

Institution: University of Nottingham
Unit of Assessment: 28
Title of case study: Preserving and Presenting Soviet Cultural Heritage
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Access to a rare collection of Soviet war posters – unique in the UK, and one of the largest internationally – has been facilitated through a process of conservation, digitisation and display. Research by Professor Marsh underpinned two exhibitions based on the collection (one physical and one digital) and a linked public engagement programme, creating new knowledge and awareness of the historical and aesthetic contexts of the posters, Soviet visual culture, the Soviet Union in the Second World War and the form and role of propaganda in a time of conflict. The digital resource provides permanent and interactive access to a rare and physically fragile element of Soviet cultural heritage, inspiring engagement from educators, members of cultural and community organisations and the public.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Key researcher: Professor Cynthia Marsh (Nottingham 1972- 2010, 2012-)</p> <p>The exhibition and the development of its on-line presence which are the focus of this case study arose from three strands in Marsh's research: the integration of poetry or prose with painting in Russian culture, involving a study of the history of Russian art; her more recent exploration of theatre as visual culture; and the translation of culture through the medium of theatre.</p> <p>Firstly, in her work on the variety of ways in which image and text can integrate Marsh has shown that the power of such integration lies in its synaesthetic effect in reception, where one of the receiving senses stimulates another simultaneously or sequentially. As a result, there is frequently an element of spectatorship in the reception of literary forms which relate to the visual arts. This research necessitated detailed study of the history of Russian art as well as of literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth century up to 1930 (research references pre-1993).</p> <p>Secondly, in her work on Russian theatre, Marsh has focused on the relationship between text and performance, and, more specifically, on the factors which are the source of a visual mode for the written dramatic word. She has demonstrated that the key to understanding this mode lies in an awareness of the spatiality inherent in the dramatic text. This dimension is seen in the visual impact of the implied staging and the implied fictional worlds (3.1). Spatiality can also be seen in the use of quotation, in all its forms, and its effects on physical performance style (3.2). Finally, visual impact is also found in the exploration of the structural aspects of the dramatic text which are central to performance, such as repetition, power relationships among characters and how these factors determine the spatial positioning in a performance (3.3). These characteristics are central to what Marsh sees as the 'theatricality' of a staged dramatic text. A significant challenge in this research is that the manifestation of these aspects in given productions is always, due to their performative nature, ephemeral.</p> <p>Thirdly, in her study of translated Russian theatre in Britain she has shown the complex changes which a dramatic text with all its visual implications undergoes in the transfer from source to target culture. The changes brought to a text in transmission by the chain of practitioners who work on a production have already been recognised, but Marsh has shown how implied stereotypes, for example, can fail to migrate successfully from the source culture or are added by the target culture and occlude aspects of the source text (3.4 & 3.5).</p> <p>The key findings from this research base which influenced the original exhibition and the on-line version are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the power generated by linking text and image as the posters do; • the function of text/image in the posters and its effect on spectatorship; • the centrality of spatial awareness in the visual composition of the posters themselves, in

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other words their 'theatricality';

- the posters as vehicles of cultural transfer (however biased);
- the nature of the ephemerality of the posters arising from their fragility as artefacts of material culture and from their status as responses to the rapidly changing events of war.

3. References to the research

3.1 'Design on Drama: V. A. Simov and Chekhov', *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, eds, Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.172-96. Available on request.

3.2 'The Implications of Quotation in Performance: Masha's lines from Pushkin in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 84:3 (July 2006), 446-59.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4214320>

3.3 'Claiming Spaces: *Enemies*', Cynthia Marsh, *Maxim Gorky, Russian Dramatist* (Bern, New York, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), pp.175-202. Available on request.

3.4 '*Three Sisters* as a Case Study for "Making Foreign Theater or Making Theater Foreign"', *Chekhov for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Appollonio, C., Brintlinger, A. (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica Publishers, 2012), pp.269-80, figs 3-9. Submitted to REF2.

3.5 'Post-War British *Month(s) in the Country*', *Turgenev and Russian culture*, eds. Joe Andrew, Derek Offord & Robert Reid (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008), pp.221-36. Submitted to REF2

Evidence of quality

Item 3.1 & 3.3: quality indicated by reputation of publisher; item 3.2 is a peer-reviewed journal; items 3.4 & 3.5 are submitted to REF2.

4. Details of the impact

Processes of conservation and digitisation have allowed public access for the first time to a rare collection of Soviet war posters – unique in the UK and one of the largest internationally. As part of her research interests, Marsh sought access to the posters through the University's Manuscripts and Special Collections (MSC) team, thus setting in motion a chain of events that would eventually lead to their physical exhibition and subsequent transformation into a permanent, digitised, interactive online resource, preserving an element of Soviet cultural heritage whose physical fragility had previously precluded the public from accessing it directly. 10,250 people have thus far visited the exhibition in either its physical or online form (5.1).

Initiated and curated by Marsh in close collaboration with the MSC team at the University, *Windows on War: Soviet Posters 1943-45* took place at the Weston Gallery (the University's public-facing Lakeside Arts Centre, which draws 90% of its audience from beyond the University) from December 2008 to March 2009. The exhibition was underpinned by Marsh's pre-1993 published research on poetry and painting and on the ways in which painting inspired pictorial passages in Russian 19th-century prose, and her more recent exploration of visual culture (3.1 & 3.4), bodily presence (3.2) and spatial awareness (3.2) in the theatre; and the translation of culture through the medium of theatre (3.4 & 3.5). This was complemented by recent, as yet unpublished research on the nature of the ephemerality of the posters arising from their fragility as artefacts of material culture. This research shaped the focus of the exhibition in terms of the topics highlighted, the manner in which the material was displayed and the captions created to guide visitors' understanding.

The exhibition attracted nearly 5000 visitors (substantial for the recorded footfall of the venue) and provoked national and local press interest, attesting to its role in raising public awareness of and contributing to a wider public understanding of this previously un-exhibited aspect of Soviet cultural heritage. It was recommended for several weeks during December 2008 and January 2009 in *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian* as a top 5 exhibition. The extent of the collection, its

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rarity, and specifically its Nottingham location also stimulated the interest of the local press (5.2). Visitors to the exhibition found it to be an 'excellent living memory of war childhood' and a 'peep into history through war posters'. There were also comments on how the posters' combinations of image and text affected Russian emotions toward the enemy, and their sentiments about home. A primary school teacher commented that his/her charges learned (after stencilling in teams) 'how mass production of images can be quite uncreative!' (5.3).

Linked public lectures and education activities engaged children, adult learners and a broader general public, contributing to increased knowledge about, awareness of and interest in Soviet visual culture, and specific issues such as preservation through digitisation, and the processes involved in the creation of the posters. Feedback has been referenced where this was sought at the time (5.3):

- **Public lectures**, such as 'The Soviet War Posters in the Context of History', by Professor Steven White (Glasgow) (27.01.09; 120 attendees) traced the Russian poster tradition's frequent reference to history (e.g. the Napoleonic invasion) providing insights into the specifically Russian, rather than Soviet, sense of history in WW2.
- **A lunchtime talk** attracted an audience of 40 people and covered topics such as preservation and digitisation as a repair tool; the provenance of a collection saved by chance; reproducing posters en masse in wartime conditions; and the paradox of the posters' war role.
- **School education days** (for 386 children and their teachers) were organised by the Lakeside Education Officer. Children were introduced to an archive, had a guided tour of the exhibition, and made their own posters. They learnt how to stencil and how teams created the original posters. Teacher comments: 'the children gained an insight into the poster collection, and were especially aware of how violent and aggressive the anti-Nazi campaign was in Russia. They produced very striking, if bloodthirsty, graphic images in black and red paint' (23.2.09). Transforming their existing knowledge, the children learnt about 'persuasive picture making' (23.02.09); and also 'learnt a few words of Russian' (23.02.09).
- **Adult study day** (28.02.09; 35 attendees, organised by Marsh). Speakers gave a comprehensive overview of the posters' role in war, their artistic inheritance as against contemporary art policy and their cultural legacy: The day concluded with a guided tour of the exhibition. Participants found the day to be 'excellent', answering 'a good number of questions'.
- The material was utilised by a **professional trainer** in her acculturating programme for businessmen visiting Russia who considers it to have had 'a great impact on me and my work'. The trainer was preparing a speech on 'Russia at War' and subsequently visited the archive to undertake further research on the posters which she considered 'too striking to omit!' She has subsequently embedded the material into three specialist talks she provides (to lay audiences and the national Arts charity National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS)) (5.4).

Using digitisation to widen access and to ensure conservation

Digitisation and online display have provided the ideal medium for the exhibition of the fragile posters, addressing what can otherwise be the opposing needs of public access and conservation. The online resource (5.1) has transformed the reach of the material, attracting new audiences to this unique element of Soviet cultural heritage. Its development called more deeply on Marsh's research, since each of the 45 posters has been fully annotated with comments on provenance, on its role in the war situation, on the artistic roots of the image and on the artist and writer (where appropriate), as well as commentary on the visual and verbal content of each poster. Interest and use of the site has been further stimulated by press coverage (5.2).

According to MSC's Digital Development Officer, the resource is proving to be 'exceptionally self-sustainable' (5.5), already generating interest from educators (5.6), and from a diverse range of cultural organisations. It has been endorsed by groups including, Nottingham Contemporary, the Irish Association for Russian, Central and Eastern European Studies, the Russian Embassy in London, the Soviet Space Program and Academia Rossica – the Russian Arts and Culture Foundation. Between its launch date on 26 March 2013 and 31st July 2013, it had 5,249 visits from the UK, US, Russia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Australia, Ukraine, France and Finland (5.7). The AHRC is featuring this 'fantastic' site in its on-line gallery as a model of best practice in creating a

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website and presenting rare materials: 'It is witty, informative, and really gets to the heart of what images mean and what they do – which is perfect' (5.8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1. Web address of the online exhibition: <http://windowsonwar.nottingham.ac.uk/>
- 5.2. Composite press report for both exhibitions (available on file).
- 5.3. Feedback from exhibition (including visitors' book comments, collated teacher comments from School Education Days. And feedback from study days (available on file).
- 5.4. Factual statement from professional trainer regarding the Russian acculturation programme (available on file).
- 5.5. Factual statement from Digital Development Officer (available on file).
- 5.6. Factual statement from US Professor (available on file).
- 5.7. Social media report on Windows on War resource (available on file).
- 5.8. E-mail from the AHRC (available on file).