

**ALLA ALEXANDROVNA RUSAKOVA'S SCIENTIFIC HERITAGE: THE  
FORMATION OF A SPIRITUAL-AESTHETIC APPROACH IN RUSSIAN ART  
HISTORY OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the life and scholarly activity of Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova, a prominent representative of twentieth-century Russian art history. Particular attention is given to her work at the State Russian Museum and to her research on Symbolism and leading figures of early twentieth-century Russian art Viktor Borisov-Musatov, Pavel Kuznetsov, Zinaida Serebryakova, and Mikhail Nesterov. The study examines Rusakova’s methodological approach, which interprets art not merely as a historical phenomenon but as a spiritual and aesthetic process. The article substantiates her role in developing the symbolic-aesthetic approach within Russian art history.

**Keywords.** Russian art, twentieth-century art history, Symbolism, graphic art, monograph, art theory, aesthetic analysis, museum studies, Borisov-Musatov.

**Introduction.** Art history is not merely the recording of history or the compilation of facts. It is the art of comprehending the artist’s intent, perceiving the spirit of an era, and penetrating the inner essence of a work of art. A true art historian views historical monuments not as external objects, but as living cultural phenomena. Consequently, art historians serve society not only as a source of scholarly knowledge but also as intermediaries who transmit spiritual heritage from one generation to the next.

This study examines the life and scholarly contributions of Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova, a prominent figure in 20th-century Russian art history. Born on January 19, 1923, in Petrograd into the intellectual Elyashevich family, her background was deeply rooted in academia and culture. Her father, Aleksandr Elyashevich, was a distinguished economist and statesman of his era, while her mother was an erudite woman with a profound devotion to art, music, and literature [1].

The cultural milieu within the family played a pivotal role in shaping Rusakova’s aesthetic worldview and intellectual framework. From her childhood, Alla observed her surroundings with meticulous attention, placing particular emphasis on the harmony of colors and forms. The decorations on the walls, the porcelain objects on the shelves, and the art albums within the bookcases acquired a distinctive significance in her imagination.

This observational keenness subsequently became one of her defining attributes as an art historian. From a young age, Rusakova demonstrated a profound interest in the visual arts, perceiving drawing not merely as an activity, but as an endeavor to comprehend the essence of art. Her aesthetic sensibilities were further enriched by the art albums provided by her father and her frequent visits to museums. Notably, her initial visit to the State Russian Museum marked a significant turning point in her life.

The works she encountered there, particularly the oeuvre of Mikhail Nesterov, profoundly deepened her approach to art. In 1940, Alla Aleksandrovna enrolled in the Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. This institution proved instrumental in her scholarly and aesthetic development. At the institute, she was afforded the opportunity to engage in the rigorous study of art history, the critical analysis of artworks, and the cultivation of compositional thinking. Faculty members frequently acknowledged Rusakova’s keen observational skills and her capacity for analytical reasoning.

The Institute Years and the War Period. Her years at the Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture inaugurated a transformative phase in Alla's life. This institution functioned not merely as a center for professional training but as an environment that fostered a profound intellectual engagement with art. The halls of the institute were permeated by the creative legacy of renowned artists and art historians, while its lecture rooms served as forums for the deliberation of complex and multifaceted issues within art history.

Rusakova developed a profound sense of belonging to this intellectual milieu, becoming increasingly convinced of the rectitude of her chosen path. Throughout her studies, she demonstrated a particular affinity for art history disciplines, specifically composition and formal analysis. For Rusakova, each lecture was not merely a passive reception of established knowledge, but rather a rigorous school of independent thought, observation, and synthesis. Faculty members highly commended her endeavor to move beyond a superficial reading of artworks, striving instead to comprehend their intrinsic meaning.

During these years, Rusakova's scholarly perspectives began to coalesce: the principle of analyzing art not merely as a historical process, but as a spiritual and aesthetic phenomenon, became her fundamental methodological approach. By the early 1940s, the exigencies of the war had a profound impact on the life of the institute [2]. The dire fate of Leningrad, characterized by the siege, extreme cold, and famine, presented a formidable challenge for the young students. Nevertheless, Rusakova remained steadfast, refusing to abandon her scholarly pursuits.

Academic activities persisted even during the period when the institution was temporarily relocated to other regions. The lectures conducted under such arduous conditions, alongside scholarly work pursued with modest resources, further fortified Rusakova's resilience and her unwavering commitment to science. During the years of evacuation, art history sessions were frequently held in unheated rooms and under severely constrained circumstances.

Nonetheless, this period evolved into a school of spiritual and intellectual fortitude for Rusakova. She began to perceive art as a vital force capable of sustaining the human spirit. It was during these years, against the backdrop of historical tribulations, that she commenced a more profound reflection on the pivotal role of art within the fabric of society.

Between 1944 and 1945, life in Leningrad gradually began to recover. The activities of the Institute were revitalized, and scholarly dialogues with the faculty were re-established. Upon her return to her studies, Rusakova profoundly sensed the atmosphere of a city that, though ravaged by war, remained spiritually resilient. During this period, she dedicated herself to mastering her discipline more thoroughly and engaging with the complex theoretical issues of art history. By the time she successfully graduated from the Institute in 1948, Rusakova had emerged as a young specialist capable of independent thought, possessing a distinct perspective on art analysis. A new and significant scholarly path was unfolding before her.

Career at the State Russian Museum and scholarly development. Upon successfully graduating from the Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in 1948, Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova commenced her professional career at the State Russian Museum. This institution stands as one of the richest and most prestigious centers for Russian art, representing an arena of considerable responsibility and opportunity for the young art historian.

The museum environment further deepened Rusakova's scholarly perspectives, compelling her toward a systematic and rigorous analysis of artworks. In her capacity as a researcher, Rusakova engaged in the study, cataloging, and scholarly description of the works held within the museum's collections. To her, every graphic sheet, sketch, or archival document was not merely a museum exhibit but a historical source reflecting the artistic and spiritual landscape of a specific era.

Consequently, she approached the artworks with profound caution and a keen sense of responsibility. Over time, Rusakova's scholarly potential and professional dedication were

formally recognized by the museum's staff, leading to her appointment as the Head of the Department of Graphic Arts. This position presented her with new challenges: the scientific classification of graphic works, the coordination of restoration processes, the systematization of archival materials, and active involvement in the curation of exhibitions.

Through the exemplary execution of these duties, Rusakova gained prominence as a distinguished expert in the field of graphic arts. During her tenure in the Department of Graphic Arts, she worked directly with rare masterpieces of 19th- and 20th-century graphic art. The process of conducting in-depth analyses of specific works ultimately defined Rusakova's scholarly trajectory.

The expressive potential of graphic art, along with the spiritual resonance of line and composition, began to occupy a central role in her research. During this period, she sought to provide a scholarly foundation for the status of graphics as an independent and profound aesthetic phenomenon within the field of art history. Subsequently, Rusakova also served as the Chief Curator of scholarly collections at the Research Museum of the Academy of Arts.

This demanding role necessitated not only organizational proficiency but also a profound understanding of the scholarly trajectory of artworks. She maintained rigorous oversight of the condition of the items held within the collections, placing significant emphasis on their preservation for future generations. For Rusakova, museum practice was inextricably linked to scholarly inquiry. The daily research conducted within the museum's repositories served as a robust empirical foundation for her subsequent investigations.

It was during this period that she embarked on an in-depth exploration of the evolution of Russian art at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, specifically focusing on the aesthetic characteristics of Symbolism and Art Nouveau.

Scholarly Research and the Oeuvre of Borisov-Musatov. The 1950s marked a significant turning point in Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova's academic career. During these years, she precisely defined her scholarly trajectory and began to gain prominence as an independent researcher.

Her initial scholarly publications were devoted to the stylistic evolution of Russian art, the aesthetic interconnections between Symbolism and Impressionism, and the complexities of artistic thought at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In these works, Rusakova analyzed artistic phenomena not merely within the framework of historical facts, but through the context of artistic cognition and psychological processes.

The scholarly community distinguished Rusakova's publications for their logical consistency, profound observations, and refined aesthetic sensitivity. In her analyses, the work of art was interpreted as a living cultural phenomenon, elucidating the complex interplay between the artist's persona and the zeitgeist of the era. Consequently, Rusakova was soon recognized as a promising researcher within the field of Russian art history. By the late 1950s, her scholarly focus shifted toward the oeuvre of Victor Elpidiforovich Borisov-Musatov. She was deeply captivated by the artist's symbolic works, which were imbued with lyricism and dreamlike imagery.

She embarked on a study of Musatov's oeuvre not merely as a stylistic phenomenon, but as an aesthetic and spiritual manifestation of an entire epoch. Throughout her research, Rusakova engaged extensively with archival materials, meticulously analyzing the artist's sketches, correspondence, and the memoirs of his contemporaries, as well as period periodicals and art criticism. These investigations resulted in a profound elucidation of the internal philosophy of Musatov's work, the psychology of his color palette, and his compositional harmony.

In Rusakova's analyses, Musatov's art was interpreted as an artistic system harmonized with themes of aspiration, memory, and musical rhythm. These investigations formed the basis of Rusakova's first major scholarly work—a monograph dedicated to the oeuvre of Borisov-

Musatov. The publication was received with great acclaim by the art history community and was recognized as a seminal scholarly source for the study of Musatov's legacy. The research was distinguished by its success in elucidating the artist's work from a contemporary and innovative perspective.

In 1967, Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova successfully defended her candidate dissertation dedicated to the oeuvre of Borisov-Musatov. This defense marked a pivotal milestone in her academic career, solidifying her reputation as a distinguished art historian. The dissertation provided a profound scholarly analysis of the artist's symbolic system, the musical harmony of color and form, and the overarching influence of Musatov's art on the Russian artistic processes of the early 20th century.

The 1970s inaugurated a new and more rigorous phase in Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova's academic career. By this period, she had already established a formidable reputation and a distinct scholarly voice within art history circles. Her research was characterized by its elucidation of the symbolic movements in Russian visual arts and the intricate interconnections between the artist's persona and artistic cognition.

It was during these years that Rusakova initiated a profound and systematic study of the artist Pavel Kuznetsov's oeuvre. Kuznetsov's art, with its inherent musical rhythm, the internal harmony of its colors, and its symbolic imagery, resonated deeply with Rusakova's scholarly interests. She analyzed the artist's work not merely as an isolated personal phenomenon, but as an expression of the significant aesthetic processes that characterized early 20th-century Russian art.

As a result of extensive research, meticulous examination of archival documents, and analysis of works held in museum collections, Rusakova produced a comprehensive monograph dedicated to the creative output of Pavel Kuznetsov.

This work occupies a significant place in art history, as it profoundly elucidates the artist's aesthetic universe, his symbolic thinking, and his color system. The research was highly acclaimed by the scientific community and further solidified Rusakova's standing as a distinguished scholar. In 1980, Alla Alexandrovna Rusakova successfully defended her doctoral dissertation on the creative work of Pavel Kuznetsov, a milestone that represented one of the most critical stages in her academic career.

The dissertation provided a profound scholarly elucidation of the symbolic-philosophical foundations of the artist's work, the musical expression of color and composition, as well as Kuznetsov's position within the broader context of Russian Modernism. Following the defense of her doctoral thesis, Rusakova's scientific prestige increased significantly. Her works began to be studied with keen interest not only within the academic circles of Leningrad and Moscow but also across other republics and throughout the European art-historical community.

She actively participated in international conferences, symposia, and scholarly meetings, communicating the critical issues of Russian art history to a broad audience. Regarding her final years, scholarly legacy, and impact on art history. Alla Alexandrovna Rusakova's academic activity during this period was characterized by the deepening and synthesis of her previous research. During this stage, she approached the complex and multifaceted issues of Russian art history from a broader theoretical perspective.

Her research focused on elucidating the internal logic of symbolism, modernism, and the artistic processes of the early 20th century. In her scholarly works, Rusakova interpreted the work of art not merely as a visual phenomenon, but as a complex cultural phenomenon that reflects the spirit of the epoch (*Zeitgeist*), aesthetic perspectives, and the internal psychological experiences of the artist's personality.

Viewing color, line, and composition as an autonomous language of artistic cognition, she provided a scholarly elucidation of their roles in the construction of meaning. In this regard, her

work represents a harmonious synthesis of formal analysis and philosophical approach within the field of art history. Alla Alexandrovna Rusakova's scholarly legacy comprises several fundamental monographs, numerous academic articles, and comprehensive exhibition catalog texts.

Her works serve as an essential primary source for the study of Russian Modernism, the "Blue Rose" (Golubaya Roza) movement, and the problems of symbolism and decorative thinking. The scholarly concepts she developed have functioned as a methodological framework for subsequent generations of art historians. Beyond her research, Rusakova was also an esteemed educator; she mentored numerous young scholars in their academic pursuits and exerted a direct influence on their professional formation.

Her lectures were distinguished by their profound content, logical coherence, and the seamless integration of artistic insight with rigorous scientific analysis. Her students recognize her not only as an erudite mentor but also as a source of inspiration who instilled a deep passion for art. Alla Alexandrovna Rusakova holds a distinct position in Russian art history as one of the preeminent scholars who provided a modern reinterpretation of the artistic processes of the early 20th century.

Her scholarly perspectives contribute to a profound understanding of the poetic and symbolic nature of Russian fine arts. Rusakova's intellectual legacy remains highly relevant today and continues to be actively utilized in contemporary art-historical research.

The life and scholarly career of Alla Alexandrovna Rusakova have left a profound mark on Russian art history. By providing a scientific elucidation of the intricate relationships between the artist's personality, artistic imagery, and aesthetic thought, she made a significant contribution to the interpretation of art as both a spiritual and cultural phenomenon. Her works remain an authoritative scholarly source for the study of the problems of Russian Modernism and Symbolism.

The scholarly trajectory of Rusakova serves as a paragon of consistent inquiry, profound analysis, and an unwavering devotion to art. Her legacy holds significant academic and spiritual importance, resonating not only within her own era but also providing a vital foundation for present and future generations of researchers.<sup>1</sup>

**Conclusion.** The results of this study show that Alla Aleksandrovna Rusakova is one of the scientists who theoretically strengthened the symbolic-aesthetic approach in Russian art criticism of the 20th century. Her scientific heritage, in particular, her research on the work of Viktor Borisov-Musatov and Pavel Kuznetsov, is based on the principle of interpreting fine art not as a set of historical facts, but as a multilayered semantic system. The analytical model developed by Rusakova reveals the dialectical connection between the artist's personality, the socio-cultural environment of the era, and the artistic language. She formed a comprehensive methodological approach in art criticism by considering the internal structure of a work of art - color, composition, rhythm, and the system of symbolic images - in a philosophical-aesthetic context. Thus, Rusakova's scientific work laid the foundation for the development of the interpretative analysis school in Russian art criticism and raised the categories of "perception" and "feeling" of art to the level of scientific discourse. His legacy remains relevant as a methodological foundation in today's art studies.

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