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Leon Bakst portrait of Ida Rubinstein: from Modern Style to Belle Epoque

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Abstract

The subject of the article is the graphical portrait of Ida Rubinstein, the work of Leon Bakst in 1921. A comparative-historical and stylistic analysis of the portrait becomes possible when considering the historical and artistic situation in European art of the early 1920s and against the background of Ida Rubinstein's portraits created by other masters during the same period. Thus, the object of research expands to the portraits of Leon Bakst and his contemporaries in the 1910s and the 1920s. The author focus his attention to "Portrait of Ida Rubinstein" by Valentin Serov (1910), numerous allegorical portraits of Ida Rubinstein by Romaine Brooks in the 1910s, sketches of scenic costumes for Ida Rubinstein, created by Leo Bakst in his «Parisian period». The purpose of the research is to reveal the stylistic features of the portrait of Ida Rubinstein by Leon Bakst in 1921 in the context of the artist's creative method and his artistic search in the 1920s. The aim of this research is to analyze the portrait, compare it with the works of contemporaries-portraitists and with the own portraits of Leon Bakst, to trace the evolution of the Bakstian portraiture. The level of novelty of the present research makes it relevant and fascinating to explore.

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Leon Bakst, Ida Rubinstein, portrait, modern, Art Deco, Belle Epoque, Valentin Serov, Romaine Brooks, Sergei Diaghilev, "Russian Seasons", "World of Art", dancer, ballet.

Introduction

The lady in an extravagant black and white garment, with a huge clutch on the softly lowered left hand, is standing in a half turn to the viewer. Her face, the resolute and delicate "Egyptian" profile, practically does not attract attention because of the large contrasting spots of the dress. According to researchers, Ida Rubinstein's graphic portrait by Lev Bakst (1921) "is deprived of individual characteristics" [Lapshina, 1977, 130] and is, in fact, continues her elegant costume, as in a sketch for a fashion studio (Leo Bakst in his Parisian period made such sketches for the studio of Zhanna Paken).

Works of Lev Bakst in the context of artistic searches on the turn of the XIX-XX centuries

In the 1920s Europe in its artistic search goes far beyond the stylistics of modernity (Art Nouveau), in which Leo Bakst created his famous images-extravaganza for the "Russian Seasons". The avant-garde and the variety of "isms" in European artistic pursuits coexist with the nostalgia of the aesthetic bourgeois on pre-war luxury, which will soon find its embodiment in the Art Deco style. The art deco tendencies, which some researchers consider a variant of the "reborn" art nouveau, are manifested in the early 1920s in interior decoration, accessories, new costume lines, hairstyles and make-up.

The artists of the "World of Art", subtle and experienced stylists, moved abroad in different years - from the early 1910s, as Bakst, and later in emigration, as Alexander Benois and Konstantin Somov. They somehow "integrated" into the European artistic process, solving or ignoring the problems of adaptation to the requirements of the European viewer and the customer. Unlike K. Somov, who turned up in Paris more than two decades later than Bakst and who remained an "old-fashioned" "stranger" and a marginalist for most of the Parisian public, Lev Bakst, recognized and famous for his works for Diaghilev's "Russian Seasons" incorporated into a new aesthetics much easier. Bakst, being a genuine "fashion designer" of Paris, who created his own style outside the style, has become one of the most active creators and interpreters of the Belle Epoque style - the fashionable images of the 1920s.

Ida Rubinstein is the "stylish" model of the era of decadence

The era of the XIX-XX centuries, brought to aestheticism limit in art and everyday life, marked by brilliant highs of symbolist poetry and painting, embodied in the splendid works of architecture and design of Art Nouveau, gave birth to an amazing phenomenon of creative artistry, self-construction of creative personalities when an imaginary decadent marginal character replaces the real identity of the creator and becomes a public embodiment of his "I". "Something of the root is added to the face of the individual" [Belyj, 1994, 420] - Andrew Belyj writes about the basic feature of the bohemians - the desire to create a personal artistic "role", the mask, which replaces the real essence. Artistic Bohemian of the late XIX - early XX centuries treats its own life as a work of art, and the stylization of the external appearance as a part of its aesthetic credo [Matyunina, 2004]. Mysterious "Cagliostro" poet Mikhail Kuzmin, "the transcendental knight" Alexander Blok, famous European dandies and decadents Oscar Wilde, Robert de Montesquiou are a number of these "main" artistic characters of the cultural life of the turn of the century. A very popular image of femme fatale - a decadent, mysterious and fatal woman - was changed by famous poetesses and women of the world. In Russia it is the "decadent Madonna" Zinaida Gippius, in Europe it is the muse of poets and artists an Italian aristocrat Louise Kazati (sketches of costumes for which, by the way, also created Lev Bakst).

Russian non-professional dancer was "a real charmer, who is dangerous to death" [Benua, 1993, book 4, 5, 471] and who had a resounding success in the "Russian Seasons" by Sergei Diaghilev. Ida Rubinstein "completely made the Parisians crazy" [Ibid, 469] for several decades and "even eclipsed Pavlova" [Ibid] thanks not to her dancing, according to her choreographers, she did not have great abilities [Dobrovolskaya, Slonimsky, 1981, 231], but thanks to her textured external and plastic data. Alexander Benua wrote: "she ... did not dance, but she walked with royal beauty, with beauty of gestures" [Benua, 1993, 469].

Contemporaries unanimously recognized the decorative oriental appearance of Ida Rubinstein as a standard of beauty of a rare type. Up to the first Parisian "season" in which Ida participated, she was "Fokin's mysterious student", whom the "conspirators" Mikhail Fokin and Lev Bakst kept "in secret", which led to "the birth of a legend that soon flourished in a lush color" [Ibid., 471]. A. Benua wrote: "She is a mysterious person, and a genius as an actress, and besides she is immensely rich. At the same time, she was remarkable for her amazing and unique features: she was ready to go to achieve the intended artistic goal to the extreme limits of permissiveness and decency, even to publicly strip naked". At the same time, Benua continues, "she was unbelievably beautiful and amazingly gifted in all senses. Finally, she belonged to the highest Jewish nobility, which was extremely disapproving of such a scenic obsession and in every way put obstacle on Ida's way to achieve the ideal. The personality of Fokin's student surrounded all this with a captivating halo" [Ibid]. "I must say that Ida Rubinstein's face had so unconditional, amazing beauty, that all the faces around her all of a sudden became crooked, meaty, blurred," her contemporary wrote [Simonovich-Efimova, 1964, 117]. So Ida Rubinstein had a halo of a mysterious woman, talented and fatal, who had no limits.

The "scandalous" portrait, written by Valentin Serov in Paris in 1910 and exhibited at the World Exhibition in Rome in May 1911, contributed a lot to the maintenance of her unusual reputation. The famous canvas where nude Ida is sitting in profile to the viewer on a draped horizontal pedestal, caused great discussions in art circles due to its substantial and artistic design and especially modernist, "matiss" performance on the verge of painting and graphics. There was even a question about the removal of the "inappropriate" painting from the museum of Alexander III. Serov's friends almost unanimously treated the portrait as the artist's luck. His teacher I.E. Repin, when saw the portrait for the first time in Rome, called it the "galvanized corpse" [Silberstein, Samkov, 1971, vol. 1, 46], and later he called the exhibition "World of Art" in Moscow in December 1911, where the portrait was exhibited after Serov's death, "the bazaar of decadence" [Ibid, 74]. Impressed by this portrait, a contemporary wrote: "I do not like Ida Rubinshtein - neither as a ravine, nor as a woman. ... Is this creature - close to the animal or is this animal close to man - so sad by secret sadness, how sad the monkeys are" [Ibid., 110].

In contrast to such a sharp negative perception of Ida's appearance, I would like to give a description of Serov's impressions of her. Igor Grabar wrote that Serov "found in her so much of a spontaneous, genuine East, as never before had anyone else seen. He was so enamored of her that he decided to paint her at any price. Serov found that Ida didn't show fake sweet worn-out East of banal operas and ballets, but Egypt and Assyria, which somehow miraculously resurrected in this extraordinary woman. "There is monumentality in her every movement – she is just a revived archaic bas-relief!" - he said with unusual enthusiasm [Ibid, 73-74]. "She has a modern figure, and a face of some ancient era, from the epic of India, "- N.Ya. Simonovic-Efimova described her [Simonovich-Efimova, 1964, 116]. Mgebrov added: "The body of Ida Rubinstein is a combination of perfectly straight lines, like a flat geometric figure" [Mgebrov, 1932, Vol. 2, 380].

Valentin Serov portrayed Ida linearly, using the color in a sparse manner, outlining her thin, angular body with a rigid geometric contour and having an uncoated canvas as the background. Her face in this portrait with the mouth of a wounded lioness (the expression of the artist [Simonovich-Efimov, 116]), the head thrown back, a strange straightened bend of the back simultaneously monumentalize the image and give it shades of soreness, insecurity - signs of decadence [Sarabyanov, 1971, 20-22].

Romaine Brooks' portraits of Ida Rubinstein in the 1910s are even more painful, "fracture" and decadence. She was her friend-artist, and along with the famous poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, they were apparently in rather complicated creative and love relations forming a "triple alliance". In the early 1910s Romaine Brooks, using the fragile image of a nude Ida, created a whole series of her allegorical "nude" in dark, cold tones: this is the white body of a corpse stretched out on a hearse in a black void (R. Brooks, "Intersection", or "Dead Woman", 1911); it is St. Sebastian in "Hidden under the mask of the arrows" (1910-1911), where Ida is depicted in the image of a saint from the musical drama D'Annunzio, and a dwarf with a bow and arrows is perhaps the poet himself; it's a beautiful languid white-skinned spring in a dark veil, dropping garlands of flowers on a green grass carpet ("Spring", or "Woman with Flowers," 1912). In 1917 Brooks wrote the romantic "heroic" portrait of Ida, where she is standing alone, wrapped in a dark cloak, against the backdrop of a stormy sky and a raging sea. And another, retrospective, and again in the dark nighttime image of Ida, the artist created in the painting "The Sad Venus" (1916-1917), written from memory on the basis of photography.

The image of Ida Rubinstein in 1921: Lev Bakst's portrait

Unlike the "unprotected" Ida, naked by Serov in 1911, Ida Rubinstein of Leo Bakst in a portrait of 1921 is wrapped in clothes so that they do not touch her body, perfectly proportionate, thin, full of straight angles and lines. The keenness and extravagance of Serov's Ida, causing decadence and the fracture of images of Romaine Brooks in no way correspond with the elegant "closed" way of Bakst's Ida. Perhaps, only a thin red "mouth of a wounded lioness" is from the famous "disastrous" beauty. This Bakst's costumed drawing, in the spirit and style of the Belle Epoque, does not even make sense to put it in one row and compare it with Serov's Ida, who "is a continuous act of inspiration" [Serova, 1968, 150], "something new"[Dobuzhinsky, 1987, 203].

Bakst's portrait does not pretend to be an artistic discovery, although it is obvious that the artist's plastic language underwent strong changes in comparison with his earlier costume drawings-sketches of the 1910's, where he portrayed Ida Rubinstein: in the image of Salome in Oscar Wilde's drama "Salome" (1908), in the image of Cleopatra (sketch for the ballet "Cleopatra" for the music of A. Arensky, 1909), St. Sebastian (sketch, 1911), in the role of Elena in the tragedy "Elena in Sparta" (1912). Colorful, decorative, oriental elegant, abounding with ornaments images, emphasizing the beauty of the lines of the naked body, the costumes in the drawing of 1921 are replaced by stylish graphics of black and white combinations and thick clothes that completely hide the famous body. Line geometry and image graphics are new features that turn from the aesthetics of Art Nouveau to the style of Belle Epoque (Art Deco). From the graphite-gray long hem of Ida's spacious dress we can see clear lines of slender legs in white stockings, shod in lacquer shoes with large "herb" buckles. The dress is in large, rigid folds, falling from Ida's shoulders. The shoulders are in three-quarters and are covered with a cloak consisting of a white, apparently satin, fabric trimmed with a wide stripe of black velvet or fur. The volume of the triangle of the divergent down dress is "inserted" into the smaller triangle of the black and white cloak, the rigid, clear lines of the folds surrounding the shoulders and the chest of the model. The soft and gentle line of the long neck, seen from the "hard" garment, goes further to a

thin, semi-transparent profile, worked out with chiaroscuro and alive by the red line of the mouth. Ida's head, small and elegant, is decorated with a black hat with a wreath of large white buds of flowers like roses or peonies. From the hat we see forehead curls of reddish hair. The neck is supported by a large collar-stand, obviously also velvet or fur.

The eccentric accent of Ida's costume is a giant-sized clutch in the foreground, put on the left arm. The black clutch closes almost half of the figure and merges with the dark dress, overlapping its folds. It is "something unformulated" [Elsevskaya, 1986, 123], which imparts sharpness, bohemianism and shock to the "wrapped up" image of a fragile red-haired lady in a white floral wreath. In general, the graphic and bold image belongs, of course, both in content and in the form to the Parisian Belle Epoque of the 1920s, taking away from the decadent fractures and from the ornamentality of the earlier Bakstian costume fantasies.

Conclusion

Lapshina's strict criticism of the Bakst's portrait of Ida Rubinstein in her monograph "The World of Art" [Lapshina, 1977, 130] is based on a comparison of creative methods of Serov and Bakst and not in favor of the latter. N.P. Lapshina accused L. Bakst in a limited desire for external expressiveness, "decorative" images, which in the end, according to the researcher, led to the disappearance of the individual characteristics in the portrait of Ida Rubinstein [Ibid..

In fact, unlike Valentin Serov who is the recognized master of the "psychological" portrait, who can reveal the "character" of the model often even against her will and desire, Lev Bakst in his portraits - "stylish" and often salon ones - focuses on external texture, "character" of the person, his "pose" in the literal and figurative sense. Being an artist of the "boundary" era, he is the representative of that "aesthetic" bohemia, for whom the artistic role is more important than the disclosure of the personality. Being a virtuoso graphic artist, painter, master of composition, Leo Bakst in the portrait of Ida Rubinstein in 1921 solved problems of interpreting the external texture and stylization, lying in the plane of interests of artists of the modernist era and the Belle Epoque.

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Портрет Иды Рубинштейн Льва Бакста: от модерна к Belle Epoque

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Аннотация

Предметом исследования статьи является графический портрет Иды Рубинштейн работы Льва Бакста 1921 г. Сравнительно-исторический и стилистический анализ портрета становится возможным при рассмотрении историко-художественной ситуации в европейском искусстве начала 1920-х гг. и портретов Иды Рубинштейн, созданных в тот же период другими мастерами. Таким образом, объект исследования расширяется до портретного творчества Льва Бакста и его современников в 1910-1920-е гг. В фокусе внимания автора статьи оказывается «Портрет Иды Рубинштейн» Валентина Серова (1910 г.), многочисленные аллегорические портреты Иды Рубинштейн, работы Ромейн Брукс 1910-х гг., эскизы сценических костюмов для Иды Рубинштейн, созданные Львом Бакстом в парижский период творчества. Цель исследования – выявить стилистические особенности портрета Иды Рубинштейн Л. Бакста 1921 г. в контексте творческого метода художника и его художественных исканий 1920-х гг. Задачи исследования – провести анализ портрета, сравнить его с работами современников-портретистов и с собственными портретными работами Льва Бакста, проследить эволюцию бакстовского портретизма – новизной своей постановки определяют актуальность исследования.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Лев Бакст, Ида Рубинштейн, портрет, модерн, ар-деко, Belle Epoque, Валентин Серов, Ромейн Брукс, Сергей Дягилев, «Русские сезоны», «Мир искусства», танцовщица, балет.

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