him in Italy in 1954.





It should be recalled that when N.S. Khrushchev went to Indonesia on an official visit in 1960, he was accompanied by N.A. Mikhailov, the Minister of Culture. I think that when the Soviet delegation visited the Bogor palace, he couldn't fail to notice the outstanding picture *Bacchanalia* by K. Makovsky, one of the canvases in President Sukarno's big collection of art works. It was said that when the Politburo members discussed the question of a birthday present to Sukarno, A.I. Mikoyan suggested that it be addressed to N.A. Mikhailov, who was the Soviet Ambassador in Jakarta at the time. Evidently, he recommended to present him not only a picture, but specified precisely what picture could enrapture him.

But let's go back to restoration. It was preceded by prolonged correspondence which defined the details of the work to be done. Our Indonesian colleagues took into account our wishes and recommendations. We brought the necessary chemical materials, except explosive ones, which could not be taken aboard the plane.

At long last the day to start work has come. Pictures were still on the wall, the palace was filled with people entrusted to do the job, all members of the guardian council of the Sukarno Museum headed by the President's younger daughter Sukmawati were also present. "And so, Bapak Vladimir, shall we take the pictures off?" "Yes!" Responsibility was very high, shall we be able to cope with the job... We prepared the place for restoration and began to study the pictures thoroughly, especially the damaged parts. The artist's manner and technique were simply amazing.

The exact size of the picture delivered from Moscow was 293 x 456 centimeters. There were 16 parts especially difficult for restoration, and also some parts rather crudely restored by local masters. However, instead of scolding we should have praised them for they managed somehow to preserve the original manner of K. Makovsky.

During cleansing the picture we found the details which clarified its essence and title. At first, it seemed to us that one of the persons depicted threw up money into the air. But as restoration work proceeded, it became clear that it was not money, but hop flowers. In the Russia of the 15th-16th century there was a ritual at royal and princely weddings going back to pre-Christian times: the newlyweds were strewn with hop as a sign of wishing them good health and many children. In the Russian Museum in St.Petersburg we have found a sketch of this picture called *Sketch to the picture "Strewing with Hop."* But we could not find information about its size on completion and the year, and also its first whereabouts.

The situation with the picture *Bacchanalia* (size 273 × 398) was worse. It has suffered a great deal from previous unskilled restorations, even the



Moscow artist Nikolai Burtov in Bandar Lampung (Sumatra, Indonesia). Photo by Yu. Lunkov

artist's signature was painted over. Thanks to Megawati Sukarnoputri who remembered the part of the canvas where she had seen the artist's signature, we cleansed it and saw his name and the year of the completion of *Bacchanalia* (1881).

To be frank, the conditions in which these pictures are preserved are absolutely unfit for the works of art of this class. The Bogor palace is a magnificent edifice, beautifully furnished and excellently kept, but it lacks the required temperature-humidity regime absolutely necessary for the normal life of canvases. And there are several hundred of them.

In the morning the palace attendants open the windows and air the halls from night humidity and stagnant atmosphere. For the sake of saving electric energy air conditioners are switched off for the night, meanwhile high humidity does its destructive work. The pictures become covered with mould and sag, but by midday dry up and buckle. And this goes on day in day out. Precipitation in Indonesia is from 2,000 to 4,000 mm a year. During our restoration work rain did not stop for a minute.

Of course, we gave official recommendations on how works of art at the palace should be preserved, and told in what temperature-humidity regime they should be kept. This was shown by the records we made in restoration



passports for each picture transferred to the Bogor palace, as well as to the embassy of the Russian Federation in Indonesia.

It is to be hoped that despite all odds the pictures collected by the first President of Indonesia will bring esthetic pleasure and joy to local and foreign lovers of fine art for many years to come.

It so happened that we had to report the work done to another head of state, because Megawati Sukarnoputri lost the presidential elections of 2004. On the third day after his election triumph the new leader of the country Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono came to Bogor. He held a working conference in an adjacent hall, and later dropped in to see us. Having seen the restoration process, he tapped me on the shoulder and said: “Go on. These pictures are our treasure.” He asked us about our opinion of Sukarno’s collection and suggested that we arrange a new exhibition of works of art from Russia. We complied with his wish in 2005, and his spouse, Ani Yudhoyono, opened this exhibition.

In conclusion I’d like to note that recently the Sukarno collection has been replenished with twelve pictures of modern Russian artists. Among them Vitaly B. Popov, People’s Artist of the Russian Federation; members of the Russian Academy of Art Stanislav M. Nikireyev and Vladimir I. Pereyaslavets; honored artists of the Russian Federation Alexander A. Voronkov, Victor S. Popov, Olga R. Yausheva, Yuli G. Petrov, Anatoly P. Rybkin, and your humble servant. ■

NOTES:

1. *Bapak* (Indonesian for Father) – respectful address to a man.
2. Sukarno (1901-1970), the first President of Indonesia.
3. Bogor palace (*Istana Bogor*) – country residence of the Indonesian President near Jakarta.
4. We were helped from the Russian side by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Indonesia and the Cultural-educational Center “Orden,” for which we express our profound gratitude.

* *Photos by Yu.F.Lunkov*