THE NAME OF ILYA IVANOVICH MASHKOV is associated above all with still-life paintings remarkable for an elemental intensity of colour which verges at times on the violent. Displaying a scope and boldness unusual in his contemporaries as well as an acute feeling for the materiality of things, Mashkov's bright canvases are striking for the breadth of their pictorial range, for the deep sonority of their colours.

Mashkov was one of the boldest innovators in Russian painting at the beginning of the twentieth century, an outstanding painter whose works contributed to the development of Soviet art, an experienced teacher who passed on his skill to many who would later become famous artists. Each of these aspects of his creative activity is instructive and deserving of special attention.

Mashkov developed as a painter in the years preceding the Revolution, at a time when artistic life in Russia was unusually complex and full of contradiction. In the field of art there were clashes between various principles and ideas, manifested as a struggle between numerous schools. Painters of an older generation,—members of the Society for Circulating Art Exhibitions (the *Peredvizhniki*), the World of Art and the Union of Russian Artists,— were still active. At the same time a host of aesthetic and artistic conceptions, precarious in their theoretical foundation, were receiving wide attention. The overthrow of traditional forms, aesthetic nihilism, the loss of firm links with reality could not, however, delay the development of art. The search for new paths and new creative principles went on, and Russian art was enriched by some remarkable achievements. Just in this period there appeared a number of talented young artists.

Despite the diversity of the new ideas and trends, one may clearly discern in Russian painting of this time a general tendency towards the perfecting of artistic form. Artists were striving for a certain synthesis, they wished to reveal the generalized meaning of phenomena not susceptible of concretization in time, and therefore not infrequently they refused to represent movement and action in their work. As a result of this loss of interest in the subject painting, the still life became the dominant genre. Landscape and portrait also occupied an important place. And particular attention was paid to the renewal of painterly techniques.

The evolving of a new system of pictorial representation advanced through a series of agonizing explorations, which were often far from successful. The principle of verisimilitude, which had prevailed in nineteenth century painting, was supplanted by that of conventionality. This testified to the inner bond linking the new trends in Russian painting with Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism and Expressionism, for the exponents of those schools sought support not in the traditions of European Post-Renaissance realism, but rather in principles adopted from the visual arts of different peoples and ages. The search for formal solutions appropriate to these new stylistic norms was of decisive importance. This tendency is not difficult to perceive in the works of such artists of the late nineteenth — early twentieth centuries as Vrubel, Serov and K. Korovin. It was characteristic of the members of the World of Art and the Blue Rose associations, but most strongly developed in the work of artists of the Jack of Diamonds group and other representatives of the so-called avant-garde in the beginning of this century.

In the artistic movements at the beginning of the twentieth century there was much romanticism, much anarchic rebelliousness. Inner contradictions were most sharply revealed in the various trends of the avant-garde movement where subjectivism, having reached the limit of non-representational depiction, was opposed by the real

achievements of a few artists of the Jack of Diamonds group, like Konchalovsky, Mashkov, Falk, Lentulov, Kuprin, Larionov and others. These painters discovered a successful balance in which expressiveness of colour, plasticity and decorative composition helped express a particularly intense, yet at the same time integral perception of reality.

Ilya Ivanovich Mashkov (1881—1944) was born in the village of Mikhaylovskaya in the Don area. His parents were of peasant origin. At the age of fifteen he lost his father, who had pursued various trades and had had to endure constant poverty. From an early age Mashkov displayed an aptitude for handicrafts; he also liked to draw. However, the cruel and degrading existence he was forced to lead (in his early youth he had been placed in the service of some local traders, supposedly as an apprentice) was least likely to further his attachment to art. He was already in his eighteenth year when he first heard that painting was something to be learned. In 1900 he entered the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. After completing his life class, he transferred to the studio of Serov and Korovin. A little earlier Mashkov had begun to give private lessons himself. During his first years in the School he studied avidly and diligently. Then there followed a period of doubt and disillusionment with the creative principles of his teachers, a period which ended with a complete change in his artistic orientation, as a result of which he was expelled from the School in 1910.

This liberation from "academic chains" was to a great extent prompted by Mashkov's first acquaintance with the Hermitage in 1907. In 1908 he went on a trip to Germany, Paris, London, Madrid, Barcelona, Italy and Vienna, during which he got to know the masterpieces of classical art as well as contemporary French painting. Before his departure he had already become familiar with the Shchukin and Morozov collections, where fine examples of the most recent French art were represented, and in 1909 he visited the Golden Fleece Exhibition, which was displaying works by the Fauvists.

Mashkov's answer to his expulsion from the School was to take an active part in the creation of the Jack of Diamonds. The spirit of *épater le bourgeois* which accompanied the activities of this group prevented critics of the time from discerning the genuine artistic merit of the work produced by its members. The emergence of a new trend in Russian painting and the organization in 1911, by a number of young Moscow artists, of the Jack of Diamonds exhibition society was connected with an eager movement towards expressiveness, decorative quality and the concentrated use of colour — all entirely characteristic of the age. Their experience of European art enabled the artists to pass on boldly towards a generalized representation of nature, refusing to follow the principles of Impressionism. Opponents of narrative painting, illusion and aestheticism, they relied on experiment in pictorial techniques. Hence their impulse towards the detail and their preference for the still life, which was indeed to become the "laboratory" of their new endeavours.

Their fidelity to a constructive line of artistic thought allowed the painters of the Jack of Diamonds group to achieve a synthesis of colour and form in their representation of objects from the surrounding world. They profited by the experience of Cézanne and the Cubists, Cubism being for them not so much a system as a means of enhancing artistic expressiveness. This exploitation of formal expressiveness, as well as the concentrated use of all the resources of painting, led to innovations in the pictorial structure and style of their works. Many artists of the time were attracted to the problem of creating in painting a *sui generis* artistic equivalent of

what was distinctively national in Russian life. Members of the Jack of Diamonds group interpreted this problem as the return of Russian painting to traditions preserved over the centuries in folk art. This link with the principles of folk art and the desire to appropriate its expressiveness of portrayal determined the character of their endeavours. They were full of enthusiasm for the Russian *lubok* (popular print), the house-painter's sign, the decorated tray, the folk toy. These painters thus enriched contemporary art with the achievements of Russian folk art. The strength of their work lay in the exaggerated emotionality and distinctiveness of their portrayals, in the intensity and concreteness of their colour and in their powerful optimism.

It is well known that the struggle carried on between the Jack of Diamonds and its various opponents did not in fact unite the members of the group. Harmonious as their first public appearance seemed to be, it was quickly followed by a number of internal disagreements, which eventually led to the society's dissolution in 1917. The first signs of Mashkov's divergence from the group date from 1911, the year of his initial *rapprochement* with the World of Art. In 1916 both Mashkov and Konchalovsky simultaneously went over to this latter association.

By the beginning of the First World War Mashkov was already an acknowledged artist. This was the time of his greatest popularity.

During the years of the Revolution Mashkov was engaged in strenuous social, organizational and pedagogic activity. There was scarcely any time for his own creative work. He was a professor at the Free Studios (the name of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture since the autumn of 1918). Attached to his studio were A. Goncharov, A. Deyneka and other subsequently famous Soviet artists. It was only in 1922, when art exhibitions began again, that the painter's creative activity regained its former scope. He took part in the exhibitions organized by the revived World of Art group and the Society of Moscow Artists (the former Jack of Diamonds).

On his own admission, the years 1923 and 1924 mark a perceptible turning-point in his views on the aims and purposes of art. This coincided with the general impetus of Soviet artists towards realism. In 1922 a new artistic group, the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (the AARR), had already made its appearance, and this society was to play a positive role in the formation of realistic art. At the end of 1924 Mashkov, along with his pupils, went over to this organization where he set up art classes. Although he continued to participate in exhibitions held by the Society of Moscow Artists, his creative output in the second half of the twenties is mainly associated with the AARR. He took part in exhibitions of the AARR and was a member of its Board. He left the association in the spring of 1930, when its historical role had already been accomplished. In 1928, for his services in the realm of representational art, the Soviet government awarded Mashkov the title of Merited Artist of the RSFSR. In 1930 he left for his home in the village of Mikhaylovskaya where he lived almost continuously until 1938. He completed his last works in 1943, one year before his death.

Despite the vividness of his style, it is no easy task to define the individual quality of Mashkov's art in so far as it was the product of a whole movement, many features of which were characteristic of their age and common to a fairly wide circle of Russian painters.

Mashkov differed from those close to him in creative disposition by the extreme spontaneity of his artistic talent and by his fervent attachment to the world of objects. These are not, however, the only factors which determined the painter's style. Re-

Inspired by the principles of folk art, Mashkov sought to express the immutable essence of things through form, dimension and colour. The medium he most consistently used for these endeavours, as well as for his attempts to discover new principles of composition, was the still life. He did not aim at thematic variety; portrayals of fruit and berries on a round dish or plate are frequently encountered in his work. In some instances the artist would strictly adhere to such motifs, as in *Still Life with a Pineapple* or *Still Life. Fruit on a Dish* (both about 1910). Sometimes the motif becomes a detail in the total composition, as in *Still Life. Berries with a Red Tray in the Background* (about 1910), *Still Life with Begonias* (before 1911), *Still Life with Grapes* (early 1910s), etc.

The emphatically naive, "primitive" method of portrayal revealed in *Still Life with a Pineapple*, the bright intensity of its colours, and their use in simplified combinations, bear witness to Mashkov's attempt to view the world through the eyes of the masters of folk art. In his yearning to penetrate the essence of things, to reveal their fixed, "eternal" qualities, he acted decisively, sacrificing subtlety of design and colour and achieving considerable decorative expressiveness. He moved on to various experimental techniques, combining the representative functions of painting with certain qualities inherent in the applied arts. The "fortuitousness" of impressionistic composition was opposed by a blunt emphasis on "structuring". Everything was subordinated to the principles of symmetry and rhythmic alternation. The oval shape of the frame is often repeated both in the disposition of objects and in the outlines of some of them. A plate with a pineapple surrounded by apples, is placed in the centre of the canvas and enclosed by a number of large, multicoloured fruits. The point of view chosen by the painter looking down on his subject from above, allows him to gain an effect of "spatial compression", while the individual objects are portrayed three-dimensionally. The black outlines emphasize the depth of objects and create an impression of stability, subduing the illusion of perspective.

Mashkov came gradually to renounce the effects of light and shade, so fundamental to the Impressionists. In his *Still Life with a Pineapple,* where the decisive importance of colour is obvious, light plays only a secondary role in the creation of form. In the still-life painting, *Fruit on a Dish*, the material qualities of the object are conveyed by a single splash of colour. Form is determined by clear-cut outlines; along with others, the black colour becomes obligatory.

For all Mashkov's desire to assert the sensuous materiality of things, one detects in his early works a certain indifference towards the real nature of his chosen subject; the material world appears there in a generalized form. This is the case, for example, in the above-mentioned portraits of E. Kirkaldi and Rubanovich, where there is a conflict between different orders of reality; the live models are set in opposition to the figures depicted on the panel and carpet, but nothing seems completely authentic. It is the same in the painting *Russia and Napoleon* (*The Russian Venus*) (1912, Moscow, private collection), where the model is shown against the background of a carpet depicting Napoleon in a sleigh, while the Emperor's troika seems about to run her over.

At this point Mashkov was to some extent influenced by European Cubism. However, he interpreted the ideas of Cubism in his own particular way, linking this new passion with his old enthusiasm for folk toys and the *lubok*. In his portrait of the poet S. Rubanovich (1910), the artist renounces colour and represents the subject through geometric forms. But living rhythms manage to burst in upon this geometric world, enlivening the grey-black abstractions. Fascinated by Cubism, Mashkov still sought

expressiveness in his art; retaining his interest in the distinctiveness of the figure he wishes to paint, he exaggerates the likeness to the point of caricature. Mashkov's humour, alien to the abstractions of Cubism, is what links his portraits here with the products of folk art.

Folk expressiveness of form was henceforth to remain the artist's ideal, but about 1913 he was on the edge of new ventures. At this time his artistic idiom becomes noticeably more complex. However, in the still life entitled *Loaves of Bread* (1912) this new complexity is not yet apparent. The whole surface of the canvas is more or less filled by the representation of the loaves, ornamental both in their detail and in their total effect; perspective is narrowed, surface is compressed. One feels the artist's passion for the primitive, particularly for sign-painting.

In the still life *Camellia* (1913), the artist is aiming at a synthesis of decorativeness and materiality. He directs his attention here to the problem of rendering the effect of light, which, however, never becomes an end in itself, as it was for the Impressionists. The camellia plant with its sharply drawn, rigid leaves stands out against a background vibrating with light; the knot-shaped bun, the fruit and the glass bowl with fancy cakes are both decorative and substantial at the same time.

This concentration on the material substance of things and, to a lesser extent, on the problem of light, involved a certain danger, that of illusion, which Mashkov did not altogether avoid even in his *Camellia*. This feature would occasionally reveal itself in some of his later works. A feeling for the three-dimensional quality and texture of objects as well as for light effects is particularly marked in the *Still Life with Brocade* (1914). Although the colours are vivid, the painting lacks sharpness of form; faïence dish, plums, plate of strawberries, pumpkin, carafe of red wine—all are equally exaggerated in mass, although the position of these objects in perspective is not the same. Their outline is retained, but their expressiveness is lost. Mashkov's tendency towards an ever greater complexity of artistic expression is obvious in other respects as well. The artist begins to be attracted by projects of a monumental nature, though remaining loyal to easel painting. This may be seen in works of different genres. In the landscapes painted between 1910 and 1915, the fragmentary and rather static method of portrayal typical of *A Town View* and *A Town View in Winter* gives way to complex three-dimensional arrangements aimed at conveying majestic images (*Italy. Nervi,* 1913; *Lake Geneva. Glion,* 1914). His portraits display a similar attempt at resolving the problem of monumentality. Though less successful and thorough-going, his searches here led him in various directions. In the portrait of Fiodorova-Mashkova (*Lady with a Double-Bass,* 1915—16), the artist's interest in problems of style brings him close to the painters of the World of Art group. Like them, he was fascinated by the problem which confronted Russian portrait painters in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries — namely, that of combining decorative appeal with a feeling for detail and subtle modelling. However, Mashkov aimed not at creating deeply psychological portraits, nor did he take any great interest in the objects surrounding his models. His portrayal of man and his surroundings is no departure from the conventions of still-life painting. Imitating the naive manner of old portraiture, with its peculiar ostentation, he tries not to conceal the model's pose, indeed he emphasizes it, though making only outward use of this device. A different approach to the problem of monumentality is apparent in the portrait of N. Usova (1915), which is comparatively simple in design. Although the portrait is executed in a strictly stylized manner, the artist does succeed in conveying the living features of the model. Here, too, one is aware of the

element of pose, but this time Mashkov, as in his Cubist experiments, takes the expressiveness of the folk toy as his point of departure.

The still lifes painted by Mashkov between 1914 and 1917 are amongst his most remarkable creations. He probes more and more deeply the problem of conveying in art the tangible substance of things. This may be seen in such works as *Pumpkins* (1914), *Still Life with a Horse's Skull* (1914) and *Still Life with a Samovar* (1916), where his tendency to experiment gives way to the achievement of a powerful synthesis, and where what was problematic in his artistic vision is renounced in favour of a forceful affirmation of life. In his earlier works a somewhat generalized method of portrayal tended to conceal the concrete nature of objects. Now, he manages to convey more convincingly than ever before the material character of things, their full diversity of colour, density, texture and weight.

Some of the above-mentioned still lifes (*Still Life with a Horse's Skull, Still Life with a Samovar*) reflect the dramatic tensions of the period. With the sharpness of his artistic vision, Mashkov noticed how useless everyday household articles had become, like so much scrap metal. With their uneasy rhythms and their dark, harsh colours, his still lifes symbolize the spirit of those difficult and restless times. Mashkov's rare talent for expressing the mood of his age reminds one of the words uttered by Mayakovsky in 1914: "You are no artist if you do not see reflected in the shining apple of a still-life composition an image of those that were hanged at Kalisz. You may choose not to depict the war, but you must paint in the spirit of the war."

The forceful perception of reality displayed in *Still Life with a Horse's Skull* and *Still Life with a Samovar* testifies to the artist's attempt, well before the October Revolution, to reveal the inner essence of his subjects.

Mashkov tried to reflect the reality of Soviet life in works of different genres. Although he painted some interesting portraits and landscapes, his talent manifested itself most clearly in the field of still life, where he would attain the true artistic realism so typical of the second half of his creative career. The few works produced by Mashkov between 1918 and 1922 revealed his desire to express that special optimistic mood which was characteristic of Soviet society in its early years. Mashkov's paintings of this period, such as *Model* (1918), *Still Life with a Fan* (1922) and the *Portrait of N. Skatkin* (1921—23), show great variety.

In his *Model* the principles underlying Mashkov's painting of still lifes of the 1914—1916 period are replaced by a search for monumentality and expressiveness. The emotional quality of his work reflected the new mood of a free society, which was very different from the dramatic outlook of the previous decades. Now the artist was interested not so much in conveying the tangible substance of things as in expressing the energy of life itself, and he indulged in bold combinations of colour and form. Monumentality was achieved by means of compositional devices, as well as by the manner of pictorial representation as a whole. The small size of the canvas brings the portrayal of the model into greater prominence, while the strong build of her body is sharply emphasized. Mashkov was not at all concerned with depicting her body, the draperies or the furniture in their real colours. His brushstrokes are vigorous and unconstrained; he does not divide his canvas into separate areas of colour, however, but rather juxtaposes various shades of pink, red, lilac, golden-brown, blue and green. The darkish gold of the body is spotted with emerald and lilac with a sprinkling of a cold, dark blue. He abandons full verisimilitude of colour here so as to enhance the expressive value of the portrait.

In *Still Life with a Fan* a feeling of energy and animation is conveyed by its very design and richness of colour.

Mashkov's desire to achieve an ever fuller expression of his age is also apparent in the portraits. The method developed in still-life paintings, however, was scarcely appropriate to the demands of portraiture. Of poor compositional design, the portraits of this period are usually overloaded with accessories; the artist was interested in depicting the kind of object which he would often introduce into his still lifes. This was a temptation which he could not resist even in the portraits of A. Shimanovsky (1922) and N. Skatkin (1921—23). But in these paintings the still- life approach does coincide with an attempt to convey the living features of his subjects.

Between 1918 and 1922 Mashkov was particularly enthusiastic about the techniques of drawing. He preferred to use such materials as charcoal, pastels, sanguine and coloured pencils, which was natural for him as an artist. Comparatively few of these works have been preserved but amongst those which have, there are some well executed drawings of nude models, as well as some portraits which are strikingly true to life.

The logical development of Mashkov's art was bound to lead him towards a consistent form of realism. From the years 1923 and 1924 onwards the artist evolves a sharper sense of reality, which was to remain with him until the end of his creative life. It is in this quality of realism, achieved by pictorial and plastic means alone, that one recognizes the strength of the still lifes and landscapes which he began to exhibit in the second half of the 1920s and during the 1930s.

Joy in the fullness of life and in the powerful forces of nature becomes the leading motif in the subsequent development of his art. As he once said: "Physical health, abundance, growing prosperity... new people — resolute, powerful, strong... — this is the world which nourishes my art, these are the surroundings which bestow joy in creation." "Beauty may be found," he goes on to say, "in the bronzed, weather-beaten faces of collective farm workers, in young people at a holiday home, gladdened by the sun, the sea and the south wind, and finally in the abundance of the 'fruits of the earth', by the boundless decorative possibilities of which I have always been captivated..."

Mashkov's attempts to work in various genres were not always successful. If the artistic method which he developed in the field of still life was scarcely suitable for portraiture, then it was even less appropriate for paintings depicting a complex theme. Far from dissuading him, however, the art critics of the time actually encouraged his efforts in this direction. In short, he tried to overreach himself, which explains the failure of a painting like *Partisans*, for example.

Similarly, it is scarcely possible to count those paintings depicting new industrial projects as being amongst Mashkov's creative achievements, although they do display his interest in contemporary life. Yet at the same time, in the twenties and thirties, Mashkov did paint some magnificent landscapes, remarkable for their sweeping perspectives and expressiveness of form. The studies which he made in the environs of Leningrad (1923), in Bakhchisaray (1925) and in the Caucasus are full of sunlight and warmth; the clearness of the air seems almost palpable. Mashkov was indeed as full of admiration for nature herself as for her abundant gifts of vegetables and fruit.

The most significant works created by Mashkov during the two last decades of his life are undoubtedly his still lifes. Although he continued to paint the same fruit, vegetables and flowers, his artistic conceptions were of a quite different order, as was his attitude to life in general. Amongst these paintings are the two still lifes displayed at the sev-

enth exhibition of the AARR, entitled *Moscow Meal. Meat, Game* and *Moscow Meal. Loaves of Bread* (1924), both of which have since become widely known. Being conceived as separate works — different in size, composition and colour — they are linked by an inner unity of content. The artist wished to express in them the popular notion of abundance, wealth and beauty of the physical world. In contrast to the somewhat simplified nature of his earlier works, here decorative expressiveness and the over-concentrated use of colour are subordinated to the real characteristics of the objects, their solidity, weight and texture. Intensity of colour, far from being an obstacle to the paintings' unity, on the contrary, emphasizes it. Making bold use of contrast and placing warm colours by the side of cold ones (bright red, pink, lilac and brownish-orange in *Moscow Meal. Meat, Game*), Mashkov relies here on his own profound knowledge of the laws of colouring.

The painter now achieves a synthesis of great artistic skill and objectivity. He is able to transform a pile of fruit lying on a table into a festival of colour. At the same time he can reveal in objects qualities one would have thought impossible to communicate in painting. His still lifes breathe forth the fragrance of the flame-coloured oranges, the dark-red roses and the strawberries which they depict; they exude the juice of sliced lemons, pumpkins, pineapples and water-melons. . . Every time the artist conveys the heaviness of a bunch of grapes differently, according to whether they are lying on a table, in a dish or simply hanging down over the side.

During the last years of his life Mashkov did not abandon his search for new artistic possibilities. He renounced all too intense an emphasis on colour and decorativeness, giving to his representations a more tranquil and intimate form. Among his last works, two are of particular interest, namely *Still Life. Pineapples and Bananas* (1938) and *Strawberries and a White Jug* (1943). Their subtle execution, their light but deliberate brushstrokes, re-creating form and distinguishing light from shade, their dignified colours — all harmonize here with a vivid and poignant feeling for life.

However experimental the practice of his art, Mashkov remained essentially faithful to a true-to-life interpretation of nature. He devoted a great deal of his time to exploring the elements of formal expressiveness in painting, greatly enhancing our understanding of the problem. His own solutions were of considerable objective value. Some unequal results in varying genres bear witness to a certain one-sidedness in his approach, but Mashkov's position in the history of Russian art is fully assured; a leading exponent of still-life painting during both the pre-revolutionary and Soviet periods, some of his achievements in this genre possess genuine grandeur.

The vivid colours of Mashkov's canvases, his delight in the infinite variety of the surrounding world, his pronounced feeling of social reality — all conspire to make his work one of the great achievements of Russian art. Igor Grabar was to distinguish in the work of Mashkov "a profoundly independent and individual interpretation of nature, refracted through an exceptionally pictorial mind and imagination". Creating canvases of an "arch-concrete and realistic" kind, Mashkov never ceased to admire the form, texture and colour of what he was painting. He shares with the onlooker his own love of nature and life, his spirit of joy, courage and optimism.

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