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Futurist Battles and the First World War. Pavel Filonov between 1914 and 1919*

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Introduction

The title *Art and Artistic Life during the Two World Wars* has a particular resonance for me as a specialist, well acquainted with the practice of mounting thematic exhibitions both in the former USSR and in Russia today, resurrecting memories of longstanding and continuous cultural policies. I have been involved in such exhibitions, not only helping to organise them, but also as the curator of a series of ‘military exhibitions’ of Soviet art held at the Tretyakov Gallery.¹ Since 1985, in our museum on Krymsky Val, we have periodically dedicated special large exhibitions to various anniversaries of the conclusion of the Great Patriotic War of 1941 to 1945.² The museum’s interest in these military exhibitions is, of course, connected with the specifically ‘propagandist’ role of all art, and especially Soviet art. And, from this perspective, a cultural analysis

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¹ The first exhibition, entitled *The Works of Moscow Artists in the Days of the Great Patriotic War*, was held during the summer of 1942 in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, because the restoration of the Tretyakov Gallery, which had been damaged by bombing in 1941, had only just begun. From 1942 to 1944, however, nine exhibitions were held in the Tretyakov’s halls, during the very process of restoration. The most significant of these was the all-Soviet exhibition *Heroism on and Behind the Front* in 1943.

² Since these exhibitions had no catalogues, their precise content may be surmised only by means of internal documents. I should also admit that there was little variation between them: for each exhibition, the Tretyakov Gallery’s own collection was used, selecting the best classic works on the theme of war and peace. In 2005, sections of the exhibition were devoted to the life of the Tretyakov Gallery itself during the years of the war, and to the history of the evacuation of a part of the collection to Novosibirsk.

of these jubilee exhibitions is a specific, and very interesting, problem: our exhibitions have helped to create visual images of the war for several Soviet and post-Soviet generations.

My article deals with another time and another topic. I would like to offer some remarks on Pavel Filonov and Russian art from the era of the First World War. Let me note that there are significantly fewer researchers into the art of the First World War than the Second World War.³ As a result, nearly one hundred years after the First World War, there is still no general or common view of official art in Russia during that period: concepts of art in the era of the First World War resemble the scattered parts of a mosaic rather than a carefully composed single panel.

In reality, there were many famous Russian battle painters working in the years 1914 to 1918, painters in whose artistic projects conflicts and battles comprised an invariable part, for reasons both of vocation and training: Franz Rubo (1856–1928), Nikolai Samokish (1860–1944), Rikhard-Karl Zommer (1866–1939), Mikhail Avilov (1881–1954), Mitrofan Grekov (1882–1934), Rudolf Frents (1888–1956), Anatoly Sokolov (1891–1971) and Ivan Vladimirov (1869–1947), who, incidentally, was a native of Vilnius.⁴ Graphic artists offered a creative tribute to the war as well: wartime newspapers were peppered with caricature assaults on the enemy, and new propaganda posters came out continually. At the same time, some of these artists became fighters, serving as soldiers or officers. Others were correspondents, and drew documentary sketches right on the front line. Let me name just a few of them: Georgy Yakulov (Yakulyan Gevorg, Zhorz Velikolepny, 1884–1928), Petr Konchalovsky (1876–1956), Aleksei Issupov (1889–1957), Konstantin Istomin (1887–1942), Anatoly Arapov (1876–1949), Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935), Pavel Filonov (1883–1941) and Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964).

³ This problem of the art of the First World War was noticed at the exhibition *Moscow-Berlin* (1996).

⁴ Born in Vilnius, the famous battle painter Ivan Vladimirov served as an artist-reporter on four military fronts, recording scenes from the Russo-Japanese War of 1905–1907, the First Balkan War of 1911–1912, the First World War from 1914 to 1918, and the Russian Civil War from 1919 to 1921, and he lived to see the Second World War as well.

A broad view of art from the time of the First World War will take shape only gradually, of course, from a painstaking assembly and study of documents, artistic works and memoirs. The war extended into national territories that were then part of a single state, the Russian Empire, generating a steady flow of refugees and large-scale emigration from different embattled areas.⁵ Putting together a general picture of 'Russian art' during this period, of course, requires the study of many individual cases, as well as material from several now independent states: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Russia proper. It is useful to examine this period through retrospective optics, through the wrong end of binoculars. Art from each of the countries that later broke off from the empire may be productively examined in the period 1914 to 1918 not only in isolation, as part of a closed-off tradition of works produced by national masters, but also in the wider perspective of artistic traditions throughout the Russian Empire, and even all of Europe. In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, almost all of the Russian Empire's artists were in one way or another united by international bonds: in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Munich, Paris, Riga and Petersburg, they studied, resided, travelled, exhibited and/or taught together. Some of them continued to participate in an international artistic milieu; others periodically or even episodically. As this conference makes evident, scholars from these different ex-imperial states have made great strides in the study of national artistic traditions in the era of the war. Nonetheless, the general picture of the cultural-historical landscape of the war era that they have tentatively posited remains, in my view, incomplete and still lacks in particular one important piece.

Official art created in eras of important historical events not only reflects or registers visual images of these events, but also fixes them in the minds of the viewers, and thus immortalises them. The war prints its trace on the popular consciousness and in artistic production not only in terms of actual scenes, but also symbolically, in moods and presentiments,

⁵ In 1915, the Latvian artist Alexander Drevin painted several paintings on the 'refugee' theme.

in mythical visions, and in new combinations of colours, forms, lines and rhythms. To illustrate this idea, we might consider the subtitle of Salvador Dalí's famous painting *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Promo-nition of Civil War)* (1936). As the art and cultural historian Aleksandr Yakimovich often emphasises, art unconsciously 'reveals' its own time, bringing to light features that many contemporaries had not previously perceived.⁶

The era of the First World War begins in the visual arts even before the first shot in Sarajevo. And it is precisely from this point of departure that I would like to share some thoughts about art on the eve of 1914. This war in Russia was sometimes called the 'Second Patriotic War' (the 'First' being the Russian-French conflict of 1812 to 1814), or 'the German War', later 'the World War', and only much later did it come to be known as the 'First World War'.

The Prologue to War: Russian Futurists in the Last Season of Peace, 1913–1914

In the second decade of the 20th century, on the eve of the storm itself, the people who were most perceptive to changes in the social climate and the state of the world at large were, in Russia, as in all of Europe, members of the innovative artistic movements. In Petersburg, for example, the most symbolically revealing events of the artistic season in the winter of 1913 were a series of performances staged in the Luna Park Theatre, in particular *Victory over the Sun*, a futuristic opera by the poet Aleksei Kruchenykh (1886–1962), with sets by Kazimir Malevich. At the opera's first performances on 3 and 5 December 1913, neither the creators of the production nor its viewers understood that they were participating in a highly significant symbolic act. In fact, *Victory over the Sun*, whose very title seems to warn of the possibility that darkness could triumph over light, marked the end of peace on earth and the beginning of chaos. The proclaimed 'victory over the sun' designated the triumph of new norms,

⁶ А. Якимович, Успехи и поражения империи в портретах Веласкеса. Report on the conference: *Произведение искусства - документ эпохи*, Москва, НИИПРАХ, 23–24 March 2011.

of semantic shifts and deformations, of explosive forms: in short, of the violent Futurist uproar over the more placid and self-contained aesthetics that had reigned up till then.

Within the context of the Russian avant-garde itself, this opera actually became a catalyst for destructive change, initiating a process that led to the disintegration of the association of artists known as the Union of Youth (Союз молодежи), a group that had been in existence for almost four years and that was closely linked to the Futurists. The reasons for the break-up of the Union of Youth were non-artistic in nature, and based on the financial demands, ultimately quite unreasonable, that the play's author Kruchenykh addressed to Levky Zheverzhev (1881–1942), the production's organiser and a patron of the Union of Youth. The conflict quickly escalated into a series of violent verbal clashes, in which various members of the union, including both Kruchenykh and Malevich, felt compelled to withdraw from the group. It is true that hostile disputes between the Futurists (called in Russian *Budetlyane*), as propagandists of new aesthetic principles in artistic creation, and their opponents had already become the norm in debates organised by the Futurists throughout 1913 in both Moscow and Petersburg. Nonetheless, after various artists involved in the squabble over *Victory of the Sun* withdrew from the Union of Youth, this centrifugal tendency in the Futurist milieu grew even stronger.

The arrival in January 1914 of the celebrated Italian futurist Tommaso Marinetti stimulated the military inclinations of the *Budetlyane*. Let me recall that Marinetti had surprised Europe with his loud and enthusiastic support of war. His sound-poem *Zang, tumb, tuuum*, inspired by the siege of Adrianople that took place in 1912 and 1913 during the First Balkan War, celebrated that violent conflict. Published before the outbreak of the First World War, the book was one of the first literary works to address the series of contemporary conflicts that led to the Great War, and Marinetti brought it along when he travelled to Russia. It was as if he were trying to rouse the god of large-scale warfare. And awake it did. The thunder of the Great War burst forth during the summer of 1914. And all of the earlier symbolic and ideological battles of the Futurists, the clashes

between artists of Petersburg and of Moscow, the Russian Budetlyane's attacks on the Italian Futurists, and, more generally, the conflict between all Futurists and the conservative and passé mindset of bourgeois society as a whole, were replaced by real battles, accompanied by the requirement that artists and poets take part in real military action. Many artists were wounded in this war; the rolls of the mutilated included the painters Konchalovsky, Filonov, Istomin and Larionov. Among the fallen were Le Dantyu and Nikolai Burlyuk. In addition, obviously, many budding talents were prevented by the war from developing further.

We do not have many records of the actual experiences of artists from this period. Those who were in the trenches or on the front line rarely discuss the war itself in their letters. And they wrote relatively little, using their hands to hold rifles rather than pens, while their legs waded through mud and their bodies were bent and misshapen under the burden of war. Nonetheless, while at the front, artists thought and felt about aspects of war that could not always be perceived by the eye. We are still in the process of acquiring information and details about some of these perceptions.

Several years ago, in an archive of the Tretyakov Gallery, I found a book by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti which he had signed with his trademark arrow and given to Yuliya Arapova, the wife of the artist Anatoly Arapov.⁷ Arapova, who saved both Marinetti's book with his signature arrow on the flyleaf and her own writings about life in Moscow's bohemian circles in different periods, both before the war and after it began, makes our knowledge about the Italian artist's stay in Moscow much more vivid.⁸ After the visit, Marinetti's work became widely known in

⁷ И. Пронина, Юлия Арапова: муза символиста, адресат футуриста, *Русское искусство*, 2010, no. 1, pp. 78-85.

⁸ Y. Arapova describes an intrigue at the reception that was held for Marinetti in the home of the writer Aleksei Tolstoy in February 1914, as a singular reflection of the war between the Futurists and the Passéists. At the event, Arapova herself appeared as Cinderella, according to the wishes of her Symbolist and Passéist husband, and this image 'struck' the Futurist Marinetti. In response to Arapova's costume, he sent her his 'arrow-autograph' on the flyleaf of his book. Arapova's memoirs reveal that it was Marinetti's interference which ultimately led to the collapse of Tolstoy's marriage: the relationship between Marinetti and S.I. Dymshits-Tolstaya that

Russia. He either brought or sent a copy of his poem *Zang, tumb, tuuum* to Arapova's husband, and later he sent a number of other copies to the Arapovs for distribution.

Arapova's recollections include notes on her direct experience of the hardships of the war. Married in the autumn of 1913, Yuliya lovingly conserved in her memoirs the details of every day from that first winter, a very happy period in her life, but soon she found herself among the new 'Decembrist wives', devoted spouses who shared their husbands' lot. A true comrade-in-arms of the Symbolist and romantic Arapov, she took the opportunity in 1915 to follow him into war, first to Warsaw and then to the Vitebsk area. Her writings on these experiences bring to life the work day of Arapov, an artist who was made a quartermaster on the front line:

A[natoly] A[fanasevich], having been put in charge of the army depot, has become terribly fatigued from this unfamiliar work, all day long counting saddles, horseshoes, treads and more than 400 other denominations [...] He had to know it all by heart. He himself kept the accounts and was quite afraid of making errors [...] Those evenings which happened to be ours alone were wondrous and full of dreams, and full of our beloved, creative labour. During such evenings, A.A. began work on the mythological scene *Venus, Vulcan and Mars* and then *Pieretta at the Seaside*.⁹

Uncovering new evidence relating to the location or the circumstances in which works of art were generated is a rare success for a biographer. This is even more true during times of war: although many artists and poets set off for the front, we have only fragmentary notes on their thoughts from this period, nothing but scattered lines about the processes of creative thinking that continued even in the midst of the military activity. Arapov continued his creative programme even during the war, and expressed his thoughts about that time in the language of mythological allegory.

began at this masquerade developed into the amorous liaison that destroyed the Tolstoy family (Пронина, *op. cit.*, с. 81).

⁹ Ю.Г. Арапова, *Воспоминания*, Отдел Рукописей Государственной Третьяковской галереи, Ф. 146, л. 47, л. 14-15.

Much to the Futurists' credit, they too found artistic inspiration, even after leaving behind the exhibition halls of Moscow and Petersburg. Thus, Kazimir Malevich, called up in the autumn of 1916, left notes containing his reflections on art in a series of letters to his friend, the artist and musician Mikhail Matyushin (1861–1934). While stationed with a detachment of military road builders in the village of Sharkovshchina in the guberniya of Vilenskaya, Malevich wrote to Matyushin, who had stayed behind in Petersburg, about the strong impression that was produced on all the men by the phenomenon of military aviation. At the same time, he also shared his plans for a new journal *Supremus*, as well as his thoughts on future exhibitions and the publication of several theoretical articles.¹⁰ Malevich's lack of attention in these letters to the hardships of war and to the discomforts of life in the field suggest that he was psychologically able to put the war aside and to exist outside the martial space. This is yet another aspect of the relationship between art and war.

Returning to the historical context of the visual arts in wartime Russia, we should note that the first artists to respond to the conflict were the creators of *lubki* (prints made from carved wooden blocks) and posters. A very similar 'representational' response to the war may be found in the art of other countries on both sides: *lubki* and posters may be found not only in Russia, but also in both England and Germany. The specifics of the *lubki* genre turned out to be unusually in demand at the time. The creative style of the artists of the 'new' Russian art that had appeared in the decade preceding the First World War was often deliberately made to resemble the aesthetics of the *lubok*, and here we can recall the Soldier series of Mikhail Larionov. Continuing our discussion of the symbolic imagery of historical events, it was precisely the artistic innovators that created the most famous 'military' works, with their mystical understanding of the laws of peace and war.

In this same era, two different cycles of paintings were produced by the female artists Natalya Goncharova and Olga Rozanova, both entitled

¹⁰ *Малевич о себе. Современники о Малевиче*. Сост. И. Вакар, Т. Михиенко, Москва, 2004, т. 1, с. 96. This book will soon be available in English translation.

War, and both painted in a highly symbolic style, although absolutely distinct from one another.¹¹ The images of war that these women created were quite close to those elaborated on the other side of the conflict by the German Expressionist painters. As scholars have noted, another Russian parallel to this stylistic tendency, with its acutely articulate reflection of the deformation of human nature during the war, may be found in the work of the artist Pavel Filonov. One of the most original artists of the 20th century, Filonov remains for many an unknown figure in the world of Russian avant-garde art, perhaps because, unlike Malevich, his ‘comrade-in-arms’ from the Union of Youth, he did not have obvious successors among the painters of Europe. Nonetheless, critics began to compare Filonov’s canvasses, works such as *Composition. Ships* (1913), *Man and Woman* (1912–1913) and *Feast of Kings* (1912–1913), with the work of German Expressionists, such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), and Ludwig Meidner (1884–1966) when he was still quite young. Essential differences in methods between Filonov and the German painters, as well as Filonov’s particular interest in the psychological aspects of the creative process, make such comparisons less than fully convincing.¹² Let me tell you a bit about Pavel Filonov and his peculiar experience of the German War.

The German War of Pavel Filonov

Pavel Filonov’s fate was both significant and typical of the war era. Filonov was born in Moscow in 1883, and thus by virtue of his age he belonged to the Russian generation that witnessed (to the extent that it was able to survive them) not only the social upheavals of 1917 and the Russian Civil War, but also the two world wars. In the First World War, Filonov was a

¹¹ Н. Гончарова, *Мистические образы войны*. 14 литографий, Москва, 1914; *Война*, слова А. Крученых, резьба О. Розановой, Петроград, 1916; А. Крученых, О. Розанова, *Вселенская война*. Б. Цветная клей, Петроград, 1916.

¹² С. Кусков, Вопросы о принадлежности Филонова к экспрессионистический традиции, *Комментарии*, вып. 2, Москва, 1993, pp. 272–282; И.А. Пронина, О Филонове и экспрессионизме, *Русский авангард 1910–1920 годов и проблема экспрессионизма*, Москва, 2003, pp. 206–213.



1. Pavel Filonov. *The Holy Family*. 1914

soldier on the Romanian front. In the Second World War he died from exhaustion and a cold that he had caught in December of 1941, while stationed on the roof of a building during the siege of Leningrad. His

development as an artist was accelerating with the outbreak of the First World War, even slightly before.

In his autobiography, Filonov describes his prodigious artistic output against the background of the First World War:

From the spring to the autumn of 1914, I painted *Peasant Family* [also known as *The Holy Family*] [Fig. 1], and *Dairy Maids*. In the period from the autumn of 1914 until I was sent to the German front, I completed *The Dray-Men, Workers, Peasants, Merchant Family*, a series of naturalistic and abstract works without titles, two portraits of my sisters, flowers, *Composition. Introduction to World Blooming* [Fig. 2] and *War*¹³ [Fig. 3], *Poor* in several versions, *The Parting of the Waters*, and the purely biological *Girls*.¹⁴

As Filonov's writing makes evident, he painted a large, partly abstract canvas known today as *The German War* in 1914, before he actually departed for the front. This is a particularly interesting fact. The work remains unlike anything that has been produced in Russian painting on the subject of war. Compositionally, this large, nearly square canvas is neatly divided into four parts of equal size, each of which is oriented towards one of the four corners of the earth. Filonov painted two other canvasses with exactly the same dimensions as this picture about war.¹⁵ One of them depicts a peaceful scene in a peasant family, with an infant at the centre, the traditional subject of the Holy Family, encircled by nature in full bloom and domestic livestock. In the vertical organisation of the canvas, the concept of the sacred is emphasised by various devices: the figure of the infant, for example, is placed in a separate space and distinguished by its luminous and colourful texture. The female figure is painted in tones that are slightly less luminous. Filonov used a similar technique of emphasising certain images or portions of the canvas, by illuminating them in the most important parts of the composition in *The*

¹³ Sometimes called *The German War* (1914–1915) now at the State Russian Museum.

¹⁴ П. Филонов, Автобиография (Черновой вариант автобиографических текстов 1929 и 1932 года), in: *Филонов. Художник. Исследователь. Учитель*. Сост. Дж. Боулт, Н. Мислер, И. Пронина, П. Ракитин, А. Сарабьянов, т. 2, Москва, 2006, p. 79.

¹⁵ These two paintings are: the abstract *Composition. Introduction to World Blooming* (1915–1916) in the Tretyakov Gallery, and *The Holy Family* in the collection of the State Russian Museum.



2. Pavel Filonov. *Composition. Introduction to World Blooming*. 1915–1916

German War as well. In this painting, amidst the dark chaos of deformed humans' and horses' bodies, the luminous figure of a young woman unexpectedly shows through at the very top of the canvas. This illuminated image forces us to react with horror to the jumble of bodies, at the senseless



3. Pavel Filonov. *The German War*. 1914

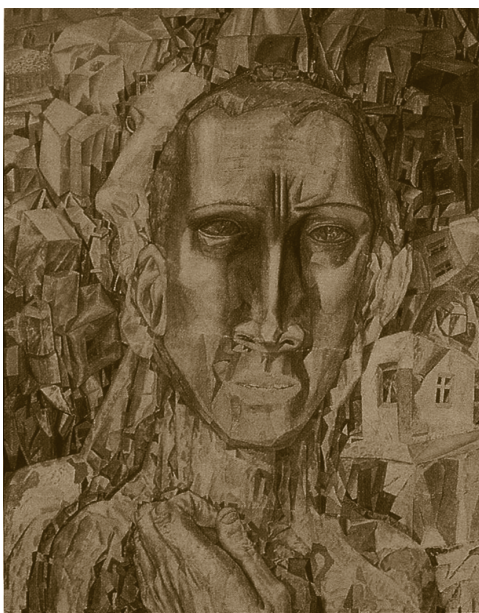
mass of victims, and simultaneously introduces a very different theme, the affirmation of life, in the image of war itself. Chaos does not cover the whole surface of the canvas. These are Filonov's figurative standards and his formulae for the representation of both war and peace.

It is interesting to look at this painting in the context of Filonov's overarching artistic programme. Many of the works that he created in this early period retained a particularly deep significance for him, even though the pictorial content of each of these individual paintings does not wholly reveal its semantic content. Some of the canvasses from 1914 were first exhibited only in 1919. After the war and the revolution, they became a part of the cycle of paintings with the symbolic title *Introduction to World Blooming*.¹⁶

The list of what Filonov accomplished in a period of two years is quite striking. He clearly understood that departing for the front line meant mortal danger, so he hurried to express his main ideas in painting. The war forced him, like many others, to look differently at the formal and structural aspects of his life, seen, for example, in family relationships. Filonov's realistic portraits of his sisters Alexandra and Evdokiya, and of Franz Aziber (the husband of a third sister, Ekaterina) and his son, are a form of gratitude for their moral and financial support. His reaction to the war may be seen not only in the way that with these paintings he creates a capacious metaphor or symbolic image of the conflict itself, but also in his mode of preparing for the possible end of his own mortal existence. If we examine his actions during this period, it becomes clear that his approach to preparing for the end was informed by a religious perspective on matters of life and death.

The real war began for Filonov in the autumn of 1916. He produced a series of drawings during his time at the front, and we have some precise information on his actual military experiences that helps to clarify where exactly the extant drawings were produced. Filonov was 'sent to the front line as a soldier of the home guard, first to Reval [now Tallinn] and Gapsal', then through Bogoyavlensk, Nikolaev and Odessa to the mouth of the Danube and the city of Sulin, on the Romanian front. In the mercantile quarter of Bogoyavlensk on the River Bug, he painted, perhaps on commission, a colour-wash on a wall entitled *Landing of the Troops* which is about 25 square metres

¹⁶ The cycle included 22 canvasses. See: И.А. Пронина, В поисках символа «Мировой расцвет» П.Н. Филонова, *Символизм в авангарде*, Москва, 2003, pp. 210-223.



4. Pavel Filonov. *Conqueror of the City*. 1914–1915

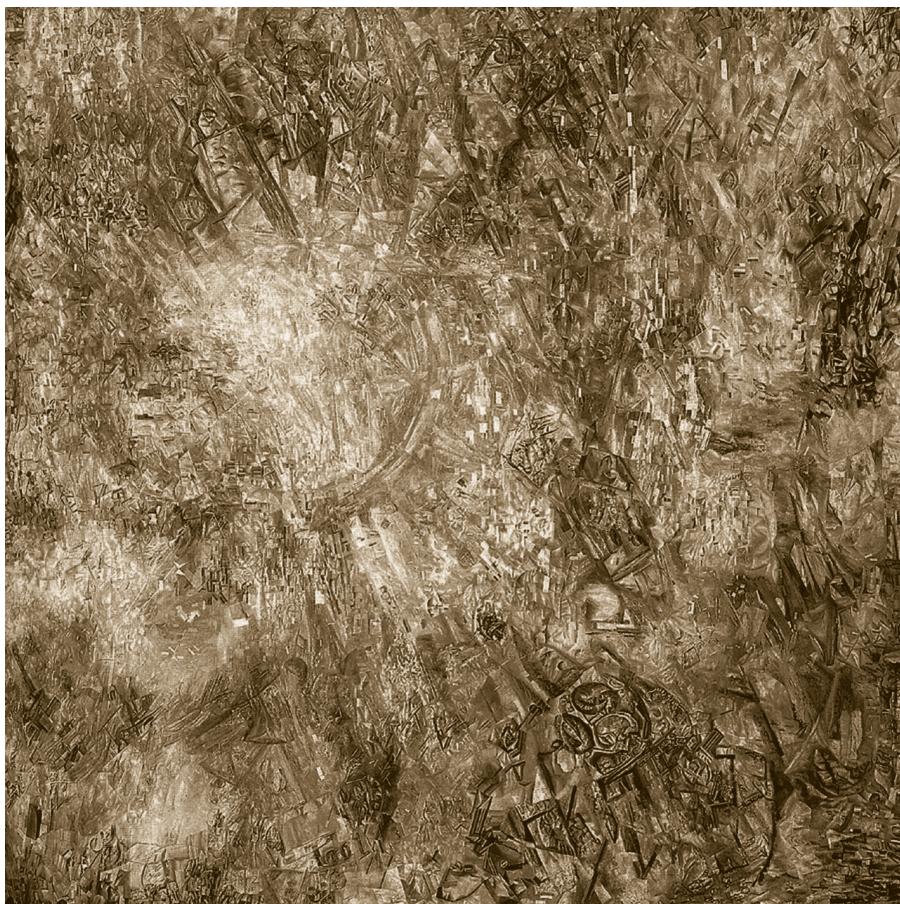
in size. In a village on the Danube near Tulchi, he painted four watercolours, *The Officers*, *Fisherman Lipovanin*, *The Soldier* and *Scouts*.¹⁷

It is interesting to note that these works produced on the front lines are painted in a very realistic style, and thus do not resemble the style of the abstract and symbolic paintings from the German War cycle. Later, he was assigned to the city of Izmail, where, elected to the soldiers' committee of the Baltic Naval Division and Danube Region, he began his socio-political activity. Here, Filonov witnessed the disintegration of the German front and the process of its transformation into a revolutionary one. His own activities briefly reflected this revolution-

ary tendency. For example, he even presided over a congress of soldiers, although he did not pursue a revolutionary career in later life.

Filonov's war came to an end in 1918, when he returned from the front, having completed all the military tasks that were entrusted to him. He did not continue the military line in his artistic career: he did not become a Commissar of Art. But he clearly returned to Petrograd with a sense of being the winner. He had walked through the fire of combat and survived: now he was free to return to his work, to his art. Symbolically as well, Filonov took up the image of the winner who rejects the temptations of power, as if realising a leitmotif that he had incorporated into a work from 1915, *Conqueror of the City* (Fig. 4). Indeed, one of his first paintings after returning to Petrograd was *Victory over Eternity* (1921), in

¹⁷ Филонов, op. cit., p. 79.



5. Pavel Filonov. *Formula of the Period from 1904 to July 1922 (Universal Shift into the World Blooming through the Russian Revolution)*. 1920–1922

which he extends his sense of victory to mortality itself. ‘I fought the war not for space (territory) but for time,’ he later wrote about his military experiences.

As he progressed further along the roads of war and revolution, the main ideas of the conceptual cycle Introduction to World Blooming

that he had initiated on the front line underwent certain transformations. In my view, the first stage of his work on the themes of this cycle concludes with the canvas *Formula of the Period from 1904 to July 1922 (Universal Shift into the World Blooming through the Russian Revolution)* (1920–1922, Fig. 5). The largest work of this period (186 centimetres by 186 centimetres) produces an impression as a figurative metaphor, as an artistic formula-abstraction. This composition does not suggest a precise and particular interpretation; its meaning lies beyond verbal language, in the sphere of the visual, of subconscious emotional knowledge. The picture is entirely devoid of depicted objects, yet powerful, complex and, at the same time, subtle, suffused with a transparent light blue, and most delicately painted with a small brush, an assemblage of dotted points in various colours, particles in a symphony of colours, and small forms that fly about in the Suprematist manner. This is the canvas-meditation, dedicated to the drama of Russian history. It begins, as suggested by Filonov's title, with the Russo-Japanese War, and concludes with the end of the Civil War. In stylistic terms, this huge canvas was bold and innovative. Conceptually, it was profound and philosophically abstract. Through these visual forms, Filonov likens historical events to the organic processes of cosmic life.¹⁸ Attempts to understand his agenda more fully result consistently in an impasse. Examining Filonov's work in retrospect, it becomes evident that his artistic and visual conceptualisation of the war era was more far-reaching and profound than his own conscious understanding of it. As a result of his experiences on the front line and in the congresses of soldiers' delegates, he was able to find a metaphor to demonstrate that war, in destroying the forms, the constructs, and the foundations of the old world, launches a new vital cycle. War and revolution create forms of a new life from the pieces of what has been destroyed.

¹⁸ It is worth noting that this picture was exhibited for years as *Cosmos*, and that the present name was restored only in 2006. See: Павел Филонов. Провидец Невидимого, С-Петербург, 2006.

The Cycle Introduction to World Prosperity – There is no Death!

I am convinced that the Russian Futurists' reply to the era of the First World War comprises three crucial moments: it extends from the opera *Victory over the Sun* by Kruchenykh and Malevich to Filonov's cycle Introduction to World Prosperity, with Malevich's famous conceptual *Black Square* (1915) serving as a midpoint. These works were Russia's principal artistic responses to the cataclysms of the 20th century. In the cycle Introduction to World Blooming, Filonov created a highly unusual artistic response to the First World War and to the Russian Revolution, both of which were historic events to which the term 'world' fully applies. In this context, he chose to use the language of artistic formulae, of polyptychs, and of complex compositions with multiple parts, containing pictures and drawings of different sizes and on different subjects.

War means the violation of boundaries and the destruction of the integrity of both lives and cultures. And war's aftermath always brings displacement and a reshuffling of cultural traditions and patterns of daily life. New flowers grow out of the ashes: new political entities take shape, in short, after the combat has ended, 'blooming' begins. It is interesting to note that 'blooming' in Russian is the same word as 'prosperity'. Thus, the painting entitled *Flowers of World Blooming* (Fig. 6) that Filonov completed before departing for the front line might also be translated as *Flowers of World Prosperity*, and his cycle Introduction to World Blooming might also be called Introduction to World Prosperity. The most important idea that Filonov symbolically expresses in *Flowers of World Blooming* is the certainty that life will triumph over death. This figurative assertion of the basic idea of Christianity constitutes Filonov's own personal article of faith. In my view, the most significant element in this cycle, and the most important and profound leitmotiv in all of Filonov's work, finds a reflection in the poetics of his contemporary Tikhon Churilin, and may be seen in the poems entitled *Spring after Death* that were published during the war in 1915.¹⁹ Much later, during the Second World War, the same

¹⁹ This book of poems written by T. Churilin (1885–1946) was illustrated by N. Goncharova



6. Pavel Filonov. *Flowers of World Blooming*. 1915

conclusion that ‘There is no death!’ would resound in the title of a story written by another artist and humanist, the writer Andrei Platonov.

(Т. Чурилин, *Весна после смерти*, Москва, 1915). It is not clear whether Filonov knew Churilin personally, but both artists were close to the circle of M. Larionov and N. Goncharova in 1912–1913, and both socialised separately with V. Khlebnikov in the period when the exchange of artistic ideas was constant and swift.

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Futuristiniai mūšiai ir Pirmasis pasaulinis karas. Pavelas Filonovas 1914–1919

Santrauka

Praėjo beveik šimtas metų nuo Pirmojo pasaulinio karo, tačiau iki šiol nėra vieningo požiūrio į to laikotarpio Rusijos dailę. Šiame kare kariavo daug rusų avangardo dailininkų: Georgijus Jakulovas, Pavelas Končialovskis, Aleksejus Issupovas, Konstantinas Istominas, Anatolijus Arapovas, Kazimiras Malevičius, Pavelas Filonovas, Michailas Larionovas ir kiti. Vizualiajame mene karo epocha prasidėjo dar iki Sarajevo šūvio futuristine Aleksejaus Kručionych and Malevičiaus opera *Pergalė prieš saulę*, pastatyta 1913 m. Peterburge. Ypatingą reikšmę turėjo italų futuristo Tomasso Marinetti 1913 m. vizitas į Rusiją. Jo poema *Zang, tumb, tuuum* buvo vienas pirmųjų literatūros kūrinių, skirtų ginkluotiems konfliktams, kurie vedė į Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą. Visą Europą pribloškęs garsia ir entuziastinga karo propaganda, Marinetti paskatino ir karinius rusų futuristų – „budetlianių“ polinkius. Filonovas buvo vienas iš jų. 1914–1916 m. jis nutapė reikšmingiausius paveikslus. Dar prieš išvykdamas į frontą 1916 m., Filonovas 1914 m. sukūrė didelę, pusiau abstrakčią drobę *Karas su Vokietija*, pasižyminčią geometriniu formų skaidymu, sudėtinga kompozicija, švytinčių, spalvingų faktūrų akcentais. Filonovo karas baigėsi 1918 m., kai jis grįžo iš fronto ir atsisakė karinės karjeros, meno komisaro pareigų. Kai kurios 1914 m. drobės pirmą sykį buvo eksponuotos 1919 m. kaip dalys ciklo, simboliškai pavadinto *Ižanga į pasaulio suklestėjimą*. Šio ciklo idėjos išsivystė į drobę pavadinimu *1904–1922 m. laikotarpio formulė (Universalus posūkis į pasaulio suklestėjimą per Rusijos revoliuciją)* (1920–1922). Šis meditatyvus paveikslas skirtas Rusijos istorijos dramai, kuri prasideda, anot Filonovo, Rusijos ir Japonijos karu ir baigiasi pilietiniu. Stilistiniu požiūriu drobė buvo drąsi ir novatoriška, sudėtinga ir abstrakti, konceptuali požiūriu – filosofinė. Pasitelkęs vizualines formas Filonovas prilygino istorinius įvykius organiškiesiems kosminio gyvenimo procesams. Jis rado metaforą, kuri teigė, kad karas, viską naikinantis ir griauantis senojo pasaulio pamatus, pradeda naują vitalinį ciklą. Dailininkas buvo įsitikinęs, kad karas ir revoliucija naujo gyvenimo formas kūrė iš nuolaūžų to, kas buvo sugriauta. Rusų futuristų reakcija į Pirmojo pasaulinio karo epochą susidėjo iš trijų svarbiausių dalių: pirmoji – Kručionych ir Malevičiaus opera *Pergalė prieš saulę*, antroji – Malevičiaus *Juodas kvadratas* (1915), o trečioji – Filonovo ciklas *Ižanga į pasaulio suklestėjimą*. Toks buvo esminis Rusijos dailininkų atsakas į XX a. pradžios kataklizmus.