

The Museum of Modern Art

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PAVEL TCHELITCHEW

Twenty-eight drawings and watercolors executed by Tchelitchew between 1918 and 1923 before his arrival in Paris and the beginnings of his mature career are shown for the first time in an exhibition of New Acquisitions at The Museum of Modern Art from March 10 through April 30. They are the gift of the artist's sister, Mme. Zaousaileff.

The exhibition was directed by Bernice Rose, Associate Curator, Department of Drawings. She points out that the drawings represent an early, geometric style which Tchelitchew later abandoned preferring the surrealist fantasy of his mature style as evidenced by Hide-and-Seek, on view in the Museum's second floor galleries.

"These drawings were done as the youthful Tchelitchew moved from city to city," Mrs. Rose says in the wall label. "Many are designs for the small cabaret theatres which proliferated in Eastern Europe and Germany in the twenties. The earliest are from Kiev, where Tchelitchew first formally studied art and first came into contact with design for the stage through the artist-designer Alexandra Exter who, with Alexander Tairov, had founded the famous Kamerny Theatre in Moscow. In Russia great emphasis was placed on the theatre; Revolutionary artists believed that in the theatre they could most effectively bring about a synthesis of art and life, making art relevant to the masses. The stylistic vehicle for this synthesis was abstract 'cubist' art, and the youthful Tchelitchew's work shows the angles and straight lines of his early training (although he quickly developed the theory that there is no such thing as a straight line, since all lines eventually follow the curve of the earth).

"As Tchelitchew moved on, first to Odessa and Constantinople and then to Sofia before settling in Berlin in 1921, he found work with the Russian cabaret theatres which had sprung up along the route of the emigrés. The Russian cabaret was particularly popular in Berlin in those years, since it combined the music hall tradition with elements

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of the avant-garde. Tchelitchev worked for two cabarets in Berlin, Der Blaue Vogel (The Blue Bird), and the Russisches Romantisches Theater (Russian Romantic Theater) which was run by Boris Romonov, formerly a choreographer with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Tchelitchev did seven 'tableaux' for Der Blaue Vogel; one, a Spanish scene, may be represented in the exhibition; two others, The Sacrifice of Ataroga, for which we have the poster, and The Wedding Feast of the Boyars, were done for the Russian Romantic Theater. The result of these successes was an invitation by the Berlin State Opera to do decors and costumes for Le Coq d'Or, the first production for which Tchelitchev is known (but unfortunately not represented in this group of works). Seeking greater challenges, Tchelitchev moved on to Paris in 1923, hoping to obtain a commission from Diaghilev, which, however, did not come until he did Ode in 1928. Ode started him on a successful career as a stage designer in Western Europe and the United States. In the meantime, abandoning his earlier style, Tchelitchev had established a reputation as a fine painter."

Tchelitchev, who became an American citizen, was born in Moscow on September 21, 1898. He worked in Western Europe and the United States from 1921, and died in Paris in 1957.

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