An unknown self-portrait of Lyubov Kozintsova-Ehrenburg is the evidence of the crossroads of two fates: a Dutch art dealer and a Russian artist

Anna Chudeckaya, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts

In 2001 a Dutch art lover acquired a painting by an unknown artist. It portrayed a dark-haired woman wearing a red dress on a blue background, hinting at a temperamental character and inner strength. To the eye its robustness seemed to point away from a more typical feminine sensibility, to suggest a male artist. However, on the lower right side of the canvas, the artist’s name was clearly written in black as ‘L.KOSINZOVA’; an unusual spelling that further complicated identification of its author.

In 2008 the Dutch connoisseur met the author Bas van Lier, grandson of the famous Dutch art collector and dealer Carel van Lier. This chance meeting made it possible to establish the identity of the artist, whilst shedding light also on the complex and interesting international relations within the art world of the 1920s.

Carel van Lier’s name is hardly ever mentioned in Russian language literature associated with art. For some reason this has been the prerogative of his more fortunate fellow art dealers; a situation which appears unjust. Van Lier was a passionate supporter of the Avant-Garde art in the Netherlands, an art movement that transcended European borders prior to the Second World War and with which he became synonymous. His life ended tragically however and he died in 1945 in a German concentration camp.
Van Lier was born in 1897, the fourth child of a Jewish family living in The Hague. His father worked in the antique business before eventually opening a small shop of his own in Bussum, near Amsterdam, where Carel assisted him. After his father’s death in 1908, the then twelve year old Carel and his mother continued the business. Following his mother’s demise, he worked in various art related businesses before eventually opening a small gallery in March 1921. Here he exhibited an assortment of old Asian Art, a small collection of African sculptures and other objects of beauty.


Van Lier was the first art dealer to collect and exhibit ethnographic art from Africa and Asia. In 1924 he moved his business to Laren, in North Holland, then a favorite location for artists, where he opened the gallery bearing his own name: Kunstzaal Van Lier. The gallery soon gained popularity as Van Lier exhibited paintings by contemporary artists as well as ethnographic sculpture. He frequently travelled to London, Antwerp, Brussels and Paris to source works to complete his collections. Bas van Lier, Carel’s grandson, mentions in his 2003 publication (Ill. 1) that his grandfather participated together with the Antwerp art dealer Henry Pareyn in May 1926 in Paris in the sale of a work by Picasso. Van Lier’s authority within art circles is endorsed by the fact that in 1927 his collection of 150 objects was exhibited at the prestigious Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Soon after the Stedelijk Museum exhibition the Gallery Kunstzaal Van Lier relocated to Amsterdam at Rokin.
New exhibitions opened every month showing works by contemporary artists from all over Europe. These included such artists as the Dutch Carel Willink, Wim Schuhmacher, Dick Ket and Henri van de Velde; the French Moïse Kisling, Tsuguharu Foujita and Jules Pascin; and the Germans George Grosz, Max Beckmann and many others. Van Lier also exhibited the work of Russian immigrants such as Yakov Shapshal, Marc Chagall and Lyubov Kozintsova. The Kozintsova exhibition was held from 21 December 1929 until 10 January 1930.

Prior to this Kozintsova corresponded with Van Lier, suppling him with biographical information. In a letter dated 7 December 1929 she writes:

... I was born in Kiev in 1900. There I began my studies in painting, which I continued in Moscow in 1920-1921. In 1921 I had a solo exhibition in Berlin, in "Der Sturm". In 1922 and 1923 I exhibited in
several Salons in Berlin (Yuri Frei November gruppe), then in Paris at the Salon des Independants, in the Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Tuileries and also within several groups. In February 1929 I had my solo exhibition at Zborovski’s. In March 1929 I exhibited in Berlin, [Kunstkammer Martin] Wasservogel. And in May in Prague «Umělecká beseda» [Künstlerischer Verein]. If you are interested, I could send you the reviews I received…

14. Lyubov Kozintsova, Landscape, undated. Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 61.5 cm. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

Analyzing this brief CV, one discovers a hint of imprecision that could be either accidental or intentional; even the spelling of her surname differs, showing both Kozintsova [Козинцова] and Kozintseva [Козинцева]. Initially she uses ‘о’ twice, but with an emphasis on the first: Kózintsova. Since traditionally Russian surnames ending in ‘ов’ have the accent on the last syllable, the name Kozintsova was often pronounced incorrectly as Kozintsóva. In the 1930s when Grigori Kozintsov, the painter’s brother, had become a famous Soviet film director, the constant mispronunciation of his surname became extremely vexatious. On the advice of his friend, the writer Yuri Tynianov, he changed the ‘о’ to ‘е’ and adopted the surname Kozintsev. After a while, his sister followed suit. In the surviving letters however, her surname is still written with the original spelling – which is retained here.

Kozintsova’s exact date of birth also requires comment. It is stated as 13
December 1899 (12 January 1900 according to the new style Gregorian calendar later adopted by Russia in 1918) which is endorsed by the artist’s relatives. Another of Kozintsova’s private documents gives her birth as 30 December 1899, whereas in her French passport (presumably designated by Kozintsova herself) it is 30 June 1900. Her birthday was always celebrated on 1 July, so maybe she simply found it more pleasant to do so in summer - and to make herself six months younger…

Her exact place of birth is also shrouded in uncertainty. The family of her mother, Anna Grigorievna Lurie, lived in Kiev and her father Moisei Kozintsov who was a doctor, therapist and pediatrician, came from the remote town of Starodub, where one of his brothers also owned a printing press. After graduating Moisei lived and worked in Novozybkov, now a town close to the borders of Belarus and the Ukraine. When Moisei and Anna married in 1896 they remained in Novozybkov for several years and where their children were born. This is most likely Lyubov’s birthplace, however she found it more appropriate to indicate Kiev – a city better known in Europe. Lyubov’s patronymic name was also changed. In her French passport, issued in 1939, it states Mikhail as her father’s name, thus altering her full name from Lyubov Moiseevna Kozintsova, to Lyubov Mikhailovna Kozintsova. Her true birthplace remains a mystery to this day.

Kozintsova grew up in Novozybkov and studied at a grammar school in Kiev where she was admitted to the fourth grade of the E.A. Kryuger School for Girls in 1911 and graduated *cum laude* in August 1915. She then started to study painting at the studio of the now renowned Avant-Garde artist Aleksandra Ekster.

Aleksandra Ekster (1882 – 1949) was a multi-facetted and prodigiously talented artist. She grew up in Kiev and spent several years in Paris (1910 – 1914) where she was captivated by the experiments of the Cubists. On her return to Russia she became part of Kazimir Malevich’s ‘Supremus’ group and one of the first non-figurative (or ‘non-objective’) artists. In 1917 Ekster opened her ‘studio of painting and decorative arts’ at 1 Gimnazicheskaya Street, Kiev, which she initially ran with the artist Yevgenia Pribylskaya. Ekster
was also a member of the Society of Artists in Kiev, giving lectures and working as an artist in the ballet studio of Bronislava Nijinsky, Vaslav Nijinsky's sister. Ekster's own studio eventually became a meeting place for the young Avant-Garde artists of Kiev, who would later play significant roles in Russian cultural life. Evenings, lectures and discussions were organized here and in addition the studio started receiving commissions for stage and interior designs, as well as poster production. Friendships were forged, including Alexander Tyshler, Nisson Shifrin, Isaac Rabinovich and Nadezhda Hazina (the later wife of Osip Mandelstam). The studio was frequently visited by Viktor Shklovsky, Osip Mandelstam and by Ilya Ehrenburg (Ill. 3). The creative and friendly bonds forged between the students lasted for many years. We cannot be sure as to how long Kozintsova attended Ekster’s studio, but it certainly gave her an in-depth understanding of European modern art developments and it was to change her personal life as well.


Ilya Ehrenburg was nine years older than Kozintsova and had been living in Paris for a decade when they first met. A distant relative of the Kozintsov family, he then had no occupation, but was viewed as a hero, a revolutionary and a poet. His life indeed reads like an adventure novel. He took part in the Russian revolutionary movement and was a political emigrant. In Paris he participated in its literary and artistic circles and was a lifelong acquaintance of Picasso. Ehrenburg returned to Moscow in 1917 but fled to Kiev, under threat of arrest, in the autumn of 1918. Here he lodged with his cousin Alexander Lurie and was in close proximity to his relatives, including
Kozintsova, on whom he made an indelible impression. Many years later Ehrenburg wrote ironically in his memoirs:

A dozen young girls and several boys studied at school. Amongst Aleksandra Ekster’s students was the eighteen-year old Lyuba Kozintsova. She became interested in me when she heard that I knew Picasso; I became interested in her although she only knew Aleksandra Ekster. I strolled to the Mariinsko-Blagoveshchenskaya Street where doctor Kozintsov lived.…

Although Kozintsova knew he had a daughter, Irina, by a Parisian girlfriend, it didn’t prevent her from connecting her life to his. Perhaps she foresaw that the object of her desire was destined to be a figure of cultural importance and influence in the twentieth century? Kiev, post-Revolution, was then an inauspicious place to make future plans, but Kozintsova and Ehrenburg were married on 13 August 1919 and moved to stay with Max Voloshin in the Crimea, where they remained until the end of the summer of 1920. In mid-October they moved on to Moscow.

In the autumn of 1920 a new art institute, VKhUTEMAS (the Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios) was opened under Soviet rule. VKhUTEMAS – sometimes seen as the Soviet Bauhaus - rejected completely the academic ethos in favour of an intensive programme for training the artist-designer, based on a sympathy with modern technology and a stress on productivity – art as labour – instead of individual creativity, regarded then as a retrogressive bourgeois tendency. In their first year students were taught to master the language of plastic forms; how to build and articulate structure and color configuration. After graduating from the first year, students continued their studies in one of VKhUTEMAS’ eight faculties: painting, sculpture, architecture, print, textiles, ceramics, wood and metal. The first year classes in drawing were led by Aleksandr Rodchenko, one of the originators of Constructivism and the founder of modern design and advertising in the Soviet Union. His task was to form the students’ ability to create abstract compositions, and on this basis to explore the contrasts of volume and plane, and to convey the characteristics of the texture of different materials. Ekster
was also invited to teach at VKhUTEMAS. Kozintsova began attending Rodchenko’s classes and was a talented student. But her work here was curtailed when she and Ehrenburg left Soviet Russia in March 1921. Of this period little survives but interestingly we find in the inventory of works from the Museum of Artistic Culture, liquidated in 1924 and transferred to the State Tretyakov Gallery, two small pencil drawings of nudes executed by “L. Kozintsova”.

Kozintsova left Russia with a heavy heart and not without reason. They were not welcomed elsewhere in Europe and a period of wandering and waiting for visas and transit permits followed. From Riga they travelled to Paris where Ehrenburg was deprived of his residence permit. They finally settled in the Prager Pension, Prager Platz 4a, in Berlin, where in 1922 the noted poet Marina Tsvetaeva also lived with them for some time.

It was at this stage in his life that Ehrenburg aspired to be some sort of cultural mediator between Soviet Russia and the West. During the first half of the 1920s this was not problematic as the foreign policy of the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic still cooperated with European cultural fields. Literature was Ehrenburg’s natural domain and he was able to establish relations with Russian publishing houses in Berlin, ensuring that works by Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Yevgeny Zamyatin and other Russian authors were published. Ehrenburg, in partnership with the artist El Lissitzky, was also able to inaugurate the magazine *Thing (Veshch)*, which comprised an international review of contemporary art, published in three languages. Ehrenburg defined the cultural policy of the magazine and was also the author of the editorials, whilst El Lissitzky implemented the graphic design.

Kozintsova does not appear to have occupied a prominent place in the artistic life of Berlin, but her very presence in this scene, associated with the creation of a ‘cultural bridge’, was hugely significant. She helped with the graphic design of the magazine and designed the cover for Ehrenburg’s book *13 Tubes*, published by Helikon (III. 4).

In the autumn of 1922 she assisted with the organization of the ‘First Art Exhibition’ in the Van Diemen Gallery. This grand presentation showcased the works of Russian artists and émigrés and Kozintsova exhibited her constructivist graphics; non-figurative compositions, executed in gouache, which are now deposited in the Regional Art Museum named after Viktor and Apollinary Vasnetsov in Vyatka, Russia (Ill. 5). Proceeds from the sale of works from this exhibition were used to ease the misery of the starving.


Kurt Schwitters and Kozintsova-Ehrenburg exhibited in May 1922 in ‘Der Sturm’, the famous gallery of Herwarth Walden. An invitation to exhibition, including a list of works shown, is retained in a private archive, thanks to which we can ascertain its content (Ill. 6). Kurt Schwitters exhibited eighty-nine pieces, including compositions and abstract works in his self-designated style ‘Merz’. Kozintsova exhibited fifteen art works, amongst them a portrait of the poet Valentin Parnakh. The invitation lists eighteen participants for the
final show (Gesamtschau) including Aleksandr Archipenko, Albert Gleizes, Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Fernand Léger, and Arnold Topp. We can be certain that the participation of the yet unknown twenty-two year old Kozintsova, who had just arrived from Russia, was thanks to Ehrenburg and his connections.

Kozintsova filled out a questionnaire for Carel van Lier in which she stated a different date for the Der Sturm exhibition, as well as omitting to mention the other great artists participating in this exhibition, an association from which she surely benefitted. She had a somewhat dismissive personal relationship with Schwitters and her general rejection of German modernism can be felt in her letters. She writes to Maria Shkapskaya, a friend of Ehrenburg living in Petrograd: “The Germans, too, do not like their "modernism", expressionism, mysticism and other stuff. It is good that you have written I.G. that he should return. I always want to – he is somehow indeterminate.”

In the early spring of 1924, the Ehrenburgs briefly returned to Russia, apparently pondering their future. However, Ehrenburg decided to return to Europe and in March 1924, on the way back from Moscow via Riga to Berlin, Kozintsova wrote to Nisson Shifrin, an old friend and fellow student at Ekster's
... Here after one day in Riga I already feel "the rotten West" and so forth. In addition, I already received the full enjoyment of reading émigré newspapers. What cretins! Living, of course, is only possible in Russia, and you are absolutely right, you are right about everything. Believe me ... If you think I'm in anything (other than age) changed after Kiev, I will be terribly offended and upset for a long time. At the station were three people I love – you, Pasternak and Savich. In Berlin are many people that I do not love. I feel as if all my life I’m doing with a lot of fun what I do not want to do..."x


France finally granted Ehrenburg his long awaited visa and in June 1924 Irina, his now twelve year old daughter, travelled to Berlin. Kozintsova, who had no children of her own, raised her and they enjoyed a lifelong mutual respect. The family moved to Paris in the autumn of 1924. Paris felt like home to Ehrenburg; his literary friends lived here and there were the coffee bars, where he enjoyed spending many an hour. His cousin Natalia, an artist, also lived in Paris. She had previously opened her own studio in 1920. Life for the Ehrenburgs was good and photographs from the 1920s depict an always elegant and refined Kozintsova, usually wearing a hat.
Kozintsova consolidated and enhanced her status as an artist by regularly participating in thought-provoking exhibitions. In 1927 she is listed for three. An exhibition dedicated to the *The Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du Printemps*) - composed by Igor Stravinsky) was organized in the second half of May, comprising nine artists mostly of Russian origin: Sergei Fotinsky, Nikolai Glushchenko, Yury Annenkov, Sophie Fedorovich, Leon Indenbaum, Mark Sterling, Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov. Another group exhibition, of works on paper, was held from 1 July - 1 August at the gallery ‘Clarté’ and included works by Annenkov, Victor Barth, Ekster, Fotinsky, Glushchenko, Georgy Yakulov, Abram Minchin, Antoine Pevsner and Konstantin Tereshkovitch). In August of the same year an exhibition of female artists was held in Oostende, Belgium. Among the participants were André Foy, Mariette Lydis and Tamara Lempinski. Unfortunately the invitation to the exhibition in Oostende has a modest catalogue list, from which we can glean only that Kozintsova showed two works - a portrait and a still life.


In the summer of 1927 the Ehrenburgs spent two months in Brittany. Ehrenburg wrote from the island of Belle-Ile on 25 July 1927 to his close life-long friend Elizaveta Polonskaya: "I’m in Brittany for the first time, and I like it. This is not France, but the north with a mild temperature. I even walk around wearing the colour orange…" The Ehrenburgs were kept company by their close friends Asya and Adia Savich and the writer Vladimir Lidin, who came over from Russia and whom Ehrenburg had befriended in Moscow in 1917.
Lidin was extremely witty, and everybody was cheerful: there were plenty of jokes and they all acquired humorous nicknames. On 1 July they celebrated Kozintsova’s birthday – who was nicknamed Rose. Ehrenburg was nicknamed Monia, and when he realized that two of the tributaries of the central European part of Danube were called Sava and Drava, Ehrenburg assigned these names to the Savichi. They gave Lidin the nickname Rurik, after the legendary Kievan warrior – a name he would be known by for years to come. Indeed all of the nicknames stuck, which causes some confusion when reading the letters from Kozintsova to Lidin as Rose writing to Rurik.

This month in Brittany was a creative success for Kozintsova where she produced sketches and gouaches, all of which she showed at the December exhibition of drawings, prints, watercolors and gouaches by Russian artists. The catalogue of this group exhibition still remains, in which a single work of each participant is displayed. One of Kozintsova’s gouaches is reproduced, described as a Breton street, sailors sitting at a table on the pavement, a woman at a shop window with a sign ‘Au petit Luxe’. It is clear how the style of the artist's work has evolved and the influence of Constructivism is now difficult to discern in her gouaches. Instead she works in a decorative manner, both pictorial and ethnographical. The following year the Ehrenburgs travelled to Czechoslovakia, where the everyday life of the Slovak Romany became her new inspiration.
In early 1929, between 22 January – 4 February, the Leopold Zborovski Gallery exhibited the series ‘Brittany’ and ‘Slovakia’, from which a small exhibition booklet is preserved. Its preface was written by Pierre Mac Orlan, a popular writer and close friend of Ehrenburg. He was an influential advocate and critic of the ‘new’ art - film and photography – who wrote important essays on the work of notable photographers of the period (Ills. 7, 8, 9).

Although Mac Orlan admits to not being an art historian, he praised highly Kozintsova’s gouaches, especially the Breton series, calling her "one of the most sensitive interpreters of the Coast, there where the European land ends." He also saw a reflection of a certain principle in her work: "which is easy to see but hard to understand, that which characters and miniatures of the 15th century also have, and what one finds in old icons." Mac Orlan wrote further: "If I were a priest in a village in Brittany, called the Holy Land, I would have asked Madame Kozintsova for twelve gouaches to decorate my church ..."

The enthusiastic tone of the text was probably caused because Mac Orlan was developing his concept of the ‘social fantastic’, which combined aesthetic elements of Romanticism and Expressionism, and Kozintsova’s work appears
to have been in tune with his own ideas. She was inspired by Mac Orlan’s 
appreciation and expressed her joy, ambition and hope in a half humorous, 
half serious letter to Lidin, shortly after the exhibition had opened (1929):

Dear Rurik, as you can see in the catalogue I am now famous and well 
worthy of you. The only thing I miss is glory in the Soviet Union. I hope 
you will arrange this for me by taking into account my beauty and 
intelligence, artistic talent and the wonderful preface by Mac Orlan. Be 
aware; I want to ask you to organize that Mac’s article is translated 
(Lina) and photos are published by some decent Press (I greatly desire 
that it is published in Russian – as soon as possible). I’m taking this 
exhibition to Berlin in March and in April to Prague, hence the European 
name. I am longing to see you. Your picture increases in price, and is 
waiting for your wall. Your loving Rose.

11. Invitation to Kozintsova’s exhibition at Kunstzaal Van Lier, Amsterdam. 1929, showing a 
reproduction of Kozintsova’s work from The Breton Cycle. Private collection, St. Petersburg.

This letter does not mention the exhibition in Amsterdam, perhaps because 
Van Lier’s offer to hold one there came later, probably in the late summer of 
1929. Unfortunately, the remaining letters Kozintsova sent to Van Lier don’t 
clarify how the idea of an exhibition in Amsterdam arose. Van Lier went 
regularly to Paris and the artistic world was small so he could easily have met 
Konzintsova. It is also possible that van Lier was enthused by the writings of 
the influential Mac Orlan, who admired the ‘social fantastic’ and 
‘ethnographical character’ of Kozintsova’s work.
The exhibition at the Kunsthall Van Lier opened just before Christmas on 21 December 1929 and lasted until 10 January 1930. Did the artist attend her exhibition in Amsterdam? We know that in the beginning of December she didn’t have the necessary paperwork to travel as she writes: “I'd love to come to Amsterdam, but I still do not have a visa. Could you please introduce me to someone from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? I would be very grateful to you for this...”

There is no record of a visa being given to Kozintsova, however a ticket to Amsterdam was purchased in her name. Also the invitation for the exhibition was saved, together with a black-and-white reproduction of one of the artists’ works (Ills. 10, 11). It depicts two men in the foreground, probably fishermen, behind whom is a bar, where a woman is talking to a visitor. It is as if the picture is divided into two parts - on the right we see the coast with a sailing ship, and on the left a female figure surrounded by a brood of children. This painting, The Breton Cycle, is certainly Kozintsova’s work, but unfortunately the invitation doesn’t list the works exhibited at the show, so its inclusion there cannot be verified. We can try to get an idea of the exhibition through the publication of a short review in the newspaper Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant dated 28-12-1929, which reproduces a single work - Bridesmaids at the Chapel. Otherwise we know that the exhibition comprised several paintings, some drawings, and mostly works in gouache (or as written in the review, opaque watercolor). The exhibition was probably a repetition of the show at Zborovski’s gallery with a few modifications. The review was written in
a very laudatory tone: the pictorial quality of Kozintsova’s work was highly appreciated, its romantic mood, the interest in the tradition and originality of people whose lives had not yet been touched by a prevailing homogenous notion of civilization, etc. Undoubtedly, the reviewer was familiar with Mac Orlan’s text.

The exhibition was probably not a commercial success and certainly there was no ensuing communication between van Lier and Kozintsova, although she did request that he return one of her gouaches that had not been paid for. As it transpired, the exhibition concluded the most productive period of her artistic life – the 1920s. Kozintsova’s hopes, that rose during the exhibition at Zborovski’s and were reiterated so enthusiastically in her letter to Lidin, were not destined to be fulfilled (Ills. 12, 13, 14).


However, a trace of the Amsterdam exhibition did remain since one of the options for participating artists was to donate to the gallery a self-portrait, from which it assembled a unique collection of such works.

Van Lier wrote to Kozintsova and she willingly responded on 14 September 1929: “... thank you for your kind letter, I will paint my portrait with pleasure for your collection...” This portrait can now be accurately dated to September-October 1929 (Ill. 15). Kozintsova seems to have had an extraordinarily
striking appearance - an elongated oval face, a long thin nose and almond-shaped eyes and enlarged eyelids.


Her appearance, dress sense and behavior combined to give the impression of innate aristocracy. She had many admirers and often modeled for artists. Numerous men are purported to have fallen in love with her; amongst them long-time friends from her youth, including the artists Aleksandr Tyshler, Nisson Shifrin, the writer Lidin ('Rurik') and the Parisian publisher Joseph Puterman. Different portraits of Lyubov, made by Tyshler, Nathan Altman and Robert Falk hung in her Moscow home, according to a statement made by Tyshler’s widow. The State Russian Museum now has the portrait of her painted by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (Ill. 16) which, thanks to the artist’s letters, published by V. E. Pondina, an art historian at the Petrov-Vodkin Museum in Khvalynsk, we now know the history of its creation.
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin came to Paris in 1924 in search of a career and private commissions. In a letter dated 28 December 1924 the artist lists the works he had already completed in France, the sixth of which he calls Portrait of Mme Ehrenburg (head). Petrov-Vodkin’s work revealed in Kozintsova aspects of her character not immediately outwardly evident; an almost biblical monumentality, severity, grandeur, and an awareness of her personal standing. Her almost iconic face barely fits into the limited scope of the canvas, as if the frame is too narrow for her image. For a long time the portrait remained in the Petrov-Vodkin family, without any connection to the Ehrenburgs, until eventually it became part of the collection of The State Russian Museum. Why, one wonders, did the Ehrenburgs not purchase the portrait from Petrov-Vodkin? If we look at Kozintsova’s self-portrait of 1929 we can see that she saw herself quite differently - much younger, prettier, more sensual, perhaps even passionate. The bright red clothes, light blue background, firm strokes of paint, combine to create a tangible tension. The face is a little doll-like, with huge attentive black eyes, her gaze aimed somewhere to the right, in the space behind the picture frame, a place that the viewer cannot see.


The name Lyubov Kozintsova remained hidden in the shadows of her famous writer and social activist husband Ilya Ehrenburg and her celebrated brother, the film director Grigori Kozintsov. It was almost as though she did not exist as an independent creative entity, absorbed into the charismatic field surrounding her male associates (Ills. 17, 18). Whilst it might appear easy to piece together her biography, on closer inspection her creative life is surprisingly difficult to reconstruct. The artist Kozintsova did not attain her rightful place in the history of Russian art, the peak of her exhibition activity coinciding with the culturally fertile 1920s. Even later on acknowledgement and recognition of her talent remained within a ‘home environment’, confined to a narrow circle of close friends and admirers. She died in 1970 in Moscow.


The recently discovered self-portrait belonging to a private collection in the Netherlands can be called one of the most striking and significant of Kozintsova’s works, created at the peak of her creative talent.
The author sincerely thanks Agaath Bijker, Carlijn Ubbens and Boris Frezinsky for providing materials and assistance in writing this article. The name Lyubov Kozintsova can also be spelled as Lubov Kozinceva, Liubov Kozintseva and Liubov Kosinzova.


Je suis née à Kieff (Russie) en 1900. Là je commençais faire mes études de peinture que je continuais à Moscou à 1920-21. 1921 j'avais une exposition personnelle à Berlin chez Sturm. 1922 et 23 j'exposais dans différents salons à Berlin (par ex. Juri Frei, November Gruppe). Après à Paris dans Salon Indépendant, Salon d’Autome et Salon des Tuileries et dans quelques groupes. 1929 février une exposition personnelle chez Zborovski. Mars 1929 à Berlin chez Wasservogel et mois de mai à Prague chez "Umelezkaja Beseda". Si ça vous interesse je peux vous envoyer les critiques que j'ai reçu pendant ces expositions”.


Copy of L.Kozintsova’s passport in the private archive of B.Ya. Frezinsky, St. Petersburg.

Copy of L. Kozintsova’s school diploma in the private archive of B. Ya. Frezinsky, St. Petersburg.


The Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (hereafter RGALI) fond. 664, vol.1, inv. 6 (2), p. 178, № 887.


Letter from L. Kozintsova to N. Shifrin undated [March, 1924]. RGALI, fond. 2422, vol. 1, inv. 283.


Exhibition invitation card, Oostende, 1927. Private archive, St. Petersburg.


Madame Kosinzova a recueilli, avec sensibilité, l’élément primitif qui n’a pas évolué depuis des siècles et qui donne aux élégantes Bidoudènes cette distinction qui n’appartient qu’aux personages éclus dans les miniatures du quinzième siècle et dans les icônes anciennes”. Ibid., note 16, pp. 2-4.

Si j’étais un prêtre perdu dans un des villages, au-dessous du pays de Léon, dans cette terre que les filles elles-mêmes appellent: la terre sainte, je demanderais à Madame Kosinzova douze belles images à fin de décorer mon église…” Ibid., note 16, p. 4.


Je voudrais beaucoup venir moi-meme à Amsterdam, mais je n’ai pas encore de visa. Peut être vous pourriez me recommander auprès le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Je vous serrai très reconnaissante. Je vous prie de croire, cher Monsieur, à mes sentiments les plus distingués, L. Kozinsova-Ehrenbourg”.


Invitation to the exhibition. Private archive St. Petersburg.

“J’ai bien reçu la caisse avec les gouaches, mais il en manque une, celle de Bretagne qui était dans la fenêtre. Voulez vous bien me l’envoyer puis que j’ai besoin d’elle. Est ce que madame Keizer a pris le dessein que je lui promis et que j’oubliai de vous dire. Il n’était pas aussi dans la caisse.
Summary

This article is the first documentary reconstruction of the biography of the artist Lyubov Kozintsova (Lubov Kozinceva, Liubov Kozintseva, Liubov Kosinzova)-Ehrenburg, wife of the writer and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg. During the 1920s, she took an active part in the artistic life of Berlin and Paris. Being a student of Russian constructivists A.Ekster and Alexander Rodchenko, L. Kozintsova eventually refused from abstract searches and found her own two-dimensional, decorative manner, which combines the aesthetic elements of romanticism and expressionism. The conducted studies allow to correlate the art of Kozintsova with the circle of ideas of "ethnographic identity", in particular with the concept of "social fiction" of the French writer and critic Pierre Mac-Orlan. The author traced the organisation of Kozintsova's exhibition in the private gallery of Carel van Lier (Kunstzaal Van Lier) in 1929 in Amsterdam. An obligatory requirement of holding the exhibition for the artist was creating her self-portrait for the gallery. Due to the fact that this previously unknown self-portrait was discovered recently in one of the Dutch private collections, and thanks to new documents from the Russian and Dutch archives it became possible to add an interesting episode concerning the international relations in European art life of the period of the 1920s and the Avant-Garde.

Keywords: biography and works of Lyubov Kozintsova (Kozintseva)-Ehrenburg, the attribution of the unknown portrait of Kozintsova, Carel van Lier's gallery activities; "Kunstzaal Van Lier, Amsterdam"; gallery of Zborovski, Paris; the concept of "socio-ethnographic" Pierre Mac-Orlan, Avant-Garde