

**CURATING THE REVEILED, BELOVED AND
QUOTIDIAN: A RETROSPECTIVE OF VLADIMIR
TRETCHIKOFF**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to contextualise my curation of 'Tretchikoff: The People's Painter' at the Iziko South African National Gallery by outlining the process by which I came to embark on this project and to examine the concepts of mass art and kitsch in relation to the painter. Mass art, in Noel Carroll's explication of the term, is art that utilises industrial processes of replication. Carroll argues that this leads to specific formal and structural tendencies in this art which have much in common with the pejorative concept of kitsch, or art that is lacking in taste or effuses excessive emotion. The latter term was and continues to be applied to Tretchikoff. Although some have attempted to 'reclaim' the word as a positive concept the negative associations that link this term to Tretchikoff are strong. Interrogating these concepts led me to decide to curate Tretchikoff's retrospective by focusing on his painting and not including the prints for which he was so well known.

Awareness of the complex associations and 'received knowledge' that his prints engender has influenced several curatorial decisions that I have taken. I consider the intellectual underpinnings of my curatorial strategy and argue for an 'open' exhibition which gives the viewer the opportunity to assess his work and legacy in an objective manner, free from as much curatorial mediation and didacticism as possible.

There are no answers to be offered in my curation of *Tretchikoff: the People's Painter*, rather I have aimed to set up dialogues, discussions, confrontations and challenges; I have offered simple relationships rather than complex juxtapositions I have aimed to position the artwork as the centre of the engagement relative to the viewer.

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From days gone by, artists, like inventors and great writers, have always been forced to struggle through a life of hardship and poverty before finally receiving recognition from their countrymen and the general public. It has always been the popular misconception that the longer the artist has been dead, the greater is his work of art. Those who managed to attain fame and fortune before reaching their deathbeds have always been classed in the minority, and even in their cases, fame, like good wine, always turned more mellow with age. Most of the famous artists whose names are to be found carved in gold in artistic museums throughout the world, in memory of the part they had played in the cultural growth of their art, were during their lives ridiculed by their contemporaries. The masses had no knowledge of them, and even artistic circles looked at them with a skeptical eye. Their colleagues seldom appreciated the value of their art. They formed a class rarely favoured by fortune, and usually died in the same poverty amidst which they had been accustomed to spend their whole lives. It is very difficult to find the name of a single famous artist whose biography does not read like a tragedy by Tolstoy (Anon 1940: 38).

Opening paragraph of the earliest known article about Tretchikoff.

Introduction

Many men have been famous in their time but their memory has perished because there were no historians to write about them. And yet the very histories are of little use when like their authors they become lost in the depths of time which makes all things obscure. (Boethius 1969: 74)

His name was anathema to most of the respected critics of the day yet reproductions of his work hung on the walls and above the mantelpieces of more middle- and working-class people than probably anyone before or since. Vladimir Griegorovich Tretchikoff¹ (1913-2006) was, in terms of the of sales of mass-produced reproductions of his work² as well as exhibition attendance, undoubtedly one of the most successful artists of the latter half of the twentieth century, yet to this day his work will not be found in the permanent holdings of any major institutional collection locally or internationally.³

One of the questions that recurred for me at the outset of this project was: Why is it that an artist who enjoyed arguably the greatest popular success of his time; whose exhibitions drew crowds that to this day have not been surpassed; whose fortune made from his art was reputed to rival only that of Picasso, has still not been the subject of virtually any sustained academic research and has never been in any major gallery in his adopted country?⁴ An easy answer would be that he epitomised kitsch, or other undesirable characteristics that excluded him from institutional acquisition and academic study and also accounts for why

¹ His name in Russian, Владимир Григорьевич Третчиков, transliterates as Vladimir Grigoryevich Tretyakov but he anglicised it when he began professional work (Room 2010: 480).

² In this case specifically the sales of industrially produced photolithographic prints. His original works were relatively modestly-priced during his lifetime.

³ A handful of corporate and privately owned institutionalised collections have one or more paintings, e.g. Sanlam Art Collection.

⁴ I shall address the issue of writings about Tretchikoff later in the introduction. Riason Naidoo's ground-breaking inclusion of *The Herb Seller* on '1910-2010: Pierneef to Gugulective' happened after I had begun this project and after it had already been agreed that it would be hosted by the Iziko South African National Gallery.

he was eschewed by the established arts community. If there is truth to this response it still leaves much of the question open. Many so-called 'kitsch' artists are celebrated today;⁵ indeed many have based their reputations upon a consciously or otherwise referencing 'bad taste' and innumerable artists once shunned are now celebrated.

Since early childhood I was aware of the figure of Vladimir Tretchikoff. Growing up in Cape Town in the 1970s one would encounter stories and anecdotes about him and even possibly catch a glance of him here and there as he went about his business. He was certainly something of a minor celebrity or publicly recognisable during that time. I remember seeing a few documentaries about him on television and every now and again reading something in the news referring to him. I also remember, in my mid-teens, around the time I was getting 'serious' about art, finding two faded prints in the garage probably handed-down from my paternal grand-mother and swiftly hidden there by my mother. It was around this time that my art class at school had a special lecture on the subject of kitsch by an academic from the Michaelis School of Fine Art⁶, which galvanised me against Tretchikoff and led to a short but very passionate period of denouncement of anything I believed to be kitsch. I read Gillo Dorfles' classic anthology with great care and my family responded by showering me with cheap and tawdry nick-nacks for my next birthday and the following Christmas. I know that I gradually softened my views on such matters and as the eighties faded so did any horror that I might once have felt for the work of Tretchikoff or others habitually lumped with him. As I got more involved in the formal art structures of this country I developed a sort of affection for those prints I would occasionally see in some trendy friend's house or in a second-hand store. In 2006, soon after Vladimir Tretchikoff died at the age of 92, the curatorial collective *Galerie Puta* – which I was a member of along with Cameron Platter, Ed Young and Dan Halter – dedicated one of our

⁵ Internationally the obvious example is Jeff Koons, but one could argue that he intelligently manipulated the language of kitsch to his own ends. A better example would be the filmmaker-artist John Waters, whose work was once seen as being unacceptable to 'normal' tastes but is now recognised by many as being significant. Locally one could cite several examples of individuals that produced (at least some) populist work that is now not only celebrated but the subject of ardent academic interest.

⁶ I have only recently realised and confirmed this was Hayden Proud, currently a curator at Iziko Museums.

last events as a memorial to the late artist.⁷ This may have been a trifle tongue-in-cheek given the iconoclastic nature of *Galerie Puta*⁸ but I personally took curatorial responsibility for the Tretchikoff evening (with the help of Christian Nerf) and it was a tribute of sorts.

This somewhat lengthy personal account of Tretchikoff's spectral presence throughout my life, first as a boy and then, in adulthood, as someone deeply involved in the arts in South Africa, prefaces the gesture that has led to this exhibition and this thesis.

In the second half of 2008 Natasha Swift (then Mercorio), Tretchikoff's grand-daughter and the head of the Tretchikoff Foundation, approached me at the suggestion of her fiancée, whom I had taught, as to whether I would be interested in curating something along the lines of 'a big Tretchikoff exhibition'. Fashion designer Marianne Fassler, a long-standing, unapologetic and outspoken 'Tretchi fan' had initiated some discussions with Iziko's management structure and there was a small possibility that the proposed exhibition, in whatever form it would take, might be hosted by the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG). I did not immediately leap at the possibility of being the independent curator for the proposed show, but I was certainly intrigued at the possibilities.

At that point I came to a realisation that has come to dominate much of my thinking about Tretchikoff and underpins the academic and curatorial project that is presented here: I had known *of* Tretchikoff for most of my life; I had seen a few old prints here and there and had read a few journalistic articles and seen a couple of TV documentaries. I actually knew almost nothing *about* either the man or his work. Until the moment that I was approached by Natasha Swift I had, from time to time, spoken about, referenced and alluded to Tretchikoff scores of times, yet the basis for my knowledge was virtually non-existent and based on faded memories, anecdotal chatter amongst other 'art people' like myself and very little else. Yet, until that moment of insight I probably believed that I was eminently equipped to speak about (and even curate) around the subject and work of Vladimir Tretchikoff. However I was not – and would never have – made a similar arrogant

⁷ Held at LBs Lounge, Long Street, Cape Town, 22-24 September 2006.

⁸ For further reference to *Galerie Puta* see Sloon 2009.

assumption in the case of most other artists whom I include in my discourse. Why was he different? As I soon discovered, when I did start to supplement my meagre knowledge about him, very little of substance was available about this artist.

At the time I began my research virtually nothing of substance had been published on Tretchikoff. There were a series of luxurious books and portfolios, frequently accompanied by brief introductions (e.g. Buncher 1950 and Richfield 1953) and a large format coffee-table book, the most expensive South African publication of its day with an interesting but essentially laudatory essay by the novelist Stuart Cloete (Tretchikoff 1969) which is generally referred to as 'The Gold Book'. In addition there was the fascinating and still immensely readable autobiography (co-written with journalist-turned-biographer Anthony Hocking) *Pigeon's Luck* (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973), which unsurprisingly takes Tretchikoff's viewpoint on all matters as its focus. Aside from these self-motivated works there was a scattering of contemporary reportage in 'serious' art publications (such as Anon 1953) and a couple of references to Tretchikoff in books published in the 1990s onwards that attempted to 're-assess' kitsch and claim it as 'cool' (e.g. Hemingway 2000 and Ward 1991) but these tended to be somewhat breathless in their celebratory, and at times uncritical stance. Aside from the journalism that I knew the man had generated in great quantity⁹ there was virtually nothing else.¹⁰ Quite frankly, I was a little surprised that no one had done anything that approached academic research on him, aside from a chapter in an MA(FA) thesis (Keith 2002) and a still unpublished, but art historically rigorous report, by Prof. Alex Duffey commissioned by Graham's Fine Art after the authenticity of the *Lost Orchid* formerly belonging to Brett Kebble was brought into question (Duffey 2009).

This almost total absence of earlier research was one of the chief motivating factors in agreeing to take up the project and I have been excited and stimulated by the immense

⁹ Which proved to be both much more voluminous than I ever imagined and intensely enlightening, covering many aspects of Tretchikoff's life. This has proven invaluable for the research into this exhibition and is still a mine for further researchers, as well as myself. I must acknowledge the library of Iziko Art Collections for exceptional help in sourcing much of this material.

¹⁰ Yvonne du Toit's two documentaries should be noted however and are excellent 'introductions' to Tretchikoff, albeit somewhat biased towards him (Du Toit 1998 & 1999).

possibilities that further research (whether by others or myself) promises, and the few modest discoveries I have made.

Thus, I agreed to curate an exhibition as proposed. One condition was that it should be a retrospective, featuring as many original works as possible and that it should be accompanied by a publication that would contextualise both the artworks and the artist. ISANG would be 'first prize' but I would be prepared to look into alternative venues should this not be possible. After some negotiations Riason Naidoo, the newly appointed Director of Art Collections for Iziko, agreed to ISANG as a venue for the show and I compiled a curatorial statement that went through some changes until it reached its last form in 2010. I stated then that:

I propose to curate a major retrospective of Tretchikoff's original works in the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG). This has been approved by the Director of Art Collections for IZIKO and is scheduled to open in March 2011. In so doing I intend to both focus academic and critical attention on his production as well as contrast his actual paintings with the legacy of his widely disseminated (and now fading) prints upon which I will argue much of the 'received wisdom' about their worth (or lack thereof) is based upon in many cases. From the outset, Tretchikoff was a controversial figure. He has become a touchstone for all that 'good art' distances itself from (not the least being its popular appeal). The Tretchikoff Retrospective I shall curate will not be a blind celebration nor will it be a display of his alleged artistic ineptitude but rather a considered exposition of what he did and why it aroused such passionate opinions both in its own time and now. In this I am inspired by Riason Naidoo's curation of *From Pierneef to Gugulective: 1910-2010* at the Iziko South African National Gallery (ongoing). Despite initial controversy this exhibition attempts to radically reposition 'received' notions of South African art history in the context of exposing viewers to works that while known through secondary literature have never before been actually *seen* together.¹¹ I will, for the first time, present original work by Vladimir Tretchikoff (sourced from four continents) alongside archival material, the popular prints produced during his lifetime and works by contemporary artists inspired by him.

¹¹ Interestingly it is also the first time that Tretchikoff has been exhibited in the ISANG. (See Schoeman 2010: 57)

As it happened there were many obstacles, financial and logistical, that would have to be faced and addressed, and, more importantly, my views on certain matters would change radically as the process unfolded.

I introduce this thesis on this personal note to foreground the fact that until I began this project my 'knowledge' of my subject was based on pre-supposition, imperfect and unreliable memory, as well as inadequate data. It has become a truism of sorts that Tretchikoff was never taken seriously by other artists and the critics. Whether or not this was or is valid I have nonetheless predicated my project upon *taking Tretchikoff seriously*, that is to say to treat him as I would any other subject of academic and curatorial enquiry. Hopefully these intentions will be evident to some degree in this thesis, the book which accompanies it and other documentation. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that the true product of this research process is the exhibition itself. The thesis, like the other textual products that have been generated, are selective in their focus and limited in their extent. Although I have been at pains *not* to make *Tretchikoff: The People's Painter* a didactic show in one way, it is a sincere hope that it does reflect knowledge, consideration and an intellectual process and that in turn debate, argument and ultimately more research will emanate from it.

Chapter 1

Mass Art / Mass Appeal

This antimony of modern art as pure art is displayed in the fact that, as the autonomy of cultural production grows, the interval of time necessary for works to impress on the public (most of the time against the critics) the concomitant norms of their perceptions is seen to grow likewise (Bourdieu 1996: 82).

Mass art, that is art produced via the machinery of industrialisation and distributed *en masse*, has become a topic of great interest amongst aestheticians and art theorists in recent years. Mass art is seen in its usual formulation as being quite distinct from popular art, which has a broader historical sweep and includes categories that mass art does not (such as 'craft'). One of the most important contributors to the rigorous understanding of mass art is Noël Carroll, whose well-known definition of mass art runs as follows:

X is a mass artwork if and only if 1.) X is a multiple instance or type artwork 2.) produced and distributed by a mass technology 3.) Which artwork is intentionally designed to gravitate in its structural choices (for example, its narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect, and even its content) toward those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort, virtually on first contact, for the largest number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences (Carroll 1998: 196).

For most theorists who refer to mass art, this categorisation is frequently associated with Hollywood movies, television, cartoons and the like. In spite of this 'easy' conflation with 'entertainment' as art, Carroll is careful to avoid equating the two, and central to his analysis of mass art is mass-production and mass-distribution. (see Fisher 2004: 57) Using Carroll's definition, it becomes possible to contextualise Tretchikoff's mass dissemination of prints (he is frequently and in my view appropriately, called a 'pioneer' in this regard)¹² as

¹² For the most sustained argument in this regard see Hemingway 2000.

an example of mass art that references (or even 'simulates') 'elite art'.¹³ Unlike traditional 'fine art' prints, produced in limited numbers using technologies such as the engraved copper plate or lithographic stone and crayon which still preserves a Benjaminian aura and trace of the 'hand' of the artist, mass produced (Hemingway's 'mass-market') prints are run off in large quantities by means of machinery developed chiefly for other printing needs, such as periodicals and books.¹⁴ By applying this mechanisation to the realm of 'fine art' reproductions, such products drop dramatically in price and increases accessibility.¹⁵

Carroll rejects a simplistic view, which argues that '[t]he consumption of mass art is a social marker; mass art is consumed by the masses, whereas so-called high art is consumed by elites' (what he calls the Essentialist Theory of mass art and maintains is socially reductive) and prefers to concentrate on formal and structural differences between mass art and any other (2001: 15-16). Accessibility (presumably both physical and intellectual) would be one such marker for mass art (Carroll 2001: 16). Furthermore he cites structural features 'include[ing] narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect, and even content' (18) as *cultural* properties of mass art. Given that all of the above have, at some time or some form, been leveled as charges against Tretchikoff by his detractors, and presumably have been quietly enjoyed or appreciated by his fans and supporters, these structural features seem worthy of further comment. When one considers that in explaining why, *inter alia*, Tretchikoff did 'not qualify' for inclusion as an article in her dictionary/encyclopedia *Art & Artists of South Africa*, Esmé Berman noted that his work 'epitomized the most typical characteristics of popular art: narrative content, illusionary pictorial imagery, popular subjectmatter, [*sic*] emotional or sentimental allusions, blatant colour, familiar visual forms and a sum of technical effects'

¹³ This term being frequently, though somewhat inaccurately, used to describe art that is antithetical to mass art, by the latter's detractors and proponents alike. Carroll, in *The Philosophy of Mass Art* (1998), takes great care to avoid this particular binary throughout his argument and has further elaborated on this problematic characterization in a later publication. (Carroll 2001).

¹⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that Tretchikoff was notoriously finicky about the production quality of his prints, frequently insisting on the destruction of quantities that did not meet up to his standards, much to the chagrin of his printers. Yvonne du Toit's documentary *The People's Painter* includes footage of him 'at work' at the printers, giving them something of a hard time.

¹⁵ Tretchikoff's prints, as has been already noted cost less than the equivalent of R100 in the 1960s and were available at stationers, chemists, department stores and other outlets hitherto not associated with buying 'art'.

(Berman 1983: 341). Carroll interprets such 'characteristics' in a very different way noting that

Producers of mass artworks aim at capturing the largest audiences they can, in part by designing their works in ways that are not obscure, but are accessible to the largest number of people. They need not assume that there is an undifferentiated mass audience, but only that there are a lot of people out there and that there are many things they are likely to have in common, and, therefore, find mutually accessible. The producer of mass art tries to strike that common chord of accessibility and to engage many, many people by doing so. (Carroll 2001: 18)

Accessibility does not, in my view, and in the specific case of Tretchikoff, exclude other structural and thematic aspects, which I hope will be able to be discerned when one sees Tretchikoff's work in a reasonably representative form. Personally I am quite intrigued by his more 'allegorical' works such as *Beggar with Golden Frame* (before 1946) and *Prisoner of War* (ca. 1950), which seem still to carry the trace of his hard wartime experiences with them and to have *some* characteristics which are at odds with Berman's glib characterization.¹⁶ Simply dismissing Tretchikoff's works on the basis of their being accessible or even 'typically commercial' seems too easy a charge in the context of times in which the charge was leveled. I presume that few would argue for the merits of art that is uniformly *inaccessible* to the majority of people on that basis alone, just as I am aware that not all critically celebrated South African artists contemporaneous with Tretchikoff were above applying a 'popular touch' from time to time. I am not arguing that this is a problem *per se* but rather that I am suspicious of the particular exclusion of art on the basis of its being open and legible to those who do not have special training or skills in orthodox art appreciation. I am not convinced that I fully understand exactly what made Tretchikoff so popular and his work so desirable and attractive to so many, but I do know that oversimplification and sweeping dismissals on the basis of assumptions that have not been rigorously tested are unlikely to be fruitful in shedding light on this question.

¹⁶ In this I am not arguing that they were less popular or even accessible (*Prisoner of War* sold well as a print at one stage) and some of the more outré works from his earliest South African exhibitions (such as *Atomic Age*) were among the drawcards for the Rosicrucian Gallery when they offered him the American exhibition which would change his life and fortunes for ever. Interestingly *Prisoner of War* was also used extensively by that gallery in their newspaper advertisements for his first US show.



The motor car advertisement (top right of image opposite) designed by Tretchikoff during his years in Singapore was clearly a source for *Atomic Age* (ca. 1948) (below), one of the pictures that drew such enormous public attention when he first exhibited. (Source: *Screen and Art* [Shanghai] 2(1-2), January-February 1940. [Both images courtesy Tretchikoff Foundation Archive]).



The accusation that he ‘pandered to the public’ was always vigorously denied by Tretchikoff¹⁷ but it is worth noting that it was amongst the charges leveled against him by many of his critics in South Africa.¹⁸ Matthys Bokhorst’s¹⁹ oft-cited article headed *Painter Expounds “Lachrymose”, “Cheap Sensation for the Masses”* (*Cape Times* 16 September 1952) is rather interesting in the light the above if one ignores the sensationalism of the heading (presumably supplied by a sub-editor) and reads on:

[...] Unfortunately he has surrendered to the desire of the masses for cheap sensation and lachrymose sentimentality. A typical example of unusual presentation pour epater le bourgeois – to dumbfound the common people [...] I do not mind an artist painting an orchid lying on a flight of stairs with a cigarette end – although I prefer it in a vase or corsage – but if the artist wants to ‘go realistic’, I want him to look at Van Aelst’s still life in the Michaelis Collection to learn how to paint a flower [...] In trying to be popular, Mr Tretchikoff is still hiding his light behind a bushel (*Cape Times* 16 September 1952).

In stating that Tretchikoff was ‘surrendering to the desire of the masses’ and ‘still hiding his light behind a bushel’ Bokhorst (despite his painting advice) seems to be implying that were he not ‘giving in’ in this way he would be a better artist. Popularity was clearly equated with a lack of quality: the public had no taste. In remembering the most damning criticism he had received up till that point, Tretchikoff, in *Pigeon’s Luck* (his autobiography co-written

¹⁷ As evinced, for example, by this comment: ‘I have been accused of creating what the public wants. The truth is I don’t care a damn about what anybody wants. I do what I believe in doing and it’s just my luck that the majority approve.’ (*Cape Argus* 6 January 1966).

¹⁸ It is perhaps worth pointing out that the very earliest reviews he received from his first South African show at Maskew Miller in March 1948 where, on the whole, considerably more even handed than most that he would receive thereafter (on the fairly infrequent occasions that his shows were subsequently formally reviewed as such. Nevertheless amongst the concerns raised were his sentimentality, cheapness, vulgarity and lack of spirituality. (See Minnaar 2011: 165-168 for a summary of these) The charge of out-and-out popularism only emerges *retroactively* after the unexpected and unprecedented crowds at his first Cape Town and Durban shows in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

¹⁹ Who had earlier derided both Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser and in August 1962 became director of the South African National Gallery. He was undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in the South African art establishment at the time (Tietze 2011: 171-172).

with Anthony Hocking) notes how Bokhorst's criticism worked in his favour, something he would gleefully point out about critics many more times in his career:

The store manager wanted me to make a reply to the attacks. But I told him it was not necessary.

'The critics have made a mistake,' I said. 'They have attacked the public. They are biting the hand that feeds them. The public isn't going to stand for that kind of treatment.'

The reaction came just as I had predicted. The papers received hundreds of letters, and published them by the pageful. Though a few of them supported the critics' stand, the vast majority were in my defence. We had great publicity and the success of the exhibition was assured. In all we had more than 61,000 visitors in the three weeks of the show. Later, people asked me how much I had to pay the critics to give me such effective help (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 200-201).

A taste of the response can be gleaned from this example of the replies from the public [Bokhorst's name is misspelled in the source]:

Tretchikoff's Art and the Masses – letter from Mr M Kuttel

This member of the common people (the plebs, the masses, or, for good measure, the teeming millions) is so irritated by Matthys Bokhurst's criticism of the Tretchikoff pictures that some expression of the common interest in his art must burst forth. The critic seems nourished by old masters and desiccated dry-points to whom nothing can be 'fine art' unless it bears the label 'Artist Dead', or be one of those abstractions so incomprehensible to the ordinary public but which the critics love to clothe in vague arty phrases. [...] I would remind Professor Bokhurst that Manet, Degas, Bonnet and van Dongen were contemptuously referred to by the critics as 'poster artists' of their time, and yet, in turn, have ultimately become the toasts of Paris. [...] Lastly, as a personal expression of opinion, I prefer certain of Tretchikoff's work to those of the modern school, the works of which remind me of patients in great pain or in a state of complete epilepsy. [Several other letters have been received concerning Professor Bokhurst's criticism. Some, unfortunately, contain a personal attack on Professor Bokhurst. The above letter, however, represents the views expressed in the more sober letters. – Editor, Cape Times] (*Cape Times* 20 September 1952).

Nevertheless, as Tretchikoff admitted, the reaction was not all in his favour. One particularly telling response to the 'Bokhorst Affair' vindicates an artist's right to please 'the people' whilst still objecting to the manner that Tretchikoff is seen to have achieved this:

Art, The Masses, and The Artist – letter from 'Architect'

[...] The very fact that there is this controversy, and the existence of the idea that any artist might not paint, write, or compose for the people of his time points up a sickness in our society, and is of the deepest concern to us all. In any vigorous, growing civilization the artist holds a place of great importance. He gives form to vital spiritual and material ideas, contributes thoughts and emotions of his own to enrich those ideals, and generally helps guide and propel the upward expansion of society. And the great majority of people, high and low, instinctively understand, and are in sympathy with, his endeavors. Where there is a divorce between the artist and the people, either the artist is out of tune with his contemporaries, or the society itself lacks vitality, and this leads to the rootlessness and eventual atrophy of the art involved. This, however, does not vindicate artists, like Tretchikoff, who approach 'the masses' through a fog of sentimentality and achieve popular acclaim by being picturesque or crudely sensational [...] (*Cape Times*, 24 September 1952).

The relationship between popularity, popularism, the people (or 'the masses' as they are significantly called by the last correspondent) and the phenomenon of mass art is complex and not always intuitive. For example Carroll draws an important distinction between popular and mass art thus:

Mass art, unlike popular art *simpliciter*, is not the sort of art that might be found in any society. It is the art of mass, industrial society, and is designed for the purposes of such societies. (Carroll 1997: 188)

He develops this at great length and notes that mass art need not be popular and popular culture has nothing intrinsically to do with mass art. (Carroll 1997)

The notion that 'good' art must challenge the viewer and 'bad' art makes the viewer feel good and conveys positive feelings (the latter's popularity thus being a circular proof of its badness) is central to many aesthetic regimes in the West and is reinforced in most systems of aesthetic education. (Winston & Cupchik 1992)

I have focussed on Carroll's theories of mass art because I believe they provide an exceptionally useful and appropriate context in which to understand not only what Tretchikoff *produced* as an artist but also because they help to explain other aspects of what I see to be the phenomenon that his career entailed, with the public success, critical rejection and various other aspects that marked it as exceptional beyond or irrespective of his 'artistic merits' (as judged by those who believe they are in a position to do so). This has proven fruitful in developing a curatorial strategy in which to present his work in this exhibition and was one contributing factor to my gradual move towards excluding the prints for which he is so well known from the show. Where I had originally intended to include examples of this important aspect of his production in the exhibition, I gradually moved to a position where I did not want to construct a dualistic dialogue between prints and originals, or at least I did not want to make such a dialogue an easy option for the viewer. The temptation (and indeed rather obvious curatorial ploy) of juxtaposing the material form by which Tretchikoff is now best known and which is his trademark and claim to fame (and fortune) – that of the mass-produced print – with the original paintings which provided a source for them and whose artistic qualities were (and still remain) a matter of grave concern for many connoisseurs and critics was simply too easy in the end.

In my own self-examination of my 'knowledge' of Tretchikoff's work *qua* art I soon became aware and sensitive to the fact that I was (as I believe many others are too) chiefly acquainted with vintage prints that are either statement-laden accretions to fashionable loft living for a generation of bohemians, fans, camp aficionados alternative design champions who were born after Tretchikoff's most successful period of activity or neglected rejects from tastes gone by, mouldering in garages and flea markets around the world. In all cases, they no longer look the same as they did then²⁰ nor do they carry the same resonance or exist in the physical and cultural milieu of their original context. Nonetheless I was, and remain, deeply conscious of the importance of mass-produced prints in

²⁰ I presented some early thoughts around this in a paper entitled 'Fading from History: The Print Culture of Vladimir Tretchikoff and its Legacy' which was presented at the 2010 conference on Colour in South African Art at Rhodes University which was organised by Ashraf Jamal and Rat Western. In retrospect I realise that I was focussing too strongly on the legacy of the *idea* of his prints, rather than the legacy of the material objects themselves.

establishing Tretchikoff's fame as an artist and the exceptional role which they played in his marketing and method of creating a buzz around his many department store shows.

I would argue that the legacy of his print culture is the primary vehicle for 'received knowledge' about his work, more than anecdote, television documentaries or the occasional newspaper article that may appear. Certainly this legacy is far stronger than any direct acquaintance with his originals. Additionally, and partly as a result of his posthumous (so to speak) championing by certain trend-setters and arbiters of contemporary taste and fashion,²¹ his works have taken on another level of reproduction in being brandished on everything from mugs to pillows to dresses. This seems to raise a significant paradox: if part of his significance and importance to contemporary art and culture today rests upon the way he utilised mass-production (as I believe) then how does this revived ubiquity sit at odds with the 'received knowledge' that I claim is due to a familiarity with the survivals of his earlier success in disseminating his painted images by means of mass reproduction (chiefly, but not exclusively) in the form of prints?²² Perhaps a simple but two-fold answer is (a) the (now faded) freshness of a print made and consumed in the 1950s or 1960s is accurately replicated in a modern handbag or set of coasters (i.e. the print does not look like it did half a century ago but the modern product looks just as it did then) and (b) the contexts of the two objects are very different. This clash of 'familiarity' with 'dissonance' leads to the rub that concerns me so much when considering the heavy weight that his print legacy carries in our current appreciation or otherwise defining, informing or (more likely) reinforcing opinions about 'Tretchikoff the artist'.

For me it would have been very interesting to juxtapose print and original in the exhibition, but I also feel it would have been a 'cheap shot' given the concerns outlined above. The temptation to compare or, importantly, the alibi for a claim that the viewer *has* compared (when in fact the strategy of juxtaposition is merely a mechanism for not looking and rather justifying existing assumptions) would be too easy.

²¹ See Gorelik 2011 for several examples of this.

²² He did sanction certain other products in his heyday, notably tables with his images laminated onto them.

By excluding prints and demanding engagement with original works I believe I have constructed a situation in which the viewer now has to confront their own assumed and long-held 'knowledge', drawing on memories as faded as a flea market reject, and in that comparison realise something different about what they thought they knew. In other words my exclusion of prints is a strategy to force the viewer (and obviously here as in much of what is written above I am focussing in this case on the viewer who has come to hold a negative view of Tretchikoff, though of course the situation may also be challenging to a fan) to *look* and to *reconsider*. Naturally if they do that and their views stand firm then no harm has been done and indeed some self-satisfied pleasure may be gained.

Tretchikoff understood mass art at a time when virtually no one else did, and for that reason is so often cited as a fore-runner or at least mirror of Pop Art, Post-Modernism and the like (e.g. Wade 1991 and Hemingway 2000; see also Gorelik 2011)²³ I still contend that for the role he played in making 'contemporary' art an affordable and accessible option for many people hitherto held at the gates of 'high culture' (as represented by the acquisition of an artwork) he is worthy of study and consideration, even to those who will not concede a place for him in art history as such. Nevertheless I chose not to include this exceptionally important aspect of his production on the show for the very reason of its dominating presence in the mechanisms by which the visitors to the show are likely to have knowledge of him. In a way I would argue that the absence of prints underline their distinct presence in the opinions, pro and con, that associate themselves with Tretchikoff. In bringing a spectral memory of them with them, I hope that the viewer will have to consider the weight that that ghost places upon the mind.

²³ This aspect of his influence or legacy was also a common feature of the high-profile obituaries that appeared after his death (e.g. Derwent 2006; Glendinning 2006 and Wines 2006).

Chapter 2

Kitsch and its Discontents

Vladimir Tretchikoff was, within his lifetime, possibly the most popular and best-known artist of his day (a title he often battled over with Pablo Picasso). Unlike Picasso, however, his work was almost invariably seen as ‘pandering to popular taste’²⁴ by the critics and the arts establishment. This was especially true in South Africa. While his first international shows received some positive critical comment, almost from the first in South Africa there was much hostile criticism. Matthys Bokhorst, F.L. Alexander and others invariably characterised his work as being cheap²⁵ and garish (Campbell 2008: 57; see also Minnaar 2011). As his shows attracted record crowds and his prints sold in unprecedented numbers to people who otherwise showed very little interest in art, the critical backlash grew even stronger. As one reads chronologically through the South African critical record a distinct change takes place from the responses of the late 1940s (which even if they were damning were tempered with what I can only describe as a concern to stop Tretchikoff before he did himself or his public a damage) to those of the later 1950s (after the American and Canadian tour). His international success and the wealth that it brought him – ostentatiously displayed on his return and which made good copy in the gossip and social pages of the newspapers – also brought a hardening line against the artist in the art pages.

The battle lines were really drawn just before he left for the United States when the New Group, an influential group of ‘avant-garde’ artists who aimed to protect the interests of art, issued a public denouncement of his work (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 201ff). Despite

²⁴ The article by Bokhorst referred to above implicitly laments the fact that he is doing himself, rather than the public, a disservice in ‘giving ‘em what they want’ – a stunting of his artistic growth and a failure to achieve artistic excellence seems to be foretold. This tone will change in both Bokhorst and the other critics as Tretchikoff’s fortunes and undeniable commercial success follow in the 1950s. The dominant position of the professional critics will be that he is deliberately ‘short-changing’ his audience and doing wrong by them in offering up his work in easily digestible form.

²⁵ Tretchikoff once stated ‘the more expensive my paintings become, the cheaper the critics make them out to be.’ (*Cape Argus*, 22 August 1959)

their attempts to prevent him exhibiting overseas he was warmly received by patrons such as the Rosicrucian organisation and soon was working independently and outside the gallery system. On one occasion Tretchikoff was able to measure his mass appeal directly against that of artists who many characterised as epitomising 'high art'. In Seattle in 1960 an exhibition of '25 Masterworks on Loan from the San Francisco Museum of Art' which included works by Picasso, Kandinsky, Klee and the like was virtually ignored by the public in the same department store (Frederick and Nelson) where Tretchikoff was attracting an unprecedented audience. (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 225-226; Hemingway 2000: 12) Tretchikoff was no longer seen as merely as a purveyor of cheap sensation to the masses but also a treat to long-defended and closely held values of taste. Taste would become a touchstone in any future debates about the relative merits of his work and at the same time as Tretchikoff was drawing in the crowds for the first time a relatively new word (in English at least) was entering the discourse and theories around taste: kitsch.²⁶

In my reading around kitsch in researching this project I was immediately struck by the fact that few writers ever truly give the word a definition proper, and gloss over that task by either listing what they see as characteristics of kitsch or by describing it in terms of what it stands in opposition to, i.e. what it is *not* rather than what it *is*. The word and the concept is not without some difficulties: As Gordon Bearn observes in his survey article in the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*:

Kitsch presents a problem of what Immanuel Kant would have called reflective judgment: given a number of examples of kitsch, a critic will construct an account of what makes kitsch kitsch. But most discussions begin with putative examples of kitsch: Hummel figurines, paintings on black velvet of a tearful clown or a beatific Elvis Presley, Muzak, Eiffel tower pepper grinders, ice cubes shaped like breasts [etc.]. But the problem of kitsch is to decide what makes all these heterogeneous objects kitsch. The technical expertise of these examples is sufficient to silence the thought that the trashiness of kitsch is a function of technical incompetence. In fact, quite the reverse is true: a certain technical

²⁶ The first recorded published reference in the English language to kitsch was by Clement Greenberg in his highly influential essay 'Avant Garde and Kitsch' which appeared in the *Partisan Review* in 1939 Although it records a usage in 1926 in a personal letter only published decades later. (Oxford English Dictionary 2011b).

competence is necessary for the production of kitsch. But if not incompetent, what does the kitschiness of kitsch consist in? (Bearn 2011).

After noting that conventional usage of the word in the realm of aesthetic discourse usually distinguishes it from art (i.e. that is what it is *not*), Bearn summarises the ‘terms of criticism’ that have been used around the word as having the following broad characteristics:

- Kitsch is too easy
- Kitsch is formulaic and too mechanical
- Kitsch is a lie and therefore evil.

All of which, in established discourse around the term *do not* apply to art; *ergo* kitsch is not art (Bearn 2011). In his survey of the usage of the word Bearn presents a case that these ‘terms of criticism’ have been used with dubious intent philosophically and concludes that the antithesis of art and kitsch is fundamentally flawed. As he notes:

The fates of art and kitsch are linked because kitsch is simply what remains of the arts once we have removed from art all but its autonomous, formal delights. Sleight-of-hand philosophers might point out that this very account of the nature of art ruins the purity of the distinction between art and kitsch, for if kitsch is, in a certain sense, the shit that art excludes and if kitsch itself is the denial of shit, then art, too, by excluding kitsch becomes kitsch. But we do not need to decide if that argument is clever or just slippery, for the general point is that if, for whatever reasons, we have become suspicious of the category of autonomous art, we should at the same time, and for the same reasons, become suspicious of the category of kitsch (Bearn 2011).

It is significant, I believe, that as the ‘autonomy of art’ was worn down by the theoretical onslaughts of Post-Structualism and Post-Modernism, so too was the need to express *de rigueur* horror at any suspicion of kitsch. The appropriation of kitsch as the new ‘cool’ that marked its open celebration by those who should have known better in the late 1970s onwards goes hand-in-hand with the development and adoption of Post-Modernist theoretical and aesthetic positions – both chronologically, personally and geographically. The summation of this acceptance and celebration (or for some, toleration) of kitsch can be seen in Peter Ward’s popular book *Kitsch in Sync* (Ward 1991). In the section on Tretchikoff

in his unabashed salute to kitsch (entitled 'The Greatest Artist in the World') there is a side note that states:

The great Vladimir Tretchikoff unfortunately declined our invitation to have his art appear in this book. All the same, his influence, like his fortune, has been immense. The two French artists/Designers Pierre et Gilles produced their 'Medusa' as a eulogy to his unmistakable style. (Ward 1991: 34)



Pierre et Gilles
Medusa
Colour photograph
1990
Collection: Russian State Museum
(Source: http://www.artknowledgenews.com/Pierre_and_Gilles.html)

However this 'eulogy' was not kitsch but something else, a concept that relied upon the received notion of bad taste, and especially kitsch as bad taste's highest form to be actualised: camp.

The popular acceptance of kitsch was presaged by Susan Sontag understanding of the notion of 'camp' in terms of the taking of ironic pleasure in something *because* of its (irony-free) qualities of 'bad taste' (Sontag: 1966: 292). The concept of taste itself might be the rub:

Taste has no system and no proofs. But there is something like a logic of taste: the consistent sensibility which underlies and gives rise to a certain taste. A sensibility is almost, but not quite, ineffable. Any sensibility which can be crammed into the mold of a system, or handled with the rough tools of proof, is no longer a sensibility at all. It has hardened into an idea . . . (Sontag: 1966: 277).

A phrase that attached itself to Tretchikoff – one that he hated more than any other insult – and one which is still evoked in the press when a good headline or pull quote is needed is ‘King of Kitsch’.

Kitsch was a word that would dog him for his entire career and haunt him beyond his grave. The obsession with kitsch (as a negative aesthetic paradigm) amongst academics coincides almost exactly with the heyday of Tretchikoff’s career (i.e. the 1950s-70s). Emanating from the first text on the subject, Hans Reimann’s *Das Buch vom Kitsch* (1936), a number of German-language studies that defined and explored the term,²⁷ and followed by some of the members of the Frankfurt School’s studies on mass culture (see Adorno 1991). In its earliest formulations kitsch is characterised as a sentimental obsession with pleasure on the part of the general public at the expense of artistic quality. (Dorfles 1968: 27-29) This in turn is seen to be the product of industrialisation, mass literacy and new forms of communication such as television. (Dorfles 1968: 30-31; Adorno 1991: 158-177) In other words it is the dangerous effluence of modernity (see Calinescu 1977: 225-228). Clement Greenberg’s essay ‘Avant Garde and Kitsch’ (1939) (reprinted in Dorfles 1968: 116-126) is an important milestone in the academic interrogation of kitsch, which attempted to put some definitional limits on the word. The essay was written while Greenberg was heavily influenced by Marxism and it was here that the correlation between kitsch and totalitarianism was first articulated. Despite Greenberg disowning it in later life (Ostrow & Greenberg 1989; Gurstein 2003) ‘Avant Garde and Kitsch’, more cited than actually read, has remained a primary document in the discourse of kitsch.

²⁷ For example Hermann Broch’s ‘Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches’ (1950-51); Ludwig Giesz’s *Phänomenologie des Kitsches* (1960); and Walter Killy’s *Deutscher Kitsch* (1961).

Kitsch is now very much a contested word academically and has moved far beyond the terms of reference associated with it in Tretchikoff's heyday. Despite this, or maybe even because of this,²⁸ the charge of kitsch levelled against its unwilling 'king' is still for most a problem. I considered the question of kitsch very carefully in conceptualising the exhibition and developed several strategies to address the issue.²⁹ Ultimately I decided not to make any direct or leading reference to kitsch in the show. Fundamental curation was the fact that I would select works that would present a survey of the artist's output as a whole. Pressure to either heighten the perceived 'kitschiness' of his work by drawing attention to works that conformed to many of the characteristics held to be indicative of it, as well as the editing out of such works, were rejected.

Kitsch cannot be avoided in a discussion of Tretchikoff, but for my purposes the word has lost much of its power in contemporary art discourse and as such I have acknowledged its importance in the received ideas about the artist but also have chosen to limit my engagement with it curatorially.

²⁸ See Maharaj 1992 for the way in which the appropriation of kitsch motifs in Pop Art creates something of a 'crisis' of identity.

²⁹ For example, I originally planned to have a barrier constructed as the viewer entered the exhibition that would be decorated with tacky 1960s wallpaper and have a fake fireplace installed, above which would hang a print of the *Chinese Girl*.

Chapter 3

'The People' and Painting: A Curatorial Strategy

I have ultimately made the decision to radically simplify my initial curatorial conception, which was to include original prints, a far more substantial archival section of artifacts and contextual material, panels with quotations by and about the artist, an ersatz working class interior and even – at one stage – artistic responses to Tretchikoff by contemporary practitioners. In the end I have decided to focus on what lay at the heart of his production as an artist: painting. I have added a gentle nod here and there to Tretchikoff himself³⁰ but have adopted a thematic approach and hanging conventions that would not be out of place in any retrospective of an artist of his era. Tretchikoff always used stark juxtapositions and would never place works that shared thematic or formal characteristics next to each other. His lighting tended to create great drama and spotlights were shone on each work while the room itself was dark. I used fairly even lighting and was assisted by a sponsorship from Lemnis Lighting, in their first venture on the African continent, to create the effect I wanted.

My key curatorial position could be summarised thus:

- To foreground the artist's primary medium, painting.
- To avoid any 'special effects' or curatorial ploys that would offset focus on the works or draw attention away from them.
- To treat this artist as I would if I was curating any other artist of his generation in the context of a retrospective.
- To display a representative range of work, in terms of time, quality and subject matter.
- To avoid – in my curation at least – any overt pronouncements as to his merits or otherwise *as a painter*.
- To curate an 'open' exhibition in which the visitor will be given all reasonable conditions to look, consider and engage with his work without a didactic 'message' from the curator being broadcast.
- To avoid giving in to 'easy' curatorial strategies that reinforce existing stereotypes about the artist.

³⁰ I have replicated the colour that he painted the walls in his famous Harrods show but found that the yellow he paired with it for the finishes was not suitable.

Essentially, until this exhibition, virtually no art historical research on Tretchikoff had been produced. Tretchikoff's excellent and generally factually reliable biography, written with Anthony Hocking³¹ entitled *Pigeon's Luck* still serves as the primary source for biographical material about him. Undoubtedly there is a great deal that can still be discovered and detailed research into the works on display was only able to be undertaken in a handful of cases. The book which accompanies this show contains what is essentially the first real research on Tretchikoff in over 30 years and I thank all the contributors for sharing their unique and hard-earned knowledge in this way. Nevertheless we are still in the early days of real Tretchikoff scholarship and I look forward to others possibly being inspired to look deeper into the many mysteries that still surround the man, his work and his influence.

One result of this lack of research, and the generally antipathy that his art received from the 'arts establishment' is that forgeries are known to have been produced of his work. Even in his lifetime this happened, as he describes in some detail in *Pigeon's Luck* and evidenced by media reports from the time. As his work starts to reach the price range of other more traditionally accepted South African artists on the contemporary auction stage I fear that unscrupulous individuals will take advantage of this gap in knowledge to pass off ever more fakes. In the curatorial process of this show I have learned some things in this regard and more than one work offered for inclusion has been politely declined due to my doubts in this regard. The Kebble *Lost Orchid* was to have been included with contextual wall-text that was aimed to give the public the opportunity to weigh up the evidence and make their own deductions. Unfortunately the Kebble trustees withdrew the work the day before the opening.

We have made a number of discoveries in putting this show together and I hope that this contribution leads to many more. I don't think that it will necessarily be possible to rectify some imbalances and assumptions that exist around Tretchikoff but I do hope that some,

³¹ This is my view. Ever since its publication it has been accused of being biased (which it is) and 'embroidered' or even downright untrue. Hocking went to great lengths to fact-check the book and, as he describes in the work itself, found to his surprise that every claim made by Tretchikoff, even the most implausible, checked out. I must add that I have, in one or two cases at least, done some 'digging' and found inconsistencies and even some distortion on Tretchikoff's part but on the whole it is still a reliable, albeit one-sided and opinionated source.

based on limited exposure to actual works rather than endlessly reproduced illustrations and faded prints, may be challenged. And should negative opinions long-held be re-enforced by direct contact with his work, then at least Tretchikoff has been given his day in the Iziko South African National Gallery, to be judged and compared to his peers, a challenge he called for when the first systematic attempts to quash his success were launched by some members of the art elite in this country.

This exhibition does not claim posthumous greatness for Tretchikoff – he was clearly considered great by the multitudes who made their only art purchase in their life when buying one of his prints. Nor, as some have already claimed, is it an elaborate joke of mine, deliberately putting the ‘worst art in the world’ in our most venerable art institution. *Tretchikoff: The People’s Painter* is a sincere attempt to question the absence of a hugely popular, influential, and well-known artist from the ‘canonical history’ of South African art; to present his work to the public and the critics so that we may all look, hopefully with fresh eyes, at a sampling of his output and the context of his times and pause, think and maybe look again. Whether you *then* love him or hate him is your prerogative.

A Note on Dating and Titling

The dating of Tretchikoff’s work is an exceptionally tricky business, complicated by a number of factors. After the mid-1950s he never dated his paintings, nor included dates in his coffee table publications and portfolios. For undated works one of the best sources is contemporary newspaper articles but even this is not foolproof as the date of first exhibition does not always lead one to the date of composition. Furthermore the fact that Tretchikoff frequently used the same or similar titles (e.g. *Zulu Maiden*, *Proteas*, *Crayfish Seller*, etc.) makes it hard to establish which specific work is being referred to in print. Stylistic evidence can help but also can be misleading. A work that at first glance seems to be from the 1970s can in fact be much earlier. Wherever possible I have attempted to provide dates for works where none is indicated on the painting itself. When a work is dated the label states this plainly. When the date is definite, based on documentary evidence, it is enclosed in square

brackets. For more speculative but likely dates square brackets and a question mark following the date has been used as well as general decade attributions such as [*ca.* 1960s?]. In some cases a period that defines whether a painting was produced before or after a certain date has been employed, e.g. [before 1953].

Conclusion
'Habilitation'



(Cartoon by 'Chip', *Cape Argus* 10 June 2011)

The Oxford English Dictionary gives as its primary meaning for the word 'rehabilitation' the following:

[...] To restore (a person) to former privileges, status, possessions, etc., by official decree or declaration; (also) to re-establish (a person's reputation) in this manner. Formerly also [...] to legitimate (a person of illegitimate birth) (*obs.*). (Oxford English Dictionary 2011c)

This word has been used in several contexts around the current exhibition, but not as far as I am aware, by myself. *Rehabilitation* assumes that there was a former status or reputation to which the subject is being restored. I explicitly have never claimed any intention to

restore a reputation that was not really there in the first place (if the critics are the guardians of that). I would rather use 'habilitate' here. The verb 'habilitate' is now recorded as rare or obsolete but its original meaning (in the Seventeenth Century) was '[t]o endow with ability or capacity; to capacitate, qualify' and by the Nineteenth this had shifted to '[t]o clothe, dress [...]' (Oxford English Dictionary 2011c). I suppose it is in this last sense that I hope that this exhibition will allow Tretchikoff to stand and face a new set of critics, judges and public. As Ashraf Jamal notes in the book that accompanies this exhibition:

A symptom of his age and an innovator, Tretchikoff demands a considered re-evaluation, notwithstanding the continued scepticism in the South African art world and abroad, which, as the artist reminds us, is 'riddled with bitchiness like a Gorgonzola with penicillin' (Tretchikoff & Hocking, 1973: 257). But then perhaps it is futile to try to reintegrate Tretchikoff into a canonical structure, which, whether domestic or international, is perforce deconstructing. Perhaps our task is not to try and explain Tretchikoff, or to rehabilitate him. Perhaps it is better to see whether the inexplicable will occur again, whether his appeal will reign unabated, despite what the critics think. (Jamal 2011: 87)

It is in this spirit that *Tretchikoff: The People's Painter* has been curated. I wish to place him in the context of South African art of his and our time, where I believe he should be (re-) assessed. I make no special claims as to what the result of that re-assessment should be but hope that this exhibition contributes to some early steps in that re-assessment and re-appraisal. Tretchikoff's importance lies far beyond his skill (or lack thereof) as a painter, nor in his subject matter, nor in his apparently unusual techniques and colour usage. He was someone who, against all odds, made a place for himself in the terrain of art, innovated and pioneered aspects of the dissemination of his work through mass-market reproductions and showed his work in accessible, open venues, which did not intimidate or exclude. He gave ordinary people the opportunity to own something that they thought beautiful. He marketed himself and used his magnetic personality to become something of a celebrity years before the YBA's were born. He protected his artistic rights at a time when very few artists even knew that they had such rights. He may have been the scourge of the critics, and his art had its faults, perhaps but he was, for the entire duration of his life devoted to his art and people noticed that. The time has come to take note again and to pass judgements anew.

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Archival Sources

Archival newspaper and ephemeral sources will be vital in the research for this project. I have complete access to the Tretchikoff Foundation Archive which includes his original scrapbooks and other materials (by far the most important source in this regard). In addition I have or will consult the following:

- National Library of South Africa Newspaper and Magazine clippings files.
- Iziko National Gallery Clippings and exhibitions files.
- Cape Times Newspaper Clippings Archive (Divided between UCT and the National Library of S.A.

APPENDIX 1

Tretchikoff Retrospective Exhibition:
Initial Proposal and Ideas/Queries

Tretchikoff Retrospective Exhibition: Initial Proposal and Ideas/Queries

The exhibition will consist of three separate component parts, two of which will be displayed in a single unified installation (as explained further below):

- Tretchikoff's life, work, context and influence
An exhibition of information boards with text and illustrations as well as objects that provide insight into the artist's life and legacy.
- The Art of Tretchikoff
Original works and reproductions
- Contemporary Responses to Tretchikoff
By young / contemporary artists
(Only S.A. or broader?)

?? What about artists who have used / been inspired by Tretchi's work before?
(E.G. Braam Kruger)

?? Tretchi in popular culture. (Could be part of 1st component).

The 'Life and Work' exhibition should be separate and include objects, incl. books, studio materials, personal possessions, archival and historical artefacts and documents as well as illustrations and accompanying text.

The art component can either separate Tretchi's work from the contemporary artists (CAs) (perhaps this is not best) but Tretchi's original works and the prints of them should not be separate. Prints and originals can be demarcated by clear labelling and consistent conventions of display (e.g. all prints in the same style of frames).

I like the idea of, for e.g., occasionally juxtaposing an original right next to a print; or a Tretchi (orig. or print) next to a work by a CA who has referenced it; or even just an unexpected juxtaposition.

Inclusion of prints with originals will allow 'gaps' where orig. is unavailable (or no print made) not to interfere with general flow and 'argument' of the exhibition.

Tretchi's work is the focus. CA works must be sympathetic in scale and form when seen next to his work and CA works as a whole not dominate but complement his work.

Should be a survey or retrospective view.

New media, installation, etc. okay for CA but cannot conflict or compete; if so best seen separately.

Criteria for selection of Tretchi's work:

- All major works and favourites included (in whatever form).

- Unexpected and little seen works included for 'freshness'.
- Works of quality emphasised.
- Range, skill and versatility of Tretchi to be demonstrated.
- Sketches and works in media other than painting to be included but possibly separated for curatorial consistency.

Proposed process for inclusion of CA and process of commissioning works

(Assumption here of local artists only)

Depending on the projected extent of the Tretchi component a group of +/- 20 artists selected on the basis of:

- Representivity (established, mid-career & emerging artists); gender; age; geographical location, etc.
- Established production.
- Does it have sympathy with Tretchi's work by virtue of its medium, technique, subject matter, etc.
- Are they artists of quality?
- Show potential (in the case of emerging artists)
- In some cases their work may not appear 'sympathetic' but may provide an interesting counter-balance to his work. This is very important as it would be very dull if there were only 'imitators' on the show.
- Likely positive and active participation in the process.
- Prior engagement with Tretchi of his works.
- (Possibly) some synergy with his life and journey
- Curator's experience of potential artists.

Process of selection and commission

- Potential artists identified by curator (approx. 1.5x envisaged final number)
- Portfolios of work and CVs presented to commissioning board and through process of negotiation roughly prioritised and if necessary, excluded.
- 'Refined' list of prioritised artists approached by curator and presented with project and asked for feedback as to potential involvement.
- Depending on response further artists approached until a 'manageable' number of likely participants identified.
- (Option 1) Workshop with curator and other relevant parties (e.g. commissioners, family, Marianne Fassler, etc.) to talk about Tretchi (to make sure everyone is on 'same page') and to discuss types of work that would be appropriate.
- (Option 2) Open discussion with relevant parties and artists via closed blog or e-mail list as above. Possible distribution of 'reader' or source document, incl. Tretchi images.
- Proposals from artists
- Through inter-personal communication artists and curator negotiate viable works. Curator to regularly consult with commissioners about this process.
- Final commissions issued.
- Production of work, in consultation with curator.

Curator to make sure that balance, harmony and variety maintained with reference to materials / medium; reference work (if any).*

Queries:

- For the portfolio should the 13(?) selected artists each make separate works (should / should they not be on not exhibition)?
- Should we perhaps select another 13 artists who are not on the exhibition for the portfolio? (Probably not the best solution).
- Or should the commissioning process specifically 'ringfence' 13 commissions for the prints that will be part of the portfolio?

I tend towards the first option and the idea that the 13 prints are 'original prints'.

- Another query: will there be a catalogue (very desirable) and if so what form will it take?

The timeframe is tight and needs very good project management and discipline.

What are the proposed locations of the exhibition?

Ownership of original works.

Payment of artists.

Team structure / composition.

Russian connection?

Musical component / concert?

At this stage there are some general observations and tendencies as far as I am concerned:

- I think the exhibition should try as much as possible to be 'in the spirit of Tretchi', e.g. idea of exhibiting in Harrods in London and being essentially popular and welcoming / accessible to those not part of the 'high art' crowd.
- BUT should also seek to place Tretchi in his rightful place as an influential, much loved and admired, gifted and prescient artist of South Africa and the world; i.e. be somewhat revisionist to the dominant negative critical reception so far.
- Be highly professional and up to international standards.
- Be fun, informative and challenging to 'accepted wisdom'.
- CA selected in terms of their engagement with popular forms, formal or other links with Tretchi and generally their ability to 'add value' to Tretchi's oeuvre.

Other Aspects:

- Educational programme
- Conference / lectures / discussions / debates

* In other words one does not end up with five artists all referencing *The Dying Swan*.

- Press and publicity strategy
- If there is a catalogue: comments / endorsements from senior figures, both in art and elsewhere (internationally). These comments can be used in the exhibition as 'wall text'.

Andrew Lamprecht
October 2008-January 2009





RENAISSANCE



VLADIMIR
TRETCHIKOFF



TRECHIKO //

TRETCHI

The Life, Work and Legacy of Vladimir Tretchikoff
(Working Title)

Summary

Tretchi will be an exhibition that will critically examine the life, work and lasting impact of the work of Vladimir Tretchikoff, arguably South Africa's most popular and controversial artist. It will consist of three elements, *viz.* a informational section that contextualises his life, accompanied by artefacts such as studio materials, newspaper cuttings and other objects associated with the artist; a representative selection of original works by the artist and prints of the sort that brought him widespread and unprecedented fame in the 1960s and 70s; a selection of commissioned work by contemporary South African artists that reflect on Tretchikoff's work and enduring legacy.

Rationale

Vladimir Tretchikoff was, within his lifetime, possibly the most popular and best known artist of his day (a title he often battled over with Pablo Picasso). Unlike Picasso, however, his work was almost invariably seen as 'populist' and even kitsch by the critics and the arts establishment. Despite this Tretchikoff had an enormous influence upon popular culture and in the way that art was received by the general public. His shows attracted record crowds and his prints sold in unprecedented numbers to people who otherwise showed very little interest in art. This show will attempt to be a retrospective survey of this artist's work and examine his lasting influence and legacy. Loved or hated, he cannot be ignored and this show aims, for the first time, to present an unsentimentalized overview of his production as well as contextualise that production historically and artistically.

Format

The exhibition is planned to take place in three discrete sections: the historical and contextual part which will consist of panels or boards with text and images, supplemented by artefacts on display, some of which may be in vitrines; the section dealing with Tretchikoff's own work in which prints and originals will be displayed together; and the section of contemporary responses to the artist's work. Depending on availability of space and quantity of material these may be in separate rooms. Another room may be used to show videos about Tretchikoff. Ideally we would wish to locate this exhibition in the Iziko South African National Gallery.

Conceptual Framework

The exhibition will not be an unconsidered celebration of Tretchikoff's work but an assessment of his influence – good and bad – on popular culture as well as a sober consideration of his artistic output. In some ways it seems that a revision of the hardline 'anti-Tretchikoff' school of criticism is overdue and the debate can be engaged with in the catalogue and in the curation of the exhibition itself.

Portfolio

A portfolio of works on paper by the selected contemporary artists as well as original prints of Tretchikoff's work will be produced to accompany the exhibition. Proceeds from the sale of these will help to offset the costs of the exhibition and be used for other projects hosted by the Tetchikoff Foundation.

Catalogue

A detailed catalogue will be produced with essays by a number of writers contextualising Tretchikoff's work as well as assessing his importance and his role as an artist and popular culture icon. In addition it will include reproductions of all the works on the show as well as other works that could not be exhibited.

Funding

The exhibition will be funded from various sources and sponsorships as well as the sale of the portfolio.

VLADIMIR
TRETCHIKOFF

Curatorial Strategy

Tretchikoff: The People's Painter

Iziko South African National Gallery, March 2011

(Version 1.1: 18.11.2010)



Tretchikoff: The People's Painter (TPP) will take place in the Liberman and Rooms 4, 5 & 6 of the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG) from March 2011. This will be the first major retrospective of the artist's work and the first time his work has been exhibited *en masse* at an art institution.

TPP will aim to place Vladimir Tretchikoff's work in historical and artistic context by bringing together a representative sampling of his work from the 1940s through to the late 1970s and presenting archival material (photographs, cuttings, artefacts and text) as well as the ubiquitous prints by which his work is now generally known.

I intend to both focus academic and critical attention on his production as well as contrast his actual paintings with the legacy of his widely disseminated (and now fading) prints upon which I will argue much of the 'received wisdom' about their worth (or lack thereof) is based. From the outset, Tretchikoff was a controversial figure. He has become a touchstone for all that 'good art' distances itself from (not the least being its popular appeal). The Tretchikoff exhibition (TPP) I shall curate will not be a blind celebration nor will it be a display of his alleged artistic ineptitude but rather a considered exposition of what he did and why it aroused such passionate opinions both in its own time and now. In this I am inspired by Riason Naidoo's curation of *From Pierneef to Gugulective: 1910-2010* at ISANG. Despite initial controversy this exhibition attempts to radically reposition 'received' notions of South African art history in the context of exposing viewers to works that while known through secondary literature have never before been actually *seen* together.¹ I will, for the first time, present original work by Vladimir Tretchikoff (sourced from four continents) alongside archival material, as well as the popular prints produced during his lifetime.

¹ Interestingly it is also the first time that Tretchikoff has been exhibited in the ISANG. (See Schoeman 2010: 57)



The Tretchikoff retrospective will be an exhibition that will critically examine the life, work and lasting impact of the work of Vladimir Tretchikoff, arguably South Africa's most popular and controversial artist. It will consist of three elements, viz. the main exhibition which will be a representative selection of original artworks by the artist that in the form of prints brought him widespread and unprecedented fame in the 1960s and 70s (Lieberman Room & Room 5); and an informational and archival section that contextualises his life, accompanied by artefacts such as studio materials, newspaper cuttings, original prints and other objects associated with the artist as well as a newly edited video produced by Yvonne du Toit who made two television documentaries on Tretchikoff in the 1980s (Room 4 & 6).

The historical and contextual part, which will consist of panels or boards with text and images, supplemented by artefacts on display, some of which (such as the original dress worn by the *Chinese Girl*) will be in vitrines. The section dealing with Tretchikoff's own work in which prints and originals will be displayed together.² As part of the research process leading up to the Retrospective an exhibition of contemporary

² I intend to 'hide' the originals from the viewer when she or he first enters the space by building a barrier at the entrance of the exhibition which will only show faded prints from the 1950s-70s. Thus the first exposure to Tretchikoff's work will be through the dulled reproductions one is so familiar with. When the viewer turns the corner around this installation the original works will come into view.

responses to Tretchikoff and original archival prints will be mounted at a commercial gallery.³

Aside from the rationale outlined above the essential conceptual framework is that of re-assessment. The exhibition will **not** be an unconsidered celebration of Tretchikoff's work but an assessment of his influence – good and bad – on popular culture as well as a sober consideration of his artistic output. In some ways it seems that a revision of the hard-line 'anti-Tretchikoff' school of criticism is overdue and the debate can be engaged with in the catalogue and in the curation of the exhibition itself.

Loved or hated, he cannot be ignored and this show aims, for the first time, to present an unsentimentalized overview of his production as well as contextualise that production historically, politically and artistically.

In terms of practical conception of the exhibition I would ideally want the door between Room 3 & 4 to be closed making the entrance to the Liberman from Room 9 to be the only entrance point. At this door there will be a curved wall erected (approx 5 metres wide) which would cut off the visitor's initial view into the exhibition. This wall will be wallpapered in a fashion typical of a 1960s lower middle class home with one faded print of *The Chinese Girl* on view. As the viewer turns to the right to enter the space the original will be on display. The Liberman Room will display the majority of original paintings in the show. The central dry-walled area will be used to show a loop of Yvonne du Toit's video *The Red Jacket*.

Room 4 will display text panels about Tretchikoff, and the walls will have vinyl text with quotations by and about Tretchikoff, positive and negative.

Room 5 will feature artefacts, archival materials and original prints.

³ Saolon 91 on Kloof Street, Cape Town, June 2010.

Room 6 will be devoted to the *Ten Commandments* and/or possibly another thematic series such as the botanical paintings.

1.4

Sponsor a Tretchi
Material

TRETCHIKOFF



TRETCHIKOFF
THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

TRECHIKOFF

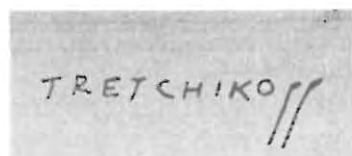
"How can anyone criticise art? You put
a brick in the Tate today and its art.
Who decided that the Green Lady is
kitsch? Not the hundreds of thousands
who bought it."

Uri Geller

TRETCHIKOFF



SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY
OPENING 2011

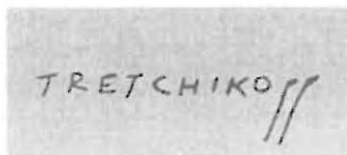


THE TRETCHIKOFF REVIVAL

For the decades from the 1940s until the 1970s Vladimir Tretchikoff received unprecedented coverage in the media and his exhibitions still hold international records for attendance. Despite this he received hostile reactions from many in the established art community who saw his hugely popular art as pedestrian and even kitsch.

Since that time many younger generations of artists and critics have championed Tretchikoff as a 'people's painter' who was ahead of his time in many aspects of his art and how he marketed it. This exhibition will re-examine Tretchikoff and show his work in a new light that will aim to bring the originals of his work to new audiences and present him to the public afresh. It is significant that the show is taking place in the Iziko South African National Gallery, arguable the most important art institution in the country and a place that has never, up till this year, acquired a single work of the artist.





ABOUT THE ARTIST

VLADIMIR TRETCHIKOFF was born on 13 December 1913 in Petropavlovsk, Russia. In 1932 he moved to Shanghai where he was a cartoonist for the Shanghai Times, but also secretly worked for the British Ministry of Information at the same time. He married Natalie in 1935 and his daughter Mimi was born in 1938. When the Japanese invaded Singapore, his wife and child were evacuated. While fleeing Singapore Tretchikoff's ship was torpedoed and he sailed across the Java Sea in a small boat. He arrived in Java only to discover that the Japanese had captured the island. Although he was imprisoned, his captors allowed him to work as an artist. In 1944 he was introduced to Leonora Maltama (Lenka) - his most famous muse. Lenka took him to a seance and it was there that he was told that his wife and child were alive in South Africa. Upon hearing this information he moved to South Africa and was reunited with his family. He began producing prints of his paintings which were displayed in department stores rather than in art galleries. He continued to exhibit, with 252 exhibitions around the world attended by over two million people. His American exhibitions rivalled those of Picasso and over one million people saw his paintings in that country alone. In 1961 he had an exhibition at Harrods but, finding the gallery too small, he was allowed to use the ground floor as an exhibition space - 205 000 people attended the exhibition. The most famous art work of all of his is 'The Chinese Girl' - it is 'The Chinese Girl' by Vladimir Tretchikoff. He died in Cape Town on 24 August 2006, having lived in South Africa for over 60 years. The original 'Fruits of Bali' was sold by Sotheby's last year for R1.74 million.





ABOUT THE TEAM

ANDREW LAMPRECHT – CURATOR

Curator, academic, critic and artist, Lamprecht has curated numerous shows many of which have achieved major public and media attention. 'Flip' (2004) was reported internationally as a ground-breaking and challenging 'curatorial intervention'. He has taught the only course on curatorialship on the African continent for 10 years, and is involved in programmes to encourage curatorialship in South Africa and Africa. Andrew is Secretary-General of the South African Association of Art Critics (SAADC branch). He has presented his views on the state of curatorship and art criticism in SA, as well as writing extensively for both the popular and scholarly press. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Cape Town.

NATASHA SWIFT – PROJECT MANAGER

Tretchikoff's granddaughter, Natasha, began her career as an account manager in the advertising industry. For ten years she worked in agencies in South Africa and London across a host of blue chip businesses. She combines these skills and experience as manager of the Tretchikoff Foundation. Natasha has been liaising with Tretchikoff fans around the world, some of whom will be lending their original art work for this exhibition.

MARIANNE FASSLER – PROJECT CHAMPION

Marianne is one of South Africa's most well-known and admired fashion designers. A passionate collector of Tretchikoff's work, she is working on a Tretchikoff-inspired fashion show to be shown alongside the exhibition.



THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition will open in 2011 for three months. It will take place at the Iziko National Gallery, Cape Town. Works will be exhibited in the Lieberman Room plus three adjoining rooms (see plan at the bottom). The signal "Chinese Call" or "Green Light" will be on loan from the permanent collection of the Iziko National Gallery. It is a digital artwork by the artist. It is a digital artwork that is a collection of digital paintings from around the world.





THE SPONSORSHIP PROPOSAL

The show that celebrates Tretchikoff, he did things differently and he was innovative of his period. As a first time artist, we have looked at the sponsorship proposal that we've developed over the years, with an intention to show you how far we've got our work to be on the show.

On the pages that follow, there are the following four different tiers from which to choose, to meet your needs:

PLATINUM TIER - R30,000

GOLD TIER - R20,000

SILVER TIER - R10,000

Diamond Tier - R5,000

What's in it for you is the following:

- A private visit about with the curator, followed by a dinner in the courtyard of the gallery for all contributors
- A credit line on the plaque next to the artwork in the gallery e.g. the plaque will read in the collection of Joe Black and sponsored by John Doe.
- Your name in will appear in the catalogue.
- You will receive an archival vintage print of the Chinese Girl accompanied by a certificate of authentication.

How do you sponsor? Please complete the pledge form below:

I, _____ pledge to sponsor a Tretchikoff

My first choice is _____

My second choice is _____

My third choice is _____

For a copy of the confirmation and banking details, the pleasure

is _____

TRETCHIKOFF

Platinum Tier – R50,000

The Chinese Girl (USA)



Fruits of Bali (South Africa)



Miss Wong (South Africa)



TRETCHIKOFF

Gold Tier – R20,000

Hindu Dancer (South Africa)



Dying Swan (South Africa)



Weeping Rose (UK)



Balinese Dancer (South Africa)



TRETCHIKOFF

Silver Tier – R10,000

Zulu Maiden (South Africa)



Ndebele Chief (South Africa)



Lady with Crayfish (South Africa)



Chrysanthemum Seller (South Africa)



Francois Hardy (South Africa)

Lenka (South Africa)

TRETCHIKOFF



TRETCHIKOFF

Bronze Tier – R5,000

Pointsettia in Chinese Vase (South Africa)



White Magnolia's in Chinese Vase(South Africa)



Protea (South Africa)



Pointsettia (South Africa)



TRETCHIKOFF

Rugby Players (Australia)



Neck and Neck (UK)



1.5

Press Release:
Call For Works

For Immediate Release

Call for ORIGINAL ARTWORKS for Tretchikoff exhibition at Iziko South African National Gallery

A major retrospective of the artist Vladimir Tretchikoff, entitled *Tretchikoff: The People's Painter*, will open at the IZIKO South African National Gallery in 2011. The exhibition organisers are issuing a general call for people who own **original** works (as opposed to prints) to be exhibited on this show. Originals paintings tend to have a textured, layered surface.

While Tretchikoff is undoubtedly one of South Africa's most controversial artists, much maligned in the 1960s and onwards by several members of the established arts community, there can be no doubt that he has become a cultural icon and remains a favourite artist to many South Africans. Sales of his work have recently reached record levels at auction and there is a considerable revival of interest in his iconic paintings amongst designers, younger artists and critics. Despite this there has been almost no serious assessment of Tretchikoff's art and his legacy. This exhibition aims to examine Tretchikoff anew and place him in contemporary perspective.

In his heyday Tretchikoff's exhibitions drew record audiences at home and abroad and he pioneered the idea of selling affordable copies of his works, enabling working class people to own art which they proudly displayed above their mantelpieces. Works such as *The Chinese Lady*, *The Dying Swan* and *The Lost Orchid* have become a vital part of popular culture.

Readers who own original Tretchikoff paintings or sketches (as opposed to prints) are encouraged to contact Andrew Lamprecht or Natasha Swift for further information:

Email: tretchikoffexhibition@gmail.com

Tel: 021 461 4828

Issued: 4 November 2010

1,6

Press Release:
Exhibition

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

13 May 2011

Tretchikoff: The people's painter

Iziko South African National Gallery, 26 May – 25 September 2011

A retrospective exhibition of the artist, Vladimir Tretchikoff, will open to the public at the Iziko South African National Gallery on 26 May. While Tretchikoff is undoubtedly one of South Africa's most controversial artists, much maligned in the 1960s and onwards by several members of the established arts community, there can be no doubt that he has become a cultural icon and remains a favourite artist to many South Africans.

Sales of his work have recently reached record levels at auction and there is a considerable revival of interest in his iconic paintings amongst designers, younger artists and critics. Despite this, there has been almost no serious assessment of Tretchikoff's art and his legacy. This exhibition aims to examine Tretchikoff anew and place him in contemporary perspective.

In his heyday, Tretchikoff's exhibitions drew record audiences at home and abroad. He pioneered the idea of selling affordable copies of his works, enabling working class people to own art which they proudly displayed above their mantelpieces. Works such as *Chinese Girl*, *The Dying Swan* and *Fighting Zebras* have become a vital part of popular culture.

'In many ways, Tretchikoff is a major figure in the history of South African and world art and ignoring him won't make him go away. It's about time that we gave him a critical look and reassessed his rightful place in our art history,' noted Andrew Lamprecht, exhibition curator and fine arts lecturer.

'We want to finally acknowledge Tretchikoff as a prominent artist in the country's history and to acknowledge the millions who loved his work,' said Riason Naidoo, Director of Art Collections at Iziko Museums.

The exhibition has been supported by or received sponsorship from, among others: Iziko Museums; the Department of Arts and Culture; City of Cape Town; Elliott's International; GAC Laser; the Rupert Foundation; the Chinese Embassy; Lemnis Lighting and the Tretchikoff Foundation.

Enquiries:

Andrea Lewis alewis@iziko.org.za

Andrew Lamprecht tretchikoffcurator@gmail.com

ENDS

EDITOR'S NOTES

*Iziko Museums (Iziko) operates 12 national museums in Cape Town. The museums that make up Iziko have their own history and character, presenting extensive art, social and natural history collections which reflect our diverse African heritage. Iziko is a public entity and non-profit organisation which brings together these twelve national museums under a single governance and leadership structure. The organisation allows *free access to all individuals on commemorative days, as well as unlimited free access to individuals aged 18 and under (*excluding the Castle of Good Hope and Planetarium).*

COMMEMORATIVE DAYS – FREE ENTRANCE (excluding Iziko Planetarium and Castle of Good Hope)

- Human Rights Day: 21 March
- Freedom Day: 27 April
- International Museum Day: 25 May
- Africa Day: 25 May
- Youth Day: 16 June
- National Women's Day: 9 August

- Heritage Week: 19 – 25 September
- National Aids Awareness Day: 1 December
- Emancipation Day: 1 December
- Day of Reconciliation: 16 December

Issued by: Melody Kleinsmith

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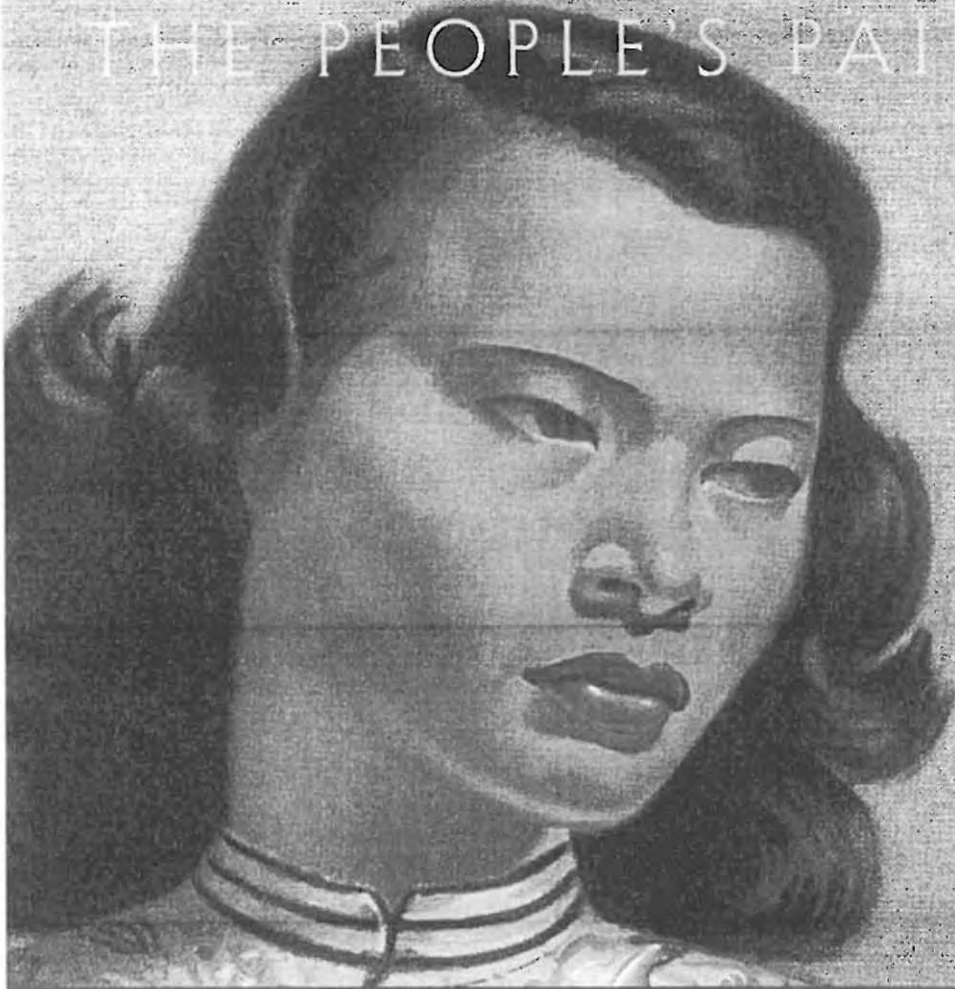
E-mail mkleinsmith@iziko.org.za

Website <http://www.iziko.org.za>

On behalf of: Office of the CEO, Iziko Museums of Cape Town

TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER



25 MAY -
00 SEPTEMBER 2011
IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY



elliott



iziko

TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLES PAINTER



25 MAY - 00 SEPT 2011
IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY



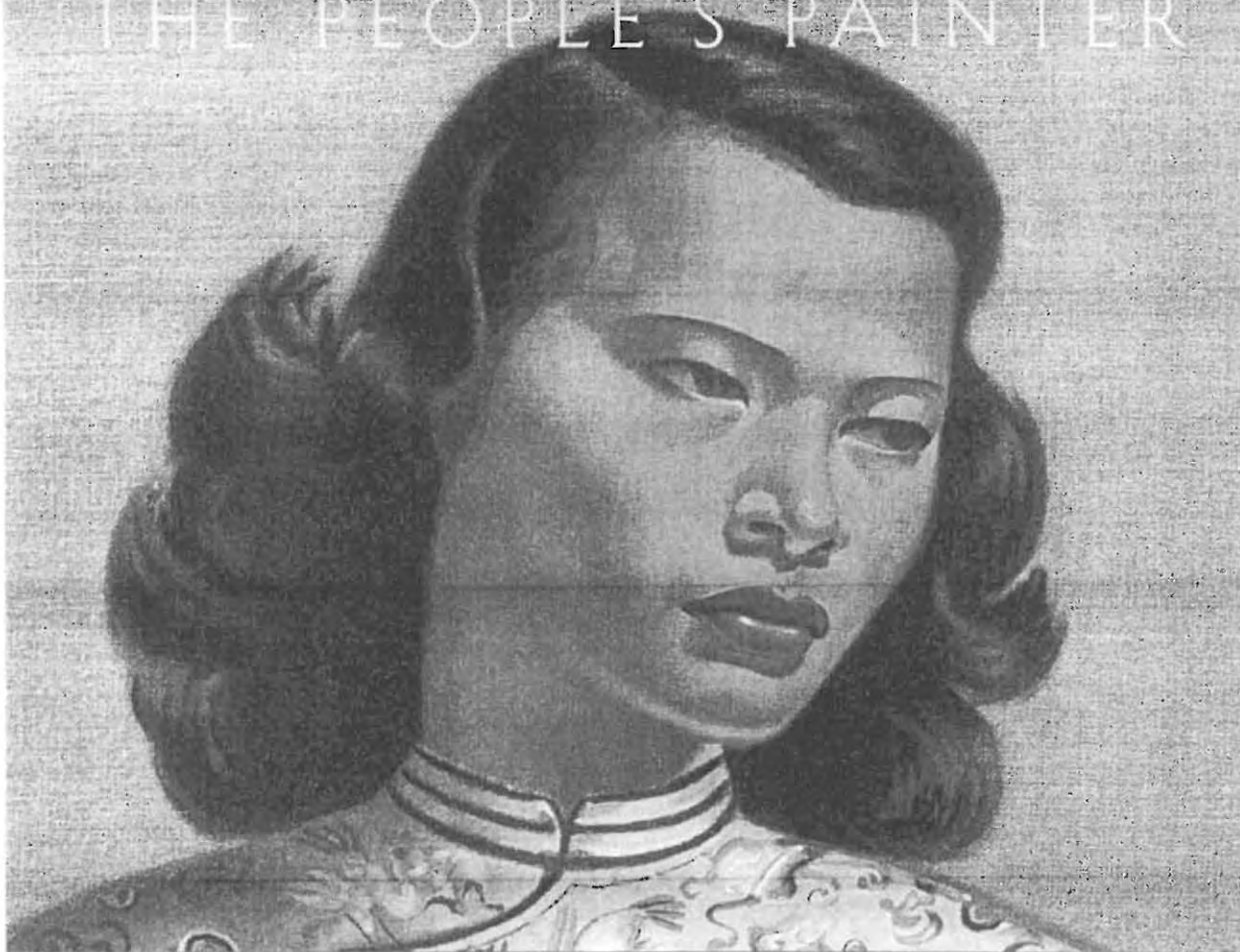
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iziko

TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER



25 MAY -
00 SEPTEMBER 2011
IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY



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TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER



25 MAY –
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THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER



5 MAY – 00 SEPT 2011
IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY



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TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

25 MAY -

00 SEPT 2011

IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY



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TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER



25 MAY - 00 SEPT 2011

IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN

NATIONAL GALLERY



TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

25 MAY - 00 SEPT 2011
IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY



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25 MAY – 00 SEPT 2011



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IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY
25 MAY – 20 SEPT 2011



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THE CEO OF IZIKO MUSEUMS, MS ROOKSANA OMAR, CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION

TRETCHIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL GALLERY
COMPANY'S GARDEN, CAPE TOWN

25 MAY 2011
5.30PM FOR 6PM

RSVP BY 00 MAY 2011 TO SHAMEEM ADAMS
ON SADAMS@IZIKO.ORG.ZA OR 021 481 3955

THE EXHIBITION CLOSURE 00 SEPTEMBER 2011
PARKING IS AVAILABLE

GALLERY HOURS TUESDAY - SUNDAY 10AM - 5PM
CLOSED MONDAYS, WORKERS DAY AND CHRISTMAS DAY

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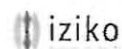


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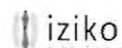


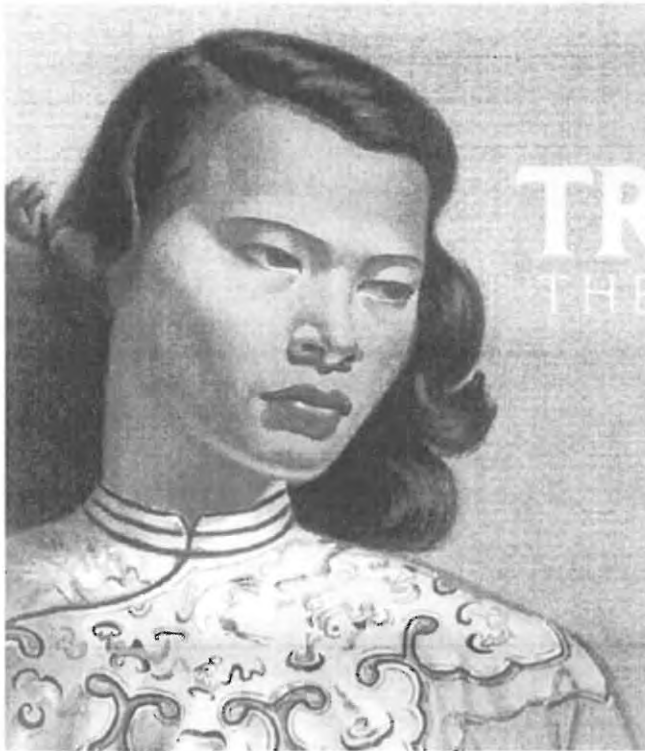
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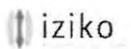
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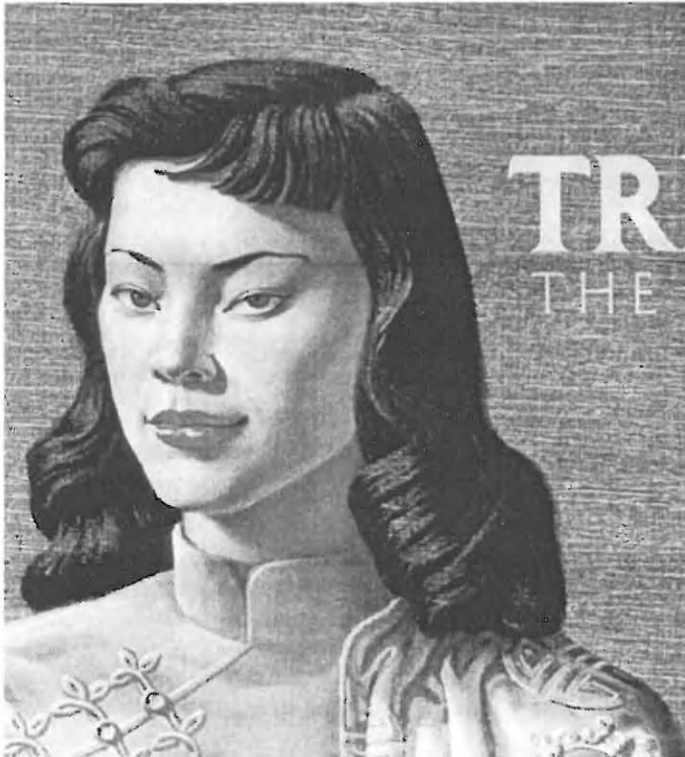
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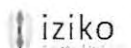
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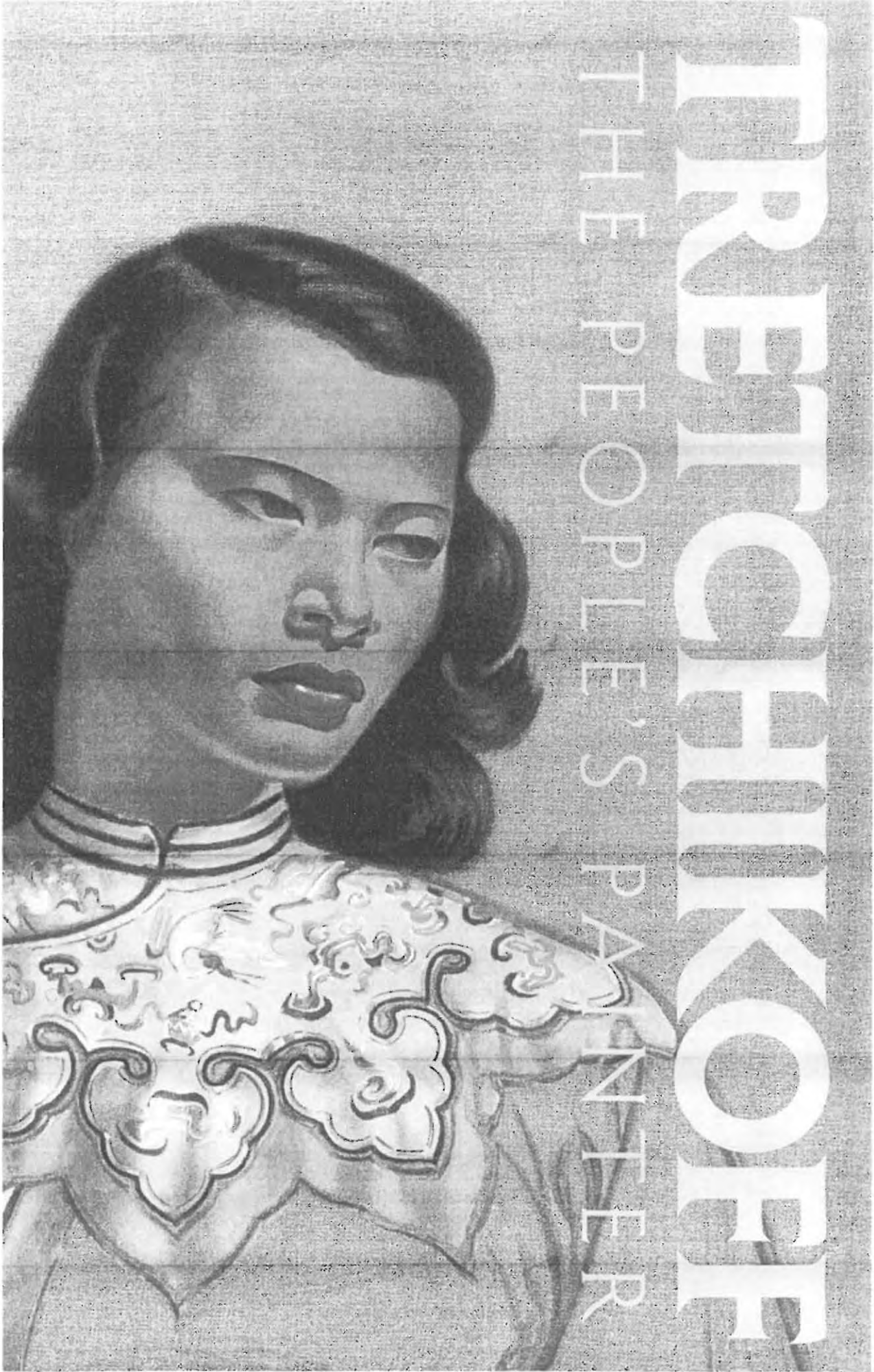


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25 MAY - 25 SEPT 2011





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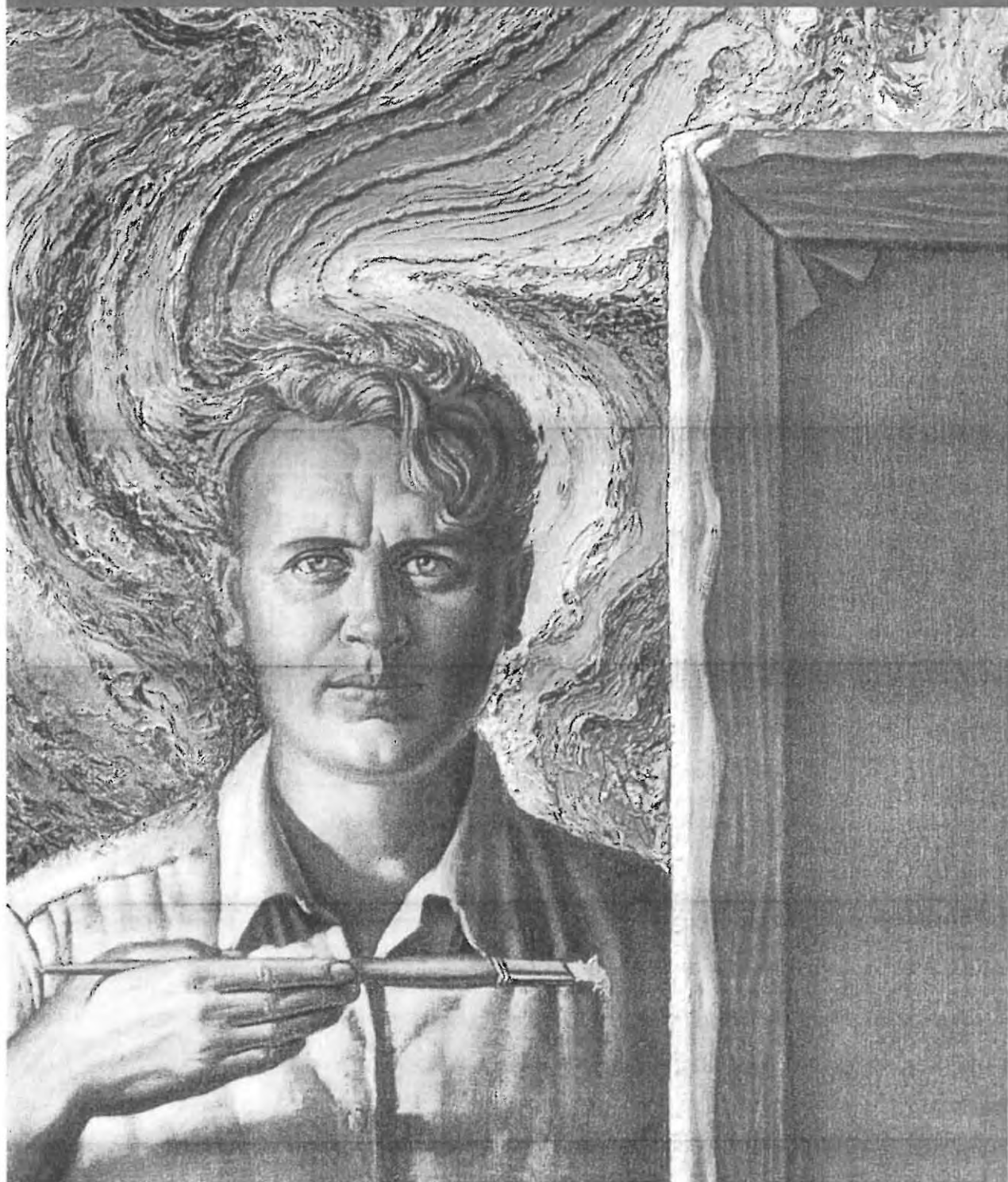
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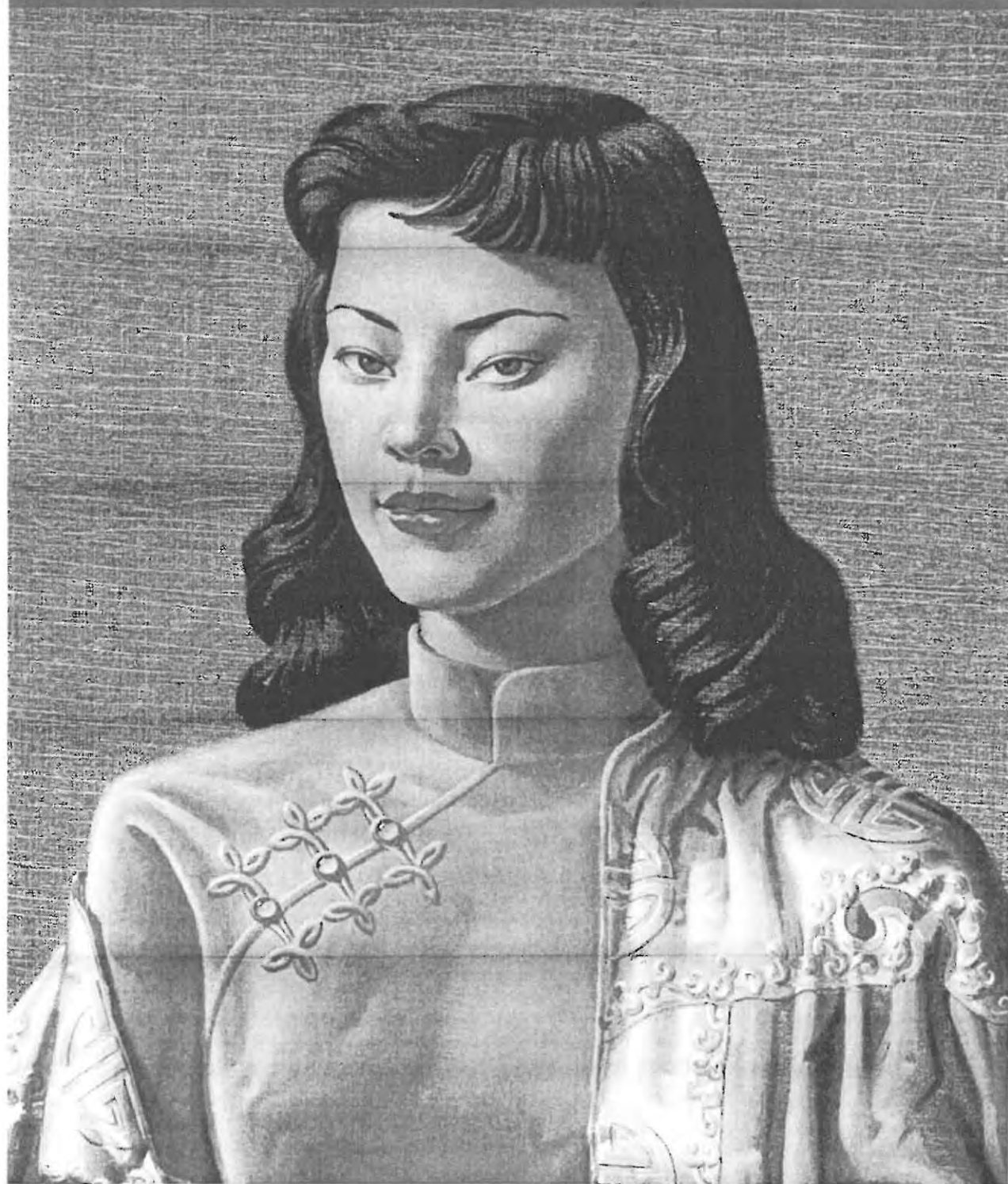
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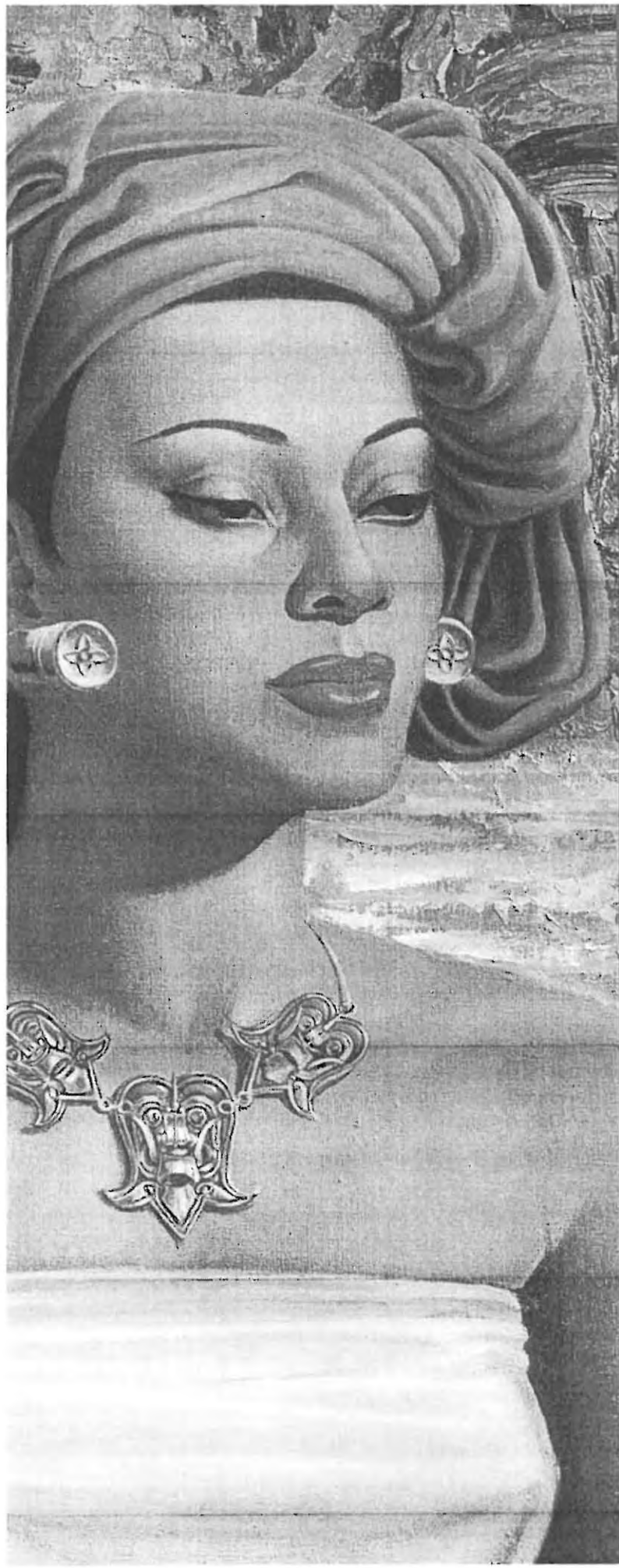


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TRÉTOCHIKOFF

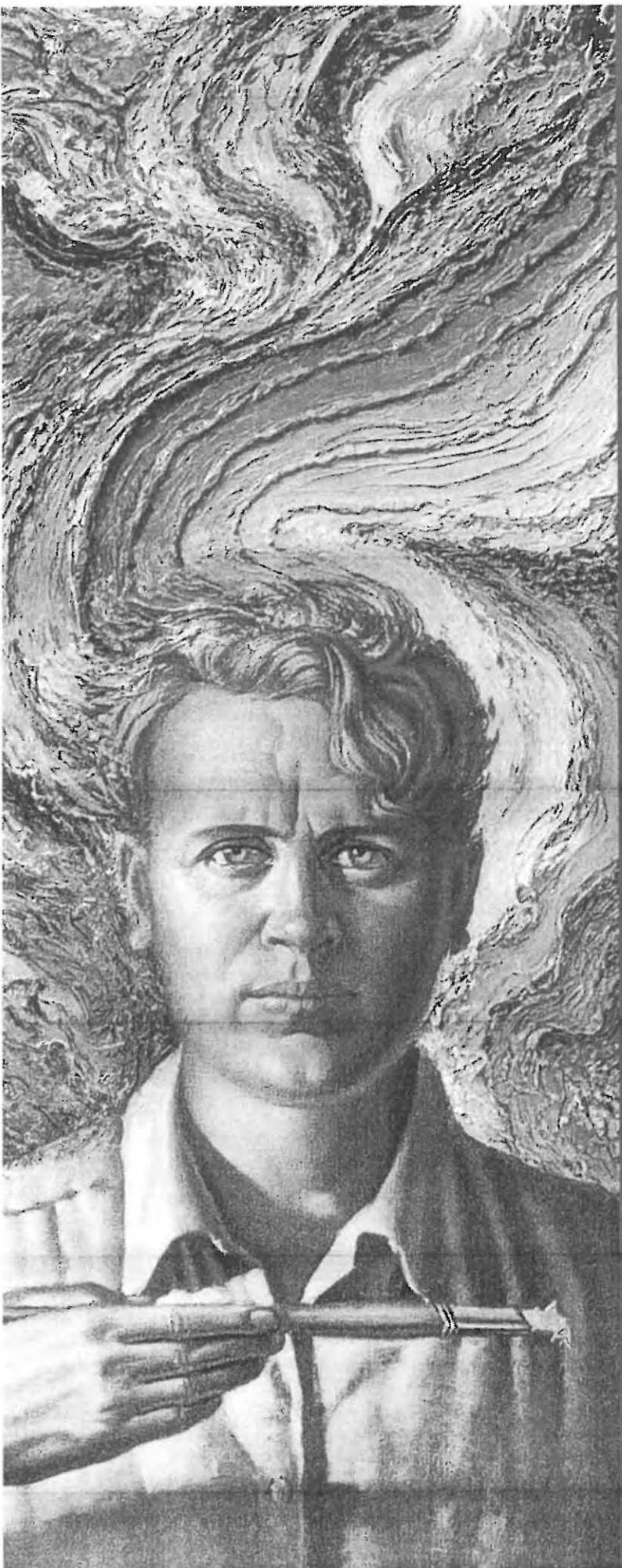
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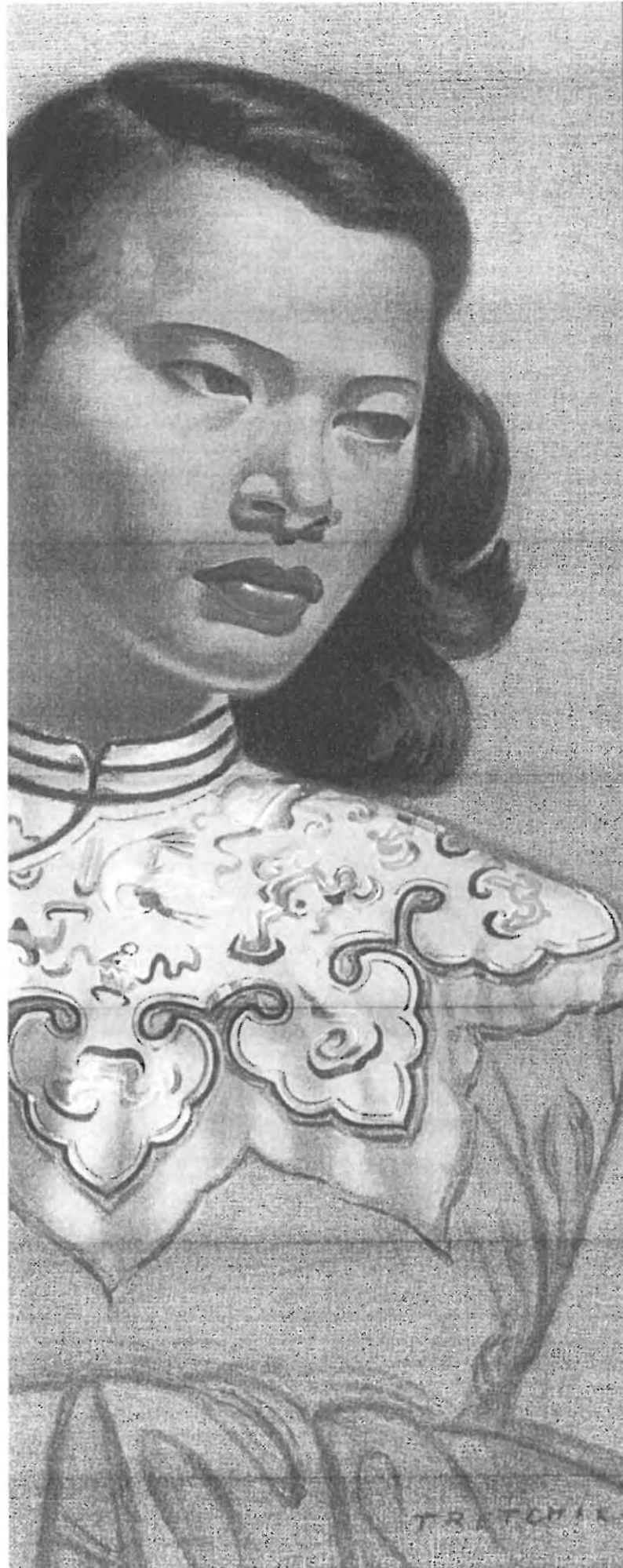


TRÉTOCHNIKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

TRITSCHEKOFF

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER



TRETCHIKOFF
THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

26 MAY - 25 SEPT 2011 | IZIKO SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY



MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the official catalogue of one of our city's best-known and arguably most neglected artists. Vladimir Tretchikoff arrived in Cape Town in 1946 to be reunited with his wife and daughter who had been evacuated here from Singapore. He fell in love with South Africa and made its people, fauna and flora the dominant subjects of his work from that point. Even his most famous work, the *Chinese Girl*, portrayed a young Capetonian, Monika Pon, who attended the opening event of *Tretchikoff: The People's Painter*.

Much has been made of the fact that 'the arts establishment' and Tretchikoff were frequently at loggerheads, but one thing is certain: a great many people in this city and the world loved his work

and attended his shows in record numbers. It is very fitting that this first retrospective exhibition of his work finally takes place in the city he called home for almost six decades and in which he was a well-known and recognisable figure 'about town' for the same period of time.

I welcome this show and the gathering together of so many of his works, back in the place where most of them were painted, to be seen anew by another generation and assuring that his presence still remains firmly in the City of Cape Town.

Alderman Patricia de Lille
Executive Mayor of Cape Town

MESSAGE FROM THE CURATOR

This exhibition is the first major survey of the work of Vladimir Tretchikoff (1913-2006). The fact that it takes place in the Iziko South African National Gallery is, I believe, of great significance. Tretchikoff only exhibited in an institutional gallery once in his lifetime and only once thereafter, last year, as part of '1910-2010: From Pieterneef to Gugulective' at this institution. During the period of his major activity, from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s he always showed his work at accessible venues, especially department stores.

Tretchikoff arrived in Cape Town in 1946 to join his family who had been evacuated here during the Second World War and for almost six decades made this city his home, always insisting that he was a *South*

African artist, despite the fact that his Russian birth was frequently alluded to in the press.

In his lifetime he generated an enormous quantity of journalism and published criticism (mostly hostile) and continues to figure in popular culture as well as the memories of many people in the English-speaking parts of the British Commonwealth and especially South Africa. However, these memories and many of the opinions expressed about him (good or bad) are, I would argue, coloured by the (often faded) prints of his work that are still to be seen in homes and antique shops in large numbers. His original work, viewed by literally hundreds of thousands of people from the 1950s-70s, has rarely been

accessible to younger generations, and never in any quantity.

This exhibition aims to present a representative sampling of his work in its original form and ask new and old audiences to look afresh at the legacy of one of the best-known artists of his day: an artist that almost everyone had an opinion about, but who was hardly ever included in texts emanating from the academy and formal institutions of art, nor represented in museums or institutional collections.

It is not my intention to argue that Tretchikoff was a great artist who was neglected and marginalized in his lifetime – rather I have attempted to present original work in a fresh context, that of the world we now live in, and to a new audience, you the viewer. I leave the assessment of his worth in your hands, as is fitting for someone who carries the epithet 'the people's painter' amongst other, less flattering ones.

I hope that whatever you decide about the value or otherwise of the work on display, the exercise of bringing these works together from four continents has been worthwhile and that, just as in his lifetime, he will generate debate and discussion. Whether one loves or loathes Tretchikoff, I think it's still hard to ignore him.

Andrew Lamprecht
Curator

LIST OF WORKS

TUR AUT VOLLUPTIS AUT EIUSA DIS RE ALIT QUISSINCIENT
 UT AUT ET EXPE MODIA PORPORATET ASSECTA QUODIS
 DIPIENT MOLUPTATE VOLUPTI IANTIS ALIT, VOLOREPUDIS
 QUIAS RAE IPIDUS MINT.



01.
Proteas
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



02.
Red Hot Pokers
 1950
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection

03.
Poinsettias in a Vase
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection

04.
Proteas
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



05.
Yellow Daffodils
 1949
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection

06.
Chrysanthemums Next to a Vase
 1951
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



07.
Three Yellow Daisies
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Collection of Naimatte di Viger

08.
Hydrangeas
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



09.
Pink Magnolias in Black Vase
 1959
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



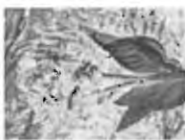
10.
Chrysanthemums
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection

11.
Dahlias, with Artist's Reflection
 Undated
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection

12.
Red Lilies
 1933
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



11. **Chrysanthemums in the Sky**
1979
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



14. **Yellow Cannas**
1989
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



15. **Poinsettias in a Window**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

16. **Magnolias in Chinese Vase**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



18. **The Atom**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



19. **Prisoner of War**
ca. 1950
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



20. **Beggar with Golden Frame**
Before 1962
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



25. **Springtime**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



26. **Beatnik Girl**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



27. **Woman with Dove**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



28. **Ten Commandments**
[1972]
Oil on Canvas (10 panels)
Private Collection



17. **Proteas in Chinese Vase**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



23. **Self Portrait**
1961
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



24. **Barbara in the Bath**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



31. **Artist's Palette**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

32. **Body and Soul**
1962
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



12
Flower Seller
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



13
Flower Seller
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



14
Vegetable Seller
1951
Oil on herman canvas
Private Collection



15
Herb Seller
1948
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



16
Weeping Rose
1949
Oil on canvas
G. A. Jones & Kenneth de Vries



17
Self-Portrait
1944/50
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



18
Dying Swan
1947
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



19
Boy with Melon
1953
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



20
Crayfish Seller
1951
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



21
Knight Sings for Javanese Woman
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



22
Newspaper Seller
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



23
Malay Boy
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



24
Rough Study for Lady of Orient
Undated
Oil on board
Private Collection



25
Portrait of a Zulu Maiden
1957
Oil on canvas
Spence, Jay & Blair



26
Ndabale Woman
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



27
Voortrekker Girl
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



28
Flower Seller
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



29
Flower Seller
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



30
Vegetable Seller
1951
Oil on herman canvas
Private Collection



31
Herb Seller
1948
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



32
Weeping Rose
1949
Oil on canvas
G. A. Jones & Kenneth de Vries



33
Self-Portrait
1944/50
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



34
Dying Swan
1947
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



35
Boy with Melon
1953
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



36
Crayfish Seller
1951
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



37
Knight Sings for Javanese Woman
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



38
Newspaper Seller
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



39
Malay Boy
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



40
Rough Study for Lady of Orient
Undated
Oil on board
Private Collection



41
Portrait of a Zulu Maiden
1957
Oil on canvas
Spence, Jay & Blair



42
Ndabale Woman
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



43
Voortrekker Girl
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



44
Flower Seller
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



45
Flower Seller
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



46
Vegetable Seller
1951
Oil on herman canvas
Private Collection



47
Herb Seller
1948
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



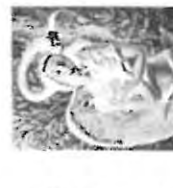
48
Weeping Rose
1949
Oil on canvas
G. A. Jones & Kenneth de Vries



49
Self-Portrait
1944/50
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



50
Dying Swan
1947
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



51
Boy with Melon
1953
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



52
Crayfish Seller
1951
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



53
Knight Sings for Javanese Woman
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



54
Newspaper Seller
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



55
Malay Boy
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



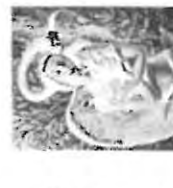
56
Rough Study for Lady of Orient
Undated
Oil on board
Private Collection



57
Portrait of a Zulu Maiden
1957
Oil on canvas
Spence, Jay & Blair



58
Ndabale Woman
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



59
Voortrekker Girl
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

Spence, Jay & Blair

Private Collection

Private Collection

G. A. Jones & Kenneth de Vries

Private Collection

Private Collection

Private Collection

Private Collection

Private Collection

Private Collection

Private Collection



32. **Balinese Dancer**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection
Singapore, Singapore



33. **Hindu Dancer**
1951
Oil on canvas
Private Collection
Singapore, Singapore



34. **Nude Study of Lenka**
1945
Sanguine chalk on paper
Collection of Anne M. Tate



35. **Red Jacket**
[before 1946]
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



38. **Rainy Day**
[1968]
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



39. **Urbette**
1950
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



40. **Balinese Girl**
1942
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



41. **Malay Girl**
1942
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



42. **Malay Bride**
1942
Oil on canvas
Collection of Anne M. Tate



43. **Malay Couple**
1942
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



64. **Merry Widow**
[ca. 1916]
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

65. **Unfinished Portrait of a Woman**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



66. **Unfinished Portrait of a Woman**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



67. **Ambassador's Wife**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



70. **North African Woman**
1931
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



71. **Japanese Woman**
1949
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

72. **Portrait of Tretchikoff**
[1993]
Oil on canvas
Collection of Anne M. Tate

73. **Japanese Woman**
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

74. **Self-Portrait**
1945
Sanguine chalk on paper
Collection of Anne M. Tate

75. **Portrait of Jean**
1943
Sanguine chalk on paper
Private Collection



76.
Lenka
[1945]
Chalk on paper
Collection of Yvonne de Tilly



77.
Mimi in Pigtails
[1941]
Sanguine chalk on paper
Private Collection

78.
Natalie (Artist's Wife)
[ca. 1946]
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

79.
Mimi (Artist's Daughter)
[1952]
Sanguine chalk on paper
Private Collection



80.
Natalie
1947
Sanguine chalk on paper
Private Collection

81.
Forest Fire
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

82.
The Storm
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

83.
Neck and Neck
1962
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



84.
The Race
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

85.
Zebra Mother and Foal
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

86.
Fighting Zebras
Artist's working sketch
Undated
Pencil on paper
Private Collection

87.
Fighting Zebras
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



88.
Zebras Standing in the Water
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



89.
Two Egrets
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

90.
Fish
[1972]
Sculpture: Amethyst and
18 carat gold
Private Collection

91.
Feeding Time
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

92.
Wildebeest
Undated
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

93.
The Charcoal Forest
[1949?]
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

DATES AND TITLES OF WORKS

The dating of Tretchikoff's work is an exceptionally tricky business, complicated by a number of factors. After the mid-1950s he rarely dated his paintings, nor included dates in his coffee table publications and portfolios. For undated works one of the better sources are contemporary newspaper articles but even this is not foolproof as the date of first exhibition does not always lead one to the date of composition. Stylistic evidence can help but also can be misleading. A work that at first glance seems to be from the 1970s can in fact be much earlier. Where reasonable certainty is possible a year or time period has been provided for undated works in square brackets. In all other cases the fact that the work is undated is indicated. Titles also provide a challenge as Tretchikoff is known to have used more than one title for a given work and also used the same or similar titles for different canvases (e.g. *Zulu Maiden*, *Proteus*, *Crayfish Seller*, etc.). Generally the titles here are taken from documentary sources in the Tretchikoff Archive, newspaper reports and the titles indicated in the artist's own publications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE FOLLOWING LENDERS

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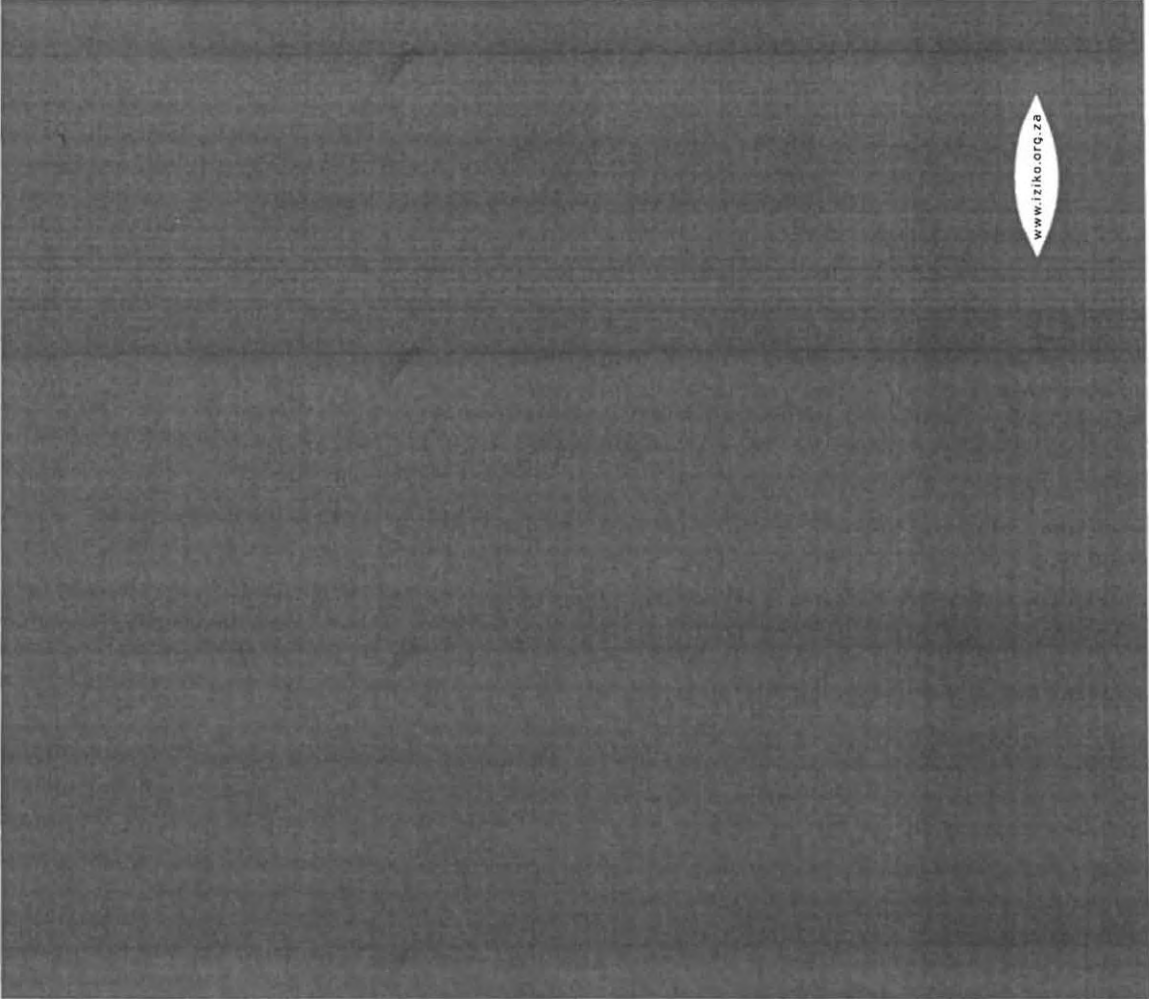
Marianne Fassler, Natasha Swift,
 Gabrielle Guy, Hannah Lewis, Renée
 Holleman.

IZIKO MUSEUMS

The CEO Rooksana Omar, Department
 of Institutional Advancement and
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 Programmes.
 Art Collections: Riason Naidoo, Andrea
 Lewis, Joe Dolby, Robyn-Leigh Cedras,
 William Visagie, Majiet Isaacs and
 Angela Zehnder.



Izich'ij The 'People's Painter' is dedicated to Pam Lamprecht and Mimi Mercurio (nee Tretchikoff).



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APPENDIX 2



In a somewhat questionable marketing endeavour, the Eastern Cape Region has been sign posted, 'Frontier Country' and indeed this is what it is. Historically it is the site of the 9 Frontier Wars and much brutal conflict and living here presently can still seem the edge of nowhere by comparison to many major South African metropolises. With Grahamstown at the heart of it, it is also a cosmopolitan space not without vestiges of past pain but - like many colonial outposts in a post-colonial time - it is no longer a satellite to an absent motherland, a mere microcosm of elsewhere, but also a world unto itself. A potential space of intellectual, debate rather than military conflict – geographically isolated from metropolitan trends – a melting pot of many places, a crucible. In more recent history, this frontier space has been a site of culture, of experiment. Home to an annual arts festival, how is it that Grahamstown with a population of just under 140 000 can command so much creative imagination in novels, plays, poetry and art? Frontier, Border, at the end of the world but not about to fall off – merely at a vantage point to observe a view to come. - **Rat Western**

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NRF Knowledge Fields Development

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2010

'Fading From History: The Print Culture of Vladimir Tretchikoff and its Legacy' by Andrew Lamprecht



This paper will examine the manner in which Vladimir Tretchikoff used mass-produced prints as a vehicle to publicise his work as well as to take it to markets outside the usual channels of 'high art'. Dubbed 'The King of Kitsch' by some of his critics, he nonetheless created a new aesthetic which drew praise (and purchases) from ordinary

middle- and lower class audiences who would not buy another artwork in their life.

The significance of colour and its application to subjects both everyday and extraordinary is of considerable significance here. Today we tend to be familiar only with faded vestiges of the prints bought in unprecedented numbers in the 1950s – 70s but these works were suffused with colour at a time when critically acclaimed South African art frequently tended towards the dung colours in their palette.

An examination of significance of these ubiquitous prints to popular culture both in the time they were first marketed and subsequently as

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a trope will conclude the paper.

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
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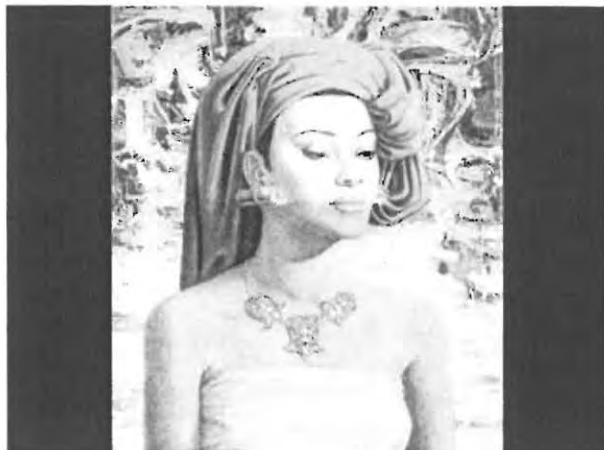
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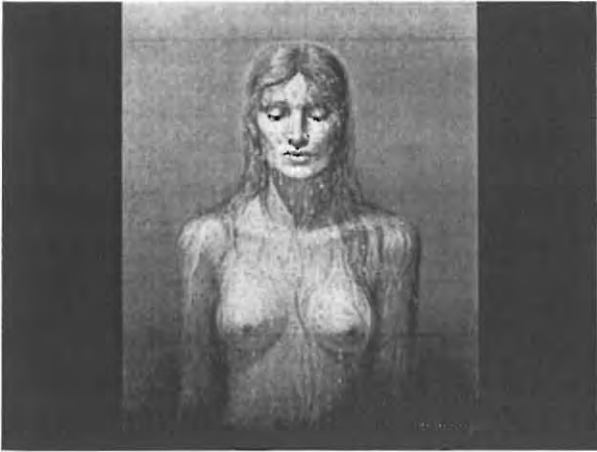
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Tretchikoff & Me at Salon 91

1 May



For decades Vladimir Tretchikoff's work was considered sub-par, technically inferior, cheap, even kitschy. Art critics of his day didn't approve of his style or his reproduction method. But Tretchikoff remains to be one of the world's most popular print artists (some say more copies of Tretchikoff's Chinese Girl have been sold than Picasso's Mona Lisa) and this year South Africa's highest art institution, the South African National Gallery, will pay credence to his influence and contribution.

In anticipation of the South African National Gallery retrospective curator Andrew Lamprecht and Salon91 are showing the work of 17 South African artists that responds to Tretchikoff's style and legacy in an exhibit aptly named Tretchikoff & Me. With the support of the Tretchikoff Foundation the artists were given access to Tretchikoff originals, which allowed them to really study Tretchikoff's techniques, style and content.

Monique du Preez, Gallery Director of Salon91, sees the recent acceptance of Tretchikoff and his works as indicative of a larger movement. One where "Tretchikoff is being accepted and absorbed by the canon of South African art, and his reputation is finally being restored." This evolution of tastes and ideas is even more apparent in the range of work that has been included in the Tretchikoff & Me exhibit. The exhibit showcases work by established as well as up and coming artists in several different mediums; illustration, photography, lithograph, ink, Daisec and mixed media. Certain pieces are dark and complicated, while others are more playful and light, each a different interpretation of Tretchikoff's subject matter. As du Preez puts it, it is evident that "The artists have truly interpreted and explored Tretchikoff's work in so many interesting ways, ranging from his subject matter, to his use of colour, to specific controversial works, to symbolism contained in some pieces, to his composition, to his reproductions." The result is a truly unique interpretation of an art icon.

The exhibit runs until July 31st, 2010. For more information see <http://www.salon91art.co.za/> and to read more about Tretchikoff check out <http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/> (the biography section makes for pretty good reading.)