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## IMPRESSIONISTIC SEARCH IN ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF DANCE AT THE TURN OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The study of Russian culture at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is instructive in the search for and finding of new expressive means of the artistic language, a new imagery in various forms of art. One of the essential features of this historical and cultural process is that it is carried out in close interweaving of stylistic innovations. Impressionism attracts the attention of researchers in the motley picture of the development of artistic trends in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now it appears to us as a stylistic trend, with clearly expressed historical premises, an ideological and aesthetic programme.<sup>1</sup> Impressionism avoids indirect ways of approaching reality, conventionality, stylization, and metaphoricity. An attempt of theoretical interpretation of the relationship between dance and fine art in the context of Impressionism undertaken in this paper is not accidental. The manifestation of not only certain

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Abbreviations: SCTM – A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, Moscow;

PSMFA – The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow;

SRM – The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; TG – Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow;

DAM – Denver Art Museum; NSAM – Novosibirsk State Art Museum;

RSAM – Ryazan State Art Museum.

1 Diane Kelder, *The French Impressionists and Their Century* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Charles-Guy Le Paul, Judy Le Paul, *L'Impressionnisme dans l'École de Pont Aven: Monet, Renoir, Gauguin et leurs disciples* (Paris: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1983).

techniques in the artwork of many artists but also the mobility of dance was related to the choreographic impressionism of the indicated period. The achievements of previous centuries were creatively reinterpreted by the choreographers and connected with the reforms of ballet art, where the struggle was ongoing for the elimination of contradictions between music and dance, between classical choreography and free dance.<sup>2</sup> The search for new means of spectacular expressiveness in the field of painting involved the development of picture size, lighting, and plasticity of movement. The theme of dance – ballet dancers, rehearsals, dance classes – became one of the most widespread subjects both in Russian and international art of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>–beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most typical direction for search, and achievements, in those years was the refusal of traditional lighting schemes, the search for picturesqueness in natural light combinations given to us by nature.<sup>3</sup> This led to greater truthfulness, lightness, and elegance of the image. At the same time, lightness and beauty and, to a lesser extent, critical truthfulness became a kind of measure of impressionistic fashion. The ballet image in impressionist fine art developed and confirmed the poetics inherent in it, with movement and skin-deep impression being ideologically significant and important. The feeling of incompleteness of every moment of life permeates sculptural and pictorial images of dance in this style. The compositions are often shifted, asymmetrical, shape transitions seem unprepared, picture frames often cut shapes and faces, random episodes crush the effect, borders are blurred and form quivering colour spots.<sup>4</sup>

The topicality of our research is evident when we consider that the analysis of the emergence and development of Impressionism in Russia makes it possible to identify different types and forms of artistic contacts, mutual enrichment and influence of various European cultures (ballet and painting) at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>

2 N. A. Klimenko, “The Manifestation of Artistic Styles in Dance Art: Historical Aspect”, *St. Petersburg Education Bulletin*, 3 (7) (2017), 35–39; Yu. Yu. Ryazanova, “The Influence of Various Types of Art on the Ballet Theater and Its Expressive Means in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, *The World of Science, Culture, Education*, 2 (45) (2014).

3 L. V. Kuznetsova, ““Philosophy” of an Impressionistic Picture”, *Bulletin of the Tyumen State University*, 10 (2012), 115–120.

4 *Musee d'Orsay. Catalogue sommaire illustre des peintures* (Paris: Edité par Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990), 524.

century. The originally international dance language is enriched by more complex interaction of its reflection in related forms of creativity.

The main goal of our paper is to study the impressionistic pictorial system reflected on the theme of dance in the artistic culture of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, determining the national peculiarities of Russian and French manners. The novelty of the research is that here for the first time the main facts relating to the interpretation of the dance theme are summed up not only using the masters as examples of Russian Impressionism influenced by French Impressionism but also using the interaction of French artistic cultures with Russian impressionistic art at the turn of the centuries.<sup>5</sup>

This overall goal of the study predetermined even more specific tasks posed by the author. They are reduced to the consideration of the existing and functioning system of visual and fine codes in the philosophical aesthetics of Impressionism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a reflection of the paradigm or vision model defined by the theoretical, scientific, cultural and historical conventions of the corresponding epoch.

Attempts at such generalization in a context of treatment of ballet images have not been undertaken in world art criticism up to now. It should be pointed out that the existing wide range of philosophical, cultural and art works on impressionist visuality is constantly being replenished, supplemented by subtle observations and perceptive conclusions (which confirms the relevance of this topic and the need to study it from various perspectives and conceptual positions). In existing domestic philosophical, aesthetic and other works on art, remarks about features of the vision of the theme of dance (even competent ones) are either fragmentary and unsystematic in nature, isolated from the dynamics of the artistic historical process, or included as an independent fluent description of the creativity of one artist or another. The Impressionist theory of style generally does not need any justification: this is proved by a number of

5 A. V. Tolstoy, *Russian-French Artistic Ties of the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. PhD Thesis (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1984), 26; D. V. Sarabyanov, “The Newest Trends in Russian Painting of the Pre-Revolutionary Decade (Russia and the West)”, *Soviet Art History-80*, 1 (1981), 201; P. A. Trusova, *The Problem of Classical Tradition in the Art and Artistic Life of France at the Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. PhD Thesis (Research Institute of Theory and History of Art of the Russian Academy of Arts), 41.

works, old and new<sup>6</sup>, highlighting the penetration of Impressionism into various spheres of creativity<sup>7</sup>. For example, let us consider some comparatively recent works<sup>8</sup> dedicated to the heritage of Impressionism in modern culture. “In its time, French Impressionism was seen as a radical revolution in painting, a radical departure from the existing traditions of European art. Today, Impressionism is recognized as the main frontier in the history of art and the threshold of the movement of contemporary art.”<sup>9</sup> All this allows us to draw the conclusion that it is necessary to study art in which new artistic material (dance and its impressionistic image) would fill the tried-and-tested settings of the disciplinary approach and let us come to conclusions that enrich our understanding of the visual culture of the past time.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper proposes an integrated approach: philosophical and artistic- imaginative interpretation of the vision of dance as an historical and semantic artefact, and visuality as an impressionistic system penetrating into the spheres of creative pursuit, aesthetic consciousness of the same historical period. Some ballet works of Zinaida Serebriakova are considered in comparison with the images of Edgar Degas, because the author believes that the role of the pictorial-impressionistic experience goes far beyond the framework of

6 Vladimir A. Lenyashin, “...From Time to Eternity”: Impressionism without Properties and the Properties of Russian Impressionism”, *Russian Impressionism. Paintings from the Collection of the Russian Museum* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi Russkii Muzei, 2002), 43–60; M. L. Magidovich, *Impressionism as a Phenomenon of Culture*. PhD Thesis (A. N. Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University), 52; T. N. Martyshkina, *Impressionist Worldview in Western European Culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Origins, Essence and Significance*. PhD Thesis (Nizhnevartovsk State University for the Humanities), 157; V. Filippov, *Impressionism in Russian Painting* (Moscow: Belyi Gorod, 2004), 320.

7 Michael Fried, “Caillebotte’s Impressionism”, *Representations*, 66 (1999), 1–51; Daniel Hannah, “Henry James, Impressionism, and Publicity”, *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 61(2) (2007), 28–43; Terry Lynn Hudson, “Uncovering Magic: Exploring Selected Préludes of Claude Debussy as Performance and Teaching Vehicles”, *American Music Teacher*, 63(4) (2014), 25–29; Suzanne Marchand, “Problems and Prospects for Intellectual History”, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 87–96; Jesse Matz, *Lasting Impressions: The Legacies of Impressionism in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 352.

8 Snider Lindsay, “A Lasting Impression: French Painters Revolutionize the Art World”, *History Teacher*, 35(1) (2001), 89–102; Matz, *Lasting Impressions: The Legacies of Impressionism in Contemporary Culture*, 352.

9 Lindsay, “A Lasting Impression: French Painters Revolutionize the Art World”, 89–102.

the purely French concept in the treatment of this subject. Therefore, it is unfair to consider all other variations of impressionism as secondary or minor ones. Impressionism was stylistic, and the theme of dance manifested itself in the same stylistic aspect. We use it in the general sense: as a certain impressionistic orientation in the development of realism of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We believe that the identification of this trend should not be contrasted with other trends coexisting with it in the visual arts, but, on the contrary, it is called upon to discover the originality of this coexistence, which in each case generates a unique artistic phenomenon.

### RESULTS

Impressionism bears a strong expression of French spiritual culture. Degas, first and foremost, is associated with the interpretation of the ballet theme. However, it does not remain just a fact of national art history. At the same time, a new wave of interest in the Impressionist methods spread from the French aesthetic impulses to the art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. “Imitating the physiological optical impulses with scientific accuracy, the Impressionist masters seemed to liken themselves to a “living machine” that records the reflection of rays; such a machine existed in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – it was a photographic camera invented in 1839. The technical flaws in the photographs (blurry outlines, random spots of black and white) were imitated as features of a pictorial style pointing to new-fashioned photogenicity; the Impressionists also have sharp angles and “accidentally” static position of characters.”<sup>10</sup>

In Russian painting and graphic works, the Impressionist vision of dance resides in the works of Z. Serebriakova, S. Lebedeva and P. Trubetskoy. The oeuvre of Degas and the theme of ballet were repeated in publications about the artist, especially in international art studies. We are going to discuss the images of Degas in juxtaposition and connection with the Russian artist Zinaida Serebriakova. It would be a mistake to locate her impressionistic works on the ballet subject beyond the limits of the creative process and consider them in isolation from other works on the same topic. A deep observation

10 A. A. Kurbanovsky, *Archeology of Visuality on the Material of Russian Painting of the 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. PhD Thesis (Saint Petersburg State University), 18.



FIG. 1. ZINAIDA SEREBRIAKOVA, *BLUE BALLERINAS*, PASTEL ON PAPER (1922). THE STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM.

of the mechanism of Serebriakova's oeuvre shows that she intuitively felt and actively used some impressionistic features of painting; thus she found a way to develop the desired artistic image. This leads to an idea of the close connection of the artist with the poetics of French impressionism, Degas in particular, the ideology and principles in his oeuvre.

The ballet "line" of Serebriakova formed in 1920; over ten years she created about sixty works on the ballet theme. Constantly visiting the Mariinsky Theatre, she observed the backstage life of young dancers; they inspired her to create works imbued with true poetry. "Twice a week my mother sketched from the life of dressing, makeup-applying and resting artists," says the artist's daughter.<sup>11</sup> Three main sides of the theme's development are the multi-figured compositions, group and single figure sketches of pencil and pastel, which served as auxiliary material for compositions, and portraits of ballet artists. Impressionistic trends are manifested in all the named varieties, with the exception of portrait images. Serebriakova expanded and democratized the sphere of the ballet theme, made the subject of her artistic analysis the multifaceted world of the artist, not exceptional, but the rank-and-file, which already brings her closer to Degas, who observed and drew his dancers at the Paris Opera. Serebriakova presents the theme of ballet in the interiors of the theatre dressing rooms, where they apply makeup, warm up and prepare for their appearance. She, like Degas, penetrates behind the scenes, opens the door to the creative laboratory, and explores the life of a theatrical company "from within". However, the interpretation of the ballet differs between Serebriakova and Degas. They both show us the dance hidden from the uninitiated world – its prose. Ballet is work; this is the emphasis in the works of both artists. But in Degas's works, the ballet is an ugly routine; and the ballet is a poetic routine in Serebriakova's works. The dancers of Degas are shown in rehearsal halls, where they do obligatory exercises at the barre for the thousandth time, as if they are encased in some rational form, sometimes deliberately speculative and pointedly coldish one. From the low-key but expressive details the atmosphere of his paintings develops, where everything is rather simple, where people are reserved, and their feelings are hidden from the eyes of others.

<sup>11</sup> From a conversation with T. B. Serebriakova. The author's notes (1998).



FIG. 2. ZINAIDA SEREBRIAKOVA, *SYLPH'S GIRLS* (CHOPINIANA BALLET), OIL ON CANVAS (1920S). THE STATE TRETYAKOV GALLERY.

In the works of Serebriakova, the work of ballet artists is reflected through the prism of light, transparent colours, without the direct reproduction of pictures, the mechanical nature of the rehearsal lessons. In the paintings of Serebriakova, we do not see dancers training. All the most important and interesting things happen in their dressing rooms, not outside them. We can say that they are the same workshop, they have the same condition of creativity as the rehearsal room for the ballet dancer. In many works of Serebriakova, we can note such a technique as their fragmented organization and cutting off individual figures: *Ballet Dancer E. Svekis in the Ballet "Fairy of Dolls"* (1920, SCTM), *In the Ballet Workshop* (1920, SRM), *Girls – Sylphs (Ballet Chopiniana)* (1920, collected by the Serebriakov family), *Ballet Dressing Room. Snowflakes (The Nutcracker)* (1923, SRM), which

brings them closer to Degas. We can find out from the statements of Serebriakova how she valued his work. Appreciating the search of the artist, Serebriakova wrote a letter to her daughter: "Degas is a wonderful master! His composition is always unexpected; he so sharply seizes life in motion."<sup>12</sup> It becomes clear from these words that this particular device made it possible to reflect the vivid impression of the observed ballet scene. So, in *Ballet Dressing Room. Snowflakes (The Nutcracker)* (1923, SRM), Serebriakova seems to stop the moment; the images of the stately dancers appear to be snatched from reality. The standing figure of the ballet dancer is cut off by the edge of the canvas; she is ready to enter the stage. She is turned to the viewer, as if inviting us with her. Thus, at a standstill moment, an illusion of inward movement is created, which creates an atmosphere of living life in the theatre workshop. The artist tries not to exhaust the plot, but to provide a poetic formula of fluidity, incompleteness of being, to emphasize, like Degas, its unpredictable, unrehearsed character.

In the works *Ballet Dancers in their Dressing Room* (1923, PSMFA), *Ballet Dancer E. Svekis in the Ballet "Fairy of Dolls"* (1920, SCTM), Serebriakova is interested in the other side, connected with the human movement and plasticity along with the preparation for the performance. Although the transfer of plasticity and beauty of the body is always present in the ballet compositions of the artist, here she focuses on the purely professional features of this plasticity, reveals and emphasizes them in comparison with other plots. In these works the artist appears as a subtle observer, who truly impressionistically fixes the dance.

In *Ballet Dancer E. Svekis in the Ballet "Fairy of Dolls"*, featuring a well-balanced composition, the central figure is a ballerina. A slightly inclined head, an exalted face and hand gestures indicate her readiness for her role. But the ballet episode draws the artist not only with an expressive pose. Extending one leg forward, gently arching the bridge of her foot, the ballerina trains her toe. With her leg stretched out like a string, in a smooth, latent movement of the whole stature we can sense a great natural step, a hidden energy.

In another picture – *Ballet Dancers in Their Dressing Room* (1923, PSMFA), we can see the turnout of legs, the excessive depth of

12 Letters of Z. E. Serebriakova to T. B. Serebriakova. Paris (March 31, 1937). In *Zinaida Serebriakova. Letters, Contemporaries about the Artist*, comp. and ed. by V. P. Knyazev (Moscow: Izobrazitelnoye iskusstvo, 1987), 304.

movements in the poses of dancers in the foreground. The person standing in the arabesque pose, which is repeated in *In the Ballet Workshop* (1920, SRM), seems similar to the works of Degas. The figure of the dancers, shown in different positions, gives the composition an element of movement, impressionistic instability.

Another compositional element suggests analogies with the paintings of Degas – the figure of the model who is adjusting the ballerina's costume in *Ballet Dancer E. Svekis in the Ballet "Fairy of Dolls"*. We can see similar figures in the works of Degas: *Before the Rehearsal* (1880, DAM), *The Mante Family* (1880–1883), *Waiting* (1879–1882, both – private collection, New York). Dressed in black, hunched and gloomy, located next to the canvas frame (Degas and Serebriakova), they offer the intersection of different planes, different spheres of existence, revealing their heterogeneity, inconsistency. They appear to be antipodes in the atmosphere of the picture, reinforce the youth of young dancers, and bring variety to the organization of ballet compositions.

In the foreground of many works of Serebriakova, the motif of the dancer who is tying or sewing tapes on her ballet shoes dominates: *Ballet Dressing Room. Snowflakes (The Nutcracker)* (1923, SRM), *Ballet Dancers in Their Dressing Room* (1920, PSMFA), and others; this was also often used by Degas. It does not mean that the artist copied or simply borrowed that plot from Degas for her compositions, but it is undeniable that she studied and knew his art well. "Now a big exhibition has opened here. Degas is my favourite artist, and I will certainly go there," Serebriakova writes.<sup>13</sup> For all the generality of the chosen motives (Degas and Serebriakova), they carry different information, different meaning. *Dancers Tying Their Shoes* (about 1895–1896, Cleveland Museum of Art), *Dancer Tying a Shoe* (1887, private collection, New York), *Dancer Adjusting Her Shoes* (1880) and other works of Degas – these drawings are sharp and almost ruthless in their truthfulness<sup>14</sup>. The delicate girls lean forward deeply. This position chosen by Degas echoes with the intense exercises the dancers do in rehearsals. "Most clearly of all artists Degas tells

13 Letters of Z. E. Serebriakova to T. B. Serebriakova. Paris (March 31, 1937). In Z. E. Serebriakova. *Letters, Contemporaries about the Artist*. Moscow, 304.

14 Jill DeVonyar, Richard Kendall, "The Class of 1881: Degas, Drawing, and the "Little Dancer Aged Fourteen"", *Master Drawings*, 41(2) (2003), 151–162; Jill DeVonyar, Richard Kendall, "Dancers" by Edgar Degas", *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 66 (2007), 30-40.

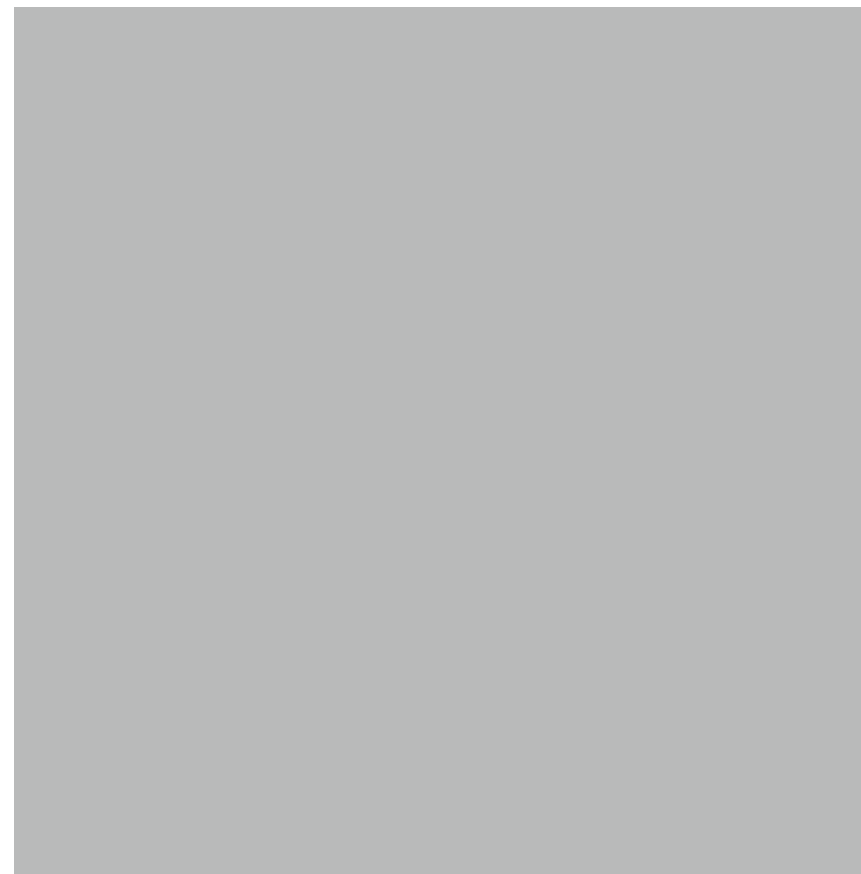


FIG. 3. EDGAR DEGAS, *BLUE BALLERINAS*, PASTEL ON PAPER (1897). THE PUSHKIN STATE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.

us the great truth about the ballet of his time, we can call him a documentary artist of the professional habits of dancers ... Degas makes us look at the ballet with his eyes" – the American critic L. Haskell wrote in one of his articles.<sup>15</sup> However, if Degas has insights into ballet through a magnifying glass, then Serebriakova – a reflecting mirror. Such subjects are in full accordance with the

15 Theyre Lee-Elliott, *Painting of the Ballet* (London: Collins, 1947), 3.

poetic atmosphere of her paintings. Serebriakova, like some French Impressionists, is interested in the issue of the transmission of the light-and-air medium, which is revealed most fully in the rapid sketches. In grouped multi-figured compositions, the artist places the highest value on the emotional role of the environment. Lighting becomes the most important agent, giving them the character of a mixture of the real and the unreal. So, in such works as *Girls – Sylphs (Ballet Chopiniana)* (1920, private collection, St. Petersburg), one of the favourite works of the artist's daughter, T. B. Serebriakova, the electric scattered light from an invisible source creates an atmosphere of muted silence, lends the canvas a scenic emotionality, poetic mood. "Zinaida Evgenievna Serebriakova has one unfinished painting *Girls – Sylphs...* I like this composition, and not because of nostalgia for my childhood. Despite the fact that the work is incomplete (which is regrettable), it attracts with its poetry, which accurately conveys the atmosphere of preparation for the performance."<sup>16</sup>

Some studies and variations of compositions closely adjoin and are an important organic part of numerous paintings of Serebriakova. Developing subjects and inheriting the stylistics of the paintings, the artist impressionistically conveys the atmosphere of theatrical life in them as well. Most sketches are done in pastel. Sometimes the artist draws with an Italian pencil highlighting drawings with sanguine or watercolour. Using mostly pastel, thinly laying and in places chafing it into the surface of paper, Serebriakova reveals the shapes of figures by delicate gradation of gentle chiaroscuro. Stumped white or light brown tone on paper becomes the most poetic part of her drawings. The painter does not prefer to look for complex compositional constructions in them, nor the multifaceted distributions of figures on a sheet. But the atmosphere, which is energized by the observed truth, all woven from the seized, seemingly insignificant and everyday manifestations of the theatrical world, does not remain outside the bounds of the sheet, does not fall out of the author's attention. Serebriakova does not embellish anything here, only highlights the true. A well-organized plot of drawings acquires the disorganization of real life, in which first movement, then feeling occurs. Kurbanovsky remarked: "Impressionism was projected in a

16 T. B. Serebriakova, *Memoirs about the Ballet School*. Manuscript. Property of the Serebriakova family (Moscow, 1988), 17.

specific context – in a city's mass spectacle environment, where social life was played out as a performance and proper "ways of looking at" were offered. Consciously or unconsciously, the artists appealed to a functioning cultural-visual semiosis: techniques of public opinion."<sup>17</sup> *In the Dressing Room. Before the Mirror, Little Dancers, Two Little Dancers, Two Ballet Dancers in Costumes for the Ballet "Paquita"* (1921–1923, property of the Serebriakov family), *Ballerinas before Going to the Stage. Study, Preparation of Ballerinas for a Waltz. Study* (1921–1923, all – private collection, Moscow), *Blue Ballerinas* (1920, SRM), *Ballet Dancers in Their Dressing Room (Swan Lake). Study* (1923, NSAM) – these sketches and some others like the finished compositions are variations on the same theme – preparation of dancers for performance. In some of them, Serebriakova outlines the elements of the situation, but all the sketches provide, above all, the plastic solution of the motif, when attention is focused on the search for movement, turn, silhouette, gesture. It is not accidental that when depicting a ballet group, the artist often draws an interesting characteristic gesture in the same sheet. *In the Dressing Room* (1910, SRM), she studies the movement of a ballerina dressing her ballet shoes or tights – *Little Dancers* (1921, property of the Serebriakov family). "The dressing rooms where the girls got dressed were adjacent to the big dressing room where the corps de ballet got dressed and where my mother mostly made her sketches, so she had the opportunity to observe children's figures," the daughter of the artist notes.<sup>18</sup> The striking paintings contribute to the lively charm of the images. The colour in these sheets is mixed and glowing, creating a colourful play of textures, and the elegant drawing complements the impression of airiness and transparency. Here it is necessary to dwell on the exquisite use of colour by Serebriakova, as it becomes a source of illumination, widely used by impressionists, Degas in particular. We cannot say that Serebriakova uses this technique in all her works. In most of her works, the light source is a sidelight, emphasizing the sculptural quality of the ballerinas' figures, but in a number of works, such as *Little Ballet Dancers* (1921–1923, property of the Serebriakov family), and *Blue Ballerinas* (1920, SRM), the free manner of imposing strokes,

17 Kurbanovsky, *Archeology of Visuality on the Material of Russian Painting of the 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, 27.

18 Serebriakova, *Memoirs about the Ballet School*, 17.

the dissolution of contours in the air, the light tones allow to call these works truly impressionistic.

*Blue Ballerinas* by Serebriakova recalls the images of *Blue Dancers* by Degas (PSMFA) – the association arises not only from the similarity of the names of these works, but primarily due to their plasticity and colour solutions. The circular movement of the dancers from left to right in *Blue Dancers*, and a slight turn from the back of one of the dancers, the figure in the background in *Blue Ballerinas*, almost moving as in the dance; the display of figures in various angles from both masters allows acknowledging some generality in the compositional solution. Nevertheless, their key similarity lies in the active role of colour. The main emotional tone of the images of Serebriakova and Degas was concentrated in the rhythm of corsage and tutus, in a whirligig of naked backs and hands illuminated by bright sunlight, and therefore absorbing all the colour reflexes from the environment in pure vibrant spots of colour from intensely dark in the shade, and bright, almost bleached in the light, merging into one whole. In *Blue Ballerinas* by Serebriakova, of course, we cannot talk about the complete harmony that exists in *Blue Dancers* by Degas. There is only a deep, hidden intimacy of artistic decisions. *Blue Ballerinas* by Serebriakova is a sketch only, to help find the right turn or movement for the composition. So, the right figure, imprinted from the back with small changes, is repeated in *Snowflakes (Nutcracker)* (1923, property of the Serebriakov family), but we can see a parallel with the works of Degas even in her study. The ballet image with a special luminosity of shades internally combines these two works.

Impressionistic search manifested in connection with the ballet theme in graphic works and painting of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century found similar reflection in the sculpture of the masters of that period. The sculptural plasticity of P. Trubetskoy and S. Lebedeva, being the most fresh and talented phenomenon, is most indicative. Free and pictorial modelling of forms that creates an effect of light and shade enhances the vivacity of the ballet image, makes it flexible in terms of intonation. The sculptural medium seems to be an uncontrolled element – eternally attracting and eternally elusive. The innovation of such masters as Trubetskoy and Lebedeva is that the core meaning of the dance motif is revealed not so much through meaningful associations and not by compositional choice, but exclusively through the sculpting structure, the movement of the sculptor's glass. In



FIG. 4. PAOLO TRUBETSKOY, *BALLERINA M. KSHESINSKAYA*, GYPSUM (CA. 1899). PRIVATE COLLECTION.

other words, the main characteristic of the works of Lebedeva and Trubetskoy is to find imagery in the material itself.

A clear example is *A. Pavlova* (private collection) by Trubetskoy. This work is typical of the artist because it shows all the features of his sculptural manner in condensed form. A footstep of an irreproachable form standing on the toe beautifully and confidently carries the excited figure of the ballerina. As if in a split second, the movement of the arm, the vibration of flexible hands, and the upward turn of the head are captured. Thin, vibrant modelling of hair and corsage, the softness of the sculptured surface, the shape of the tutu modelled by energetic-dynamic, uneven strokes – all these create the illusion of non-stop movement. Long, undulating sculptural folds give the impression of an elastic transparent gauze. The plastic form, the silhouette here is extremely mobile. Improvisation is clearly remarkable in a rapid, almost sketchy modelling, in common with the momentary dance itself. Knowledge of A. Pavlova's performing manner helps to feel more clearly the poetic design of the statue, to comprehend the image of the ballerina with lyrical penetration. The boldness of the plasticity solution of Trubetskoy, in this case, is formed also by a fleeting impulse of the creative spirit of the artist. Even when he uses a sitting posture – *Dancer (SCTM)*, *Seated Ballerina*



(RSAM), and less flexible material, such as bronze, he can create the impression of movement.

Small ballet plastique by Lebedeva *Standing Ballerina. Sketch* (TG), *Dancing Ballerina. Sketch* (TG), *Ballerina – a Dying Swan* (TG), *Ballerina with Arms Raised. Sketch* (TG) also demonstrates skilful possession of the form in fleetingly recorded sketches made in an experimental manner. Using some extremely laconic, generalized sculptural masses for a few minutes, she created the plasticity of the movement of small figures of dancers, whose “fleeting” truth would have escaped with deeper and more prolonged observation. These rapidly recorded episodes of dance are only sketches, as if flashed before us with some semi-figurative sign. They have all the advantages and disadvantages of sketches. That is, there is the beauty of understatement but there is no completeness of finished work, where each movement is unique and necessary. Unlike Lebedeva’s, the ballet images of Trubetskoy, despite their sketch quality, possess a bright inner logic and completeness.

As we can see, the individual mannerism of sculptors, freed from all sorts of inert form, their chosen ways of depicting images of living and renewing content with a dynamic form, constitute the inner force of the conceptual artistic solution.

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude that the search of artists associated with Impressionism in painting and sculpture clearly results in diverse ways of developing the theme of dance, and unlimited stylistic possibilities of its interpretation.

The development of Impressionism in the context of the image of dance had two trends: the first was determined by a specifically Russian outlook and associated with lyrical and romantic tradition, developed primarily in the St. Petersburg art school; the second one was close to the Western impressionistic worldview, it accumulated the artistic traditions of the French school. The stylistic features of the pictorial and sculptural impressionism are aimed at conveying the first impression and are associated with the implementation of impressionistic methods of absolutizing the moment (at the levels of themes, ideas, images, genre, and form) and colouristic techniques (using means of artistic plastic expression). Impressionism has

established a new way of looking at the dramaturgy of the image in fine arts. Edgar Degas, Z. Serebriakova, P. Trubetskoy, S. Lebedeva – it is not accidental that these four names are connected in this paper. In these four biographies, there are no clearly evident points of restraint; nevertheless, the commonality in the interpretation of the ballet theme is clearly manifested. Being talented artists, they were closely engaged in improving the spectacular impression, the subject matter of the frame, which contributed to the creation of a new aesthetic space that is higher and more important than just the compositional and luminous impeccability of the image; all this depicted the very truth of life of ballet. Studying from a certain angle the pictorial and sculptural works of Russian artists who applied the Impressionist laws, we wanted to show the smooth, very natural occurrence of the principles of French Impressionism in the toolbox of Russian masters, because this process was prepared by the historical path of the development of artistic culture throughout the preceding period.

Research materials can be useful in further scientific research related to the study of Russian culture of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; they can be part of the content of various disciplines of higher and secondary choreographic education (history of ballet, analysis of choreographic and artistic works). Some research results can be applied in other areas of the humanities (art history, aesthetics, culturology), as well as directly used in the practice of the ballet theatre.

**TATIANA V. PORTNOVA:** IMPRESSIONISTIC SEARCH IN ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF DANCE AT THE TURN OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**KEYWORDS:** IMPRESSIONISM; THE THEME OF DANCE; COMPOSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS; SPECTACULAR EXPRESSIVENESS; STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION; CREATIVE MANNER

## SUMMARY

This paper is an attempt to theoretically comprehend the interaction of classical dance and fine art in the context of Impressionism. The data is mainly based on two representatives of French and Russian art: Edgar Degas and Zinaida Serebriakova. Some impressionistic pursuit in sculpture has also been considered. The studied works of the artists, which have their unique features of compositional organization and stylistic manner of writing and modelling, are viewed as a single process of fine dramaturgy reflected in the meaning of artistic works. A new impressionistic approach to the theme of dance, which is associated with its expressive and fine nature, is stated on the basis of trend generalization of the compositional-visual thinking of the artists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## CV

Tatiana V. Portnova, Doctor of Art Studies, member of the Union of Theatre Workers of the Russian Federation, Russian and International Academies; professor at the department of The Art of the Choreographer at the Institute of Slavic Culture, Russian State University A.N. Kosygin. The main directions of Portnova's scientific research are focused on the sphere of classical ballet considered in the system of integrative arts history, contactual links, and forms of dance and plastic arts synthesis (the interaction of ballet and plastic arts in Russian artistic culture of the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Moscow, 2007). Portnova's research and expert work funded by public and private museums identifies and systematically catalogues works of art that capture classical dance, including the study of ballet dancers' and choreographers' creative staging viewed as creative activities, both historical and contemporary.