

The Munich group was well represented at the first 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition, which pre-dated the first 'Blaue Reiter' show by six months. The second 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition was even more biased towards the Munich School, and this exhibition was, in fact, almost identical in its make-up with the 'Blaue Reiter' show of 1912.

To the first 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition, Kandinsky and Yavlensky sent four works each. (Kandinsky sent four *Improvisations* - a, b, c, d.) In spite of the common interest in folk-art, the Munich group was isolated in feeling from the rest of the exhibition, although some of the Burliuks' work came close to it. It was not until the second 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition that the 'Brücke' and 'Blaue Reiter' groups were fully introduced in Russia, by which time the chief personalities of the Moscow groups, Larionov and Goncharova, had become so extreme in their nationalist ideas that they had shaken off 'Munich decadence' and the 'cheap Orientalism of the Paris School'.¹⁰

The core of the first 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition was the work of four Russian students from the Moscow College who had been expelled from the school in 1909 for 'leftism'. The four were Aristarkh Lentulov (1878-1943), Piotr Konchalovsky (1876-1956), Robert Falk (1886-1958) and Ilya Mashkov (1884-1944). At first they were known as 'the Cézannists'. Their 'leftism' consisted in a too marked devotion to the work of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Matisse. Later, when the German School and the Primitivists had abandoned them, these four remained and took over the name 'Knave of Diamonds', turning it - to Larionov's loudly remarked disgust - into an official exhibiting society.

Lentulov has already been mentioned in connection with the Burliuk brothers. He had exhibited with them and Larionov and Goncharova at all the little provincial exhibitions of the past three years: it was Lentulov's brother-in-law who had provided the 3000 roubles to launch the first 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition. Lentulov's work of this date was typical of his three 'Cézannist' colleagues. In particular the influence of Le Fauconnier predominated in the works which he sent to this exhibition. (Le Fauconnier sent his *Portrait of Jouve* of 1909 and then *L'Abondance* of 1910-11 to the first and second 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibitions.) His portrait entitled *Study* shows the use of

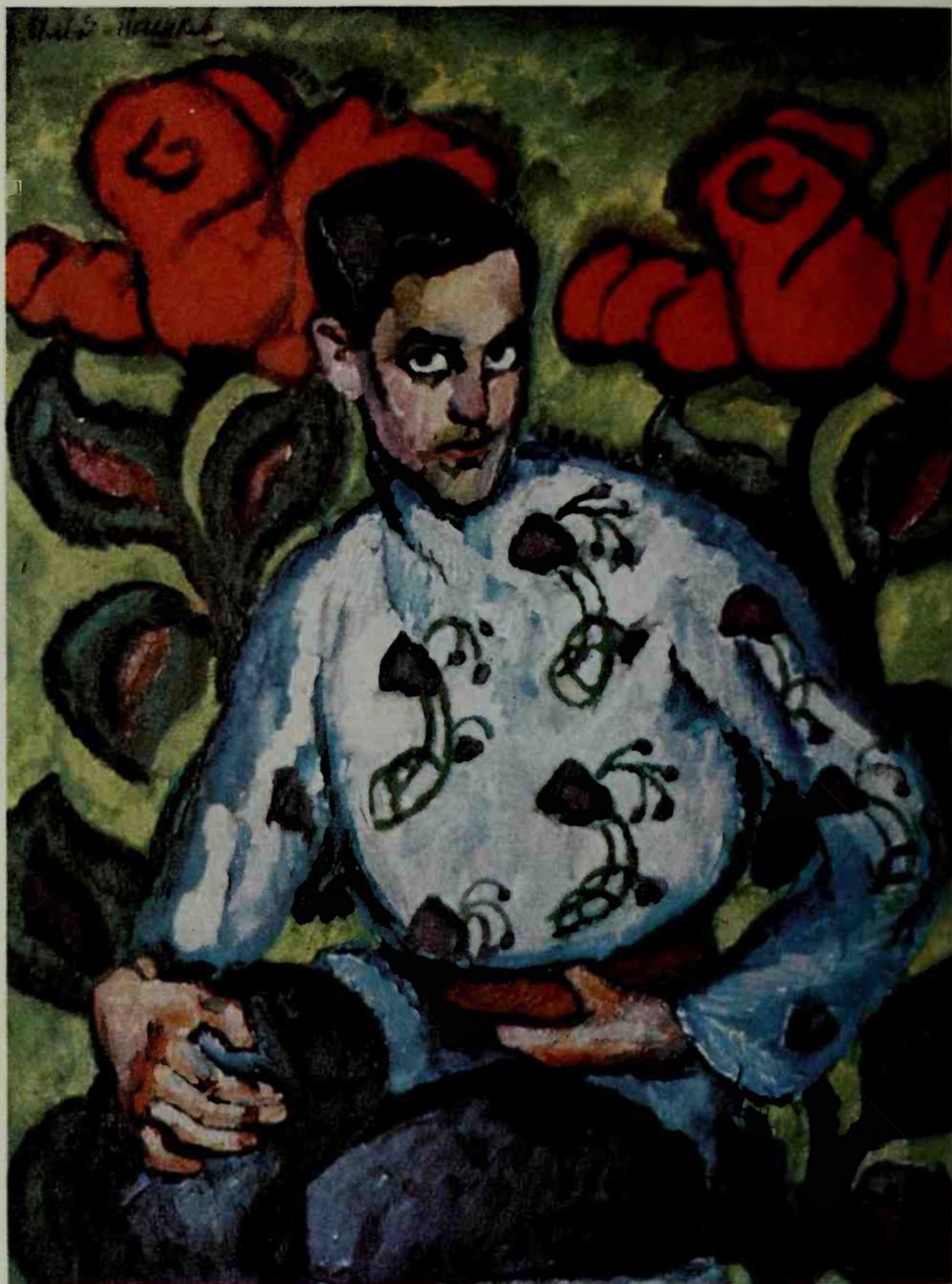


83 Ilya Mashkov,
Portrait of E. I. Kirkalda,
1910

traditional perspective and shading which were soon to give way to a more Matisse-like sweeping line and decorative pattern, using brilliant colour.

The use of brilliant sated colour, an intense surface patterning and a radical simplification of form were to become the chief characteristics of these four painters' work. The work of Ilya Mashkov is perhaps the most typical of this group. In his *Portrait of E. I. Kirkalda*, which he sent to the first exhibition of the 'Knave of Diamonds', the influence of Matisse is all too obvious and undigested. In particular it recalls Matisse's *Portrait of Greta Moll* which was reproduced in colour in the *Golden Fleece* of 1909. There is the same use of a thick line to delineate the forms; brilliant, highly unnaturalistic colour, in particular in the flesh tones; and a highly ornate silhouette in the hair-styles of the two ladies. The curious juxtaposition of the entirely two-dimensional Chinese painting as a background to the three-dimensional seated figure emphasizes the inconsistency of the formal

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84 Ilya Mashkov, *Portrait of a Boy in an Embroidered Shirt*, 1909



85 Robert Falk, *Portrait of the Tartar journalist Midhad Refatov*, 1915

composition. It is a painting midway between the academic perspective representation of space and a decorative surface patterning which is a characteristic of this artist's work (*Portrait of a Boy in an Embroidered Shirt*). Apart from the debt to the French Fauve school, Ill. 84 the work of Mashkov is related to that of the German Expressionists, Kirchner, Pechstein and Heckel, who all contributed to the second 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition of 1912. There is the same violence and feverish colour, although the work of the Russian is less jazzy in form and subject and his rhythm is rounded and enclosed, whereas that of the German tends to the angular.

Portraits and still-life subjects were the themes typical of these four Moscow painters. They used simple, insignificant objects as a means of avoiding literary anecdotal elements. In fact, they simply wanted 'pretexts' for abstract experiment in formal composition and colour.

It was colour above all which concerned Mashkov, and also Piotr Ill. 86 Konchalovsky in his first works. His *Portrait of Georgy Yakulov* of 1910 again reveals the close connection between his work and that of Matisse. In his later work, however, the influence of Cézanne became paramount, and the preoccupation with colour was exchanged for a typically Cézannist monochrome palette, and a loose, hatching stroke.

Robert Falk was the most serious and sensitive artist of these four painters. His work was always more indebted to Cézanne than to Matisse. His subjects were likewise portraits (e.g. *Portrait of Midhad Refatov*) and still-lives. There is, however, a Jewish melancholy and intensity which differentiates his work from the rather superficial and immature work of his 'Knave of Diamonds' colleagues. The sensitive manipulation of planes of colour in dry, quiet tones and insistent rhythm of brushstrokes removes his work from the rather provincial level of the group as a whole. Falk was the only one among them who later evolved a personal idiom built on this Cézannist grounding. He, in company with Konchalovsky and Kuprin, another early member of his group, were influential in training successive generations of Soviet painters.

The works which Larionov sent to the first 'Knave of Diamonds' exhibition were those which he had done during his stay with the Burliuks – many of which he had already sent to the third 'Golden Fleece' exhibition – and a number of others of the past year, as well