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ART FOR THE SOVIET HOME

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Abstract: As an intensive housing construction drive in the late 1950s began to provide separate apartments for millions of Soviet citizens, aesthetic experts envisioned the Soviet home as a potential site for the display of works of art and for amateur aesthetic production. In the context of de-Stalinization, reformist artists and aestheticians committed to the liberalization and modernization of Soviet artistic criteria, promoted the value of amateur art and even of home decorating in the formation of the new person who would live under communism. They also pressed for affordable art and craft to be made available to ordinary people for their new homes. Thereby they would dwell in their new apartments surrounded by beauty in their everyday lives, and would thus, the experts argued, be brought closer to communist consciousness. Moreover sales of art to individual citizens would provide an alternative income stream to fund artists' production. The possibility of private art consumption would therefore free artists to some extent from their reliance on state commissions and from the strict stylistic and thematic norms and hierarchies of Socialist Realism as established under Stalin.
Keywords: art; Soviet; khrushchevki; de-Stalinization; home decorating

The home has often been cast as a recalcitrant, unruly realm that evades regulation, monitoring, and efforts to engage it with public projects such as modernization, technological progress, or the construction of communism.[1] Its relationship with modernism has been especially contentious.[2] But could the home also pose a challenge to dominant norms and mainstream cultural criteria or, in the case to be addressed here, play a role in cultural de-Stalinization? Could it be recast as a source of artistic "progress", liberalization of artistic norms and hierarchies, and a site where cultural alternatives could be nurtured and legitimated?

This paper will propose that, in the Khrushchev-era Soviet Union during the late 1950s-early 1960s—a time of intense expert and popular attention to the conditions of home life, as well as one of cultural upheaval or "Thaw"—liberal or "reformist" aesthetic experts drew

[1] E.g. in Soviet discourse of the 1920s; see Reid (2009, 465-498).

[2] Avant-garde art was conceived in opposition to the domestic rejection of domestic values, as a challenge to authority and comfort. On the contentious status of the home as a location for art, "born of modernism's definition of itself in contrast to the domestic", taking a stand against the daily run of life"; see also Lubbock (1999), cited by Painter (2002, 1).

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the Soviet home into their cultural struggles against the narrow dogmas of Stalinist Socialist Realism and against the still entrenched conservative institutions and individuals that sought to maintain them. The reformers' attention to the home as a location for art was part of a wider effort to promote acceptance of heterogeneity; the promotion of socialist values required not a unitary, one-size-fits-all set of cultural norms, they proposed, but different approaches fit for different purposes (Sarab'ianov 1960, 25-45; Kagan 1960, 46-84).To this end, reformers in the Soviet art world asserted the specificity of different artistic media and different modes of encounter between viewers and art, located in different types of spaces, private and intimate or public, sacred/ceremonial or profane/everyday, indoors and out. This location affected the mode of consumption and the meanings produced by the spectator, and, they argued, had implications for the types of genre appropriate and the formal qualities required for the work to be effective, such as the construction of space and the degree of detail or abstraction required (e. g. Dmitrieva (1962).[3]

In thinking about the relation between art and the Soviet home in a time of major cultural, political and material changes and struggle between reformist (liberalizing, modernizing) aesthetic experts and conservative (including Stalinist) forces, we will focus on the new standard flats thrown up in millions in the Khrushchev era. We will consider art produced *at* home (domestic amateur art); art *of* the home (interior decorating); and art *for* the home. What did art do for the home and its inhabitants; and what could the home, as a site of consumption, do for art? How could it potentially impact upon artistic hierarchies, formal structures, and meanings?

Probably the best-known image representing the use of pictures in the Soviet home—and the judgments entailed in hanging them—is Aleksandr Laktionov's *Moving into the New Flat*. W*hat* to hang is a "no-brainer" in the world of this 1952 painting: it *has* to be a photo-portrait of Stalin, circulated in massive editions for use in this way in homes and workplaces across the country. *Where* to hang it is, however, the focus of the action, a decision about the place of pictures in the Soviet home. Laktionov's painting cannot, of course, be taken as evidence that real Soviet citizens actually behaved like his fictional family (or even that they had anywhere to live!). True to the principles of Socialist Realism, this family is "typical" in the sense of exemplary: many other families around the Soviet Union will, it implicitly claims, go through the same decision process as they, too, receive new flats from the beneficent Soviet state. Yet for many in 1952, living in cramped and substandard conditions, such dilemmas were a luxury, associated with a settled and prosperous lifestyle far removed from their own experience. What room could there be for such non-essential concerns as picture hanging and the exercise of aesthetic discernment in their conditions of poverty and shortage?

In the mid-1950s, however, changes were set in train that fundamentally transformed the material conditions of everyday life for millions of ordinary Soviet citizens and that would make home furnishing and decorating a matter with which many citizens began to engage. Between 1956 and 1965, over one hundred million people—the population of the USSR—out

[3] A significant distinction was drawn between "easel" and "monumental" art and the styles appropriate to each, e. g. Gastev (1957); Dmitrieva (1961); Kagan (1968).

of overcrowded slums into new housing or renovated. The process was accelerated by a mass housing campaign launched in 1957, which used modern industrial construction methods such as standardization and prefabrication to re-house as many people as quickly as possible.

The new apartments—nicknamed *khrushchevki—*were standard and basic, quite unlike the presidential, Stalin-era apartment Laktionov's lucky family receive. But they aimed to provide a modern standard of living, with bathrooms, kitchens, gas supply and running hot water, and to provide it for *all,* not only for an exemplary or privileged few. Significantly, they were designed for separate nuclear families, in place of the communal apartments or barracks that were the norm. The renewed thrust of urbanization and modernization was accompanied by other changes over the next decade: the entry of technology into everyday life (starting with TV), rising disposable incomes and living standards, more leisure time, and increasing opportunities for consumption of durables and of mass culture. The move to new flats was envisaged by modernizing authorities as—and to some extent effected—a rupture with the material culture and practices of the past. The hold of traditional ways and norms began to loosen with the physical separation of nuclear families from the older generation. At the same time, the move was the beginning of a new stability: as they settled into the new flats, my subjects entered the most stable period ever in their own lives and, indeed, in all Soviet history. In these new conditions, aesthetic decisions and judgments of taste would, along with other consumption and lifestyle choices, become a normal part of life and an exercise in the fashioning of identity.[4]

After 1953 the idea of hanging Stalin or even Khrushchev's portrait in the home, as represented by Laktionov, would be even more unlikely (although not out of the question) as Stalin's "excesses" were denounced and the basis of regime legitimacy shifted away from the cult of the leader towards taking real measures to improve mass living standards. But what, if anything, did Soviet citizens put on their walls in these new flats, how did they arrange it; and what does it matter? What can we learn from a focus on the visual culture of the Soviet home, specifically the new flats built under Khrushchev into which people began to move around 1960?

This paper draws from my research project and forthcoming book *Khrushchev Modern: Making Oneself at Home in the Soviet Sixties* (working title), which concerns how people made home, became consumers, and "made themselves" in the 1960s in the standard spaces of separate apartments built under Khrushchev.[5] There, in a chapter that focuses on aesthetics and display in the interior, I propose that the selection and deployment of pictures in the home can cast light on issues of identity and the production of self in a time of change. More broadly, it can help us understand the nature of late Soviet modernity, specifically its emergent social stratifications, consumer culture, and expanding private sphere. While that chapter attends primarily to the practice of "ordinary" (nonspecialist) householders and the ways in which they account for their aesthetic decisions—what art could do for the home

[4] On modernity, lifestyle and self-identity in the context of "loosening hold of tradition"; see Giddens (1991).

[5] Project *Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat, s*upported by the Leverhulme Trust and the AHRC.

and its occupants—the present paper focuses on the place of art in the Soviet home and the question "what could the home do for art," as seen by reformist art specialists.

While providing "private" (segregated) spaces for individual families, the *khrushchevki,* like many twentieth-century housing projects, were also conceived as a means of social engineering and homogenization. The physical structures and planning of urban space were supposed to organize residents' consciousness and relations. In addition, extensive efforts were made discursively to shape the way people took up occupancy, furnished and dwelled in their industrially built, standard apartments. Through widely circulated advice and visual representations, intelligentsia experts sought to impose their standards of modern good taste as universal norms, promoting an austere modernist aesthetic, the Contemporary Style (for detail see Reid (2005, 289-316); Reid (2006a, 145-170); Reid (2009, 465-498)).

Using over seventy semi-structured interviews as well as archival and published sources, the project investigates the spaces for individual agency within these given, anonymous structures and reflects on how the historical processes of urbanization, modernization and social transformation—which entered a new, intense phase after Stalin—were experienced by ordinary individuals. It addresses the relations between the common and the particular, the anonymous and the personal: for example, between centrally planned, standard, mass-produced spaces and things, on one hand; and decentralized, individual consumption choices, improvised practices (DIY making do), domestic aesthetics, and hand-making, on the other; and between expert regimes of taste and individual homemakers everyday aesthetics' and practical know-how (compare Scott 1998). Paying special attention to everyday aesthetics and consumption, I explore how people used these standard apartments as the setting and material for the production of their social selves. Even as a range of media promoted expert orders of taste, can we discover idiomatic constructions of home interiors: perhaps a kind of unruly Eigensinn of home decorating, in Alf Lüdtke's terms (Lüdtke 1995).

The project as a whole also seeks to test and adjudicate between two contradictory narratives concerning social processes in the Soviet Union after Stalin. On one hand there is an extension and elaboration of the tendency of Cold-War thinking to deny Soviet citizens any freedom for maneuver and agency, depicting them as a passive, faceless mass, duped by authority and cowed into submission to an all-pervasive state, whose regulatory power was extended and perfected (see Kharkhordin 1999).[6] On the other is the thesis of increasing separation of public and private life and the growth of the private sphere. Vladimir Shlapentokh (1989, 153-164) has argued that the mass relocation to separate apartments in the new urban housing regions, in combination with other innovations that began in this period such as ownership of television sets and private cars, was responsible for social shifts that came to fruition in the Brezhnev era which he designates the "privatization" of life (Raleigh 2006). The thesis of a retreat from public values into private life has now taken on the status of orthodoxy concerning the Brezhnev era and has become part of the standard explanation to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Compelling as it is, much work remains to flesh out and nuance the nature of this "privatization", and such work may yet prove it an

[6] Ruble (1993) asserts that the alienation from residence common in the West "was magnified in the Soviet Union, where all planning is done for strangers."

inadequate model. A focus on art, aesthetics and taste can help us to understand the personal and particular and the ways in which they appropriated and accommodated elements of the common culture. It also highlights other processes such as social stratification, distinction and self-identity in the context of unprecedented stability, relative prosperity and greater opportunities to consume. Decorative elements, aesthetic judgments and material practices are one angle from which to approach the question of agency and individuation, treating homemaking as a "reflexive project of the self," which, as Giddens (1991) proposed, is characteristic of modern life where the hold of tradition has been loosened. They can also help us with questions of self-identity and distinction.

Aesthetic categories such as taste and style—central to my project—were also central to the utopian discourses of Khrushchev-era experts and their vision of modernity. Contemporary Soviet public discourse acknowledged the domestic interior as a site of aesthetic display; the household's cultural level might be manifested through the presence of books or a piano, but also through the use—or misuse—of art and decoration (e. g. Sharov, Poliachek 1960, 70-72).[7] It also saw the aesthetic as the point where individual preference could have free play (even as they sought to educate that taste to conform with their norms). One specialist (in the new discipline of Technical Aesthetics) advocated thoroughgoing standardization of utilitarian routines and domestic fittings as a means to combat any fetishistic tendencies, which increased availability of consumer goods might foster. Yet she forestalled possible objections that this would prevent the manifestation of individuality because, she asserted, the occupant's individuality would find full expression in the *aesthetics* of interior decoration (Liubimova 1964, 16).

Nevertheless, to make aesthetics focal may seem at best eccentric in regard to the Soviet material environment, everyday life and, in particular, to the khrushchevki. I'll briefly address three legitimate objections to my focus on everyday aesthetics and art in the home as a means to understand the experience of late Soviet history. We will then turn to the reformist expert discourse on art for the home in the Khrushchev era, at the time when millions of people first received and made home in these new separate apartments.

The first contradiction is philosophical: "everyday aesthetics" is an oxymoron from a Kantian perspective that sees aesthetics as, by definition, disinterested and transcending the everyday. However, this idealist approach to aesthetics has been subjected to critique, not least from a Marxist materialist perspective (Dmitrieva 1960).[8] It is true that some of my informants operated with an emic understanding of the aesthetic according to which beauty required freedom and, as such, was impossibility in their own lives, for, they wanted to emphasize to the interviewer, and these were lived out under the sign of necessity rather than freedom, constrained by poverty and shortage. Nevertheless works of art and decorative

[7] According to the script of a programme for Moscow Television, "Dlia doma, dlia sem'i: vasha lichnaia biblioteka" (2 Feb.1963), books were an essential attribute of the cultured home and no amount of luxury could compensate for their absence (Rybitskij 1963).

[8] Bourdieu (1984) insists that aesthetic sensibilities are not absolute and disinterested but produced in social and material relations: the idea of the transcendence of the aesthetic masks the way it serves these interests and helps maintain those relations. Featherstone (1991) identifies the "aestheticization of everyday life" as a defining process of late/post-modernity.

art and purely decorative touches are to be found in almost all the interiors in the sample, including even those where the householders disclaim any concern with the aesthetics of the interior on grounds of poverty and shortage.[9]

The second problem is the conjunction of "aesthetics" and "khrushchevki". Why even put these terms together in the same sentence when the khrushchevki are notorious for having denied aesthetics, rejecting the *art* of architecture in favour of economics and engineering? Surely khrushchevki had nothing to do with aesthetics and everything to do with ugliness and necessity?

The khrushchevki have received a bad press. Negative views have been imposed on them first by the Cold-War West, where they were taken as further evidence that even welfare-oriented reforms in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union would, if scratched, reveal communism's essential dehumanizing "totalitarian" impulse never far below the surface (Ruble 1993, 244). Retrospectively, in post-Soviet Russia, they have been condemned and cast as slums as new priorities make it more expedient to clear the relatively centrally located khrushchevki to make way for high-rises, rather than to restore and adapt them to present-day demands. My purpose is not to redeem them so much as to historicize them. True, some architectural professionals, invested in the historicism and rich ornamentation of Socialist Realist architecture as established under Stalin, resisted the new minimalism. This hostility was not, however, shared by my informants, for whom these apartment blocks are "home"; many describe their impressions of them as "palaces" or "heaven" when they first moved in and some are explicit that they still feel that way today.[10] Moreover, the *Existenzminimum* design of the khrushchevki was not conceived by its authors as a rejection of beauty (although it was explicitly a rejection of superfluous embellishment) so much as the birth of a new, modern beauty based on the demands of machine production and modernist principles including the beauty of utility, truth to function (*tselesoobraznost')*, and "democracy" (social justice and mass provision). The modernist taste norms that were prescribed by reformist aesthetic experts for new domestic (and public) interiors were meant to constitute a coherent period style. Austere and modernist, this "Contemporary Style," as it was called, was a rejection not of aesthetics per se, but of residual prerevolutionary bourgeois taste and, above all, of Stalinist aesthetics, identified with historicism, irrational and expensive ornament, cover-up ("facadism") and sham (Khrushchev 1955).

The third set of possible objections to my choice of "art in the home" as a lens on late Soviet home culture, and the most pertinent for the remainder of this paper, concerns doubts about the status of the home in general as a site for art, that is about the effects that locating art in domestic space, in the midst of daily routines, may have on its reception and production, criteria and value. Such doubts have not been limited to the Soviet context, especially in regard to modern art. In the West, the incompatibility of modernist art and the home, of avant-garde aesthetics and domesticity, has been widely discussed (Reed 1996; Painter 2002, 1-3, and Chap. 3). For some conservative aesthetic experts in the Soviet Union,

[9] Evidence suggests that the impulse to decorate is not dependent on affluence or on good housing. It was also a commonplace that even in direst poverty the desire to decorate and beautify daily life, was an essential feminine or universal human instinct, e. g. in the words of poster artist Dmitrii Moor in the mid-1930s (RGALI, f. 2943, op. 1, d. 173, l. 17); and those of US observers of Soviet life in the 1950s (Gould and Gould 1957, 176).

[10] For examples see Catherine Cooke (1997, 137-160); Reid, interviews for the Project *Everyday Aesthetics.*

"art for the home" was also a self-contradictory proposition. For art under the Soviets was a *public* good. Art was supposed to belong to the masses—*en masse*: to be consumed by the public, in public *as* a public (a social experience) not by isolated individuals in the private sphere. Art was also a means to public moral, political and aesthetic education rather than an ornament, commodity for personal use (or worse still, enrichment). However, the idea that the only way for Soviet people to encounter art was in the public sphere, was challenged by art world reformers in the Thaw. As part of broader efforts to de-Stalinize and liberalize the art world (and to legitimate a rapprochement with figurative modernism) they began to promote a notion of art *at* and *for* the home. This will be our focus in the next section.

Authoritative reformist discourses on art for the home and the aesthetic home in the Khrushchev era

Art appreciation

Philosophical debates about beauty and the relation between people and material things were a vital element in the lively intellectual context of de-Stalinization in the late 1950s and early 1960s, contemporaneous with the move to new housing regions and new one-family flats. The concern with beauty and the aesthetics of the everyday material environment drew philosophically on a return to Marx's writings, where he identified the truly human essence of man with "creation according to the laws of beauty."[11] Full emancipation—the realization of man's species being—required "working over the objective world" in accordance with the laws of beauty. Freed from the satisfaction of immediate need, the production of aesthetic value (and not only of use value) was what made human beings fully human. The development of aesthetic sensibility was treated as closely related to that of morality; both were equally necessary in the development and self-realization of the fully rounded, unalienated human individual envisioned as the precondition for the transformation of the socialist state into Communist self-government, as the Third Programme of the CPSU, ratified in 1961, affirmed (see Hodnett 1974, 167-264).[12]

The aesthetic development of adults as well as of children became a public priority in the Thaw, integral to the ideological and moral formation of the Constructor of Communism.[13] Existing popular enlightenment organizations were pressed into service to make the slogan

[11] Karl Marx's *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 were published in Russian for the first time in 1956 (Marx, Engels 1956); Rappoport (1962); see Scanlan (1985, 299).

[12] Even before adoption of the Third Party Programme in 1961, ministerial decrees were published on measures to improve aesthetic education. A conference was held (8-10 Dec. 1959) on the theme, "The Role of Art in Communist Education," with an address by art historian German Nedoshivin (1960). The USSR Ministry of Culture issued an order on aesthetic education 24 Feb. 1959: "Prikaz MK SSSR o merakh uluchsheniia raboty uchrezhdenii kul'tury po esteticheskomy vospitaniiu naseleniia (osobenno moldodezhi)."-

[13] According to Party statements, the highest phase of Communism required art, along with other forms of ideological work, to "raise ... the working people up to the level of their Communist vanguard," preparing them to be responsible, self-motivated, self-regulating contributors to the common weal in the transitional period of participatory government (Editorial 1961).

"art belongs to the people" a reality. Around 1960, aesthetic education was added to the remit of the popular knowledge society *Znanie*, hitherto dedicated primarily to scientific and technological mass education (GARF, f. 9547, op. 1, d. 1185).[14] Cultural enlightenment and amateur creativity for adults were fostered also by trade unions in workers' clubs, and by the local housing administration (ZhEK) in the new residential neighbourhoods. There, voluntary organizations set up red corners and "universities of culture," art circles and picture galleries to "bring art to the people" in their everyday lives.[15] Archival reports on the activities of housing administrations around 1961 depict a population eagerly involved in self-improvement and cultural activities as part of the public life of the local community.[16] Even the new medium, television, just taking off as people began to move into their modern, separate apartments and avidly embraced by the populace, was ascribed a role under socialism as a medium for popular enlightenment and aesthetic education, a "people's university of culture in the home," as Stanislav Strumilin called it.[17] Indeed, the minimal television programming in the late 1950s included a large proportion of programmes on art, as well as on home decorating, while art specialists debated how best to deploy this new medium to educate people's love of art (e.g. GARF, f. 6903 (Gosteleradio), op. 26, d. 417, no. 4628; see Roitenberg (1962, 21-22)).

Amateur art production

Mass art appreciation was not enough, however. Marx's ideal of the fully rounded development of the individual would be attained by bringing the masses closer to culture not only through the contemplation of art but also as cultural *producers,* active creators of beauty. Reviving the initiatives associated with the Proletkul'ts (proletarian culture

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[14] Schools and children's extracurricular organizations offered arts as well as science, technology and physical education. Aesthetic education was a vital part of the activities for children at Pioneer houses. The new Pioneer Palace in the Lenin Hills, opened in 1962, included well-equipped art studios, dance, music amateur theatre, film and photographic laboratories; see Reid (2002).

[15] Mass educational work was conducted by "universities of culture" and by Houses or Palaces of Culture (see White 1990), and also by art museum and gallery staff. In Moscow this provision was enhanced by the establishment of the Central Exhibition Hall in 1957 along with a sector devoted to mass cultural enlightenment. According to one report "Annually around 10 million people visit museums. In regions and republics hundreds of exhibitions are organized" (GARF, f. 9547 op. 1, d. 1185); see also Klimova (1961, 8-9).

[16] The secretary of the party bureau of one Moscow ZhEK reported in 1961 that they had up a "house university of culture" (*domovoi universitet kul'tury*) in 1959 with the aim to "raise the cultural level" of the population, to acquaint them with music, literature and art (RGASPI, f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, 4 Jan. 1961).

[17] "In classless society, where there are no class antagonisms or property barriers to overcome… all working people are drawn to knowledge, like plants to the sun. The whole system of workers' education supports this, from nursery to university, including also that universal people's university of culture in the home, which [is constituted by] millions of television sets" (Strumilin 1960,144). Thereby the role of television in socialist culture was differentiated from that under capitalism (where Soviet and western left wing critiques cast it along with other cultural industries, as mass entertainment, perpetuating false consciousness and alienation). On the way early television enthusiasts saw their mission as *Kulturträger*; see Roth-Ey (2010, 147-176); and Roth-Ey (2011).

organization) after the Revolution, everyone was to be enabled to become an artist and the division between professional and amateur, artist and audience, should be dissolved.[18] Amateur artistic activity blossomed between 1959 and 1961 in the context of discussions of the Third Party Programme and of fostering "participatory government."[19] Its new importance in public life was marked by a major All-Union exhibition of amateur art held in Moscow's prestigious Central Exhibition Hall (Man ge) in 1961.[20] "How valuable that the participants of our amateur activity learn to see beauty in everyday life, thereby enriching their individuality [*lichnost'*] and enriching us!" one 1961 source proclaimed the significance of this flowering of mass amateur creativity (TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 131 ll. 53-54). Amateur photography was also encouraged, and moves were made to improve the quality of, and access to, photographic education, for photography was presented as an ideal medium through which a worker could, as an amateur, actively participate in the production of culture. Education in photography was essential for every cultured person because it could contribute to the formation of the fully rounded human being by bridging the gap between the sciences and humanities, and developing good taste. The magazine *Sovetskoe foto* (Soviet photography) identified the growth of photographic "literacy" with progress itself, and argued that photography should not be taught merely as an applied technical subject but must address the *aesthetics* of the medium (Aleksandrov (1961, 4); Cheporov (1961, 20); Friedliand (1961, 32)).[21]

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[18] On the Proletkul'ts see Mally (1990). Just as the functions of professional state organs should be taken over by popular voluntary/unpaid social organizations, so, too, the relation between professional (represented by Artists' Unions) and amateur art also came under discussion. The emphasis on state and professional art must now give way to voluntary and amateur artistic activity (Amshinskaia 1962, 11-19).

[19] The aim of the balanced, all-round development of each individual—which informed discussions of aesthetic education and of the relation between amateur and professional art—also underpinned Khrushchev's "polytechnicization" reforms, introducing practical work experience into education, so that those involved in mental labour should also undertake manual work.

[20] The encouragement of amateur artistic activity was not entirely new: it had been fostered in the 1930s, with amateur art exhibitions, and there may have been a drive to set up amateur studios around 1950 (a number of studios celebrated their tenth or twelfth anniversary around 1961). The first "All-Union Exhibition of artistic creativity of workers and clerks" took place in 1954. It achieved new scale and prominence in the Khrushchev era, however, with the emphasis on mass participation. In 1959-61, in the context of preparations for the 22 Party Congress and public assimilation of the Third Party Program, the second "All-Union review of Amateur Fine Art" took place, organized by the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions together with the USSR Ministry of Culture. It culminated in a major exhibition whose importance as a marker of the elision of the division between professional and amateur art was proclaimed by the venue, Moscow's prestigious Central Exhibition Hall or Manege. Wide popular participation is indicated by contemporary archival sources. A two-year-long process - during which 2386 Republic, regional and city level exhibits were held, at which a total of 130,000 works were shown to tens of millions of viewers—culminated in 12,000 works of painting, sculpture, graphics and decorative-applied art, being shown, from which 600 were selected. 2526 amateur artists participated. Visited by 107,017 people, the culminating exhibition put amateur art on the cultural map, demonstrating that "amateur art has become a mass affair." The review and exhibition provided the occasion for a celebration of both a quantitative and a qualitative leap forward in amateur art (TsAGM, f. 21 (Manezh), op. 1, d. 131).

[21] Opportunities were expanded for schoolchildren and workers to receive instruction in photography as an extracurricular or leisure pursuit, and in 1960, the Ministry of Enlightenment of the Russian Federation proposed that photography and film production should be taught in high school as technical

The home and neighbourhood were presented, in contemporary discourse, as essential premises (in both senses of the word) for this flowering of amateur creativity. The move to adequate housing and the increase in leisure time provided the enabling conditions for home-based cultural production.

The popularity of amateur art and photography as hobbies, noted in the contemporary sources is corroborated in my informants' khrushchevka interiors and in their oral accounts, especially those of men (who, time budget studies showed, had more leisure time than women). Being an amateur artist or photographer was an important part of the identity that several of my male informants wanted to present in the interview. Having the opportunity to learn these skills in amateur clubs was also one of their positive memories of Soviet life (Reid, Interviews for the Project "Everyday Aesthetics").[22]

Art into Life! Production of the khrushchevka interior as popular production of aesthetic value

To bring the masses closer to beauty, according to Khrushchev-era discourse, was also a matter of everyday aesthetics, that is, the abstract beauty of harmonious interior arrangements and material culture. As television viewers expressed it, writing in to a programme on homemaking: "everyone must become an artist in their home!" (Rybitskij 1963). Aesthetic specialists invoked Marxist first principles to argue for increased attention to the decorative and applied arts, and to the design of the everyday material environment. As Marx indicated, aesthetic activity included the "practical creation of an objective world, the working over of inorganic nature." Accordingly, the production of a tasteful ensemble through work on the interior was in itself a form of aesthetic production and, at the same time, of self-production, and not only of discerning consumption.[23]

Concern with the aesthetics of domestic material culture—the art *of* the home—was legitimized as appropriate for Soviet experts and amateur homemakers through claims for the broadly educative effects of the material environment. The decoration of the apartment must

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subjects. However, as one contributor to *Sovetskoe foto* complained in 1962, the textbooks available for teaching photography in schools treated it merely as a sum of technical skills. They ignored entirely the *aesthetics* of photography, that is, "photography as an art, as a method for the cognition and pictorial reflection of actuality. … [However] Photography must not only be seen as an element of 'polytechnicization' in education, but must also become one of the means of aesthetic education, along with lessons in drawing and singing" Lavrent'ev (1962, 29); see also Reid (1994); Sologubov (2008, 75-102).

[22] Viewers' comments in the guest book for the second "All-Union Review of Amateur Fine Art" in 1961 (578 comments were written) noted that the very fact that such an exhibition was organized in the major exhibition hall of the country, in combination with the quality of the work, vividly demonstrated the superiority of the socialist order over the capitalist, "since only in the conditions of constant growth of well being of the people, reduction of the working day, accessibility of education, broadening the work of cultural facilities,… are created the unlimited possibilities for development of amateur art of the masses and the most conducive conditions for the erasure of the boundary between city and country, between mental and physical labour" (TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 131, 1961).

[23] "Things created by human labour do not simply surround him but also reflect his spiritual aspect, his idea of the beauty of the world he himself creates, his tastes" (Filatov 1961, 177).

not only "meet everyday [practical] and aesthetic demands. It must also […] raise the culture of the Soviet person, and participate in the upbringing of the constructors of communist society" (Editorial 1961, 5-6; Liubimova (1964, 16).

In a book on *Beauty* (1960), reformist aesthetician Nina Dmitrieva wrote of the ennobling influence exercised on human behaviour by a dignified, harmonious environment, "including the material conditions of things that surround us, their beauty, their style" (Dmitrieva 1960). Thus tasteful home decorating could speed the transition to full Communism.

Historically, the artistic roots of this position lay in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century concerns with the Gesamtkunstwerk and synthesis of the arts, and it also drew on the Constructivists' (or more specifically Productivist) development of a Marxist materialist aesthetics in the 1920s, which was tentatively rehabilitated in the Thaw.[24] The insistence on both the expressive and the educational value of utilitarian objects and ensembles rested on the assertion that not only narrative, pictorial art could educate the Soviet person but also applied arts and the entire surroundings of everyday life. For abstract combinations of colours, shapes, and proportion could be meaningful in themselves and could affect people's behaviour and worldview.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, this premise was not as innocuous as it may seem. It represented a challenge to the limited approach towards art and aesthetics that had become hegemonic during the Stalin years (derived from nineteenth century aesthetics of Chernyshevsky and others) that emphasized the "literary" aspects of art (those that could be retold in words: theme, plot, development of character) at the expense of the communicative possibilities of visual form. In a programmatic speech in 1959 (whose title "Art into Everyday Life" invoked the Productivist campaigns of the 1920s), leading reformist art historian Dmitrii Sarab'ianov stressed the value of abstract form, its power to educate, move, and convey ideas:

> In many art forms the idea is expressed not directly but indirectly, mediated. This idea cannot be retold in words, expressed concretely. It is more abstracted than, say, the idea of any *kartina* [narrative picture] with subject matter connected with an important social event. They may not immediately convince that they express progressive social interests. Yet they do not stop being socially important works that educate and ennoble man. They engender a sense of beauty, for they themselves are constructed according to the laws of beauty without which art cannot exist…. For genuine beauty awakens the artist in man, the thirst for creativity gives birth to good, opens up man to the nobility that lies within him (Sarab'ianov 1960, 99).

Such art had been wrongly condemned as "classless" and "abstract" of formalist in the recent, Stalinist period, Sarab'ianov complained. Yet "genuine beauty awakens the artist in man, the thirst for creativity gives birth to good, opens up man to the nobility [*blagorodstvo*] that lies within him" (*ibid.*). In regard to painting, pure abstraction remained unthinkable even for reformers. However, they envisaged the interior as a synthesis of decorative, applied and figurative arts forms whose beauty resided in primarily abstract criteria (see Gerchuk 2000; Baiar, Blashkevic 1962). The fashioning of the Contemporary Style interior as a

[24] For the Neoproductivist line in Khrushchev-era aesthetic discourse see for example Kantor (1960, 18).

Gesamtkunstwerk required the exercise of formal competencies in selection and composition (working with pattern, proportion, colour), to produce beauty, harmony and a sense of order (Rappoport 1959, 36-42).[25] Beauty was to be achieved through design rather than through superficial applied embellishment (in accordance with Khrushchev's 1954 condemnation of "superfluity" in architecture) (Khrushchev 1955).[26] The use of non-functional decorative elements was not ruled out, but they must be deployed with great restraint and discernment. Architect Irina Voeikova, a prolific authority on the Contemporary Style interior, recommended calm tints for walls because they allowed one to use decorative fabrics for curtains and soft furnishing. At the same time, she wrote, they made a good background for prints, paintings, photographs and decorative elements. "In such a room a bright patterned rug or colourful decorative cushions on a divan will not look excessive, nor a vase in a saturated colour or picture on the wall" (Voeikova 1964, 31). It is noteworthy that Voeikova envisages a role for pictures and other figurative elements in the domestic interior, in spite of the rejection of non-functional ornament, but they are treated as formal elements of the total ensemble, subordinated to the decorative scheme, rather than as representations of important people or illustrations of ideologically weighty themes. We will discuss the implications of this primarily decorative role in the next section.

Professional art for the "private" home: privatization of art consumption

Art was also to enter everyday life—and its chief space, the home—in a more literal sense, according to aesthetic reformers: through the production and distribution of professional works of art for private, domestic consumption. Experts began to consider the domestic interior as a potential site for daily association with the values of professional fine art.

"Art *for* the home" was a new agenda of the Khrushchev-era art world, also associated with the liberalizing, de-Stalinizing platform. The idea of "democratizing" access to art had been part of the discourse since the Revolution. Once the prerogative of the privileged classes, art now belonged to the people as Lenin said, and must be comprehensible to and loved by the people (Zetkin 1927, 13). But the *narodnost'* or nationalization of art had hitherto been taken to mean that art should be publicly commissioned (the social command) and owned; that the public should be able to access publicly owned art in public places such as museums or monumental art on exteriors of buildings; and, since the 1930s, that popular taste and aesthetic competencies should be the measure of artistic quality and legitimacy.

As homes and housing became a focus of public attention in the Khrushchev era, "art for the masses" took on a new interpretation: art for the *masses' homes,* for individual, private consumption in domestic space, rather than in streets, squares and museums or factory canteens. Reformers aimed to democratize the consumption of art in the sense not only

[25] Ernst Gombrich (1999, 110; Gombrich 1979*,* 95-116) discusses the "minimal art" of placing pictures, "the setting of visual accents".

[26] Dmitrieva (1960) defined "the beauty of everyday surroundings" as "their style, that is the harmony of things with the desired way of life and their harmony one with another: their ensemble, corresponding to the aesthetic ideals of society".

of having access to it *collectively* on the walls of a museum but of being able to possess it individually and to live in its midst.

There was a growing critique of the existing opportunities for sale of art to private individuals for personal, domestic consumption in the context of de-Stalinization in the art world after Stalin's death. Sarab'ianov analysed the obstacles preventing art from reaching the masses in this way, including artists' attitudes, as well as the mechanisms or art funding and distribution. Many artists did not recognize this as a necessary (or sufficiently prestigious) task. Yet artists could not limit themselves to work for exhibitions, he exhorted, for most viewers—especially those who lived far from collections of masterpieces—only got to see paintings in the form of poor quality reproductions in journals such as *Ogonek* or *Rabotnitsa*, whereby they lost much of its expressiveness on the way from the museum to the people. Production of art for sale or distribution to the masses could help redress the geographical inequalities in access to the benefits of beauty. Sarab'ianov and others also criticized the Artists' Union and Art Fund for neglecting the production and sale of work for private apartments (Sarab'ianov 1960, 96). There were no opportunities for private individuals to buy art from exhibitions nor to receive consultations from qualified art historians or artists on selecting art for their homes (RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 74, ll. 46-50). Other ways of bring the people to art and art to the people were also neglected, such as art fairs (bazaars) and lotteries.

In the late 1950s, the system of selling art to the masses was limited indeed. The population could buy small-scale sculpture, small studies, and decorative art produced by firms of the Art Fund. These were sold through salons run by the Fund, but as early as 1954 there were complaints that only 78 such salon-art shops existed in the whole country, 51 of which were located in cities of the RSFSR and the remaining 27 in other Union republics. Many major cities had no salon at all. The work of the existing salons was also unsatisfactory. Rather than propagandizing art to the general public they functioned primarily as warehouses and packing facilities, being too small and poorly equipped so that visitors were unable to see the works, which stood in crates rather than being displayed. Nor did they fulfill their educational role, reformers complained, for the staff were interested only in major patrons, representatives of large institutions and organizations, and paid no attention to ordinary private buyers (*ibid.*; for further detail see my article Reid (2006b, 161-175)).

Moreover, the kinds of works the salon managers chose to sell for private consumption was of a fashionable "salon" character that, far from raising public taste, corrupted it. Meanwhile they would not accept or put on sale higher quality, more tasteful work, falling back on the magical formula "the people won't understand this" in defense of their selection (Sarab'ianov 1960, 97).

In campaigning to develop authorized mechanisms for artists to sell their work to private individuals (not directly, which would be illegal, but mediated by a state system of art salons and fixed pricing scales) reformers did not use the term "art market" nor speak of art as a commodity for personal consumption in "private" space.[27] To do so would prejudice their cause. Moreover, the term would perhaps be inappropriate since what was envisaged was

[27] In other realms, too, such as design and production of consumer durables, reformers proposed studying consumer preferences and taking demand and sales into account in setting the plan.

not a full-blown art market in the Western sense, with the possibilities of investing in and re-selling art, speculating on escalating prices based on fashion for a particular artist or the rarity value of a unique masterpiece. It was more limited and based not on the exchange value but the aesthetic and morally uplifting value of art. The buyer of a work of art would benefit from living with it and being able to contemplate it every day, but was not expected to treat it as alienable and sell it on for profit.

Nevertheless, major challenges to the status quo of the art world lay unstated beneath the rhetoric of "art for the home" and popular everyday access to art. Reformers sought to empower the mass art "consumer" and mobilize something like market forces in favour of their own liberalizing agendas while using the specificity of domestic encounters of art to relativize the criteria of Socialist Realism as canonized under Stalin (Dmitrieva 1958, 9-12).

The promotion of art for the home represented a synergy of interests among different elements of the Thaw-era cultural intelligentsia: those concerned with raising public taste and morals; artists and art historians seeking to break the monopoly of a privileged few artists who dominated the Stalinist art world, to challenge the hegemony of the strict norms and canons of Socialist Realism, and to open the way for a selective rapprochement with figurative modernism; and those of artists seeking to diversify their source of employment and increase their income.

Although some artists had been served well by the Stalinist system and were disdainful of the home as a destination for their paintings, many had an economic interest in finding legal ways to sell their work to the population and thereby reduce their dependency on the state institutions and public organizations that monopolized art patronage and concentrated power and privilege in the hands of a few. There was not enough work for artists, especially following successive decrees following Khrushchev's late 1954 condemnation of "superfluity", which discredited all forms of nonfunctional embellishment and decorative art and provided a pretext to axe such commissions from building budgets.[28] The single patron, the state, did not provide enough opportunities to sell work and not enough commissions, while the most prestigious or lucrative commissions were monopolized by an elite few artists, forcing many to earn their living through doing copies and other tasks considered menial.[29] Rather than relying entirely on public funds, to open up a quasi-private art market would draw out the resources of individual citizens, provide work, and allow artists and the artistic organizations to diversify their source of income. It would also make artists less dependent on major state commissions and massive exhibitions. Art was produced, exhibited and evaluated by professionals in the name of the masses, but direct sales to the population would allow the masses to decide for themselves.

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[28] A decree of 23 Apr. 1959 extended the moratorium on superfluous embellishment to public interiors: "Ob ustranenii izlishestv v otdelke, oborudovanii i vo vnutrennem ubranstve obshchestvennykh zdanii" (*Sobranie postanovlenii pravitel'stva SSSR* 1959, 166-171).

[29] Such unprestigious serial production, including copies of leader portraits, constituted around 85% of all production by firms of the Art Fund in 1958. A total of 8240 artists tried to live by production of works of art (including decorative arts). The Soviet state gave the USSR Ministry of Culture an annual budget of 35-40 million rubles for commissions and acquisitions, but some of this went on purchasing works of artists of the past from private collections (RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 74, l. 46-50; RGANI, f. 5, op. 17, d. 498, ll. 22-23, 36-38).

The possibility of private domestic consumption represented, above all, a theoretical challenge to the hierarchies and exclusions of Socialist Realism, as part of a wider campaign to liberalize and modernize the criteria of Soviet art and reinstate the beautiful and expressive use of the medium, hitherto subordinated to legible narrative and ideological correctness. Calling for "a kind of painting that will beautify the apartment interior," Sarab'ianov and others made clear that the production of art for the home had implications for style, subject matter and genre, demanding different norms and criteria from public art. Reformist art specialists used the idea of personal, one-to-one association with art in intimate settings to legitimate types of painting that were quite different from the way Socialist Realism had come to be practiced and understood under Stalin and to take forward their agenda of rehabilitating a moderate figurative modernism under the sign of the Contemporary Style.[30]

The new proposition "art for the home" provided for painting that was primarily decorative rather than ideological, that is, whose formal, aesthetic qualities mattered at least as much as its subject matter. From the reformists' point of view this was not to say that it lacked social meaning or educational benefit; as we saw above, they argued that harmonious form contributed to the public project of advancing communism by surrounding people with beauty, thereby fostering their aesthetic upbringing and all-round development. It also opened up a legitimate space for smaller works with intimate subject matter and private, personal meaning; for still life and landscape—genres marginalised by the Stalinist Academy and institutions of Socialist Realism; and for more painterly "spontaneous" artistic technique inspired by impressionism which had hitherto been criticized for lack of "finish" (Filatov 1961, 177). Still-life painting was proposed as the most appropriate genre of painting for the new domestic interior, and tempera or watercolour as more suitable media than "heavy, fat" oil paint, to complement the light architecture and small, low-ceilinged interiors of the new residential blocks (*ibid.*). The implications of domestic consumption were aired in relation to the first public art lottery, held in 1963, through which over 20,000 works of art by contemporary artists were to be distributed as prizes. The brief to artists contributing prizes was that works had to be of small dimensions, suitable for the "immediate decoration of everyday life." Discussing the criteria on Soviet television, liberal art historians emphasized that artistic quality was not defined by size.[31] Simple though this point may seem, it was significant given the Stalinist art world's emphasis on monumentality (and a payment structure that rewarded large dimensions). It asserted the value of a more personal, private kind of experience of art, acknowledging for the first time since the 1930s, a valid place for intimate art in socialist society. For reformers, to insist on the specificity of the location and mode of viewing thus supported their efforts to liberalize the formal and thematic strictures of Soviet art, broadening the scope of what artists might legitimately produce without being condemned for "formalism."

[30] To relativize and diversify artistic criteria, the reformers insisted on the specificity of different media and spaces or modes of encounter with art.

[31] Discussion of art lottery by liberal art historians P. I. Lebedev, Miuda Yablonskaia, and chief editor of *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR,* M. F. Ladur (GARF, f. 6903 (Gosteleradio), op. 2, d. 420, item 1793 (Telezhurnal "Iskusstvo,") 26. Nov. 1963).

There is a gender aspect to this tale. Socialist Realism's priorities, including the hierarchical division between public genres and media and intimate or "chamber" forms, had been detrimental to women's career chances in the Stalin-era art world. Until the institution of Socialist Realism in the early 1930s, which elevated the large public *kartina* (thematic painting), women had been most prominent in the minor genres and "minor" art forms (decorative and applied arts), in addition to being stereotypically associated with the private, domestic sphere, conventionally gendered feminine (for details see Reid 1998, 133-173). Regarding literature, Beth Holmgren (1993, 9-10) has argued that the Stalinist state never fully succeeded in colonizing the domestic sphere and the home and the chamber genres of writing associated with it, and to a large extent practiced by women, remained as potential site of resistance to official values.[32] Thus the domestic realm remained as an untouched resource, a heterotopic reserve of potential alternatives to hegemonic culture if not of resistance. Few women artists appear to have taken advantage of the proposed new possibilities in the early 1960s, however, but this is a question for further research.[33]

At the same time as art for the home was promoted, it was recognized that unique paintings might not be accessible for all. Nor, some modernist reformers argued, were easel paintings even desirable in the contemporary interior; their dust-collecting frames and spatial illusionism did not correspond to the Contemporary Style. Instead, light, simplified, stylized and flattened images were to be preferred, which emphasized the decorative two-dimensional surface rather than creating the illusion of penetrating the wall plane. Judiciously chosen art prints were advocated as a more "contemporary" and democratic art form, especially those in which decorative, formal—abstract—qualities took precedence over naturalistic representation (Gerchuk 1962, 34-37); Voeikova 1962, 30); Filatov 1961, 177).[34] The most vanguard journals, such as *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* (Decorative Art of the USSR) or the Estonian *Kunst ja kodu* (Art and the Home) offered a more extreme (modernist) version of the Contemporary Style than popular publications. One 1962 issue of *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* illustrated model interiors with bold contrasting colour schemes, very simple modern lines of furniture, a big geometric patterned rug on the floor, open uncluttered shelving, and minimal decorative items. Hung on the wall near the divan, it showed two prints by contemporary artists both depicting reclining nudes. One, a black and white lithograph by G. Zakharov is stylized and abstracted, with stark tonal contrasts and simplified silhouette, and is demonstratively flat, eschewing any spatial illusionism (Gerchuk 1962, 34-37).[35]

Not surprisingly, art world conservatives sniffed out a conspiracy to smuggle in modernism through the back door and undermine the public realist aesthetic of Socialist

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[32] Miuda Yablonskaia, likewise suggests that the "intimate" or chamber painting of artists such as Nadezhda Udal'tsova, Antonina Sofronova and others in the 1930s represented a "counter-movement" to Socialist Realism (Yablonskaya 1990, 171, 174).

[33] One exception, in the largely male dominated art world of the Thaw, may be Nataliia Egorshina, associated with the Group of Eight.

[34] Interview with I. A., St Petersburg, b. 1927, engineer, female. Sarab'ianov also championed artist prints: "More and more successfully the print, penetrates the everyday, having previously been neglected, considered an extremely intimate [chamber] form of art and not finding a path to the broad consumer" (Sarab'ianov 1960).

[35] Colour photo of interior with print in *DI*, no. 1 (1962, 8); Luppov (1962, 4-13); Chekalov (1962, 19).

Realism. From a conservative point of view, the implications of the private home as the destination for art remained suspect because inclusion in the interior ensemble reduced painting to a "decorative patch" on the wall at the expense of its ideological significance. The conservative art historian V. Kemenov (1961, 10-14) equated calls for a "Contemporary Style" (in art as well as in interior design) with a revival of the Productivist arguments of the avant-garde Left Front of the Arts (LEF) in the 1920s, who had announced the end of painting and its replacement by production art and "art into life"; it was a cover for an all-out attack on easel painting, he accused. Thus, at an important exhibition of model domestic interiors, *Art into Life (Iskusstvo – v byt)*, held in Moscow's prestigious Moscow Central Exhibition Hall or Manege in 1961, not one of the settings included an oil painting or a watercolour. With the hyperbole typical of conservative efforts to discredit the reformists' project, Kemenov accused the designers of seeking to cast easel painting as an out-dated art form that demanded a mode of passive contemplation unsuited to the new "dynamic" perception of the modern present, and to deny it any place at all in contemporary architecture. The interior settings were treated in such a way as to make it unthinkable to place a realist oil painting in them, prioritizing the abstract art of colour relations over that of figuration, narrative and ideological content (*ibid*., 11).

Conclusion

The answer to the question "what could the home do for art?"—from the reformist perspective—was that the new modern apartment could be art's saviour. It could potentially rescue art from the sclerosis of Stalinist dogma, injecting it with new dynamism, diversity, modernity, and responsiveness to present-day needs and audiences. To introduce an element of privatization into the patronage and consumption of art by promoting "art for the home" represented a way to liberalize and diversify Soviet art, to reengage selectively with modernism, and to reinstate the formal criteria. In the Soviet modernizers' campaign during the Thaw, the idea of "art for the home" was one of several strategic challenges to the identification of legitimate Soviet art production with a conservative, narrowly defined conception of realism and with the primacy of narrative ideological content at the expense of the expressive or decorative potential of artistic form. Flying in the face of the conventional assumption that the home is antithetical to progress or innovation, in general, and to modernism in particular, in this discourse the interiors of the new apartments were posited as a potentially progressive force in both artistic and social terms.

But was the "public" a reliable ally? Could the "private consumer of art be relied upon to make the right aesthetic choices? Unleashing the people's choice was a double-edged sword. As my research shows, householders often had different interests, values and criteria in choosing and arranging art for the home, and different ideas about the role of art in the interior and the kind of art that was fit for hanging there. In the end the home was an unruly space for art.

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