The Politics of Soviet Self-Representation: Soviet Cultural Diplomacy at the 1925 and 1937 Paris World's Fairs.

by

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Abstract

Participation at the 1925 and 1937 Paris International Expositions offered the USSR two unique opportunities to present carefully constructed and multifaceted images of the Soviet Union, its peoples and culture to massive foreign audiences in the context of World's Fairs. The collection of writings, artworks, images, industrial products and other artefacts displayed at each Exposition worked together to form a set of narratives about Soviet life and culture aimed at shifting foreign conceptions of the socialist state and accomplishing foreign policy aims. In this way, these expositions functioned as instances of cultural diplomacy. This thesis comparatively examines Soviet participation at the 1925 and 1937 Paris expositions in order to understand how the USSR used international expositions as a specific medium of cultural diplomacy. It focuses upon the construction and reception of Soviet narratives of self-representation. For each Paris exposition, the USSR created crafted images of its state and peoples in response to a number of factors, including Party leadership, the development of culture, industry and agriculture, global politics, Soviet foreign policy aims and Franco-Soviet relations. Thus, narratives constructed for each Exposition were steeped in a particular national and international context. As the 1925 Exposition offered the Soviets their first opportunity to showcase the developing socialist state, self-representation at the first Expo focused upon introducing French visitors to the USSR and correcting foreign misconceptions. In turn, the Soviet exhibits in 1937 celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution and emphasized progress and achievements in arts, industry and agriculture. At each Exposition, a combination of written and visual means was used to communicate a set of ideas to fairgoers. By separately assessing written and visual sources, this study shows how the Soviets employed a variety of strategies in constructing narratives about themselves. Further, assessing these categories separately demonstrates how

written and visual narratives expressed communicated different ideas related to the same themes. Although the written and visual components of the Soviet exhibit in 1925 were generally complementary, in 1937 some aspects of the Soviet display expressed ideas in tension with the framing texts. Some aspects of the pavilion and its contents placed increased emphasis upon Soviet leadership, and others altered the theme of peace by suggesting Soviet military preparedness. The final section examines responses to the two pavilions, showing that the exhibits were not always interpreted as the organizers intended. The Soviet exhibit in 1925 received a mixture of praise and condemnation. Many visitors and reviewers felt that the folk art displayed within did not match the revolutionary exterior of Konstantin Melnikov's pavilion. In turn, the reception and interpretation of the Soviet pavilion in 1937 shows how influential the experience and preconceptions of the viewer are in the process of interpretation. The vast majority of responses considered the Soviet display in relation to the German one that was located just opposite. The placement of the two pavilions inspired many visitors to interpret them in terms of a confrontation between socialism and Nazism, thus altering the narratives constructed in each exhibit. The comparative study of Soviet participation at these two Expositions shows the uses and limitations of the World's Fair as a medium of cultural diplomacy. Although these exhibits introduced large foreign audiences to the peoples, life and culture of the USSR, the organizers could not fully control how the displays were interpreted.

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Introduction

We will see the Art of New Russia on the historic banks of our Seine. We will see the fruits of its labour. This will be a boon for everyone because the immense people who live in the territory of the Union, harmonious in its very diversity, have always brought and still bring humanity fresh ideas, new forms, flowers that no one else can pick.[1]

French Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jean Herbette, Moscow, 29 January 1925

Just under three months before the 28 April 1925 opening of the Paris International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts, the French Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jean Herbette, expressed great enthusiasm about the socialist state sharing its culture with French audiences for the first time. Less than a decade after the October Revolution, the Paris event offered the Soviets a sort of coming out party. Paris was *the* exposition city. In the years since its first *Exposition Universelle* in 1855, Paris had acquired a reputation for its impressive feats in planning and staging these world events. For the Soviets, the Paris World's Fair offered a platform for the developing socialist state to familiarize foreign audiences with how the Revolution and Bolshevik leadership had shaped society and culture. The Soviet exhibit aimed to correct foreign misconceptions about the USSR, particularly the notion that the young socialist state was "Russian" and a continuation of the former imperial state under new leadership. Twelve years later, the 1937 International Exposition of Arts and Techniques in Modern Life provided a second opportunity for Soviet self-representation—this time on the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. In the time between the two Expositions, monumental changes were made within the USSR and the tone of its displays shifted from timid introduction to enthusiastic celebration of achievements made in the "construction" of socialism. More than just a passive

[1] Jean Herbette qtd. in "SSSR i Parizhskaia vystavka 1925 g. Mneniia otvetstvenykh politicheskikh deiatelei" [The USSR and the 1925 Paris Exhibition. The Opinion of Political Authorities], (Moscow: Sviaz, 1925), 8-9.

display of a collection of artefacts, each of these exhibits, the items on display, guidebooks and the pavilions themselves fashioned a set of narratives about the Soviet Union and its relationship to France. Using the cultural displays of the World's Fair medium, the USSR engaged in cultural diplomacy, attempting to improve Franco-Soviet relations and change French conceptions of the socialist state.

Following the death of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in 1924, and the beginning of the Party's turn away from world revolution, the Soviet Union increasingly attempted to reestablish relations with foreign powers and seek political and economic cooperation. Both France and England offered the USSR formal recognition in 1924. After the restoration of diplomatic relations with France, the first Paris Exposition allowed the Soviets to share the progress of the "construction" of the Soviet Union. In October 1924, the USSR received the first of two invitations to participate in international expositions in Paris. The 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts and the 1937 International Exposition of Arts and Techniques in Modern Life each provided opportunities for the Soviet Union to redefine how the French and other foreign visitors conceived of Soviet life and culture. Both of these occasions facilitated international cultural exchanges that served political purposes, and thus each Exposition may be assessed as an instance of cultural diplomacy. Beyond a simple collection of objects and writings, Soviet self-representation at each World's Fair aimed at fulfilling specific political and diplomatic aims through constructing narratives about the Soviet Union, its people and culture.

These International Exhibitions occurred within specific contexts of global politics, formal Soviet diplomatic efforts, and internal changes in Soviet political, economic and cultural life. Each of these factors shaped the aims of the USSR's participation and the images of the socialist state that the organizers attempted to create in 1925 and 1937. By addressing foreign

ignorance about the USSR and familiarizing audiences with carefully constructed representations of the Soviet nation, the state attempted to further other political and diplomatic aims. Soviet cultural diplomacy worked alongside formal diplomatic relations to target wider audiences and employ different aspects of Soviet culture for a variety of political aims. Among Soviet initiatives of cultural diplomacy, the World's Fair medium was exceptional as a means of showcasing multidimensional views of Soviet life and culture to vast audiences of different walks of life. Displays in world expositions allowed the Soviets to introduce foreign populations to images of the Soviet Union tailored to specific purposes and provided many visitors with their first tangible experiences of Soviet life and culture.

The present study is a detailed analysis of Soviet cultural diplomacy focused upon Soviet participation and self-presentation at the 1925 and 1937 Paris International Expositions. The comparative assessment of the two Fairs will allow for a more complete understanding of the World's Fair as a specific medium of cultural diplomacy and how Soviet participation reflected shifting diplomatic aims, means of representation and cultural products. Between 1925 and 1937, the Soviet Union underwent significant changes in terms of its political leadership, social and economic organization, culture and foreign relations. Thus, this study will also assess the impact of these changes on the form and content of Soviet displays. The pavilions and their contents displayed at each Paris Exposition constructed a series of narratives reflecting Soviet motivations for participation and specific images of Soviet people and culture.

Soviet self-representation at international expositions constructed narratives through a complex combination of written and visual content. At each Exposition, a number of written materials written by Soviet authors—often experts in a particular artistic field—framed viewers' experiences of the contents of the Soviet pavilion. In addition providing useful context with

respect to a particular artistic style or aspect of Soviet life, these texts informed visitors as to how they should interpret the items on display as representations of the Soviet Union. Further, these works often explicitly stated some of the aims of Soviet participation at each Exposition, such as distinguishing the Soviet Union from the imperial Russian state or preserving peace and seeking allies. In turn, the visual aspects of Soviet displays also communicated their own set of ideas and images of the USSR. As tangible representations of life, culture and industry, artefacts were often selected with the aim to inspire visitors to imagine their wide-reaching implications for Soviet society as a whole. The relationship between these two means of communication and their ideas was not always clear, however. At times, the ideas expressed visually were in tension with key points of Soviet framing texts. Thus, Soviet self-presentation consisted of a number of layers of narrative expressed through words and a variety of visual means.

The 1925 and 1937 Expositions each participated in a French tradition of expositions that reaches back to the first "Public Exposition of Products of French Industry," which opened on 26 August 1798. Indeed, the *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XXième siècle* traced the inspiration for the 1925 Exposition back to 1798 and to a series of other expositions and events, including the London Great Exhibition of 1851, that celebrated the place of art in French society and the world. On 29 March 1911 the French Central Union of Decorative Arts, the Society for the Encouragement of Art and Industry, and the Society of Decorative Artists considered a proposal drafted by G. Roger Sandoz and René Guilleré for organizing an International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris.[2] A commission of study formed from delegates of each of the associations; however, it recommended that the Exposition

[2] *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XXième siècle t. 1* (Office central d'éditions et de librairie: Paris, 1927), 15-20.

be held in 1915 instead.[3] International tensions and the outbreak of the First World War postponed planning further, and 1925 was finally selected for holding the Exposition. Beyond its celebration of the decorative arts, the French government also viewed the 1925 Exposition as an advertising campaign aimed at boosting French exports during a moment of economic stagnation.[4] Thus, even the host nation viewed the Exposition as an event with political and economic goals. The meeting of nations through the World's Fair medium allowed the host nation and its visitors to seek their own political and diplomatic aims through the use of cultural displays.

The study of Soviet self-presentation at the 1925 and 1937 Paris Expositions is central to understanding how the Soviets used the World's Fair as a medium of cultural diplomacy. Comprised of a combination of written documents, the pavilions themselves, cultural works and other aspects of Soviet life on display, Soviet self-representations each reflected a series of narratives reflecting how they wanted their state to be perceived, and what their motivations for involvement in each Fair were. Soviet documents from each Fair help to develop an understanding of how the Soviets framed their displays at each Exposition. These frames will then be studied in relation to the works on display in order to assess how the visual content and experience of each pavilion worked together to fashion Soviet narratives. Finally, a study of Soviet cultural diplomacy also demands an analysis of the reception of the Soviet pavilions. Studying French perceptions and reactions to Soviet self-presentation at each Fair will permit an assessment of the successes and failures of Soviet cultural diplomacy in each instance.

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[3] *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XXième siècle t. 1*, 20.
[4] Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 257.

A Brief History of World's Fairs

As previously mentioned, the 1925 and 1937 Paris International Expositions were just two events in a longer history of global expositions. While the organizers of the 1925 Exposition traced its origins back to the first "Public Exposition of Products of French Industry" of 1798, scholars of world's fairs as a phenomenon recognize the British Great Exhibition of 1851 as the first true example of the medium. Although institutions that promoted the principle of display had been developing in Britain and France since the late eighteenth century and smaller exhibitions focused upon art and industry occurred in the lead up to 1851, Britain's Great Exhibition was the first of its kind in scale of participants and variety of works on display. Thirty-four foreign states took part, displaying manufactures, machinery, materials and fine arts to the six and a half million visitors. It was not until the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1855, however, that the arts assumed their central role in the World's Fair tradition. Napoleon III insisted upon the significance of the arts and argued for their equal representation to industry at the Exposition. From that point on, the fine arts held a central place in nearly all World's Fairs—an important shift in the lead up to the 1925 Paris Exposition of Decorative Arts. In the early years after these first two expositions, a spirit of rivalry emerged between France and Britain, pushing each host nation to stage increasingly fantastic events.[5]

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the predominant rivalry shifted to a competition between France and the United States. Following the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1867, host countries measured their success against the French model. Both France and the United States hosted monumental events. Beginning with 1867, the expositions moved away from the British model of a single exposition building divided into sections for each exhibiting

[5] Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010* (Winterbourne, Berkshire: Papadakis, 2011), 15-28.

state. Instead, the organizers favoured an exposition site, featuring national pavilions. This new format created a new field of international competition and simultaneously a new dimension of national representation. With the addition of national pavilions, the expo sites grew in size, and between 1876 and 1915 there averaged one event per year featuring the participation of at least twenty nations. This was the period that Paul Greenhalagh describes as the "golden age of expositions," interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War.[6] Thus, the 1925 and 1937 Paris Expositions occurred in a period after this "golden age"; however, they still represented the culmination of the trends that occurred starting with 1851 and 1855.

World's Fairs were conceived with a number of purposes in mind, and as they developed, they became associated with a number of key themes. In their earliest incarnations, world expositions served a number of functions for both the host and invited nations: improving trade, promoting new technology, educating visitors and elaborating political stances. More than just displaying artefacts, the national exhibits told stories, communicating to visitors a particular view of their state through industry and culture. Often, expositions celebrated a particular theme or event. The Philadelphia Centennial (1876) honoured the hundredth anniversary of American independence; the 1889 Paris *Exposition Universelle* marked the centenary of the French Revolution; the 1939 New York World's Fair celebrated its theme of "the world of tomorrow"; and the Montreal Expo (1967) commemorated Confederation.[7] The themes of the 1925 and 1937 Paris Fairs, in turn, centered upon images of modernity and the modernization of culture and industry. Further, the theme of peace, which pervaded the rhetoric of earlier expositions, was especially resonant in the aftermath of the First World War and amidst the global tensions that

[6] Greenhalagh, *Fair World*, 27-28.
[7] Ibid., 15, 32.

prefaced the Second World War.[8] Soviet exhibits at both expositions reflected these major themes, appealing to peace and cooperation, while also presenting their images of society, culture and modernity.

Cultural Diplomacy: Uses and definitions

Before approaching Soviet participation at the 1925 and 1937 Paris Expositions from the perspective of cultural diplomacy, it is important to first provide both a definition of the term and discuss the key themes and ideas of current scholarship on Soviet cultural diplomacy. This discussion will guide the overall analysis and also help to situate it within current understandings of the aims and functions of cultural diplomacy. Though many historians employ this term, it is at times loosely defined, detracting from the clarity of analysis. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried note that in broad terms, the current historiography often treats cultural diplomacy as "a national policy designed to support the export of representative samples of that nation's culture in order to further the objectives of foreign policy."[9] This definition contains the most fundamental points, particularly the understanding that culture is politicized and instrumentalized. In providing further clarification, they cite Richard Arndt's distinction between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy:

> The former "grow naturally and organically, without government intervention—the transactions of trade and tourism, student flows, communications, book circulation, migration, media access, intermarriage—millions of daily cross-cultural encounters." The latter, in contrast, involves formal diplomats in the service of national governments who employ these exchanges in support of national interest.[10]

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[8] Greenhalagh, *Fair World*, 33-34.
[9] Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance and the Promise of Civil Society," in *Searching For a Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 13.
[10] Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance and the Promise of Civil Society," 14.

Arndt's distinction stresses the importance of the intentional use of cultural interactions and the pursuit of some national aim. Intentions and goals relate quite clearly to the World's Fair medium, wherein voluntary state participation, state-crafted displays and diplomatic aims—both explicitly stated and implicit—play important roles. Thus, cultural diplomacy differs in form and content from both traditional diplomatic engagements and more informal cultural relations. Indeed, Gienow-Hecht and Donfried state that "Cultural diplomacy has occasionally replaced or contradicted formal diplomacy in cases of relations going sour."[11] This special function of cultural diplomacy is significant, as its study can reveal aspects of foreign relations that complement or contrast with formal diplomacy. Further, the means of expression in cultural diplomacy can operate on multiple levels, expressing a plurality of meanings. Herein lies the importance of the perspective of cultural diplomacy. The study of cultural exchanges reveals a wealth of dimensions of foreign relations not considered in many studies of high diplomacy. By forming an understanding of cultural diplomacy and comparing it to existing studies of high diplomacy, we can form a more complete and nuanced understanding of the various dimensions of foreign relations and how they relate to one another.

The study of Soviet cultural diplomacy remains an expanding field of scholarly inquiry, offering an increasingly comphrehensive understanding of the numerous practices, programs and aims of Soviet efforts. Although Frederick C. Barghoorn completed a significant survey of Soviet cultural diplomacy in 1960, the more recent expansion of the field of cultural diplomacy has brought more focused analyses of specific events and Soviet cultural exchanges.[12] These

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[11] Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy," 20.

[12] Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). Although Barghoorn does devote some attention to the interwar period and makes a brief mention of the 1937 Paris Exposition, his treatment of this period lacks systematic focus. Barghoorn recognizes some early manifestations of Soviet cultural diplomacy; however, the depth of his analysis focuses upon the "cultural offensive" of the Khrushchev period.

studies have shown that the Soviet Union engaged in multiple cultural exchanges, often simultaneously, using different means to pursue a range of diplomatic objectives. Although numerous scholars have shown that Soviet culture was politicized and used to pursue political aims internally, the study of cultural diplomacy clearly shows how the Party leadership also viewed culture as a political tool for export. Several recent studies have treated various aspects of Cold War-era cultural diplomacy, such as the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Though this was an American exhibition, these studies highlight the role and significance of self-representation in practices of cultural diplomacy.[13] Several of these studies significantly highlight the construction of politicized narratives through culture. By contrast, the interwar period has received comparatively less attention. Some short studies have assessed specific aspects of other projects of Soviet cultural diplomacy, such as the 1939 New York World's Fair.[14] Further, several important studies have treated early Soviet cultural diplomacy with a focus on the central role of the All-Russian Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries

[13] Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika* 8, no. 4 (2008): 855-904, accessed November 10, 2014, http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=6b852505-4e19-4fa9-8f43-50c4c08fa911%40sessionmgr4003&vid=1&hid=4202. Marilyn S. Kushner, "Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 6-26, accessed November 20, 2014, doi: 10.1162/152039702753344807. Other examples of studies of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War include: Gryörgy Péteri, "Sites of Convergence: the USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 3-12, accessed September 20, 2015, http://www.jstor.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/23248979. Cadra Peterson McDaniel, *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015). Philip D'agati, *The Cold War and the 1984 Olympic Games: a Soviet-American Surrogate War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Nigel Gould-Davies "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003): 193-214, accessed September 15, 2015, http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c674804e-ac9c-443c-82bd-bef8a5d96c3a%40sessionmgr4005&vid=1&hid=4202.

[14] Anthony Swift, "The Soviet World of Tomorrow at the New York World's Fair, 1939," *Russian Review* 57, no. 3 (1998): 364-79, accessed November 12, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/131952. Alison Rowley, "The New Soviet Woman at the 1939 New York World's Fair," in *Gendering the Fair*, ed. T.J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 37-55. David Nye, "European Self-Representations at the New York World's Fair, 1939," in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. R. Kroes (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1993), 47-66.

(VOKS).[15] Created in 1925, VOKS aimed at helping foreign states to learn about Soviet culture and renewing connections with cultural institutions such as museums, scientific journals, academies and learned societies.[16] In addition, as Michael David-Fox shows, VOKS also played a central role in Soviet practices of inviting foreigners to the Soviet Union in order to experience socialism in its construction. Thus, David-Fox shows that foreign pilgrimages to the USSR were a significant, though not always successful, means of cultural diplomacy that functioned through crafting displays and experiences. David-Fox also recognizes Soviet attempts to improve foreign relations through the sponsorship and formation of "Friendship Societies" in foreign states. In France in particular, the USSR made multiple attempts to create Friendship Societies in the mid-1920s. The 1924 *Nouvelles amities franco-russes*, a scientific committee for rapprochement established in 1925 and the society *Russie neuve* in 1928 all represented early efforts to shift French opinion.[17]

Although these studies do not deal directly with Soviet participation at either the 1925 or 1937 Paris Expositions, they are significant in relation to the present study because of their close analysis of many of the programs, government bodies and individuals involved in Soviet cultural diplomacy in the interwar period. As such, these studies present an existing understanding of the motivations and means of Soviet cultural diplomacy. In a period marked by foreign hostility and diplomatic tension, cultural initiatives provided alternative means to communicate with foreign populations, educate them about Soviet life and culture and, in doing so, attempt to improve

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[15] Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: cultural diplomacy and western visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Michael David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party-Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period," *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 1 (2002): 7-32, accessed August 20, 2015, http://www.jstor.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/20081815. Jean-François Fayet, "Chapter 1: VOKS: The Third Dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy," in *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 33-49.
[16] Fayet, "Chapter 1: VOKS: The Third Dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy," 38.
[17] David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*. 84-86.

formal diplomatic relations. The present research understands cultural diplomacy as the politicized employment of culture and the construction of narratives of self-representation for specific aims of foreign relations. Further, it employs a definition of culture in the widest sense, including not only the arts, but also representations of all dimensions of Soviet life. Thus, it expands upon the existing scholarship of Soviet cultural diplomacy by exploring how the USSR used international expositions to communicate images of Soviet life and culture to foreign audiences. David Nye's research has provided some useful assessments of the strategies used by the USSR and other European nations in creating self-representations at the 1939 New York World Fair.[18] He argues that an effective exhibit fulfills two fundamental tasks through its display: it creates a sense of bond between the host nation and the exhibitor and it projects national greatness and distinctiveness.[19] Soviet exhibits in 1925 and 1937 displayed efforts to accomplish both of these aims. Thus, a comparative approach to the two Paris Expositions allows for deeper analysis of how the means and aims of Soviet cultural diplomacy changed over time. Despite changes in Soviet approaches from one exposition to the next, it is a combination of the scale, audiences and functions of World's Fairs that distinguish them as mediums of cultural exchange. In the same sense that Gienow-Hecht and Donfried state that cultural diplomacy at times has replaced or contradicted formal diplomacy, it is important to consider that the World's Fair medium may operate differently or reflect different aims than do the other structures of cultural diplomacy already studied.[20] Beyond conclusions drawn about 1925 and 1937, the present research draws significant conclusions about the World's Fair medium and its place within the wider scope of cultural diplomacy. International expositions offered foreign audiences

[18] Nye, "European Self-Representations at the New York World's Fair, 1939," 47-66.
[19] Ibid., 58.
[20] Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance and the Promise of Civil Society," 20.

multi-faceted yet controlled views into Soviet life and culture, showcasing the arts, selections of Soviet literary works, photographs and other means of representing the Soviet Union. Each display was designed with diplomatic and political aims in mind; at the same time, it was understood that the displays would be temporary and leave behind only traces and memories. Thus, the World's Fair medium supplemented other Soviet diplomatic initiatives by attacking what the Soviets perceived as key foreign misconceptions about the USSR and obstacles to foreign policies and attempting to sway public opinion and make foreign audiences more receptive to political and economic agreements.

The Soviet cultural diplomatic efforts at the two fairs, it is important to note, did not occur in isolation. In both 1925 and 1937, Franco-Soviet relations were a frequent subject of discussion in French newspapers and both states engaged in other diplomatic initiatives simultaneous to the expositions. In 1925, the newspapers were full of reports of Franco-Soviet negotiations and attempts to improve political and economic relations between the two states.[21] From the beginning of 1925 to its close, the issue of Soviet responsibility for the debts of the tsarist state was thoroughly debated and written about in French journals.[22] These debts were the

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[21] "Informations politiques," *Le Petit Parisien*, May 30, 1925, accessed February 22, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606131k/f2.item.r=Franco-Russe. "M. Krassine expose la situation des négociations franco-russes," *Le Matin*, June 22, 1925, accessed February 24, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k575101r/f3.item.r=pavillon%20russe.
"Les négociations franco-russes," *Le Petit Parisien*, August 27, 1925, accessed February 22, 1925, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6062205/f1.item.r=Franco-Sovi%C3%A9tique. "Au congrès communiste M. Staline définit les buts de la politique de l'U.R.S.S.," *Le Matin*, December 21, 1925, accessed February 24, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k575283k/f3.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets.

[22] "Les pourparlers sur les dettes russes sont entrés dans une phase active," *Le Petit Parisien*, August 1, 1925, accessed February 22, 2015, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606194s/f1.item.r=Franco-Sovi%C3%A9tique. "Le paiement de la dette russe: les propositions soviétiques sont vagyes et subordonnées à une ouverture... de crédits," *Le Matin*, September 4, 1925, accessed February 24, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k575175p/f3.item.r=pavillon%20sovi%C3%A9tique.
"Vers une reprise des pourparlers franco-soviétiques," *Le Petit Parisien*, October 3, 1925, accessed February 22, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606257v/f3.item.r=Franco-Sovi%C3%A9tique. "M. Tchitcherine a eu hier un long entretien avec M. Briand," *Le Petit Parisien,* November 27, 1925, accessed February 22, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606312w/f3.item.r=Franco-Sovi%C3%A9tique.

key issue in obstructing Franco-Soviet rapprochement; however, numerous negotiations and Soviet participation at the Exposition represented efforts to improve relations between the two states. Similarly, in 1937 Soviet participation occurred alongside negotiations and attempts to improve Franco-Soviet political and economic relations.[23] Many of these discussions revolved around the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance of 1935, possible revisions and its influence upon the balance of power in Europe.

Scholarly Approaches to the 1925 and 1937 Expositions

While a wide range of literature addresses the more general aspects of each Fair, scholarly assessments of Soviet participation at the Paris expositions are limited and treat only particular aspects of Soviet displays, architecture, critical responses to Soviet artworks or other aspects of Soviet involvement at the Fairs. Though they do not address cultural diplomacy directly, these focused studies offer insight into specific aspects of Soviet self-representation that contributed to the USSR's overall program of cultural diplomacy. The vast majority of these studies, however, focus only upon the external aspects of Soviet display, providing little or no assessment of how the architecture related to the items displayed inside. The 1925 Exposition has received comparatively less attention. S. Frederick Starr's two books on the architect

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"Déclarations de M. Rakowsky sur Locarno, la S.D.N. et les dettes," *Le Petit Parisien*, December 11, 1925, accessed February 22, 2015, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606326r/f1.item.r=Franco-Sovi%C3%A9tique.

[23] "Une interpellation au sénat à propos des menées contre la sûreté de l'état," *Le Petit Parisien*, February 3, 1937, accessed February 25, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k664094c/f2.item.r=Franco-Sovi%C3%A9tique.
"L'activité intense de la diplomatie française," *Le Petit Parisien*, May 9, 1937, accessed February 25, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k664188v/f3.item.r=Franco-Russe. Lucien Bourguès, "Hier, journée franco-soviétique: MM. Blum, Delbos et Litvinov ont réaffirmé la fidélité au pacte qui lie les deux pays," *Le Petit Parisien*, May 19, 1937, accessed February 25, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6641986/f3.item.r=Franco-Russe.
"Les journées françaises pour la paix et pour l'amité avec l'U.R.S.S.," *Le Petit Parisien*, October 24, 1937, accessed February 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6643559/f10.item.r=Pavillon%20Sovi%C3%A9tique.

Konstantin Melnikov and his pavilion in Paris, and Claude Leclanche-Boule's article provide the most extensive assessment of Soviet participation in 1925.[24] Starr primarily discusses the Soviet pavilion from an architectural perspective, assessing both the history of its development and its reception; however, he makes no mention of how Melnikov's constructivist exterior related to the contents housed inside or how the exterior expressed political ideas.[25] Beyond an overview of the pavilion and its contents, Leclanche-Boule also provides considerable background information regarding France's invitation and the conditions of Soviet involvement at the Exposition.[26] These studies are limited, however, and do not attempt to understand the narratives crafted through the exhibit as a whole.

The 1937 Exposition, by contrast, has received more extensive treatment. One of the main subjects of scholarly attention in 1937 was the placement of the Soviet and German pavilions opposite one another at the Exposition. Danilo Udovički-Selb and Karen A. Fiss have both devoted attention to the issue of the relationship between the two pavilions, public reaction, and Soviet-German relations at the Fair.[27] The location of the two pavilions and the competition it inspired played a key role in the planning and development of the two buildings and in how French audiences interpreted both exhibits. Aside from its relation to the German pavilion, several scholars have discussed Soviet participation at the 1937 Fair from an architectural

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[24] S. Frederick Starr, *K. Mel'nikov, le pavillon soviétique, Paris 1925* ([Place of Publication Not Identified]: L'Esquerre, 1981). S. Frederick Starr, *Melnikov: Solo Architect in a Mass Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Claude Leclanche-Boule, "La Section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," *L'écrit: revue d'histoire des arts* 3 (1983): 44-56.
[25] Starr, *Mel'nikov: le pavillon soviétique*. Starr, *Melnikov: Solo Architect in a Mass Society*, 85-92.
[26] Leclanche-Boule, "La Section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," 44-46.
[27] Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47 (2012): 13-47, accessed November 10, 2014, doi: 10.1177/0022009411422369. Karen A. Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Karen A. Fiss, "In Hitler's Salon: The German Pavillion at the 1937 Paris Exposition Internationale," in *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*, ed. Richard A. Etlin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 316-342.

perspective.[28] While analyzing specific aspects of the Fairs, these studies have not attempted to understand the political and diplomatic motivations for Soviet participation, and how these were reflected in Soviet self-presentation.[29] Furthermore, no work has examined the two Expositions together in order to understand how the Soviets used the World's Fair as a specific medium of cultural diplomacy in their relations with France and how these interactions changed from 1925 to 1937. This study builds upon the analyses of existing scholarship in order to provide a thorough analysis of Franco-Soviet relations through the lens of cultural diplomacy, understanding how Soviet written and visual self-representation at each Exposition created different narratives and images of the Soviet Union, aimed at political and diplomatic aims entrenched within the context of each Fair.

Fiss's extensive treatment of the German pavilion at the 1937 Exposition is an important precursor to my own study.[30] Not only does she make some reference to the relationships between the Soviet and German pavilion, but she treats German participation from a perspective of cultural diplomacy, attempting to understand how German self-presentation in 1937 influenced Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime. Some assessment of German participation at the Exposition will help to put the Soviet experience in perspective. This is reinforced by the fact that discussions of the Soviet display were so often conducted with reference to the German pavilion and vice versa. Soviet narratives in 1937 were reshaped by visitors and writers alike, who constantly drew comparisons between the two displays as representations of the two opposing political systems. Fiss notes that the German participation at the 1937 Exposition

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[28] Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Between Modernism and Socialist Realism: Soviet Architectural Culture under Stalin's Revolution from Above, 1928-1938," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, No. 4 (2009): 467-495, accessed October 25, 2014. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jsah.2009.68.4.467. Ol'ga Kostina, *Skul'ptura i vremia: rabochiĭ i kolkhoznitsa: skul'ptura V.I. Mukhinoi dlia pavil'ona SSSR na mezhdunarodnoi vystavke 1937 goda v Parizhe* (Moscow: Sov. Khudozhnik, 1987).

[29] Karen Fiss's *Grand Illusion*, by contrast, considers Franco-German cultural diplomacy and the impact of the German exhibit on the wartime occupation of France.

[30] Fiss, *Grand Illusion*.

reflected a shift in foreign policy initiatives from the more aggressive diplomatic initiatives of the early-mid 1930s:

> Initially, the French strategy of rapprochement seemed successful, as Germany's new rhetoric of détente during the watershed years of 1936 and 1937 marked a radical shift away from the aggressive political and military actions that had come before: the repudiation of the Versailles Treaty, intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and remilitarization of the Rhineland. By shifting its strategy to diplomatic initiatives and goodwill propaganda campaigns—the 1936 Berlin Olympics being another example—the Third Reich moved to calm international anxieties, while buying time for its rearmament program.[31]

Like the Berlin Olympics one year previous, the Paris Exposition was a cultural event that brought nations together, and allowed them to further political aims. The 1937 Exposition presented a new opportunity for France and Germany to resume negotiations for a new Franco-German trade agreement.[32] Soviet participation, in turn, may be examined with reference to similar aims. The visual confrontation of the Soviet and German pavilions suggests that the French organizers and public were well aware of the tension and potential conflict between the two states. Franco-Soviet discussions of a non-aggression treaty had taken place earlier; however, in displaying its message of peace, the Soviet Union may have viewed the Paris Exposition as a potential means of negotiating an alliance, by first familiarizing French citizens with a positive, progressive representation of the Soviet State.

Building upon the conclusions of this established body of research, this study brings a new lens of analysis to Soviet participation at the 1925 and 1937 Paris International Expositions. By understanding the expositions as instances of cultural diplomacy, it places the two within a wider context of cultural initiatives and diplomatic relations. Thus, it not only examines specific aspects of each display, but it attempts to understand how the components of each exhibit

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[31] Karen A. Fiss, "In Hitler's Salon: The German Pavillion at the 1937 Paris Exposition Internationale" in *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*, edited by Richard A. Etlin, 316-317.
[32] Ibid., 317. Fiss further discusses the impact of the Exposition on Franco-German relations in her book, *Grand Illusion*.

contributed to Soviet narratives of self-representation. At both Expositions, the Soviet organizers used both written and visual means to communicate key ideas about life and culture in the USSR. By providing extensive comparative analysis of Soviet participation in 1925 and 1937, this study shows both how strategies of communication changed from one Exposition to the next, and how the World's Fair medium functioned as a medium of cultural diplomacy.

Theoretical Approaches to Exhibits and Self-Representation

In analyzing Soviet self-presentation at the two Paris Expositions, the present research borrows and modifies theories of museum studies. Many of these scholarly writings deal with how museums and their exhibits create narratives, either through written documents, objects and their placement or the buildings themselves.[33] Although World's Fairs differ in many aspects from museums and their exhibits, the ideas that scholars of museum studies employ in understanding narratives, their formation and interpretation apply to the World's Fair medium as well. Recognizing these differences, however, will aid in adapting theories of museum studies to the World's Fair medium. Some of these important differences include: duration, in that the displays crafted for World Expositions are assembled with the knowledge that they are temporary;[34] content, for unlike national museums, the World's Fair displays feature items representative of the current achievements of the nation, rather than its history; and audience,

[33] Suzanne Mulder, "From Cathedral to Disneyland: Archetypes of Narrative Space," in *Narrative Spaces: On the Art of Exhibition*, ed. Herman Kossmann, Suzanne Mulder and Frank den Oudsten (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2012), 128-191. Greer Crawley, "Staging Exhibitions: Atmospheres of Imagination," in *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, ed. Suzanne MacLeod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 12-20. Lee H. Skolnick, "Beyond Narrative: Designing Epiphanies," in *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, ed. Suzanne MacLeod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 83-94. Chulani Rambukwella, "Museum and National Identity: Representation of Nation in National Museums," in *Building Identity: the Making of National Museums and Identity Politics*, ed. Yui-tan Chang and Suzanne Macleod (Taipei: National Museum of History, 2012), 35-50.

[34] While some museum exhibits are temporary as well, the duration of World's Fair exhibits is intimately tied to the medium itself. Thus, it is at least worth noting that these displays differ from the permanent collections of museums.

since World's Fair exhibits are directed at a foreign population, and so rather than inspiring a sense of collective memory, they aim to introduce visitors to a particular representation of the nation. Despite these differences, the displays of international expositions employ similar techniques of self-representation and meaning making found in museums. Following these ideas, I have decided to divide my analysis of Soviet participation at each Fair into sections based on written and visual self-presentation in order to understand how the Soviets created narratives at the expositions, and how written and visual means communicated both complementary and contrasting ideas.

Recognizing the importance of narratives in how people make sense of the world and how they remember experiences, scholars affirm that exhibits are not solely a collection of objects, but a combination of narrative components that express a pre-defined purpose.[35] Like museums, the pavilions at International Expositions use a combination of media to tell the stories of a community, and by inspiring the imagination of visitors, suggest an image of a nation or community as a whole.[36] Of the forms of representation, written sources can provide some of the clearest articulations of the central themes and ideas of an exhibit. Written documents can be integrated into the exhibits as objects of display—such as books or the Soviet Constitution in 1937—and thus contain narratives or ideas, or they can mediate visitors' experiences of the objects on display, framing the exhibition or architectural design by presenting particulars in terms of wider ideas, themes or narratives.[37] Thus, assessing the written documents that framed the Soviet displays at each Exposition is imperative to understanding the ideas the Soviet

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[35] Chulani Rambukwella, "Museum and National Identity: Representation of Nation in National Museums," in *Building Identity: the Making of National Museums and Identity Politics*," ed. Yui-tan Chang and Suzanne Macleod (Taipei: National Museum of History, 2012), 39.
[36] Rambukwella, "Museum and National Identity," 39-40.
[37] Laura Hourston Hanks, "Writing Spatial Stories: Textual Narratives in the Museum," in *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, ed. Suzanne MacLeod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 31.

organizers hoped to communicate and the stories they wished to share. Two complex images of the Soviet Union were constructed largely through text, and subtle differences such as narrative tone played an important role in how those two images were formed.

While written sources played a defining role in how visitors experienced the Soviet exhibits, the objects on display were also integral to constructing narratives and contributing to the aims of self-representation. Chulani Rambukwella asserts that "objects are displayed to tell stories to the community in order to interpret and teach facts, truths and even beliefs inherent to various kinds of disciplines such as arts, culture, history, nature and technology."[38] The experience of objects, their placement and their relation to one another are all important factors in the formation and communication of ideas and stories. At both expositions, the Soviet selections worked together to form multi-faceted images of the Soviet Union. In 1925, artistic productions from the working people and the various regions of the USSR communicated ideas of the importance of workers and peasants and the multi-nationality, whereas samples of manufactured goods, a map of the electrification of the USSR and a display dedicated to the Stalin Constitution contributed to a narrative of Soviet progress and industrialization in 1937.

Scholars also recognize that architecture contributes to the narrative environments of exhibitions. Citing the Dutch pavilion at the 2000 World Expo in Hannover and the British *Seed Cathedral* at the Shanghai World Fair in 2010, Suzanne Mulder explains how the components of the pavilion itself can contribute significantly to the narrative of a display. Just as the Dutch pavilion symbolized "the possibilities and the necessity of an efficient use of space in the Netherlands," both the Soviet contributed to and communicated key ideas of the nation's self-representation—either functionally like Melnikov's 1925 pavilion, which used a multitude of windows to light the interior and make its contents visible, or cosmetically, like Iofan's 1937

[38] Rambukwella, "Museum and National Identity," 39.

pavilion, which served as a pedestal for Vera Mukhina's sculpture, *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*.[39]

Finally, scholars also discuss the importance of processes of interpretation in visitors' experiences of exhibitions. John H. Falk recognizes that the individual's identity and experience of an exhibit influences how he or she interprets the combination of works on display.[40] Indeed, Skolnick also acknowledges some of the difficulties in ensuring that visitors experience an exhibit as its organizers intended.[41] While understanding the intended narratives of Soviet self-representation is important, it is also necessary to consider the reception of each exhibit and how people interpreted its content. Thus, the final section of my analysis explains how people understood Soviet self-representation. Although some ideas resonated with visitors, reactions to each pavilion also show that visitors derived some unintended ideas, and, in the case of 1937, reinterpreted the Soviet presence in terms of a visual confrontation with the German pavilion it faced. Thus, reception and interpretation comprise the final step in assessing Soviet self-representation at the two Paris expositions.

[39] Mulder, "From Cathedral to Disneyland: Archetypes of Narrative Space." 134-137.
[40] John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009).
[41] Skolnick, "Beyond Narrative: Designing Epiphanies," 83-85.

Chapter I: Setting the World's Stage: Context of the 1925 and 1937 Expositions

Soviet participation in the 1925 and 1937 Paris World's Fairs cannot be understood in isolation from broader Franco-Soviet relations and European politics. Developments in Franco-Soviet political and economic relations, and tensions with foreign powers, such as the rise of Nazi Germany, shaped the motives for Soviet participation and the content of its displays. The narratives of each exhibit reflected both the realities of Soviet life and culture—or, at least, a carefully selected representation of these—and the state's relationship to France and other European powers. The images of a timid, peaceful Soviet Union in 1925 and a powerful potential ally in 1937 each responded to international relations and to the opportunities the Soviet leadership viewed in participating at each event.

Between 1925 and 1937, the Soviet Union underwent considerable political, social, economic and cultural change. In 1925, the Soviet Union was in a significant period of transition. Following the conclusion of the Russian Civil War, the Soviet state was left economically decimated and in a state of internal and external political tension. Further, the death of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in 1924 led to a power struggle, meaning that the first Exposition occurred at a time when the fate of the Revolution was still being decided. By 1937, the country's path was clearer. Stalin's ascension to power, and with it the adoption of the theory of Socialism in One Country and the Five-Year Plans radically changed the social and economic structure of the Soviet Union. The changes brought about by industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture made it so that the state on display at the two Paris Expositions reflected two very different worlds.

Likewise, Soviet culture also experienced significant changes, and by 1937 the narrow range of styles and themes deemed "acceptable" by the state contrasted with the relative cultural

freedom of the early-mid 1920s. In the 1920s, elements of the pre-revolutionary Avant-Garde persisted alongside multiple efforts to create a proletarian culture.[42] Further, the Soviets attempted to develop folk art and mass culture, recognizing these arts as means to communicate revolutionary ideals to the people.[43] In turn, "Socialist Realism" became the slogan defining ideologically correct Soviet art in the 1930s. Its articulation by Maxim Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, and its adoption as *the* only acceptable style of Soviet art, reflected Party attempts at establishing a distinctly Soviet style.[44] Zhdanov defined this new style as "reality in its revolutionary development. The truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image must be linked with the task of ideological transformation, of the education of the working people in the spirit of socialism."[45] Thus, Socialist Realism reflected not only Soviet attempts to define art and its representation of the world, but also to educate its audiences and assist in the actualization of socialism. In practice, however, ambiguity in its definition and difficulties associated with applying that definition to the visual arts caused difficulty in developing a uniform visual style.[46] Socialist Realism at the 1937 Exposition was most clearly represented by Vera Mukhina's sculpture, "Worker and Kolkhoz Woman", which crowned the Soviet pavilion, and several other sculptures and paintings, many of which placed the Soviet leaders, Lenin and Stalin, at the forefront. By exhibiting these examples of Socialist Realism in Paris, the organizers attempted to turn its

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[42] Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 70-71.
[43] Alison Hilton, *Russian Folk Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 257-259.
[44] Andrei Zhdanov and Nikita Khrushchev, "The Party and The Arts," in *Readings in Russian Civilization: Volume III – Soviet Russia, 1917-1963*, ed. Thomas Riha (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 693-695. Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 56.
[45] Zhdanov and Khrushchev, "The Party and the Arts," 56.
[46] Susan E. Reid, "Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror: The *Industry of Socialism* Art Exhibition, 1935-41," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 2 (2001): 153-84, accessed October 15, 2015, http://www.jstor.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/2679538.

educational function to a new audience. Overall, these significant changes in the Soviet Union and its leadership form an important backdrop for understanding the changes in the Soviet state on display at the Paris Expositions. The impact of these developments was manifest throughout the Soviet exhibit in 1937, which will be addressed in greater detail below.

In terms of its political context, the 1925 exhibition occurred at a time of important transition in Soviet politics. The year prior to the 1925 Exposition saw several substantial changes. The death of the founder of the state and Party, Lenin, on 21 January 1924 gave way to an internal power struggle and conflict over the direction of the Soviet Union's development, and its relationship with foreign powers and revolution. Ultimately, the conflict between Leon Trotsky's idea of Permanent Revolution, and Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin's idea of Socialism in One Country led to Trotsky's resignation from his post as People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs in January 1925.[47] The 1925 Exposition occurred at a precarious time when the question of Soviet succession had yet to be resolved. The status of the Soviet leadership had a definitive impact upon Soviet self-presentation at the Exposition. Although the significance of Lenin as leader of the Revolution was noted in Fair documents and his image and name were present on works displayed throughout the pavilion, these documents also spoke of the Party leadership in collaborative terms. This is a point of contrast with the 1937 Exposition, where the image and significance of Stalin was central to Soviet displays and writings.

The character of Soviet foreign policy and Franco-Soviet relations shaped Soviet participation at each of the fairs by setting the tone of Soviet displays and their narratives, and the aims for participating. Economic relations and concerns with foreign hostility influenced Soviet expectations for the Expositions, which were viewed as alternative opportunities for the

[47] Claude Leclanche-Boule, "La section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," in *L'écrit: revue d'histoire des arts* 3 (1983): 46.

improvement of Franco-Soviet relations. The 1925 Exposition occurred at an important point of transition in Soviet foreign policy and relations. Following the First World War, France and Britain had condemned the Bolshevik Revolution, using both military deployments and the creation of a *cordon sanitaire* in order to contain Bolshevism and stop the spread of revolution. After the conclusion of the Russian Civil War in 1921, Western powers withdrew their military forces and resorted to peaceful, yet tense, coexistence with the Soviet state.[48]

Although industry across the former Russian Empire was crushed by the Civil War, the beginnings of Soviet industrialization and the establishment of the New Economic Policy made the prospect of trade with the Soviet Union increasingly attractive to France. Indeed, while attempting to establish diplomatic relations with European powers, the Soviet Union also sought to secure economic relations in order to gain access to new markets and foreign goods. The election of a British Labour party minority in December 1923 led to de jure recognition of the Soviet Union in February 1924, and elections in France in 1924 led to a similar result.[49] In spring 1924, the Cartel des gauches, the centre-left coalition led by Édouard Herriot, came to power in Paris. Under Herriot's leadership, the French reconsidered relations with the communist state, before finally offering the Soviet Union formal recognition in October.[50] Still, Franco-Soviet relations remained strained in this period. In their formal diplomatic dealings, French representatives met Soviet diplomats with harsh terms and even anti-communist hostility.[51] Despite these tensions, however, French recognition of the Soviet Union allowed for the reestablishment of diplomatic and commercial relations, and led to an invitation for Soviet

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[48] Michael Jabara Carley, "Episodes from the Early Cold War: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1917-1927," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 7 (2000): 1276, accessed February 10, 2016, http://www.jstor.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/155680.
[49] Ibid., 1276, 1281.
[50] Carley, "Episodes from the Early Cold War: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1917-1927," 1281-1282. Leclanche-Boule, "La section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," 46.
[51] Carley, "Episodes from the Early Cold War: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1917-1927," 1299.

participation in the 1925 Fair.[52] The study of Soviet involvement at the Fair reveals an alternative dimension of Franco-Soviet relations. Public enthusiasm for the Soviet pavilion and its displays, and the formal honouring of Soviet achievements through numerous awards showed French appreciation and understanding of Soviet life and culture. Understanding how the French received and understood Soviet self-presentation in each instance shows not only that the Exposition medium served as an effective means for communicating key aspects of Soviet life and culture, but also that French populations reinterpreted Soviet displays and their ideas.

The context of Soviet foreign policy and Franco-Soviet relations also played an influential role for the 1937 Exposition. Just as elections in 1924 were a determining factor in diplomatic recognition of the USSR and invitation to participate, the character of the political leadership in France in 1937 exerted significant influence upon the Exposition itself and Soviet participation. In the lead-up to the 1936 elections, French rightists expressed concern about the possibility of a Popular Front government, and its relationship to the Soviet Union. In March 1936, the Propaganda Centre of the National Republicans for the Struggle Against Socialism and Communism distributed letters warning that a Popular Front government would lead to war—both civil and international.[53] Despite these fears, however, Léon Blum and the Popular Front won the national elections in May 1936.[54] The Popular Front was a coalition of socialists, radical socialists and communists.[55] Although the French Left had supported a Franco-Soviet military

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[52] Leclanche-Boule, "La section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," 46.
[53] Centre de propagande des Républicains Nationaux pour la lutte contre le socialism et le communisme. Direction à "L'écho de Paris", March 30, 1936, Archives Nationales, Site de Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 20130148/13-20130148/15. The letter condemned the relationship of the Soviet Union with parties of the French Left and argued that France was in a very dire situation. The letters urged recipients to take action against the election of a Popular Front government.
[54] Karen A. Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3. Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 8.
[55] John E. Dreifort, "The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-37: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 217, accessed January 13, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/260258.

agreement prior to 1936, the election of the Popular Front government did not lead to an immediate alliance between the two states.[56] Rather, France maintained an open, yet cautious relationship with both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Thus, the impact of the 1937 Paris Exposition remains an important subject of investigation regarding Franco-Soviet relations. Karen Fiss has already covered Franco-German rapprochement at the Paris Exposition; however, the study of Franco-Soviet relations at the Fair suggests that Soviet attempts to secure an alliance through participation at the Paris Exposition were unsuccessful. [57] Although self-presentation as a peaceful nation was a core component of the Soviet narrative, French visitors largely viewed the Soviet Union as a potentially hostile state, or at least one that might engage in conflict with Nazi Germany.

The character of the Popular Front government also influenced how the French political leadership approached the planning of the Exposition. Although the Popular Front inherited the International Exposition project from the previous government, the coalition government made significant changes to the program and its purpose. The Blum government viewed the Paris Exposition as an opportunity to showcase its populist social and economic reforms. Further, regarding the influence of the new government on the fairgrounds, Fiss explains that "Blum and his allies, determined to link the Popular Front with progress and modernity, commissioned modern architects and artists, including such figures as Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris) and Fernand Léger, to design and decorate numerous pavilions at the exposition."[58] Thus, the Popular Front exerted significant control over the Exposition, and, given its socialist leanings, must be considered in relation to the Soviet displays at the Fair. It must be noted, however, that Blum resigned one month after the official inauguration of the Exposition,

[56] Dreifort, "The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-37," 217.
[57] Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 9-44.
[58] Ibid., 3-4.

signaling the decline of the Popular Front movement.[59] This shift in French government influenced how the Soviet displays were received and how Franco-Soviet relations developed following the Exposition.

At a more popular level, French perceptions of the Soviet Union during the years between the two Expositions also provide important context for understanding their responses to the Soviet pavilion in 1937. In particular, French intellectuals responded with both support and condemnation to the changes made under Stalinist rule. Henri Barbusse, literary director of *L'Humanité* to 1929 and director of the review *Monde* from 1928, published *Russie* in 1930, praising the agricultural, industrial and cultural progress of the Soviet Union. Despite Barbusse's praise, other works in France and throughout Europe began to condemn the emerging Stalinist system and its abuses. A December 1930 tract by Louis Aragon and Georges Sadoul addressed the trial of the saboteurs in Moscow, showing disillusionment with the Soviet project.[60] In the 1930s, the Soviets increased efforts to sway Western opinion by inviting intellectuals, professors, theologians, musicians, writers, artists and critics to experience Soviet life and culture.[61] Many of these visits resulted in foreign endorsements of the society under construction in the USSR; however, praise of the Soviet system was not unanimous, and some of these expeditions to the socialist state resulted in harsh criticism and disillusionment. Critical to the French case, French writer André Gide's excursion to the USSR resulted in the publication of *Return From the USSR*, wherein the former supporter of the Soviet state criticized its "cultural sterility and growing social inequality."[62] Published in 1936, Gide's extensive critique entered the French

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[59] Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 4.
[60] Sarah Wilson, "The Soviet Pavilion in Paris," in *Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992* eds. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 1993): 108.
[61] Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 38.
[62] Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 41.

consciousness shortly before the Paris Exposition and the publication of a revised volume, *Retouches à mon retour de l'U.R.S.S.,* in 1937 ensured that Gide's ideas were a topic of discussion in French newspapers well into 1937.[63] Combined with news of the Soviet purges, the Soviet display in Paris faced considerable skepticism and opposition.[64]

In the more immediate context of the Paris Exposition, knowledge of the Moscow show trials reached Paris by late August 1936. This news provoked critical responses, and on 3 September French writer André Breton spoke out in a speech titled "The Truth about the Moscow Trials" at a meeting at La Mutualité, a conference hall in Paris. Breton denounced "the trials of Zinoviev, Kamenev and their followers as 'abominable and inexpiable crimes,' " and called for an investigation by the Vigilance Committee for Intellectuals, a French left-wing anti-fascist political organization. In contrast to Breton's speech, however, some groups continued to support the Soviet Union and defended the show trials. Members of the pro-Communist Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists were also in attendance at the meeting and they insisted upon, "the victims' betrayal of the state and their legitimate punishment."[65] Debates over the show trials and the Soviet project as a whole showed that the Soviet display in 1937 would open to a divided audience. Writings and speeches influenced French perceptions of the Soviet Union; however, the Soviet pavilion played a role in validating or debunking these ideas.

Soviet attitudes towards Europe and the world also provide important context in relation to Soviet cultural diplomacy and the two Paris Expositions. Between their invitation to join the 1925 Paris Exposition and the conclusion of the 1937 Exposition, Soviet attitudes and official

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[63] La Girouette, "Touches et retouches," *Le Figaro*, July 3, 1937, accessed March 15, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k409538w/f5.item.r=pavillon%20U. "L'expérience russe de M. André Gide," *Le Figaro*, August 21, 1937, accessed March 15, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k409588m/f5.item.r=pavillon%20U.
[64] "Les executions continuent en U.R.S.S.," *Le Figaro*, July 21, 1937, accessed March 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k409556t/f3.item.r=pavillon%20U.
[65] Wilson, "The Soviet Pavilion in Paris," 108-109.

policies towards the outside world shifted considerably. Many of these transformations were in response to the rise and establishment of the Stalinist system. Soviet foreign policy aims responded to the shifts in domestic policies and the policy-making processes of different periods.[66] Bolshevik leadership and high politics changed considerably in the years between the Paris Expositions, and these changes influenced the aims of Soviet participation.

Scholars have characterized early Soviet foreign policy as a "dual policy," comprising on the one hand, policies related to the USSR as a state in the traditional sense, and on the other, policies linked to the goal of world revolution. The Russian Civil War and foreign intervention caused Bolshevik leaders—especially Lenin and Stalin—to increasingly consider policies related to national interests and requirements: expelling foreign troops and thereafter cooperating with capitalist governments upon a set of key political, military and economic issues.[67] On the revolutionary front, the Communist International (Comintern) was one of the key instruments for the Bolsheviks to advance their aims abroad. Formed in 1919, the Communist International played a central role in Soviet foreign policy. From its second congress in July-August 1920, the Comintern aimed to represent the international proletariat and to offer a supra-national organization for the coordination and mobilization of Europe's communist parties and organizations.[68] Thus, in the early years of its activity, the Comintern advanced the goal of world

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[66] Erik P. Hoffman, "Soviet Foreign Policy Aims and Accomplishments from Lenin to Brezhnev," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 36, no. 4 (1987): 13, accessed February 20, 2016, http://www.jstor.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/1173830.

[67] Hoffman, "Soviet Foreign Policy Aims," 13. E. H. Carr, "Early Soviet Diplomacy," in *Understanding Soviet Foreign Policy: Readings and Documents*, ed. Vladimir Wozniuk (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990), 44-47.

[68] Jean-François Fayet, "Paul Levi and the Turning Point of 1921: Bolshevik Emissaries and International Discipline in the Time of Lenin," in *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917-53*, ed. Norma LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 105-23. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95-100.

revolution, providing a "revolutionary" front to foreign policy while the Soviets were still engaged in civil war and the Soviet-Polish war of 1920.[69]

The 1925 Exposition occurred at a definitive point of transition in Soviet foreign policy because it was also a transitional period in Soviet leadership. The revolutionary state's attitudes towards foreign nations were reflected in the Soviet Constitution of 1924, which expressed hopes for a worldwide socialist revolution. Guaranteeing the equal rights of the Soviet people and the right of any nation to join the Union, the Constitution asserted:

> that the new federal state will be worthy of the crowning principles laid down as early as October 1917, of the pacific co-existence and fraternal collaboration of peoples, that it will serve as a bulwark against the capitalistic world and mark a new decisive step towards the union of workers of all countries in one World-Wide Socialist Soviet Republic.[70]

Although it did not adopt a position of armed hostility against foreign nations, the constitution still expressed opposition towards the capitalistic world. Despite this fact, however, any mention of Soviet hopes for a worldwide socialist state were omitted from Soviet self-presentation in Paris in 1925.

Under Stalin, however, Soviet foreign policy aims shifted considerably. Stalin repurposed the Comintern, redirecting its aims from world revolution to furthering domestic policy aims. Stalin's theory of Socialism in One Country inspired a turn inwards for the modernization and strengthening of the Soviet state. Erik P. Hoffman notes that between 1931 and 1939, Soviet foreign policy concerns focused primarily upon the possibility of a large-scale war and ensuring either Soviet non-involvement or securing an alliance with the winning side.[71] This concern about the international situation was one of the key themes of Soviet displays in 1937. The

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[69] Carr, "Early Soviet Diplomacy," 44-47.
[70] "The Formation of the USSR: The Union Constitution," in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 132.
[71] Hoffman, "Soviet Foreign Policy Aims and Accomplishments from Lenin to Brezhnev," 14-15.

Soviets presented themselves as both a nation interested in preserving peace and also a strong potential ally should war arise.

Soviet foreign policies responded not only to developments in France, but also throughout Europe and the world. Hitler's ascension to chancellor of Germany in 1933, the remilitarization of Germany and its aggressive foreign policies influenced Soviet foreign policy initiatives. While expressing openness to cooperate with Hitler, Stalin also attempted to create a French-Polish-Soviet security system in secret. However, the signing of a German-Polish nonaggression pact in January 1934 pushed Stalin to seek a political agreement with Western democracies.[72] Soviet involvement at the 1937 Exposition occurred against this backdrop of seeking to preserve peace, tension with Nazi Germany and seeking allies among Western democracies. As previously mentioned, the election of a Popular Front government in France did not immediately lead to a Franco-Soviet military alliance. Thus, the Soviet displays in Paris reflect both Soviet concerns about the rise of Germany and the Socialist state's attempts to secure an alliance with France—or any other willing powers. The Soviet exhibit in Paris responded to the global climate and Soviet foreign policy aims of the 1930s. The World's Fair medium served as a unique means of communicating these goals and sharing Soviet culture with the West, by allowing the Soviets to communicate directly with the French public and combining these foreign policy motives with representations of Soviet life and culture that portrayed a developing state concerned with the preservation of peace and the progress of humanity.

[72] Hoffman, "Soviet Foreign Policy Aims and Accomplishments from Lenin to Brezhnev," 14-15.

Welcome to the Exposition: Introducing the 1925 and 1937 Paris Expositions

The Paris 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes opened in Paris on 28 April and closed on 25 October and featured exhibits from 21 countries.[73] Its general regulations stated that only "works of new inspiration and of real originality"' would be admitted to the exclusion of copies of older styles. The works on display were divided into five groups, each divided into classes: architecture; furniture, which included furniture, ceramics, textiles and books; finery, which included clothing, jewelry and fashion; theatre arts and education.[74] Thus, although permitting a range of entries, the Exposition excluded pure visual arts such as paintings and favoured decorative arts over industry and technology.

Franco-Soviet relations and, in particular, French recognition of the Soviet Union in 1924 had a definitive impact upon the planning and completion of Soviet displays at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes. The Soviets did not receive their invitation until after formal French recognition in October 1924. This late invitation gave them limited time to plan and organize their display for the Paris Exposition, contributing to the late opening of the Soviet pavilion. Although the Paris Exposition was inaugurated 28 April 1925, the Soviet pavilion opened weeks later on 4 June.[75] Despite the late invitation and the resulting delay in construction and preparation, Leonid Krasin, the Soviet Commissioner General for the Exposition, insisted that Soviet participation was necessary to restoring Franco-Soviet

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[73] Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, "Paris, exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels de 1925," accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.mediatheque-patrimoine.culture.gouv.fr/fr/archives_photo/visites_guidees/expo_1925.html. Emile Humblot, "Les nations étrangères à l'exposition," in *Guide album de l'exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (Paris: L'édition moderne, 1925), 5. The *Guide album*, it should be noted, labeled Soviet participation as "Russian." A significant effort of Soviet participation in 1925 aimed at introducing French citizens to the new Soviet state and distinguishing it from the former Imperial Russian state.

[74] Leclanche-Boule, "La section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," 45-46.

[75] Ibid.

friendship and close cultural relations.[76] Claude Leclanche-Boule notes that Soviet preparations benefitted from previous experiences in self-presentation. In preparation for the First Exposition of Russian Art in Berlin in 1922, the organizers borrowed the formula for expositions developed by Sergei Diaghilev in 1906 for the exposition of Russian art in Paris at the Autumn Salon. This earlier exposition combined a wide range of art forms including painting, sculpture, modernist art, traditional art, architecture, poster art and ceramics. Further, the Soviets benefited from their experience at the 1924 Venice Biennial, where they displayed paintings and sculptures.[77] Thus, both previous experience at other international expositions and the late recognition and invitation of the Soviet Union played important roles in determining the form and content of the Soviet displays in 1925.

The architect Konstantin Stepanovich Melnikov designed the Soviet pavilion, a constructivist work that reflected both budget limitations and the revolutionary ideas of the Soviet Union (Fig. 1).[78] Melnikov's plans were selected after his work won First Prize in a competition organized by the Academy of Sciences of Art in Moscow.[79] The pavilion resulted from several stages of planning. Melnikov drafted seven designs before settling upon the final variant. The Soviets were limited in their budget for the Exposition and therefore Melnikov's designs and the materials used for construction reflected Soviet efforts to limit costs, while still presenting a distinctive Soviet architectural style.[80] Recognizing these limitations, Melnikov adapted his architectural plans to the purpose of the Exposition. Using a wooden frame and a

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[76] "Leonid Krasin qtd. in "SSSR i Parizhskaia vystavka 1925 g. Mneniia otvetstvenykh politicheskikh deiatelei" [The USSR and the 1925 Paris Exhibition. The Opinion of Political Authorities], (Moscow: Sviaz, 1925), 6-7.
[77] Leclanche-Boule, "La section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," 45-46.
[78] Konstantin Melnikov's Pavilion. Adolphe Dervaux, *L'architecture étrangère à l'exposition internationale des arts décoratifs: 42 planches* (Paris: Editions Charles Moreau, 1925), [No page number assigned] Planche 40.
[79] Ministère du commerce et de l'industrie, *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs: catalogue général* (Paris: Vaugirard, 1925), 679.
[80] S. Frederick Starr, *K. Mel'nikov, le pavillon soviétique, Paris 1925* ([Place of Publication Not Identified]: L'Esquerre, 1981), 82-86, 50.

multitude of windows to illuminate the interior, Melnikov insisted that the building was suited to the temporary nature of the Exposition: "why should a building whose function is temporary be given false attributes of the everlasting? My pavilion doesn't have to keep standing the whole life of the Soviet Union. It is quite enough for it to keep standing until the exhibition closes."[81] The result was, in fact, one of the most praised pavilions of the exposition. Situated on the south bank of the Seine, neighbouring the Italian, British and Turkish pavilions, the Avant-Garde characteristics of Melnikov's pavilion distinguished it from the Art Deco stylings of many of its neighbours. Indeed, Melnikov insisted, "it was necessary that my little building should stand out clearly amidst the shapeless masses through its colour, height and a skillful combination of forms."[82] Viewed from the front, the pavilion featured a wall of glass windows and a staircase that led to the entrance, above which were suspended the hammer and sickle. The plan of the pavilion was a rhomboidal form, "with two stairways slicing dramatically in opposite corners, dividing the structure into two acute triangles."[83] Indeed, triangular and diagonal forms were distinguishing aspects of Melnikov's design.[84] The distinctive style of Melnikov's pavilion inspired both praise and condemnation from critics and visitors alike; however, most importantly, it captured their attention and provided a striking visual introduction to the Soviet Union.

The Exposition Internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne opened in Paris on 25 May and lasted until 25 November 1937. It was the final French *Exposition Universelle* of the twentieth century and was considerably larger in scale than the Exposition of 1925. Budgeting and design began in 1929; however, the Exposition took its final shape under the

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[81] Konstantin Melnikov, qtd. in "Konstantin Melnikov: USSR Pavilion, Exhibition of Decorative Arts, Paris 1925," *Architectural Design* 61, no. 9-10 (1991): 31.
[82] Ibid.
[83] S. Frederick Starr, *Melnikov: Solo Architect in a Mass Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 93.
[84] Ibid., 96.

direction of Léon Blum's Popular Front government.[85] Along with a number of French exhibits, the Exposition featured displays from 44 countries.[86] Thirty million people visited the Exposition. [87] Nationalism, modernity and peace were key themes of the displays; however, interstate tensions played out in the World's Fair context, foreshadowing in the cultural realm the armed conflict that would break out only a few years later. Just as drama surrounded the construction of the Soviet and German pavilions, the visual confrontation between the two pavilions received considerable attention from visitors and the media, and the image of the two pavilions became one of the most iconic of the Exposition. The Italian pavilion, which Greenhlagh writes reflected "Mussolini's vision of himself as Roman emperor," and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, which depicted the bombing of the town of Guernica, were also regarded as highlights of the Exposition.[88]

The theme of the 1937 Exposition permitted a much wider range of materials and artworks for display. It extended beyond the 1925 Exposition's focus upon the decorative arts, opening itself "to all industries wherein the production presented an artistic character and clearly modern tendencies."[89] Through this broad definition, the Paris Exposition included not only a wide range of artistic and industrial products, but also a great and contrasting variety of representations and visions of modernity. In representing themselves, the exhibiting nations exported representative examples of their own social and political systems, and the future that each hoped to create. In this way, the 1937 Exposition served as a peaceful encounter between

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[85] Thomas G. August, "Paris 1937: The Apotheosis of the Popular Front," *Contemporary French Civilization* 5, no. 1 (1980): 43.
[86] Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010* (Winterbourne, Berkshire: Papadakis, 2011), 176.
[87] Sylvain Ageorges, *Sur les traces des Expositions Universelles, Paris 1855-1937: à la recherche des pavillons et des monuments oubliés* (Paris, Parigramme, 2006), 167.
[88] Greenhalgh, *Fair World*, 176-181.
[89] *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1925), 1.

communism, fascism and liberal democracy.[90] By 1937, the Soviet Union had made considerable progress in establishing its society, culture and industries, and so the "construction" of the socialist society and its ideal future formed much of its display.

In contrast to the hurried planning resulting from their late invitation to the 1925 Exposition, the Soviets were one of the first nations to accept the French government's invitation to participate in the Exposition Internationale of 1937.[91] Thus, they were able to more carefully prepare both the exhibits and the pavilion itself. Planning of the Soviet pavilion made clear that the building itself was given particular significance as a representation of the USSR and its culture. The original brief for the pavilion, dated 10 September 1935, affirmed a clear purpose for the building and its place at the Paris Exposition:

> The USSR pavilion must be considered as an exhibit in itself, expressing the expansion of socialist culture, of art, technology and the creations of the people, thanks to the socialist system. With its clear and joyful forms, the pavilion architecture must bear witness to the creativity of this system, which has promoted unprecedented development within mass culture and all man's creative capacities.[92]

In the image of the pavilion, the organizers of the exhibit wanted visitors to be exposed to not just a representation of Soviet architecture or arts, but all the key elements of the Soviet system. The organizers invited several leading architects to participate in a closed competition, before deciding upon Boris Iofan, the architect who designed the Palace of Soviets.[93] The resulting design of the Soviet pavilion, with Vera Mukhina's sculpture in Socialist Realist style, displayed an attempt to capture and communicate these ideas (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). A significant departure from Melnikov's constructivist style, Boris Iofan's pavilion consisted of a long, streamlined block

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[90] Ageorges, *Sur les traces des Expositions Universelles, Paris 1855-1937*," 164.
[91] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 491.
[92] qtd. in Wilson, "The Soviet Pavilion in Paris," 111.
[93] Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 201. Other architects invited to participate include: Moisei Ginzburg, Karo Alabyan, Dmitrii Chechulin, Vladimir Shchuko, Vladimir Gel'freikh and Konstantin Melnikov. Construction of the Palace of Soviets began in 1937; however, it was never completed.

and a tower that rose eight storeys high at its front. Although it included the main entrance to the pavilion, the tower also served as a pedestal for Mukhina's imposing group-sculpture.[94] Mukhina's sculpture of the male worker and kolkhoz woman represented the union of workers and peasants under Bolshevik Party leadership. Further, the forward motion of their dynamic pose suggested the Soviet Union's progress toward a communist future. The style of Iofan's pavilion and Mukhina's sculpture reflected a critical shift in the accepted artistic forms of the Soviet Union. As Melnikov's constructivist exterior reflected artistic currents of the 1920s and the NEP, by 1937 Socialist Realism was the only acceptable style, and this was reflected in the very exterior of the pavilion.[95]

The process of the development and construction of the Soviet pavilion in 1937 was influenced immensely by competition between the USSR and Germany. The oppositional placement of the two pavilions incited competition between the architects and planners behind each display. The amount of French aid given to each state shows both that the French organizers recognized that the confrontation between socialism and Nazism represented by the two pavilions would be a key element of the Exposition, and that France was willing to invest heavily in developing the pavilions of the two competing states. The initial French subsidies of 750,000 francs exceeded those offered for the construction of other pavilions, both national and foreign. Soviet and German planners each secured a 500,000 Franc increase before the Exhibition's Commissioner General, Edmond Labbé, capped the subsidies offered each nation.[96] Parallel to their competition for French funds, the two states also competed through the design and

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[94] Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (New York: Overlook Press, 2011), 133.
[95] Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, 133. Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 44-45. Greenhalagh, *Fair World*, 176-177.
[96] Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," 20-21.

development of their pavilions. The German architect, Albert Speer, admitted in his memoirs to viewing early plans for the Soviet pavilion and reworking his own design in order to counter the upward direction and height of Boris Iofan's pavilion.[97] Writing about the German pavilion, Speer conceded, he "designed a cubic mass, also elevated on stout pillars, which seemed to be checking this onslaught, while from the cornice of my tower an eagle with the swastika in its claws looked down on the Soviet sculptures."[98] Thus, the story of the development of the two pavilions was intimately connected to competition and the visual confrontation between the two pavilions. Although the contents of neither pavilion directly targeted the other, the tension between the crowning sculptures and the pavilions as representations of their political systems was central to how visitors perceived and received the two displays.

The processes of planning and constructing each of the Soviet pavilions were closely related to a combination of factors, including Franco-Soviet relations, Soviet foreign policy more generally, the budget and materials allotted for the structure and the favoured architectural styles within the Soviet Union. Melnikov's pavilion responded to the Soviet Union's late invitation to join the Exposition and tight budget constraints that prevented the use of expensive materials. Nevertheless, the constructivist style that characterized Melnikov's design also represented a statement about the uniqueness of the Soviet Union and its revolutionary character. In turn, Iofan's pavilion was the result of a lengthy planning period, an enormous budget and a competitive spirit. Organizers insisted that it should represent the USSR in all its dimensions, and the result was a structure that was unmistakably Soviet. Thus, not only did the two pavilions present two considerably different versions of the USSR, they also emerged out of contrasting conditions of planning and construction.

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[97] Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 60.
[98] Speer qtd. in Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 60.

Chapter II: Opening Remarks and First Impressions

Although only a small fraction of the total visitors to each Soviet pavilion was present for the inauguration ceremonies, these events provided significant moments of initial contact between the French and the Soviets. Speeches given by French and Soviet representatives showed not only how the Soviets attempted to frame the pavilions and their contents, but how French representatives interpreted these displays and understood Soviet life and culture. Echoing many Soviet themes and ideas, the French representatives also took part in the celebration of the socialist state, particularly in 1937, which marked the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Thus, at each event the inaugural speeches provided the first articulations of Soviet narratives, characterizing the aims of participation at each Exposition.

Inauguration of the Soviet Pavilion in 1925

The Soviet pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition was inaugurated 4 June 1925, following the opening of the Exposition on 28 April. In attendance were the Soviet ambassador, Leonid Krasin, the Soviet Commissioner General for the Exposition, Petr Semenovich Kogan, and the French minister of public instruction, Anatole de Monzie.[99] Both Krasin and Kogan spoke at the inauguration, each offering an initial frame of the Soviet exhibit by highlighting several of its key themes. Krasin and Kogan explained the rationale behind the selections for the Soviet displays by introducing French audiences to the history of the Soviet Union since the Revolution, and explaining how the domestic political situation had produced a profound impact upon the development of Soviet society and culture. Krasin stressed that in order to truly understand the

[99] Claude Leclanche-Boule, "La section soviétique à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de Paris," in *L'écrit: revue d'histoire des arts* 3 (1983): 45.

examples of Soviet culture on display, it was imperative to understand the social and political changes underway in the Soviet Union, because life and art were reflections of Soviet politics.[100]

Speaking first, Krasin appealed to his French audience by forming a link between France and the Soviet Union through appealing to a common theme: revolution. This effort to create a bond between the two states reflects David Nye's arguments about crafting a successful exhibit.[101] In both states, the advent of revolution had triggered massive societal transformations, and Krasin appealed to this fact in order to show that the two countries were similar:

> The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was born on the ruins of the old regime just as here, the French Republic was born on the ruins of the old regime in the era of the Great Revolution of 1789. The social and political transformations which constituted the essence of the Revolution of 1917 demanded enormous efforts and sacrifices from the proletarian masses of the Soviet republics.[102]

By highlighting the shared experience of revolution, Krasin hoped to make his audience more understanding of the issues facing Soviet society, and how they influenced the development of its culture. Krasin explained that, although each era inspires its own corresponding artworks and styles, the numerous internal and external issues that the USSR had faced in the period between the Revolution and the Paris Exposition meant that the creation of a Soviet art had taken a secondary place to dealing with the more pressing issues facing the emerging state: "The new art that should appear and is beginning to appear as a reflection of the great October Revolution of 1917 exists only in its first tentative forms and we later will be able to perceive its tendencies and aspirations."[103]

Although revolution was indeed a shared experience for the two peoples, Krasin affirmed that the October Revolution constituted a new type of experience. Unlike the French Revolution

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[100] Leonid Krasin, quoted in, "Un nom domine notre art: Lenine!," *L'Humanité*, June 6, 1925.
[101] David Nye, "European Self-Representations at the New York World's Fair, 1939," in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. R. Kroes (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1993), 57-58.
[102] Leonid Krasin, quoted in, "Un nom domine notre art: Lenine!," *L'Humanité*, June 6, 1925.
[103] Ibid.

and all other great revolutions, the Russian Revolution was unique because it was the first wherein the proletariat and the peasant classes played a central role. In emphasizing this contrast, Krasin introduced his audience to one of the key aspects of the Soviet narrative of self-representation in Paris: the focus on constructing an image of the Soviet Union as a state of workers and peasants. These two groups were the core of Soviet identity and the display in Paris aimed both to introduce visitors to the lives and culture of Soviet peoples and to present the Party as the vanguard of the working people and their interests. Turning from his focus on the Soviet people to the Party-led government, Krasin attempted to dispel fears that the USSR was a hostile state, insisting instead that the Soviet government aimed at several positive goals: peace and the friendship of all peoples, and the development of culture, the sciences, the arts and techniques.[104] These aims reflected both the beginnings of the Soviet turn away from world revolution and the themes of the Exposition itself.

Finally, Krasin drew a link between the artworks on display and the former Soviet leader, Lenin. Visitors, Krasin insisted, would find references to Lenin throughout the pavilion: "If you consider attentively the different objects of the Soviet section, you encounter a name that seems to pervade all of this diverse collection, the name of the great founder of the Soviet government, Lenin."[105] These references—"dominating" the books on display, and inscribed upon simple objects and the products of artisans—were, according to Krasin, a sign of Lenin's impact on the lives of Soviet peoples. Thus, although a new art style had yet to be created, Krasin insisted that references to Lenin and new revolutionary subject matter were proof that the former leader inspired the working classes in their artistic productions.[106] The extensive celebration of Lenin suggested the beginnings of a personality cult and, while communicating the importance of the

[104] Krasin, quoted in, "Un nom domine notre art: Lenine!," *L'Humanité*, June 6, 1925.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

leader of the Revolution to French audiences, it also placed increased emphasis upon the Party leadership as a whole—one of the key features of the 1937 exhibit.

Whereas Krasin's speech served primarily as an introduction to the Soviet Union and its brief history, Kogan focused upon the arts and their role in Soviet society. Kogan asserted that Soviet artists shared a common belief about the utility of art: "The artists of our country—and not only those of the left—have erected a principle and proclaimed with force this idea that arts consist in the construction of objects according to their use."[107] He continued, "That which is called 'art for art's sake' is somewhat ignored in the Soviet Union," affirming that all the Soviet arts were purposive, meant to serve life.[108] This stress upon the utility of art relates to the later development of the Socialist Realist style; however, it was also reflected in the objects that the Soviets chose to display. Falling under the umbrella of the decorative arts, many of the works on display such as embroidery, porcelain, and print served a purpose.

In addition to these speeches, the inauguration of the Soviet pavilion was also important because of demonstrations that occurred in support of the Soviet Union. Numerous newspapers reported the enthusiastic welcome offered to the Soviet representatives and their pavilion by groups of French demonstrators. Cries of "Long live the Soviets," "Long live Lenin" and "Long live Krasin" were followed by a chorus singing the *Internationale*.[109] This incident provided an example of the great enthusiasm that French communists and pro-Soviet groups showed for the pavilion and its display.

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[107] P. S. Kogan, quoted in, "Un nom domine notre art: Lenine!," *L'Humanité*, June 6, 1925.
[108] Ibid.
[109] "Un incident a marqué l'inaguration du pavillon des soviets à l'exposition des arts décoratifs," *Le Petit Parisien*, June 5, 1925, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606137v/f1.item.r=russe%20Sovi%C3%A9tique, accessed February 20, 2016.

Laying of the First Stone and Inauguration of the Soviet Pavilion in 1937

In contrast to the limited ceremony that surrounded the inauguration of the Soviet pavilion in 1925, a series of speeches given before the opening of the 1937 pavilion both drew public attention to the Soviet project, and provided an initial frame for experiencing the Soviet display. These speeches show the development of both Soviet and French ideas about the USSR's participation and display the celebration of Soviet life and culture that was central to the pavilion as a whole.

Prior to the opening of the 1937 Exposition, the celebration of laying the first stone of the Soviet pavilion served as an initial diplomatic encounter. On December 22 1936, representatives of both nations gathered at the site of the future Soviet pavilion. In attendance were Paul Bastid, the French Minister of Commerce; Edmond Labbé, the French commissioner general of the Paris Exposition; Paul Léon, the deputy commissioner general; Evgeny Hirschfeld, a councilor at the Soviet Embassy in Paris and deputy general commissioner for the participation of the USSR; and Gabriel Amand, the secretary general of the Exposition. Representatives of both states spoke in celebration of the event and of the Soviet Union's participation at the Paris exposition.[110] Hirschfeld spoke first, introducing the Soviet Union, and was followed by Labbé.[111] These speeches illustrate several key themes of Franco-Soviet diplomatic relations and of the displays

[110] "Pose de la première pierre du pavillon de la Radio et de celui de l'U.R.S.S.," *Le Petit Parisien*, December 23, 1936, accessed February 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6640527/f4.item.
[111] Eugène Hirschfeld, "Discours prononcé par M. Eugène Hirschfeld, commissaire général adjoint pour la participation de l'U.R.S.S. à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Exposition internationale Paris 1937: rapport général tome X* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1938), 286-288. Edmond Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Exposition internationale Paris 1937: rapport général tome X* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1938), 288-290. In Labbé's speech, he notes that Hirschfeld spoke in the absence of the Soviet commissioner general Yvan Mejlaouk, the Soviet deputy director of administrative affairs and vice-president of the Council of Peoples Commissaires, and that Hirschfeld was the Councilor to the Embassy of the USSR in Paris. Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 290.

of the Soviet pavilion. In particular, the comparative analysis of these speeches highlights which aspects of Soviet diplomacy and display resonated most clearly with French representatives. In retelling Soviet history of the twenty years since the October Revolution, many of the speeches stressed the immense progress of Soviet society, culture and industry. Further, these narratives assigned responsibility for these benefits to the Party leadership. What is significant is also Edmond Labbé's direct reference to Marxist ideas, which shows the French representative's attempt to appeal to the Soviet representatives and their ideology.

Hirschfeld's speech placed a strong emphasis upon recounting and celebrating Soviet history, a theme that carried through to the exhibition as a whole. Before discussing Soviet culture and works on display, Hirschfeld reflected upon the difficulties encountered by the young Soviet state, and its progress and achievements in the years since the October Revolution. In this sense, Hirschfeld's speech displayed similar form and qualities to the narratives that framed Soviet participation in the 1925 Paris Exposition. Hirschfeld's narrative diverged, however, in identifying the year 1928 and the start of the First Five-Year Plan as marking an important shift in Soviet development. Reminding his listeners that the goals of the First Five-Year Plan were accomplished in only four years, he affirmed, "we transformed our backward agricultural country into a modern state with great industry and perfected agriculture."[112] Hirschfeld's speech continued with praise of the Second Five-Year Plan and the ways in which the Soviet Union, the lives of its people and its industries were being transformed through industrialization and electrification.[113] Thus, a significant segment of Hirschfeld's speech expressed a familiar narrative of the Soviet Union's triumph over adversity, stressing the greatness it had achieved in the twenty years since the October Revolution.

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[112] Hirschfeld, "Discours prononcé par M. Eugène Hirschfeld, commissaire général adjoint pour la participation de l'U.R.S.S. à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S," 286.
[113] Ibid., 286-287.

Following his lengthy discussion of Soviet industrialization, Hirschfeld dealt with Soviet culture much more briefly. Like industrial production, however, he placed Soviet culture into a narrative of progress achieved under Party leadership. As an important and far-reaching change in Soviet life, the development and spread of education played a central role in this story of transformation:

> Tsarism left us with a population that was 75 percent illiterate, if not more. We have created countless schools, we have largely opened doors to the children of workers and peasants of all regions and all peoples; 27 million children—Russians and Ukrainians, Georgians and Armenians, Tartars and Bashkirs, Tajiks and Kyrgyz people, Yakuts and Mentsi, the children of tens of formerly backward, ignorant, half-savage peoples, now are educated, learn and enjoy the fruits of universal culture in their mother tongue.[114]

Citing illiteracy in imperial Russia, Hirschfeld established a point of contrast from which to stress the notable shift that occurred under Soviet leadership.[115] Further, by listing the various peoples of the Soviet Union, Hirschfeld portrayed the Soviet state as a multi-national union, wherein all of its peoples benefited from progress and education.[116] In relation to the spread of education, Hirschfeld also praised the Stalin Constitution as assuring liberty and equality for all citizens through its guarantees of work, rest and old age security.[117] Like education, the Constitution reflected benefits for the whole Soviet people and here served to contribute to an image of the Soviet leaders as benefactors of the Soviet people.

Lastly, but also significantly, Hirschfeld commented on the Soviet pavilion itself and Soviet participation at the exposition in Paris. Though refraining from providing specific details

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[114] Hirschfeld, "Discours prononcé par M. Eugène Hirschfeld, commissaire général adjoint pour la participation de l'U.R.S.S. à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S," 287.
[115] Literacy was one of the key themes of Soviet self-presentation in 1925, and again in 1937 the expansion of Soviet literacy was highlighted as one of the key themes of showing the benefits of Soviet leadership.
[116] The multi-national point is significant, because while I have noted many references to the Soviet Union as a multi-national state in materials related to the 1925 Fair, these references seem much less prevalent at the 1937 Fair.
[117] Hirschfeld, "Discours prononcé par M. Eugène Hirschfeld, commissaire général adjoint pour la participation de l'U.R.S.S. à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S," 287.

about the contents on display, he described the pavilion as a representation of Soviet life, work and culture:

> In its five sections, you will find objects, paintings, models, and diagrams that will allow you to judge the state of our industries, our agriculture, our sciences and our arts, material and spiritual culture. The pavilion itself, from its general structure, form and design attempts to symbolize the creative enthusiasm of our peoples, and their bold enthusiasm for a radiant future.[118]

Thus, Hirschfeld's speech revealed little about the actual contents of the pavilion, assuring his audience, instead, that the displays would allow visitors to experience and judge representations of the progress that occupied the vast majority of his speech.

In closing, Hirschfeld affirmed that the pavilion represented Soviet hopes for the future, and importantly for peace. In this initial speech, Hirschfeld clearly stated that one of the reasons for Soviet participation at the Exposition was for the preservation of peace in the world:

> It is with joy that we accepted the invitation to participate in the 1937 exposition, which, we hope, marks an important step in the collaboration of all peoples, like our own, who desire to live, work and progress in peace. It is to realize this peace that we continue to work in loyal collaboration with countries, such as France, that are also desirous of maintaining peaceful collaboration between all peoples.[119]

Hirschfeld's speech provided a clear articulation of one of the Soviet Union's diplomatic aims for participation in the 1937 exposition. Following his recounting of Soviet history and achievements, Hirschfeld insisted that the Soviet Union was not an aggressor, but a nation seeking peaceful collaboration. It is worth noting that Hirschfeld's list of Soviet accomplishments did not include reference to the military. By focusing upon the benefits that Soviet power had brought to the people and presenting the USSR as a peaceful state, Hirschfeld set the initial tone of the Soviet presence in Paris.

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[118]Hirschfeld, "Discours prononcé par M. Eugène Hirschfeld, commissaire général adjoint pour la participation de l'U.R.S.S. à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S," 287.
[119] Ibid., 288.

Following Hirschfeld's speech, the French commissioner general, Edmond Labbé, spoke, expressing a French perspective on Soviet participation at the Paris Exposition. In form and content, much of Labbé's speech mirrored that of the Soviet representative. Beginning with the First Five-Year Plan, Labbé praised advances in Soviet industry, agriculture and the creation of the collective farms, the development of transportation and communications, and the measures taken to satisfy the material and cultural needs of workers.[120] Thus, as a representative of France and the Paris Exposition, Labbé participated in the celebration of Soviet achievements. Labbé expressed openness to the visiting nation and acknowledgement of its successes.

What is perhaps most striking about Labbé's speech is his appeal to Marxist-Leninist philosophy by relating it to Soviet art and cultural production. Where Hirschfeld's speech contains only one direct reference to Lenin,[121] Labbé referred to Marxist-Leninist ideas directly, commenting on the place of art in Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and the significant social function ascribed to the artist in the Soviet Union:

> Marxist-Leninist philosophy has underlined many times that Art, the ideological superstructure, is a specific instrument for the comprehension and interpretation of reality. And the Marxist conception understands the comprehension of the world, not as its passive description, but as an arm of its active transformation. Nowhere is this social function of Art so clearly revealed as in the U.S.S.R., where it plays henceforth an enormous role in the education and organization of the masses. The Soviet artist does not conceive of his activity without the clear comprehension of his social function. It is not locked within the four walls of his studio. The horizons of his country are open to his eyes. Not only the study of surrounding life, but also participation in its formation has become an indispensable condition for his work.[122]

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[120] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Exposition internationale Paris 1937*, 288-290.

[121] Hirschfeld's reference to Lenin is in the context of discussing the electrification of the Soviet state. He states that the Soviet people have increasingly replace lanterns with light bulbs, "which our people call the "Illyich" lamp, from the patronymic name of the man who created our Soviet Union and who, first, initiated the call for the electrification of the country." Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 287.

[122] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 289.

Labbé's speech displayed a thorough understanding of the role ascribed to artists in the Soviet Union. His description of the artist's clear social function reflects the ideas of Socialist Realism first articulated at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. That this description of the Soviet artist came from Labbé and not Hirschfeld reflects the French representative's attempt to connect with the USSR. Whereas Hirschfeld spoke primarily of Soviet culture in terms of education, Labbé noted both the educational role of the Soviet artist and the importance of his or her participation in reforming the world through art. By taking Soviet ideas seriously and articulating them with understanding, Labbé showed his willingness to consider the special role of the Soviet artist and share these ideas with the French people.

Labbé's speech was also significant because of its reference to the Soviet participation at the 1925 Paris Exposition, which he linked to the new Soviet pavilion under construction. Labbé praised the design of the earlier pavilion, noting in particular its glass composition and use of diagonal lines, and described how it had inspired the curiosity of the exposition's visitors.[123] By recalling the positive reception of the former Soviet pavilion and praising its distinctive features, Labbé included the 1925 pavilion in his list of Soviet successes. Labbé linked this praise to the new Soviet pavilion under construction, noting the symbolic importance of the worker and peasant figures that would stand atop the structure.[124] In forming this link and recalling the positive response of visitors to the 1925 pavilion, Labbé expressed high hopes for Soviet participation at the 1937 Exposition.

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[123] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 289.

[124] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 290. The *Petit Parisien* article also drew attention to the pavilion's two figures as one of its most notable features. "Pose de la première pierre du pavillon de la Radio et de celui de l'U.R.S.S.," *Le Petit Parisien*, December 23, 1936.

In closing, Labbé spoke about the purpose of the 1937 Exposition and expressed similar diplomatic aims to those articulated by the Soviet speaker. Beyond its role as a forum for nations to display representations of their artistic, economic and social achievements, Labbé affirmed that the Exposition was a "manifestation of contemporary humanism," serving both the aims of peace and cooperation in human progress by its exaltation of human powers.[125] In stressing the importance of peace and cooperation as key themes of the exposition, Labbé echoed the closing words of Hirschfeld's speech.[126] Rather than making reference to the competitive aspects of the Exposition, Labbé reflected upon its role as a coming together of nations for a positive end. In this sense, the preservation of peace served as an explicit aim for both the French and Soviet visitors, and this stress on peaceful cooperation carried through to many elements of the Exposition. Another significant shared theme of the two speeches was their praise of the progress of democracy.[127] This aspect, however, was more complicated in the Soviet case. Both Hirschfeld and the displays and writings within the Soviet pavilion praised Stalin's Constitution as a symbol of democracy in the Soviet Union.[128] By giving the Constitution such importance, the Soviet Union attempted to frame itself as a champion of democracy and appeal to Western powers, France in particular, that ascribed great value to the ideas and practices of democracy.

The celebration of laying the first stone of the Soviet pavilion provided an opportunity for representatives of the Soviet Union and France to publicly express their ideas about the place of

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[125] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 290.
[126] Although Paul Greenhalgh notes that peace was one of the most common themes at World's Fairs, these explicit statements about preserving peace made by both representatives show that it is important. Other aspects of Soviet self-representation in 1937 reflect this aim of pursuing peace and stability. All of this reflects the influence of international tensions during the 1930s and the desire to avoid conflict. Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: a history of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010* (Winterbourne, Berkshire: Papadakis, 2011).
[127] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé, commissaire général, à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 290.
[128] Hirschfeld, "Discours prononcé par M. Eugène Hirschfeld, commissaire général adjoint pour la participation de l'U.R.S.S. à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S," 287.

the Soviet Union at the Exposition and the purpose of the Exposition as a whole. Both speeches shared many features, such as overviews of Soviet history and accomplishments; expressing hopes for peace and cooperation; and the praise of democracy. These commonalities, as well as Labbé's description of the Soviet artist, show common aims of both countries and a sense of openness to Soviet ideas and culture on the part of the French representative. Many of these central themes celebrated in these early speeches were further developed through documents and artefacts on display at the International Exposition.

Labbé spoke again at the inauguration of the Soviet pavilion in 25 May 1937.[129] This speech was considerably shorter than those that celebrated the laying of the first stone of the pavilion; however, it reiterated many of their key points. The twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the Soviet Constitution and the development of agriculture and industry were all touched upon as Labbé introduced fairgoers to the newly completed pavilion. What was new, however, was Labbé praise of the finished structure and of Mukhina's sculpture. Each of these, he asserted, demonstrated Soviet prowess in art and techniques of architecture, engineering and design. Thus, he identified the pavilion itself as a significant example of the key themes of the Exposition. Labbé insisted that a description of its contents would not do justice to the items on display, and he urged his audience to explore the pavilion and take in its varied examples of Soviet progress. In closing, Labbé linked the Soviet exhibit to the Exposition's wider themes of humanity, progress, peace and democracy, thereby encouraging fairgoers to

[129] Edmond Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé commissaire général, à l'inauguration du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Exposition internationale Paris 1937: rapport général tome X* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1938), 290-291.

consider the Soviet exhibit in light of these themes and as a positive contribution to their improvement and fulfillment.[130]

Preceding visitors' experiences of the USSR's pavilions and their contents, the speeches and ceremonies that surrounded the inauguration of each exhibit shared Soviet perspectives on the key themes of each Exposition. Like the guidebooks published in 1925 and 1937, Krasin, Kogan, and Hirschfeld wove their discussions of specific aspects of each display into stories about the Soviet Union, its development and its aims for the Exposition. Themes of progress and peace were shared by the speakers; however, even these short speeches displayed the differing characteristics that defined each exhibit. Where narratives of Soviet development led to (re)introduction in 1925, similar narratives led to celebration of the socialist present and future in 1937. Thus, like the more extensive guidebooks, these speeches suggested a way of interpreting the displays and imagining the place of their contents in Soviet life and culture.

[130] Labbé, "Discours prononcé par M. Edmond Labbé commissaire général, à l'inauguration du pavillon de l'U.R.S.S.," 290-291.

Chapter III: Soviet Written Narratives at the 1925 and 1937 Paris International Expositions

While Soviet self-presentation at the Paris Expositions took many forms—the pavilions themselves, artworks, books, charts and images on display—, written documents intended for visitors provided clear articulations of many of the key ideas and themes of Soviet self-presentation. Like the speeches at the inaugural ceremonies, many of the written documents available at each exposition told stories, placing particular aspects of the displays within a wider representation of Soviet life and culture. Further, these narratives worked together with the items on display to express the aims of Soviet participation. Though these guides were produced to supplement the visual experience of visitors, their functions as narrative frames and as written means of self-representation warrants a careful examination. Assessing them first will show both how the Soviets used literary means to communicate with their audiences, and a more careful examination of how the visual experience communicated more subtle, and even somewhat contrasting ideas. The themes of peace, progress and cooperation were important at both fairs; however, the tones and aims of each narrative differed, owing to changes within the Soviet Union and without. Acting as frames for visitors' experiences of the Soviet displays, the written works at each exposition aimed to mediate and guide viewers' interpretations of the pavilions and their contexts.

Framing Soviet Art, Life and Culture in 1925

The majority of written works in 1925 assumed that the French knew little, if anything, about the Soviet Union, its peoples, and its culture. Acknowledging the lasting influence of the former Russian state and how it shaped perceptions of the USSR, these writings considered both

the continuities and major changes of the years since the October Revolution in order to better introduce visitors to the developing state. In doing so, the guides appealed to sets of preconceived ideas the authors felt French audiences held about the Soviet Union and chronicled important changes and developments in order to better help readers imagine and understand Soviet life and culture. Focus upon the Soviet people and their artistic production was central to these writings and the displays as a whole. In order to dismantle conceptions of the socialist state that conflated it with imperial Russia, the exhibits emphasized the multinational character of the socialist state and introduced visitors to the lives and culture of workers and peasants. These efforts introduced visitors to a more representative vision of the USSR. Further, the centrality of the workers and peasants related to the ideology of the Party and the ideal state they were in the process of creating.

One of the most significant introductory materials was the description of the Soviet pavilion included in the Exposition's guidebook: *Paris Decorative Arts 1925: Guide to the Exposition*.[131] For many visitors to the Exposition and the Soviet pavilion, this introduction provided an initial frame for experiencing the Soviet displays and forming an understanding of Soviet life. Making a clear distinction, the booklet affirmed that it was not a Russian display, but one representing the Soviet Union.[132] This was one of the central themes and aims of Soviet self-presentation at the Exposition. Soviet writings and objects on display aimed to replace perspectives that equated Soviet and Russian with a multi-national image of the Soviet Union, which put the workers and peasants of various Soviet regions at the forefront.

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[131] *Paris arts décoratifs 1925: guide de l'exposition* (Paris: Hachette, 1925).
[132] Ibid., 266.

The *Guide* introduced the pavilion and its architect, Konstantin Melnikov, explaining that he had assumed responsibility for its design following a competition.[133] Further, the *Guide* provided an extensive description of the pavilion, its rooms and contents, allowing readers to visualize the Soviet display. Expanding on its opening statement, that this was not a Russian display, but a Soviet one, the booklet emphasized the multi-national character of the Soviet state and how works representative of the various Soviet peoples were on display. The Republic of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Belarus, Crimea, Ukraine and the Tartar region each had dedicated displays on the ground floor.[134] Their central placement, both in the pavilion's description and the building itself, gave the multi-national displays of the Soviet pavilion increased prominence. For visitors with little prior knowledge of the Soviet Union, this description destabilized preconceptions about the Soviet Union as a predominantly Russian state and stressed, in turn, that the USSR was in fact a union of peoples, each with their own cultural products to be put on display.[135]

Complementary to its presentation of the Soviet pavilion, the Exposition *Guide* also included a similar description of the Soviet works on display at the Grand Palais. Whereas the description of the pavilion emphasized the multi-national character of the Soviet Union, in detailing the Soviet section at the Grand Palais, the *Guide* focused on listing specific examples of decorative arts on display such as the works of Soviet craftsmen, the *Kustari*, prints and theatre

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[133] *Paris arts décoratifs 1925: guide de l'exposition*, 267.
[134] Ibid.
[135] References to Russia, particularly as a means of distinguishing the Soviet Union from the former imperial state, were much more plentiful in other documents distributed at the Exposition. In its collection of essays, the booklet *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.,* made frequent references to old Russia most French citizens were more familiar with and highlighted the multi-national character of the Soviet Union in contrast. The booklet will be addressed below as an important framing device for visitors to understand the Soviet display. *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.*, ed. P.S. Cogan, Victor Nicolsky and J. Tugenhold (Moscow: [publisher not identified], 1925).

arts, stressing the idea that the decorative arts were a faithful expression of Soviet social life.[136] As such, the materials on display reflected a way of life, with works ranging from lacquered boxes to spoons, embroidery and drawings, which incorporated revolutionary inspiration into traditional forms and motifs. In order to complete its representation of this new way of life, the *Guide* also made reference to the spirit of revolution reflected in all aspects of Soviet self-representation. A room dedicated to art reflecting revolutionary tendencies, and Soviet stamps, medals and bank notes all demonstrated the emerging visual culture of the new socialist state.[137] By referring to traditional cultural products in relation to these official symbols of the Soviet state, the booklet reminded readers that the decorative arts on display were also meant to reflect aspects of a new Soviet culture.

The task of introducing the Soviet Union was perhaps most important at the 1925 International Exposition, when the Bolsheviks were still in the process of establishing the new state and most foreign conceptions of that country were formed with little or no first-hand experience of Soviet culture. In turn, Imperial Russia cast a long shadow over the Soviet Union and its display. For foreign audiences, Imperial Russia was familiar, and in 1925, the organizers had to take care to address that familiar Russia and distinguish it from the Soviet Union on display. Throughout Fair written materials and works on display, there was a strong tendency of comparison with the former imperial Russian state. In introducing the new state and its art, the Soviets made reference to the old Imperial state in three primary ways: to point out limitations and undermine the imperial state; as a point of reference in explaining the evolution of Soviet art and culture; and as a point of contrast to show great changes made since the Revolution. Through comparison and contrast, the authors acknowledged a starting point in the former Russian state,

[136] *Paris arts décoratifs 1925: guide de l'exposition*, 309.
[137] Ibid.

paid respect to its art and culture, and presented their own state and culture as something new and improved, yet unthreatening and grounded in the familiar.

The booklet, *The Decorative and Industrial Art of the USSR,* played a key role both in introducing visitors of the Fair to the Soviet Union and framing viewers' experience of the works on display.[138] A collection of thematic essays, the booklet familiarized readers with the USSR and its arts, such as painting, theatre and other decorative arts.[139] Further, the inclusion of articles written by prominent Soviet voices such as Anatoly Lunacharsky, Soviet People's Commissar for Education, and Olga Davidovna Kameneva, who became chairwoman of the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, or VOKS, gave legitimacy and significance to the works. The diverse collection of essays on Soviet life and culture provided readers with a range of introductory materials that shaped their experience of the Soviet pavilion by providing background information, and strong and consistent narrative threads that established a relationship between Soviet history, politics and culture.

The collection of essays made it clear that the exhibition provided an opportunity for visitors to familiarize themselves not only with artworks produced by the USSR, but the state and its people.[140] Indeed, representation of the people was a key point in these introductory remarks, as the exhibition claimed to represent not only high art, but the creations of workers and

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[138] *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.*, ed. P.S. Cogan, Victor Nicolsky and J. Tugenhold (Moscow: [publisher not identified], 1925).

[139] The essays included in the booklet are: P. Cogan, "Préface," 5-8; O. D. Kameneff, "L'Exposition de Paris doit aider à faire connaître l'U.R.S.S.," 9-14; A. Lunatcharsky, "Développement d'art dans l'U.R.S.S.," 15-21; Victor Nicolsky, "La Russie—pays d'art décoratif," 22-26; J. Tugendhold, "L'élement national dans l'art de l'U.R.S.S.," 27-33; N. Bartram, "L'art paysan et la petite industrie à domicile," 34-38; D. Arkine, "L'artiste et l'industrie," 39-47; Dm. Ivanoff, "La nouvelle porcelaine russe," 48-53; A. Lebedeff, "L'impression sur tissus dans l'industrie textile russe," 53-57; A. A. Sidoroff, "La graphique et la polygraphie russe," 58-67; Abram Efross, "Le théatre et le peintre pendant la révolution," 67-79; N. Docoutchaeff, "Trois tendances de la nouvelle architecture russe," 80-85; and D. Sterenberg, "L'école supérieure des arts à Moscou," 86-89, all in *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.*, ed. P.S. Cogan, Victor Nicolsky and J. Tugenhold (Moscow: [publisher not identified], 1925).

[140] Kameneff's "L'exposition de Paris doit aider à faire connaître l'U.R.S.S." is a key example of this effort to introduce readers and visitors to the Soviet Union.

peasants as well.[141] Further, works on display were selected from the various regions of the Soviet Union, showing how these different peoples and artworks were united by the Soviet state.[142] Thus, the collection of essays carried on and expanded upon the *Guide*'s statement that the Soviet display was not a uniquely Russian one, but representative of the different regions of the USSR and their peoples.

Writings on the Fair noted that Soviet participation in Paris followed a series of displays aimed at familiarizing Western Europeans with Soviet arts and culture. Placing the Paris Exposition in relation to two earlier expositions in Florence and Venice, Kameneva explained the significance of these fairs in introducing foreign citizens to Soviet life and culture: "It is by these means that we have managed to persuade a certain number of people that civilization in Russia was far from being destroyed under the communist government, and that on the contrary, work in the domain of sciences and arts has not ceased to continue."[143] Thus, a principal goal of Soviet participation in the World's Fair was to introduce foreigners to the works of the people and show that civilization continued to exist within the Soviet Union. Abram Efross also commented on this issue, stating that it was important for the exhibition to show Western Europe that there had been progress in Soviet art and culture since 1915:

> Our rupture with Europe lasted ten years. It was caused by the war and prolonged by the Revolution. Our ties with Western Europe were broken. The period of 1914-1924 surrounded us with barriers. It is in relation to France that we have felt this especially. France did not know anything of our art during this period. The reestablishment of relations seems to be based upon the assumption that we have not progressed since 1915.[144]

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[141] Cogan, "L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.," 6.
[142] Ernst Henri's collection of images, *U.R.S.S. Broderies Russes, Tartares, Arméniennes*, shows this diversity of display and will be discussed further below. The book shows examples of embroidered works on display from various regions in Soviet Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and the Crimea, as well as Tatar, Armenian and Azerbaijani works. Ernst Henri, *U.R.S.S. Broderies Russes, Tartares, Arméniennes* (Paris: Ernst Henri, 1925).
[143] Kameneff, "L'exposition de Paris doit aider à faire connaître l'U.R.S.S." 10.
[144] Efross, "Le théatre et le peintre pendant la révolution," 67.

Thus, the Soviets perceived the Fair as a suitable and effective opportunity to introduce Soviet life and culture to audiences that had been largely cut off during the last decade. The writings stressed the divide between the Soviet Union and Western Europe and that the Fair could allow Soviets to correct foreign misconceptions about their culture.

Throughout the various essays in *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.,* the significance of the October Revolution recurs as a principal theme. Beyond recognizing the origin point of the Soviet Union, the essays identified the October Revolution as *the* turning point in Russian life and culture, initiating significant changes that affected both the lives of Soviet peoples and the content and form of their art. P. S. Kogan,[145] in "L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.," linked the changes brought about by the revolution to the spirit and purpose of the Paris Exposition:

> It is, in effect, our Revolution that has accented this idea that art must, above all things, embody real life, that it must construct reality and that real beauty consists in the adaptation of the object to its destination. This is also the principle of the Paris Exposition of 1925.[146]

Thus, the October Revolution was framed as an event of great importance in the positive development of Soviet art.[147] By relating the Revolution's impact on art to the principle of the Exposition, the Soviets encouraged French and other visitors to view the Revolution in a positive light.

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[145] Although *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.* uses the spelling "Cogan," I have chosen to use "Kogan" to remain consistent throughout my thesis.

[146] Cogan, "L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.," 5. In some senses, this statement anticipates some of the ideas about Socialist Realism shared at the Soviet Congress of Writers. In particular, Zhdanov's statement that art must reflect "reality in its revolutionary development. The truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image must be linked with the task of ideological transformation, of the education of the working people in the spirit of socialism." Zhdanov's statement also reflects the idea of art influencing and constructing reality, yet with a much more specific purpose. Andrei Zhdanov and Nikita Khrushchev, "The Party and The Arts," in *Readings in Russian Civilization: Volume III – Soviet Russia, 1917-1963*, ed. Thomas Riha (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 693-695.

[147] Kogan does not, however, provide specific examples of what he views these changes to be, or of artworks that exemplify the characteristics of "Soviet" art.

Another significant appeal to French audiences in particular was to suggest a relationship between the Russian Revolution and the French Revolution. Efross discussed the two revolutions and their influence upon culture:

> Our revolution has certainly broken many windows, but it has also hardened steel. The memory of the life of art in France during the years 1789-1799 suffices to offer analogies. The fundamental properties of Revolutions have not changed. The Revolution has disturbed the assizes of our artistic civilization. It seems to have exposed its composing elements. The belles-lettres, music, the fine arts, and theatre have begun to live a life more or less particular. Each had its own fate. Sometimes these elements remain on the surface and bubble with the Revolution, sometimes they disappear in its depths.[148]

Tracing a link between the two Revolutions may have been part of an effort to show both states as having a similar history and to improve overall relations. By drawing this link and framing the Revolution in a positive light, the Soviets attempted to reject foreign views of the October Revolution as negative and hostile.

Related to the October Revolution as the origin point of the Soviet state and a turning point in the lives of its people, the Soviets also wove the period of Civil War and external hostility into a narrative of the Soviet people overcoming adversity. Kogan explained that the Soviet Union needed to build a new life while surrounded by hostile elements. Experiencing these hardships during the formative years of the new state had a definitive impact upon its development and the Soviets tied this impact to cultural production. Kogan explains that Soviet industries and arts experienced a renewal following the Civil War:

> With the conclusion of the Civil War, all the branches of industry were developed once again thanks to the feverish activity of Soviet Russia. It was also then that awakened the artistic forces of the Russian people who had remained for a while drowsy.[149]

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[148] Efross, "Le théatre et le peintre pendant la Révolution," 70.
[149] Cogan, "L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.," 6.

This renewal, he notes, was shown most strikingly by the speed through which the Soviet people, peasants in particular, changed the subject matter of their art in response to the new conditions of life. Regarding the cultural products of the Soviet people, Kogan explained, "The old methods were used for modern subjects and the breath of the new life enriched this art."[150] The subject matter of the people's artworks, rather than particular stylistic characteristics, was used as a measure of the changes in Soviet culture. By discussing the impact of the revolution on the cultural works of the people, the Soviets framed the Revolution as an event with positive consequences for the people. For the Soviets, the Revolution was not meant to be solely a change of the ruling elites. In order to communicate the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it was important to highlight the place of the people in the new state and communicate this to the viewers in Paris.

The Paris Exposition of 1925 afforded the opportunity to introduce French audiences to not only the new Soviet state and its art, but also aspects of Soviet and Russian society that the presenters argued were little known prior to the Revolution. [151] The booklet stresses the impact of the Revolution upon the people's art, and in turn argues that the Exposition would introduce the French to ordinary Soviet people:

> Before the Revolution, France only knew the opulent facade of the Russian monarchy. The French capitalists knew without a doubt that the soil of the enormous empire contained untold wealth and that it was a very advantageous place to invest their capital.[152]

Part of the Soviet strategy in introducing their audiences to their representation of the new Soviet state was to reject earlier conceptions of the Russian state as limited, and to propose their own representation as more inclusive of the various Soviet populations, the workers and peasants in

[150] Cogan, "L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.," 6.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Kameneff, "L'exposition de Paris doit aider à faire connaître l'U.R.S.S." 9.

particular. Kogan attacked the Russian literary tradition for its limited representation of society and the lack of focus on workers:

> French intellectuals had an idea of the "nest of gentlemen" ruined after Turgenev's novel, of the Karamazov family by Dostoyevsky, of the "Power of Darkness" from Tolstoy's drama, of Russian vagabonds from Gorky's stories, but the true face of the Russian worker of old was not known by anyone.[153]

Thus, in setting up a negative contrast, the Soviets emphasized the people as the basis of power and the true face of the socialist state. The Soviets, in their display, intended to highlight the cultural products of the people as significant in their self-representation abroad. This is particularly significant in relation to writings describing the Soviet Union as a workers' state or dictatorship of the proletariat.

These framing documents addressed a number of key themes in relation to early Soviet life and culture. It is clear throughout that the Soviet authors made a concerted effort to distinguish the Soviet Union from its Imperial Russian predecessor. Despite limited space for introduction, the *Guide* made it clear that the pavilion was not a Russian one, but representative of the Soviet Union as a multi-national state. The essays of *The Decorative and Industrial Art of the USSR* expanded upon this point, but also listed a number of achievements in Soviet society and the arts. Although visitors to the Soviet pavilion may have been familiar with certain aspects of pre-revolutionary Russia, Soviet written materials insisted that something new was on display, a product of the changes of the Revolution. Further, in their focus on discussing the arts and life of the Soviet people, these documents emphasized that the Soviet Union was displaying representations of a portion of Soviet and Russian society that was previously unknown to Western Europe: the working class. In presenting the art of Soviet workers, the Soviets also drew

[153] Kameneff, "L'exposition de Paris doit aider à faire connaître l'U.R.S.S." 9.

attention to the important place of the working people within the Soviet Union, and their relationship to the Bolshevik Party.

Celebrating the Anniversary of the Revolution: Framing the Soviet Pavilion in 1937

Soviet written self-presentation at the 1937 Paris Fair abandoned the strategy of collective authorship and exhibited a strong shift of tone. Unlike the collection of essays used to familiarize visitors with Soviet life and culture in 1925, the organizers favoured a more limited use of written materials and the use of an anonymous author. Further, contrary to the tentative character of writing and reliance on comparisons to the imperial Russian state that characterized Soviet documents at the 1925 Fair, Soviet writings at the 1937 Fair displayed greater confidence in Soviet identity and a celebration of the state, particularly because 1937 marked the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution.[154] Indeed, the Soviets seized on the anniversary to demonstrate the achievements of their regime:

> Twenty years of the Great Socialist Revolution have changed from the top to bottom the structure of the Country of Soviets: Science, Industry, the Arts, Techniques— everything that comprises the word "Civilization"— has reached, in the Country of Socialism, a high degree of development and has profoundly impacted the lives of the peoples of the USSR.[155]

Thus, rather than a narrative of contrast and progress from the imperial era like the documents of 1925, the Soviet Union in 1937 focused on its origin point in 1917 and celebrated the achievements and development in the twenty year span since the October Revolution.

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[154] The years 1917-1937 were engraved above the entrance in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Soviet Union.

[155] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 492.

Soviet self-presentation at the 1937 Paris Fair reflected new political and diplomatic aims. Whereas participation in the 1925 Fair sought to introduce foreign audiences to the Soviet Union and establish foreign relations, writings about the 1937 Fair argued that Soviet participation aimed at the preservation of peace, civilization and democracy:

> At a time when forces of aggression are unleashed throughout the world, and where the very existence of Civilization and Democracy is in danger, the USSR felt that all that contributes to progress, to the mutual understanding of peoples, and to peaceful competition and collaboration in the cultural and economic domains, serves the cause of Peace, which is so ardently desired by the masses of all countries.[156]

These goals were repeated throughout other Soviet writings at the Fair and aimed to resonate with visitors because of tensions within Europe and throughout the world in the late 1930s. In this sense, the Soviets displayed continuity between the two expositions in attempting to defuse tensions and present themselves in a non-threatening manner.

As they had at the 1925 Fair, the Soviets in 1937 propagated a narrative of overcoming adversity in the face of both internal and external sources of hostility. In both cases, these difficulties were used to accentuate Soviet achievements. The Soviets highlighted the Civil War and economic reconstruction as the primary fronts of these struggles:

> On the fronts of the Civil War and economic construction, the Bolshevik party has overcome the greatest difficulties, struggling against numerous interior and exterior enemies. It has led the peoples of the USSR to the triumph of Socialism, as reflected in the record of the twenty years of the reconstruction of socialist USSR.[157]

The successful overcoming of these struggles served as validation for socialism as a system of political and economic organization. Indeed, while the exhibit celebrated the achievements of the Soviet people, the accompanying writings stressed the centrality of the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, and of Lenin and Stalin in particular.[158] These writings stressed the

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[156] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 491.
[157] Ibid., 499.
[158] Ibid., 499, 514.

responsibility of Party leadership in the USSR's progress and achievements, thus attempting to provide justification for Soviet political and economic organization:[159]

> In showing visitors the results of the struggles and victories of the peoples of the USSR, led for twenty years by the Party of Lenin and Stalin, [...] the pavilion of the USSR reflects the national politics and economics of a country that is trying to achieve the grandiose construction of a new social regime, founded on the basis of socialist ideals.[160]

Thus, Soviet appeals to struggle and perseverance served to accentuate their achievements, and support socialism under the rule of Lenin and Stalin.

Within the Soviet pavilion, one of the most significant items on display was the Soviet Constitution. Its authorship attributed to Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Constitution played into the greater narrative of the Soviet Union as a defender of democracy. The first hall in the pavilion was dedicated to the Constitution, presenting its key articles engraved upon an obelisk. This presentation gave the Constitution a sense of immediacy and importance for viewers. The *Livre d'Or* described the Constitution as a symbol of the achievements of the USSR: "The Stalin Constitution, approved by the Eighteenth Congress of Soviets, is dedicated to all the conquests made by the peoples of the USSR during the twenty years of the construction of socialism, under the direction of the Communist Party."[161] This framing explains why the Constitution was given such prominence at the Exposition. In presenting to the democratic West, the presence of a constitution guaranteeing essential rights was used to counteract accusations of tyranny and exploitation.[162] Indeed, as in Labbé's speech at the laying of the first brick of the Soviet pavilion, the Stalin Constitution was celebrated as a manifestation of democracy in the Soviet Union. By

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[159] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 499, 514.
[160] Ibid., 514.
[161] Ibid., 496.
[162] In its description of the Constitution, the booklet explained: "The Stalin Constitution expresses the particularities of the socialist state: socialist ownership of land, factories, forests and all means of production; the end of the exploitation of man by man; the elimination of unemployment. In the USSR, work is a duty and an honour for all citizens able to work. The right of each citizen to work is guaranteed by the Constitution, along with the rights to rest, education, etc." "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 496.

presenting this positive achievement first, the Soviets made viewers more receptive to the other elements of the Soviet display.

Although the Constitution represented modernization of the Soviet state in its political dimension, Soviet writings also referred to the modernization of Soviet agriculture and industry. As in 1925, the organizers reminded readers of the largely agricultural beginnings of the Soviet state as a means of creating contrast and emphasizing Soviet achievements. Indeed, the booklet stressed that the objects on display were proof of the evolution of the USSR to a highly industrialized state with a strong technical base.[163] Though limited in its discussion of Soviet industrialization and agricultural reorganization, the *Livre d'Or* showed that it was important for the Soviets to portray their nation as industrially advanced and with a strong economic base. Further, the use of contrast contributed to the idea of Soviet progress, which reinforced the legitimacy of Soviet rule.

In both 1925 and 1937 written documents played a central role in shaping and expressing Soviet narratives of self-representation. In both cases, guidebooks gestured visitors toward specific aspects of Soviet displays and provided a lens through which to read the arrangement of cultural objects on display. As representations of the lives of Soviet people and their political-economic system, each display reflected a vastly different Soviet world. Progress under the leadership of the Communist Party was a key theme of each display. In 1925, constant references were made to the former Russian state as a familiar point of reference for visitors, and in order to show how the USSR had progressed. In 1937, with its theme of the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, references to tsarist Russia were almost non-existent. Rather, Soviet writings contrasted early Soviet society with the massive changes that had occurred under Stalin's leadership. References to the Party leadership were limited in 1925, owing in part to the period

[163] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 497.

of transition between Lenin's death and the ascension of Stalin. Fair documents placed much more focus upon constructing an image of the Soviet people. In 1937, by contrast, the role of Party leadership had a central place in Soviet writings. Finally, Soviet writings shifted in tone from 1925 to 1937. In their efforts to introduce French populations to Soviet culture after a decade of separation, these guides took a cautious, gentle tone, providing much clarification of how the Soviet Union differed from imperial Russia. In their celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, the Soviets expressed the central ideas of their display in a confident tone. This confidence also served to present the Soviet Union as a strong and highly industrialized nation.

Perhaps the greatest strength of these guides as means of literary self-representation was their ability to place contemporary achievements within the context of a wider narrative about the development of socialism and its impact upon all aspects of Soviet life. Unlike national museums, which inspire collective memory and develop narratives of progress through exhibiting artefacts from different periods of a nation's development, the International Expositions are very much focused upon the present, displaying the most recent achievements in industry and culture. Thus, although visual self-representation allowed visitors to experience the Soviet present and its developing future, guidebooks were the most effective means of highlighting the themes of the display and placing them within a narrative of development that justified the present state organization and leadership.

Chapter IV: Soviet Visual Self-Representation and Narrative

Beyond the combination of speeches and writings that framed visitors' experience of the Soviet pavilions, the works of art, cultural objects and other samples of Soviet life and culture on display formed the other key aspects of Soviet self-representation. These written frames highlighted specific components of the Soviet displays and constructed a set of narratives for understanding the pavilion as a whole; however, the displays themselves formed narratives in their own right, reflecting key aspects of Soviet life and culture. While the written frames suggested lenses for experiencing and understanding Soviet displays, individual objects and their relationships also created multiple layers of meaning, often in tension with the more explicitly stated ideas of Soviet written works at each Exposition. Clear differences in Soviet self-representation are identifiable when considering the 1925 and 1937 Paris Expositions. In terms of content, these changes stem in part from the themes and works permitted for display at each Exposition, as well as a shift in acceptable art styles within the Soviet Union. The exhibited works also reflected the shift in purpose of Soviet participation. From the cautious introduction to Soviet culture in 1925 to the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1937, the artworks and other items on display at each Soviet pavilion expressed many of the same ideas as the framing texts at each exposition. Sometimes, however, these selections altered or undercut key ideas expressed in the Exposition documents, showing that visual means of communication shared their own set of narratives.

Reflections of Soviet Life: Soviet Visual Self-Presentation in 1925

At the 1925 Exposition, many Soviet writings focused on introducing visitors to the life and culture of the Soviet people and on explaining how the Soviet Union differed from imperial Russia by focusing upon the developments and improvements that Soviet leadership had brought to the lives of Soviet people. The display, in turn, introduced visitors to the USSR and its peoples by providing visual examples of the people's works and displays, such as that dedicated to Gosizdat, the State Publishing House of the Soviet Union, which attempted to show evidence of the progress of the Soviet Union, and the benefits it brought to its people. Further, functional qualities of the Soviet pavilion, such as its windows and use of light, contributed to Soviet self-representation by making the items on display more accessible to passersby. Thus, the visual aspect of Soviet displays emphasized both the new importance of the Soviet people and the leadership of the state as it introduced French visitors to Soviet life and culture.

The constructivist exterior of Melnikov's pavilion echoed the idea of revolution. Like the socialist state itself, the pavilion was an outlier. Melnikov's experimentation with form reflected the revolutionary ideas of the USSR and the wider societal experimentation of the NEP period. The revolution contained within was of a very different sort, symbolized only by the image of the hammer and sickle. The use of windows and light also served an important function, however. By illuminating the interior, the windows also allowed passersby to glimpse the items on display inside.[164] Thus, the architecture also played a functional role, allowing visitors an initial glance at the objects that represented Soviet life and culture. Indeed, the openness of the pavilion suggested that audiences could look in upon socialism in its development before experiencing it first hand through the artefacts exhibited inside. The artistic productions of

[164] "Konstantin Melnikov: USSR Pavilion, Exhibition of Decorative Arts, Paris 1925," *Architectural Design* 61, no. 9-10 (1991): 31.

workers and peasants expanded upon written descriptions of the Soviet people, providing visitors with visual representations that fed their imaginations and contributed to new understandings of the Soviet state.

A key aspect of Soviet self-presentation was introducing viewers to an image of the USSR comprised of a collective of peoples. Thus, in line with the theme of the Exposition and the fulfillment of this goal, the displays exposed visitors to a number of cultural objects produced by the various Soviet peoples. In doing so, the exhibit allowed viewers to see the stylistic differences of works representing the various regions of the socialist state. Although focused primarily in Melnikov's pavilion, the USSR's displays were divided between the Soviet building and the Exposition's Grand Palais. Together, these displays provided a diverse view into several forms of Soviet decorative arts. Among these, porcelain, embroidery, and the works of the *Kustari*, or small artisans, made up significant portions of the display. These works represented the Soviet working people and selections from a multitude of regions helped to communicate the diversity of peoples represented by the USSR.

The display of works of embroidery from throughout the Soviet Union provides a significant example of how the Soviets used the decorative arts in order to introduce viewers to the idea of the Soviet Union as a collective of peoples and distinguish it importantly from existing conceptions of the USSR as merely a successor state to imperial Russia. The examples of Soviet embroidery displayed at the Soviet pavilion present a contrast to the works of high art and Avant-Garde cited in Soviet writings as characteristic of Western perceptions of the pre-revolutionary state. Although Melnikov's pavilion provided a substantial example of the progress of the Soviet Avant-Garde, the display of embroidery contributed to Soviet efforts to introduce French visitors to the lives and culture of workers and peasants. Drawing together examples from

multiple Soviet regions—northern Russia; central Russia; Ukraine; the Tatars; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Crimea; and Georgia—, the pavilion exposed visitors to the diversity of Soviet popular arts. Embroidered works displayed a number of different motifs, subject matter and colour schemes that showed clear regional differences. For example, although many embroidered works from northern Russia featured figurative depictions of men and women, examples from Ukraine mainly used floral motifs, showing different focuses in subject matter.[165] Further, some of the examples on display showed revolutionary themes and subject matter. A series of pieces from northern Russia featured red flags, a factory and an automobile, all representative of the new society being built in the USSR (Fig. 4). Through the multitude of contrasting examples, the Soviet display both constructed an image of a multi-national state and provided evidence of the turn toward revolutionary subject matter. These examples are significant not only because they show the cultural productions of the Soviet people, but also because they include works produced by Soviet women.[166] By including artworks by men and women, the Soviet display presented a more complete image of Soviet life and culture.

Although, as Alison Hilton notes, porcelain was "definitely not a folk or mass art form," artists adapted it in style and subject matter to the ideas and purposes of the new state.[167] Porcelain was, in fact, a luxury art. Like the other arts exhibited in Paris, however, some of the works of porcelain presented revolutionary subject matter. One such example featured the image of Lenin, a star, and the words "[those] who do not work shall not eat" (Fig. 5).[168] The plate with Lenin's image was displayed in the centre of four other works, each depicting different national costumes and artistic styles. The arrangement reinforced the centrality of the Soviet leader and

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[165] Ernst Henri, *U.R.S.S. Broderies Russes, Tartares, Arméniennes* (Paris: Ernst Henri, 1925).
[166] Ibid.
[167] Alison Hilton, *Russian Folk Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 268-269.
[168] Dm. Ivanoff, "La nouvelle porcelaine russe," in *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.*, ed P.S. Kogan, Victor Nicolsky and J. Tugenhold, (Moscow: [publisher not identified], 1925), 53.

suggested the important role of the Party as a link bringing the various Soviet peoples together. Other examples featured more subtle revolutionary themes, blending the image of the hammer and sickle with traditional floral motifs.[169]

Presented in the Grand Palais, the section of the *kustari*, or small artisans, consisted of a set of displays assembled by the Central Museum of Kustar Art. This section consisted of a diverse range of folk arts: female costumes; wooden toys, lacquer boxes and other sculpted wooden items, embroidery and decorated trays. Beyond representing the various regions of the socialist state, many of the artworks featured depictions of the new conditions of life and revolutionary themes. Trays illustrating a "Scene of a worker's life," "the village of today," and "the Red Army soldier" were displayed alongside a box dedicated to the subject of "the worker" and toys and dolls representing the "Nationalities of Russia," and "the children of the new Russia."[170] In providing visitors with a view to the diversity of folk art production in the USSR, the *Koustari* section also featured the central themes of the Soviet exhibit.

The combination of these examples of popular arts created a strong image of the diversity of Soviet people and of the artistic products of workers and peasants, the primary groups whom the Soviet state claimed to represent. Indeed, the quantity of works from numerous Soviet regions communicated a multi-national conception of the Soviet Union and the media on display introduced visitors to the Soviet people through their cultural productions. While written works at the Exposition did not directly provide a voice to the Soviet people, their artistic productions spoke multitudes about their lives, their backgrounds and what was important to them.

Simultaneous to introducing viewers to the Soviet people, the pavilion also contributed to the narrative of the beneficial Soviet state and its progress since the October Revolution.

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[169] Kogan, *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes: Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes catalogue*, 185, 187.
[170] Ibid., 82-88.

Constrained by the limitations of the Exposition, the organizers conveyed this idea of progress by demonstrating influence upon the development of Soviet culture. The publication of written works provided a particularly useful means of conveying this idea.

The first floor of the Soviet pavilion was dedicated to displaying Soviet literary works. Focused upon the products of Gosizdat, this section introduced viewers to a range of forms of Soviet publications. The display dedicated to Gosizdat also aimed to illustrate how Soviet power had made great efforts to expand literacy and make written works more accessible to ordinary people.[171] The section also served to develop the narrative of the Soviet Union overcoming adversity. By indicating pre-war figures in relation to Soviet annual literary production, the Soviet exhibit described how the First World War and Russian Civil War had decimated the Soviet literary industry. Although production only reached pre-war levels in 1924, the data suggested that Soviet production would continue to increase.[172] Despite this slow growth, the Gosizdat display conveyed the idea that Party leadership played a central role in the restoration of Soviet literary production and the idea that the spread of literacy and the increased production of written works would only continue under Soviet leadership. A. Rodtchenko's iconic image was on display, embodying this idea of the spread of books and literacy (Fig. 6). The image of the female worker and the words "books on all branches of knowledge" represented the idea of the dissemination of knowledge to all the peoples of the USSR.[173]

Like the narratives of framing documents produced for the exposition, the Soviet pavilion in 1925 focused heavily upon the Soviet people and the benefits brought by Party leadership. A

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[171] "Section des éditions d'état de l'U.R.S.S. Gosizdat," in P.S. Kogan, *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes: Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes catalogue* (Paris: Imprimerie Kapp, 1925), 39-44.
[172] Ibid., 39-40.
[173] Kogan, *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes: Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes catalogue*, 169.

diversity of examples, both in terms of popular art forms and regions represented, strengthened Soviet self-presentation as a multinational state and as a state representative of the people. By focusing upon the popular arts, the Soviets delivered upon written promises to introduce viewers to the Soviet people and their lives. Thus, Soviet writings and displays in 1925 largely complemented one another, working together to introduce viewers to the Soviet Union, through manifestations representing its peoples, culture and the state itself.

Socialism on Display: Soviet Visual Representation in 1937

The content of Soviet displays in 1937 was considerably more diverse. The Exposition's theme—arts and techniques in modern life—allowed for a wider selection of samples to represent Soviet life and culture. Further, inclusions such as the Stalin Constitution and Soviet machinery show that the Fair allowed the display of objects that could not be immediately classified as art, but that represented important aspects of the narrative about Soviet life that the organizers were constructing for their visitors. The sheer scale of the Soviet pavilion in 1937 continually increased through competition with its German equivalent, which allowed a greater space for displays, and, in turn, more objects on display.[174] The pavilion itself aimed to embody Soviet values. Vera Mukhina's sculpture, *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*, represented the union of workers and peasants and the importance of the masses within the Soviet state and its political system. Internally, the Soviet pavilion continued in the celebration of the achievements of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. As in 1925, the progress of the Soviet system and the benefits of Soviet leadership were emphasized. In 1937, however, emphasis upon Bolshevik leaders overshadowed focus on the people. The Stalin Constitution, displays on the

[174] Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 20-21.

Soviet sciences, industry and resources combined with other displays on Soviet life and culture to portray a confident image of the Soviet Union. Aspects of Soviet visual representation displayed tension, however, with the written materials accompanying the exhibit. While the ideas of peace and democracy were central to the exhibit, the displays of the pavilion also expressed Soviet military preparedness and, through limited representation of Soviet women and emphasis on Soviet leadership, undercut ideas of the equality of the Soviet people.

Unlike Melnikov's experimentation with form, which suggested ideas of revolution, the exterior of the Soviet pavilion in 1937 reflected instead the image of an established Soviet Union. Iofan's streamlined pavilion featured little adornment other than the group sculpture at its peak and a series of relief sculptures at its base. Acting as a pedestal, the Pavilion encouraged viewers to look upward at the figures of the male worker and kolkhoz woman. Unlike the contents of the pavilion, written materials did little to frame Mukhina's sculpture. The connotations of the group sculpture were clear, however. Onlookers could see the central importance of workers and peasants within the Soviet state. Further, the dynamic pose of the two figures suggested movement from East to West, progress and a view toward the ideal socialist future. In addition to Mukhina's sculpture at its peak, a series of relief sculptures decorated the base of the pavilion. These sculptures represented the eleven Soviet republics and depicted men and women in various forms of national dress engaged in both agriculture and industry.[175] These works combined the diversity of peoples with Soviet iconography to provide visitors with an initial image of a multi-national state of workers and peasants. Through its collection of relief sculptures, the exterior of the pavilion emphasized the centrality of the Soviet people; however,

[175] "U.R.S.S." in *Exposition international des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne: rapport général tome X* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1938), 207-212. "Les onze républiques sovietiques à l'exposition de Paris," *Le Journal de Moscou.* April 20, 1937, Archives Nationales, Site de Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 20130148/13-20130148/15.

the actual artistic products of workers and peasants occupied a much more limited place within the pavilion than they had in 1925.

The Soviet pavilion consisted of five rooms, each focused upon showcasing different aspects of life and culture in the socialist state. The first room was dedicated to the Stalin Constitution, and also featured tableau displays that introduced viewers to Soviet territories, natural resources and industries.[176] In its second room, the pavilion featured representations of the Soviet sciences, electrification of the Soviet state, and Soviet literary works. The second and third rooms exhibited displays on painting, popular theatre, sculpture and applied art, children, the peasantry and the Red Army. Finally, the fourth room focused upon all Soviet modes of transport and the fifth dealt with architecture and the transformation of Moscow and Leningrad.[177] Each of the displays expressed a strong celebration of Soviet achievements, particularly focusing upon the development of Soviet industries. Repeated references to the years 1917 and 1937 reminded visitors of the youth of the Soviet state and emphasized the accomplishments made in its twenty years.

The first room of the Soviet pavilion was dedicated to the Stalin Constitution, emphasizing its importance in the narrative of Soviet self-representation. Upon entering, visitors viewed a large obelisk engraved with the principal articles of the Constitution, and the profiles of Lenin and Stalin, reinforcing the central importance of the Party leadership in drafting the Constitution.[178] The central placement of the obelisk and writings dedicated to the praise of the Soviet Constitution ensured that visitors to the Soviet pavilion could not easily ignore it (Fig. 7). Instead, the display of the Constitution functioned as a celebration of the Soviet Union as a

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[176] Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: a history of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010* (Winterbourne, Berkshire: Papadakis, 2011), 176.
[177] Ibid.
[178] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 496.

democratic nation. Despite highlighting the rights guaranteed to each Soviet citizen—among these, the rights to work, to rest, and to education—, many other aspects of the Soviet pavilion undermined Soviet self-presentation as a democratic nation.[179] The placement of the images of Lenin and Stalin at the top of the obelisk, the very term the "Stalin Constitution," and the further emphasis upon Party leadership throughout the pavilion placed the Soviet leaders on a level above the people. In contrast to the German pavilion, which did not display images of Hitler or the Nazi leadership, the images of Lenin and Stalin were repeatedly displayed throughout the pavilion.[180] Thus, while the Constitution and the democratic ideas it represented played a central role in the first room of the pavilion, the message of Party leadership held a much more important place in the pavilion as a whole.

Although dedicated to Soviet arts, the final room of the Soviet pavilion also put the image of Stalin at its centre (Fig. 8). Many of the paintings depicted Stalin surrounded by groups of generals or workers.[181] Further, two sculptures by Sergei Murkhurov displayed the Soviet leaders, Lenin and Stalin. Although Murkhurov's first sculpture featured a seated Lenin, the second depicted Stalin standing straight and dominating the room.[182] Uniformed, with a floor-length great-coat and hand clasped to his breast, Stalin's image was reminiscent of Caesar.[183] The contrast between the two sculptures suggested Stalin's current position as the leader of the Soviet Union. The repeated centrality of Stalin's image elevated him above other Soviet leaders and

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[179] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 496.
[180] Heinrich Hoffmann, *Deutschland in Paris* (Munich: Heinrich Hoffman, 1937). Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 24.
[181] Sarah Wilson, "The Soviet Pavilion in Paris" in *Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992* eds. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 1993): 112.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Wilson, "The Soviet Pavilion in Paris," 112. "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 514.

simultaneously subtracted from the significance of the Soviet people and the country's self-presentation as a democratic nation.

Along with the central place given to the Stalin Constitution in the Soviet pavilion, the display also featured a stand with Marxist literature. Above, the names and faces of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were all displayed, tracing the development of socialist thought.[184] Further, forming this link visually gave increased legitimacy to the image of Stalin, which was so prevalent throughout the pavilion.

The second room of the Soviet pavilion focused upon representing the sciences through displaying examples of the Soviet materials industry and electricity. On display were examples of minerals and an explanation of the planning and process of the electrification of the Soviet state. On a map of the system of Soviet power stations Lenin's famous phrase was on display, showing the importance of electricity in Soviet conceptions of development: "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country."[185] Over the course of fifteen years, the Soviet project of electrification had gradually produced thirteen large power stations.[186] Lenin's quote expressed the significance of electricity within Soviet consciousness. Further, the Soviet decision to introduce visitors to the electrification project was important in showing both the level of development of the Soviet state and also in stating to viewers that socialism was not, in fact, a distant dream, but an achievable goal. The electrification of the USSR represented a monumental change in the lives of its people. The use of a map represents a strategy of self-representation that encouraged visitors to visualize how electricity changed Soviet society in all

[184] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 500.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

its vastness.[187] Through detailing the progress of electrification and framing it in terms of progress toward communism, the Soviets celebrated their achievements in the years since the Revolution, emphasizing both the efficiency of Soviet power stations and the benefits brought to the people under Soviet leadership.

Whereas folk art constituted a large portion of the Soviet display in 1925, its place in the 1937 pavilion, and the Exposition as a whole, was much more limited. In 1937 few states dedicated exposition space to popular arts. The Soviet Union, Switzerland, Romania, Hungary, Portugal and Poland were some of the few nations that displayed popular crafts. In the Soviet pavilion, boxes of inlaid wood, pottery, filigreed objects and designs etched in ivory exposed visitors to examples of popular culture.[188] That the Soviet Union reserved space in its display for the artworks of the people shows that some representation of the Soviet people was necessary to the narrative the Soviets constructed in 1937. Despite a heavy focus upon high art, industry and Party leadership, the display of popular art showed the relationship between the people and the Soviet state.

While the focus on decorative arts in 1925 ensured that the products of Soviet women were well represented, the representation of female artists in 1937 was much more limited. Significantly, Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* was one of the most iconic images of the Paris Exposition and the first example of Soviet art experienced by visitors to the Exposition. Within the pavilion itself, however, few works by Soviet women were on display. Out of around one hundred artists displayed in Paris, only seven were women.[189] The painter Ol'ga Ianovskaia,

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[187] David Nye, "European Self-Representations at the New York World's Fair, 1939," in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. R. Kroes (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1993), 60-61.
[188] Emile Condroyer, "À l'exposition l'art populaire tresse aussi ses guirlandes," *Le Journal*, Paris, August 29, 1937, Archives Nationales, Site de Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 20130148/13-20130148/15.
[189] Susan E. Reid, "All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 1 (1998): 158, accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2502056. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2502056.

graphic designer Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva, and the sculptors Vera Mukhina, Sarra Lebedeva, Ol'ga Kvinikhidze, Beatris Iu. Sandomirskaia, and A. Lavrova were each displayed, providing only a limited view of the arts of Soviet women.[190] Thus, although the exterior of the pavilion suggested the equality of Soviet men and women, workers and peasants, the reality of Soviet self-presentation reflected a strong preference for the works of male artists. Further, upon closer inspection of Mukhina's sculpture, Susan E. Reid detects subtle details, which she argues suggest that the male worker represents the " 'leading class' " of workers.[191] The smaller stature of the female peasant figure and its positioning suggest that it lags behind the dominant male worker figure.[192] Taken in relation to the contents of the Soviet pavilion, Mukhina's sculpture suggests not only a preference for Soviet industry over agriculture, but also for male artists and leaders as well. The limited representation of women at the 1937 Exposition displayed an important inconsistency with Soviet language of equality and democracy that surrounded other aspects of the Soviet display, such as the Constitution.

Although peasant life and culture played a substantial role in the Soviet display in 1925, the lives of Soviet peasants had changed significantly since the earlier Exposition. By 1937, the collectivization of agriculture had transformed the Soviet countryside. The display of popular arts played a limited role in introducing visitors to the Soviet peasant. In 1937, the narrative shifted and cultural products were largely replaced by images and examples of Soviet machinery, which helped to construct a narrative of transformation.[193] In the first room of the pavilion, a tractor with the words "Stalinets diesel" symbolized the advancements of Soviet agriculture and

[190] Reid, "All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s," 158.
[191] Ibid., 147.
[192] Ibid.
[193] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 492.

its machine industry (Fig. 9).[194] This shift in the means of representing Soviet peasants emphasized the productive efficiency and capacity of collectivized agriculture, contributing to the overall image of a strong Soviet state and the competence of its industries and political-economic system.

Within the pavilion, the message that the USSR stood for peace was prominent; however, in some instances it took on a strongly defensive tone. Like the theme of democracy, the theme of peace was expressed with contradictory tension. Several quotations attributed to Stalin were inscribed on the walls throughout, and expressed this relationship between preserving peace and defensive military preparedness:

> We will resolutely pursue the politics of peace with all our force and by every means. We do not desire one jot of another's land but we will not concede one inch of our own.
> We are in favour of peace and will defend the cause of peace. But we fear no threats, and we are ready to respond with blows to the blows of warmongers."[195]

In appealing to the preservation of peace and stressing that the Soviet Union did not seek to expand its territory, Stalin's words offered comfort to foreign viewers and sought to dismantle views of the Soviet Union as a potentially hostile nation. Simultaneously, however, the inscriptions expressed a strong defensive tone. While Stalin argued the Soviet Union would defend the cause of peace, and thus could be an ally against potential "warmongers", the words reflect a striking appeal to force when compared with other Soviet writings about the preservation of peace at the Paris Exposition. Overall, in its celebration of Soviet achievements, the pavilion stressed the strength of the Soviet Union, and Stalin's words expressed that they would defend these achievements, whether through forming an alliance or through relying upon the strength of the Soviet people and their industries.

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[194] "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," 497.
[195] Stalin, Inscriptions, Soviet Pavilion interior, 1937 qtd. in Wilson, "The Soviet Pavilion in Paris," 106.

The pavilions and their exhibits in 1925 and 1937 developed key ideas of Soviet self-representation, which both complemented framing texts with physical examples and complicated the overall narratives of the Soviet pavilions through multiple layers of meaning. The contribution of visual self-representation to Soviet narratives was considerably more complex and included some contradictory elements. Although written texts attempted to frame visitors' experience of the Soviet pavilions, the individual aspects of Soviet display, and how they interacted together, expressed different layers of meaning, and messages that were sometimes at odds with these written frames. In 1937, the key themes of democracy, equality and peace were undermined by elements of the display. Clearly, the notion of the leading role of the Communist Party, and the figure of Stalin in particular, dominated the Soviet display, shifting the focus from the workers and peasants, as suggested by Mukhina's sculpture, to the achievements of the Soviet leadership. Assessed together, the Soviet displays of 1925 and 1937 each represent contrasting versions of the Soviet Union owing major differences to the development of the state, its place in world politics and the political and diplomatic aims of participation at each Fair.

Chapter V: Reception of the Soviet Pavilions and their Narratives

Finally, an important component in understanding the successes and failures of Soviet cultural diplomacy in 1925 and 1937 is an assessment of the reception of Soviet displays at each Exposition. Written responses to the Soviet pavilions provide a means of assessing how foreign audiences perceived and understood what they saw. While the Soviet exhibits communicated certain key themes and ideas, visitors and critics responded to particular elements of each display and in some cases even transformed Soviet narratives based upon their own experiences. Writings about the pavilions represent differing perspectives; however, at each Fair some key patterns are identifiable in responses. This chapter will focus primarily upon French responses; however, it will also draw from some British and American sources in order to provide a wider assessment of reactions to the Soviet exhibits. In 1925, the Soviet pavilion received a mixture of praise and condemnation. For many writers the building itself was the highlight of the Soviet display. Its contents, by contrast, were viewed as markedly un-revolutionary and in tension with the modernist exterior that housed them. The reception of the pavilion in 1937 was considerably more complex. On its own, the Soviet pavilion was met with skepticism and received largely unfavourable reviews. Its reception was complicated, however, by its proximity to the German pavilion. Many visitors perceived the oppositional placement of the two pavilions as a confrontation between their respective political systems. References to the "totalitarian" displays were common in critical responses, as reactions to the Soviet pavilion almost always discussed it in relation to the German pavilion and its display. In this sense, the experience of visitors at the 1937 Exposition reshaped Soviet narratives.

Receiving Melnikov's Pavilion: Responses to the Soviet Display in 1925

The Soviet pavilion in 1925 received much public acclaim from the moment of its opening and by the closing of the Exposition, the Soviet Union had received 27 grand prizes, 32 diplômes d'honneur, 59 gold medals, 47 silver medals, 26 bronze medals and 18 mentions. France was by far the prime recipient of awards at the exposition—earning 732 grand prizes, 960 diplômes d'honneur, 1,282 gold medals, 1,126 silver medals, 745 bronze medals and 325 mentions—however; the Soviet Union received a similar number of awards to Austria and Italy.[196] Further, the French Commission established to evaluate the foreign displays awarded the First Prize to the Soviet pavilion.[197] These numerous awards showed that the Soviet display received a positive reception from the Exposition's officials; however, the responses of critics and visitors provide a clearer understanding of how people experienced the Soviet pavilion and what aspects of the Soviet display resonated most strongly with viewers.

The opening of Melknikov's pavilion was an important event for understanding how French audiences responded to the Soviet display in Paris. Both the highs and lows of French reactions were present in how people welcomed the pavilion, and how journalists wrote about the opening. The incident that marked the opening of the Soviet pavilion—with cries of "Long live the Soviets!"; "Long live Lenin!"; and groups singing the *Internationale*—showed that the pavilion received a warm reception from French communists and sympathizers; however, these demonstrations themselves were also the subject of criticism.[198] Anti-communist and anti-Soviet

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[196] R*apport général de l'exposition*, 121, Archives Nationales, Site de Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 20140260/34-20140260/54.
[197] S. Frederick Starr, *K. Mel'nikov, le pavillon soviétique, Paris 1925* ([Place of Publication Not Identified]: L'Esquerre, 1981), 108.
[198] "Un incident a marqué l'inauguration du pavillon des soviets à l'exposition des arts décoratifs," *Le Petit Parisien*, June 5, 1925, accessed November 23, 2015, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k606137v/f1.item.r=russe%20Sovi%C3%A9tique.

sentiment marked many of these reactions, and later writings on the Soviet pavilion. Much like its initial welcome, the Soviet pavilion's time in Paris was met with a mixture of enthusiasm and disappointment, praise and criticism. These varying responses ensured that it held an important place at the Exposition, and in the consciousness of French visitors. S. Frederick Starr notes that the pavilion's reception benefitted from the enthusiasm of the French intelligentsia for the avant-garde cultural products of the pre-revolutionary state. Further, the general ignorance of the French population about the USSR generated curiosity in visitors who flocked to view the cultural products of the post-revolutionary state.[199] The combination of these factors generated sustained interest for the Soviet pavilion, drawing in visitors who desired to see examples of Soviet culture and become acquainted with the socialist project.

Responses to Melnikov's pavilion show that many visitors and critics considered it a standout at the Exposition, though for reasons varying from praise to disapproval. Several French journalists reflected upon Melnikov's pavilion with great enthusiasm. *Le Quotidien* stated that the pavilion was "without a doubt the highlight of the Exposition," and *Les Annales* noted that, "French workers, without knowing Russia, were frenzied with enthusiasm."[200] In their recollections of the Paris Exposition, Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, who were both on staff at the British section of the Exposition, stated that the Soviet pavilion "expressed the aspirations of the revolution in an exciting and spontaneous manner. It was a constructivist and romantic building, built of inexpensive materials on a minimal budget."[201] These reactions show

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"Les autosaboteurs," *Le Figaro*, June 5, 1925, accessed February 15, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k294396z/f1.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets.
"Une manifestation déplacée," *Le Matin*, June 5, 1925, accessed March 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k575084b/f1.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets.
[199] Starr, *K. Mel'nikov: le pavillon soviétique*, 107.
[200] *Le Quotidien*, *Les Annales* qtd. in Starr, *K. Mel'nikov: Le pavillon soviétique*, 108.
[201] Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, *Arts Décoratifs 1925: a Personal Recollection of the Paris Exhibition* (New York: London/St. Martin's Press, 1975), 79.

that the Soviet pavilion resonated with many visitors; however, a significant portion of French critics expressed mixed views. For example, while noting that it was one of the most celebrated displays at the exposition, Gaston Varenne also observed that the viewer was struck by how strange and unexpected the building was.[202] The Figaro's correspondent, Simon Arbellot, in turn, found the pavilion "quite disconcerting"; however, he acknowledged that it was also "a symbol of a nation under construction, a civilization in effervescence."[203] The divided opinion of critics on the Soviet pavilion was captured in an article by W. Franklyn Paris in *The Architectural Record:*

> The most eccentric of these buildings is dividing the opinion of many who have stood aghast before it, some declaring it a practical joke on the Exposition and the others warmly asserting this monstrosity to be rich in symbolism and an advance in the direction of a new art millennium. This building is the contribution of the Soviet Russians to the new modern school and it follows closely the formula which banishes completely all curves and all ornament. A facetious writer in the Paris press hazards the guess that this edifice must have been completely constructed in Russia and then taken down, piece by piece, for shipment to Paris. It is quite clear, says this humorist, that some of the packing boxes were mistakenly labeled and that in reconstructing the Soviet monument the workmen have mixed up the various units.[204]

Paris refers to examples of the harshest criticism and highest praise for the Soviet pavilion, and shows that there was no unanimous position among critics. In one of the most striking assessments of the Soviet pavilion, Yvanhoé Rambosson compared it to a guillotine:

> On the banks of the Seine and in the shadow of the red flag, the Soviet Union has developed a stylization of the guillotine. Intended or not, the symbol is there. The supports, the scaffold, the basket represented by the glass cage and the blood spilled

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[202] Gaston Varenne, "La section de l'Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes" *Art et décoration: revue mensuelle d'art moderne*, July 1925, 113, accessed March 20, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5404254f/f133.item.r=Soviets.

[203] Simon Arbellot, "Á l'exposition des arts décoratifs: inauguration des sections soviétiques." *Le Figaro*, June 5, 1925, accessed February 15, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k294395k/f3.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets.

[204] W. Franklyn Paris, "The International Exposition of Modern and Decorative arts in Paris," *The Architectural Record*, no. 4, (October 1925): 376-379.

> everywhere. The author, Mr. Melnikoff, has forgotten nothing, or chance has served him well.[205]

Despite evoking this powerful image, Rambosson's critique of the pavilion's exterior was not entirely negative. Like many other reviewers, Rambosson described the pavilion as bizarre;[206] however, he affirmed that it succeeded as an instrument of publicity: "it attracts from afar, and those who pass beside it cannot ignore what it has on display."[207] Thus, Melnikov's design fulfilled an important function for the international exposition. Although it divided the opinion of critics, it captured the attention of the French population, and caused many to question whether its contents reflected a revolution in art to match the political revolution of October 1917.

Commentators frequently described the perceived tension between the contents on display and the modernist exterior that they were housed in. For example, addressing the relationship of Melnikov's design to the interior display, Varenne stated: "The interior of this official pavilion offers with the exterior, at least on the ground floor, the most amusing of contrasts."[208] Like many others, Varenne was struck by the Soviet decision to compose a display consisting largely of the cultural products of "Russian" peasants.[209] He asserted, however, that these artworks, drawn from all corners of the Soviet state, were reflections of the "Russian soul."[210] Varenne's assessment shows his understanding of Soviet efforts to communicate an image of a multi-national state, and the central importance of the common people. Other critics, however, responded with skepticism to the folk art displays and to written assertions that the Revolution had also revolutionized Soviet arts and encouraged their development. Indeed,

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[205] Yvanhoé Rambosson, "La participation étrangère." *La revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, no. 267 (June 1925): 172, accessed March 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k432553g/f179.item.r=soviet.
[206] Starr notes that the adjectives most frequently used by the press to describe the Soviet Pavilion were: "bizarre, curious, striking, and strange." S. Frederick Starr, *K. Mel'nikov: le pavillon soviétique, Paris 1925*, 109.
[207] Rambosson, "La participation étrangère" 172.
[208] Varenne, "La section de l'Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes," 114.
[209] Varenne, "La section de l'Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes," 114. Arbellot, "Á l'exposition des arts décoratifs: inauguration des sections soviétiques" 3.
[210] Varenne, "La section de l'Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes," 114.

Rambosson argued that the Bolshevik Revolution had not given birth to any new artistic expressions, except for printed materials, such as books, posters, periodicals and various leaflets.[211] Finally, Rambosson concluded that instability and significant changes to Soviet politics and society had harmed the artistic production of the USSR. He insisted, in turn, that Soviet artworks should be reconsidered in a few years' time once the political situation had stabilized.[212] Thus, Soviet organizers' decision to focus on folk art undercut their efforts to communicate their revolutionary conception of Soviet politics and culture. Visitors perceived a tension between the modernist exterior of the pavilion and the folk arts displayed inside. Those expecting revolutionary artworks were let down by Soviet attempts to revolutionize French conceptions of Soviet art by displaying the works of the common people.

Although ranging widely in their conclusions, reactions to the Soviet pavilion show that the Soviet display in Paris sustained French interest. Whether fueled by curiosity, interest in the socialist project or condemnation, the attention of French visitors and media ensured that it held a significant place in the Exposition as a whole. Written responses show that visitors perceived tension between Melnikov's exterior and the folk art that comprised the majority of the interior display. Although constrained partially by the rules of the Exposition, the contents of the Soviet pavilion failed to provide many visitors with a glimpse of the "revolutionary art" they felt Melnikov's pavilion promised. Some critics responded positively to the folk art, as a glimpse into the lives and culture of the real Soviet people. Many also regarded the Soviet display of books and poster art as one of the high points of the pavilion. Ultimately, official recognition of the pavilion through awards validated the display as a whole and the continued influx of visitors

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[211] Rambosson, "La participation étrangère," 173. Varenne and an article in the communist newspaper, *L'Humanité*, also commented favorably upon Soviet printed works. Varenne stated "It's in books and posters that Russian art seems most alive." Varenne, "La section de l'Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes," 114. "Krassine inaugure la section soviétique aux 'arts décoratifs,' " *L'Humanité*, June 5, 1925.

[212] Rambosson, "La participation étrangère," 174.

showed that French audiences were receptive to viewing examples of Soviet life and culture, and understanding the new state through its self-representation. Though not all of its key ideas were well received, the Soviet pavilion in 1925 represented an important first attempt to communicate an image of the Soviet Union, its peoples, life and culture. Twelve years later, Rambosson's wish to see the artistic productions of a stabilized and established USSR was fulfilled with the Soviet return for the 1937 Paris Exposition.

(Re)interpreting the Soviet Exhibit: Reception of the Soviet Pavilion in 1937

Like its precursor in 1925, the Soviet pavilion in 1937 captured the attention of French audiences in attendance. Its central location and imposing stature ensured visibility; however, the experience of the Soviet pavilion in 1937 shows how significant the placement of the pavilion and the perception of the viewer were in defining reactions to the Soviet display. Preconceived notions of the Soviet Union, its place in world politics, and its relationship to Nazi Germany and that state's pavilion all influenced how visitors and critics experienced the Soviet pavilion and its narratives. The constant comparisons and perceived confrontation between Germany and the Soviet Union shifted viewers' understanding of the Soviet Union away from a narrative directed toward France and its people to one of conflict with Nazi Germany. On its own, the Soviet pavilion received some critical attention, which addressed, for example, the imposing image of Soviet leaders throughout the display. The vast majority of responses show that the perceived confrontation of "totalitarian" states captured the imagination of French audiences, and that the Soviet display was constantly thought of in reference to its Nazi rival. Despite the excitement and enthusiasm that surrounded the Soviet pavilion, critical responses to Iofan's pavilion—both

treating it on its own and in relation to the German pavilion—displayed predominantly negative appraisals of the USSR's exhibit.

Unlike the mixed reviews of Melnikov's pavilion in 1925, critical responses to Boris Iofan's design and Vera Mukhina's sculpture were largely negative. Writing in the Christian-inspired *Sept: L'hebdomadaire du temps présent*, Jacques Lassaigne critiqued the Soviet pavilion based upon its relationship to the two themes of the Exposition: arts and techniques. In his discussion of the architecture of the Exposition, Lassaigne stated that the Soviet pavilion and the buildings surrounding it were indeed triumphs of technique, but not artistic triumphs. These buildings, Lassaigne asserted, did not complement the architectural grandeur of the Paris skyline.[213] In the *Paris Review*, Albert Flament attacked Mukhina's sculpture in particular, stating the two figures were "totally out of proportion" and they exemplified "the bad manners, the excess of pride, and the vain pretensions" that "make a distasteful impression on the French, an impression shared, in front of this audacious paroxysm, by foreign visitors."[214] Concluding his evaluation of the exterior of the Soviet display, Flament asserted that the pavilion failed in its propagandistic aims by creating such a negative impression in the eyes of the viewer.[215] Thus, the exterior of the Soviet display, which was intended to capture the key ideas of the USSR and its people, was criticized as an expression of the vanity of the Soviet Union and of overstepping the boundaries of "fair play" at the Exposition.[216] The immense stature of the pavilion and its relationship to the German one opposite placed the two in a league of their own beyond the other

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[213] Jacques Lassaigne, "Triomphe des techniques ou triomphe de l'art," *Sept: l'hebdomadaire du temps présent*, June 4, 1937, 16, accessed March 5, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65562181/f12.item.r=Pavillon%20des%20Soviets.

[214] Albert Flament, "Tableau de l'exposition," *Revue de Paris* 44 (15 June 1937): 948, accessed April 6, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k17697q/f234.item.r=flament. James D. Herbert, 'The View of the Trocadéro: The Real Subject of the Exposition Internationale, Paris 1937" *Assemblage* 26 (1995): 107, accessed March 4, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3171420.

[215] Flament, "Tableau de l'exposition," 948.

[216] Herbert, 'The View of the Trocadéro," 107.

foreign nations in attendance, leading to criticism of the two competitors.[217] Léon-Paul Fargue also expressed disapproval of the sculpture, noting that the figures appeared "tiresome and of an immensity a bit pointless."[218] While the Soviets viewed their pavilion as a key aspect of self-presentation, its reception by some showed that it failed to properly communicate an image of the Soviet Union as a state of the working people. Instead the style and scale of the architecture, combined with Mukhina's statue, communicated a vain image of the USSR that was offensive to several critics.

Despite the negative responses of many commentators, some reactions to the Soviet pavilion reflect efforts to understand the key points of the narratives crafted by the Soviet display. American Professor of Education, Carroll D. Champlin, in an article in *The Phi Delta Kappan*, commented upon the combined elements of the Soviet display, noting how Mukhina's statue, its figures and the hammer and sickle symbolized Soviet "energy and labor."[219] For Champlin, the most resonant aspect of the pavilion was the portrayal of Soviet industries through a combination of statistics, manufactured products on display and propagandistic posters.[220] Champlin's response reflects the organizers' attempts to present the USSR as a strong industrial power and also his efforts to draw together the individual elements of the display and to understand the key ideas of Soviet self-representation.

One of the few overwhelmingly positive responses to the Soviet pavilion came from the French communist newspaper, *L'Humanité*. In discussing the opening of the Exposition, P. Vaillant-Couturier highlighted the early success of the Soviet display. Vaillant-Couturier

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[217] Herbert, 'The View of the Trocadéro," 107.
[218] Léon-Paul Fargue, "Un flaneur à l'exposition: à l'heure où la féerie s'eveille," *Le Figaro*, July 24, 1937, accessed February 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k409560w/f5.item.r=Pavillon%20Sovi%C3%A9tique.
[219] Carroll D. Champlin, "The Cultural Contribution of International Expositions," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 20, no. 4 (1937): 116.
[220] Ibid.

affirmed that the U.S.S.R. had won the heart of Paris, and that some of the highlights of the pavilion included its models, graphics, photomontages and the map of Soviet precious metals, which displayed the wealth of the Soviet nation.[221] A second article, "Successful First Day," featured a lengthier assessment of the Soviet pavilion; however, it also provided a clearer expression of the pro-Soviet bias of the communist newspaper. The author affirmed, "Visiting the Pavilion of the USSR will be for each impartial mind a tangible and indisputable revelation of what socialism can do." Further, the journalist recognized that the pavilion represented the key Soviet themes of "peace, liberty and happiness."[222] For the writer, the Soviet display represented a window into the construction of an ideal socialist world. The articles of *L'Humanité*, with their uncritical attitude to all things Soviet, contrasted with other responses to the Soviet pavilion; however, this praise and repetition of key Soviet ideas aided in sharing a pro-Soviet vision with the newspaper's readership. *L'Humanité* offered a French voice for interpreting the Soviet display for the French workers and communists that made up its audience.

For all the extremes in responses to the Soviet pavilion, several French newspapers also expressed relatively neutral assessments, reporting significant events, such as the inauguration, with little commentary. The majority of the articles of *Le Petit Parisien* mentioned the Soviet pavilion only briefly, and often included it in a list of foreign displays. The newspaper devoted considerably more attention to other instances of Franco-Soviet relations on a formal diplomatic level, such as the "French Days for Peace and Friendship with the USSR," a meeting of 1,800 delegates at the Sorbonne, aimed at evaluating the Franco-Soviet pact and the development of Franco-Soviet cultural and economic exchanges.[223] One distinct aspect of the journal's

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[221] P. Vaillant-Couturier, "L'exposition est ouverte... et déjà les visiteurs affluent," *L'Humanité*, May 26, 1937.
[222] "Premier jour de succès," *L'Humanité*, May 26, 1937.
[223] "L'activité intense de la diplomatie française," *Le Petit Parisien,* May 9, 1937, 3, accessed February 10, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k664188v/f3.item.r=Franco-Russe. "Les journées françaises pour la paix et pour

commentary, however, was its assessment of Soviet cinema at the Exposition.[224] Journalists of *Le Petit Parisien* recognized that the pavilion, like those of Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Romania, and Denmark, had a room equipped for screening films, permitting the use of an additional medium of propaganda and of immersing visitors in Soviet life and culture.[225] André Le Bret's review of Iosif Kheifits and Aleksandr Zarkhi's *Baltic Deputy* is one of the journal's few responses to Soviet self-representation. Beyond a synopsis, Le Bret asserts, "this film—presented at the pavilion of the USSR at the Exposition—serves, above all, the purpose of propaganda and throughout it is an homage to the Soviets." Despite recognizing its propagandistic function, Le Bret also stresses that the images of the film "offer a harsh beauty and that the characters are admirably typed."[226] Thus, Le Bret's assessment moved beyond the political message of the film to recognize its aesthetic quality. The review is unique as one of the few considerations of Soviet film and also as a reflection on the political aspects of the Soviet display in *Le Petit Parisien*. In a similar vein, the articles of the right-wing newspaper *Le Figaro*, covered the Soviet pavilion in limited depth, recording factually events such as its opening and popularity with visitors.[227] Significantly, although in limited capacity, the articles of *Le Figaro* also participated in the wider trend of French journalism, which turned the oppositional placement of the Soviet and German pavilions into a narrative of competition.

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l'amité avec l'U.R.S.S.," *Le Petit Parisien*, October 24, 1937, accessed February 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6643559/f10.item.r=Pavillon%20Sovi%C3%A9tique.

[224] René Manevy, "Le cinéma à l'exposition," *Le Petit Parisien*, July 30, 1937, accessed February 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k664269v/f8.item.r=Pavillon%20Sovi%C3%A9tique. André Le Bret, "<<Le député de la Baltique>> Un beau film soviétique et une interprétation de grande classe," *Le Petit Parisien*, July 2, 1937, accessed February 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k664242h/f8.item.r=Pavillon%20des%20soviets.

[225] Manevy, "Le cinéma à l'exposition."

[226] André Le Bret, "<<Le député de la Baltique>> Un beau film soviétique et une interprétation de grande classe."

[227] "Le président de la république a inauguré hier l'exposition de 1937," *Le Figaro,* May 25, 1937, accessed March 5, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k4094978/f1.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets. "La grande foule a envahi l'exposition," *Le Figaro*, May 27, 1937, accessed March 5, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ark:/12148/bpt6k4094991/f4.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets.

Despite these Soviet-focused responses to the 1937 display, the vast majority of writings on the Soviet pavilion discussed it in relation to the German pavilion. The oppositional placement of the two pavilions generated numerous responses from the press, critics and visitors to the Exposition. Though it was not the intention of either the Soviets or the Nazis, the location of the two pavilions suggested a narrative of conflict and confrontation in the eyes of French viewers. Facing one another on the Trocadéro's esplanade, the pavilions were viewed as representations of two opposing states and their political-economic systems. Indeed, Udovički-Selb suggests that this was the intention of the Exhibition's chief Jacques Gréber, who designed the site-plan in 1934. Udovički-Selb argues "representing opposing totalitarian systems, the pavilions formed a triumphal gate framing the Eiffel Tower in compliance with the site-plan the Exhibition's chief Jacques Gréber (1882-1962) conceived in 1934."[228] Although presenting itself as a peaceful nation comprised a fundamental component of Soviet self-representation, French audiences responded to the aggressive elements of the Soviet display, and combined these with the placement of the two displays and the perceived opposition between the Soviet and Nazi systems. Competition had defined the development of the two Pavilions, and again the notion of competition defined how visitors experienced the two at the Exposition.

French critics established a relationship between the two pavilions by noting similarities, contrasts, and comparing the quality of the two displays. Through repeatedly making these comparisons, French critics developed a narrative of competition between the two pavilions. Covering the Exposition for *La Revue d'art ancien et moderne*, André Dezarrois commented on the explicitly political nature of the two pavilions, stating that in their grandiose and colossal

[228] Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 15.

displays, neither aimed to disguise its propagandistic aims.[229] For many French writers, these propagandistic aims entailed showing that one nation's political system was superior. Jean Rimaud's "Images of totalitarian civilisations" reflects this tendency to place the two pavilions, and their respective political systems in opposition.[230] Rimaud approached the Soviet, German and Italian pavilions critically, drawing each of them together as examples of "totalitarian" arts and societies. In addressing the presentation of the new Soviet world, Rimaud drew attention to some of the successes of the Soviet pavilion, such as its displays on the progress of agriculture and industry. By contrast, his criticisms of Soviet art, of the lack of displays on the Soviet family or the Soviet mother, and particularly of the pervasiveness of the image of Stalin outweighed the positive assessment.[231] Rimaud's critique shows that the Soviet display failed in its efforts to represent itself as a democratic nation. Rimaud asserted that the Soviet Union, like Nazi Germany, was a totalitarian state and that Stalin's pursuing gaze, which had "a ferocious violence," was one of the defining aspects of the Soviet display.[232] Other responses further developed the idea of confrontation between the two powers. An article in *Sept: l'hebdomadaire du temps présent* developed this narrative of conflict by commenting on the sculptures crowning the two pavilions: "The Pavilion of the USSR and that of the Third Reich face one another. They seem to confront one another in their gazes and gather momentum before throwing themselves on one another for one final clash."[233] Scholar of architectural design, history and theory, Udovički-Selb, also commented on this confrontation in his treatment of the relationship

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[229] André Dezarrois, "Les pavillons étrangers," *La revue de l'art ancien et moderne,* April 1937, 128, accessed February 22, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5780534d/f142.item.r=soviet.
[230] Jean Rimaud, "Images des civilisations totalitaires," *Études*, 1937, 83-89, accessed March 10, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1138060/f86.image.r=Pavillon%20des%20Soviets.
[231] Ibid., 85.
[232] Ibid.
[233] "L'aigle, la faucille et le marteau," *Sept: l'hebdomadaire du temps présent*, May 14, 1937, accessed February 17, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6556215s/f6.item.r=pavillon%20des%20soviets.

between the two pavilions, suggesting it reflected the hopes of many Western powers that the two states would engage in conflict:

> Much observed in the press, the perceived 'confrontation' of the Russian and German pavilions embodied emblematically the European democracies' secret hopes that war with Hitler might be averted if these two totalitarian giants could be pitted against each other.[234]

Within the perception of the French public, the cultural confrontation between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany served as an alternative battleground between the two states, and a potential preview of an armed conflict to come. Thus, the combination of the placement of the two pavilions, French preconceptions about the Nazi and Soviet systems, and the actual designs of each building, particularly the sculptures that crowned each, contributed the creation of a narrative of conflict between the two states.

The view of perceived conflict between the Soviet and German pavilions was so prevalent that it became the subject of numerous political cartoons. Notably, on 15 July 1937 the newspaper *Candide* featured a cartoon by the artist A. Dubout (Fig. 10). Dubout's image gave life to the sculptures atop the two pavilions, and depicted the Soviet figures and German eagle in a heated dispute. Further, Dubout's cartoon played upon the excessive attention given to the conflict between the two states: "It's still those two that are fighting."[235] By this point the visual confrontation between the two pavilions and its discussion in French media had become central to the Exposition. Dubout's image was not the only one to target this confrontation, however. A cartoon titled "On Ferme" depicted the German eagle and the Soviet worker and peasant reaching out in an act of shaking hands, as if they had been engaged in a sporting event (Fig. 11).

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[234] Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 17.

[235] A. Dubout, "À l'expo: c'est encore eux qui disputent," *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire,*" July 15, 1937. James D. Herbert, 'The View of the Trocadéro: The Real Subject of the Exposition Internationale, Paris 1937" *Assemblage* 26 (1995): 107, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3171420.

Captioned below, the comic reads "Good-bye, then!"[236] In contrast to the heated conflict of Dubout's image, Chanel's cartoon displayed civility between the two powers, reflecting the conclusion of an enduring conflict. Both of these images show that the relationship between the two pavilions remained significant in the French media and general consciousness throughout the Exposition.

In contrast to French responses to the Soviet and German pavilions, which continuously placed the two in relation to one another, Soviet and German journals isolated their respective pavilions, rejecting the tendency of comparison and the perspective of conflict.[237] By purposely not engaging with the idea of conflict between the two states, both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany focused instead upon their own narratives and avoided spreading this idea of confrontation within their own states. Further, the isolated coverage of each pavilion also avoided providing information about their competitor to domestic audiences. In doing this, the states asserted control over what aspect of the Exposition their audiences could access, and how their own displays with envisioned. How each state framed its participation at the Exposition for its own population is beyond the scope of the present research; however, it is worth noting that they did not import this perceived conflict.

French responses to the Soviet pavilions in 1925 and 1937 show that the Soviet displays in Paris each attracted significant attention from French populations. Whereas Melnikov's constructivist design grabbed the attention of visitors who were curious about understanding the Soviet Union and its display, Iofan's imposing structure and its central location primed it for attention at the Fair. Further, its relationship to the German pavilion shows how the French

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[236] Chanel, "On ferme," Archives Nationales, Site de Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 20140260/34-20140260/54. Unfortunately no journal title was indicated. The archives only had a clipping of the comic itself.
[237] Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 20.

public reshaped the Soviet narratives of self-presentation. The mixed reviews of both displays show that French audiences did not always grasp the central messages crafted by Soviet displays. Tensions between different elements of the exhibits and the preconceptions and expectations of visitors influenced which aspects viewers responded to and how they understood the components of Soviet narratives. Even with written documents framing Soviet displays, the experience of visitors defined how the various elements were understood. Many French critics commented on the tension between Melnikov's constructivist exterior and the folk art display within. In this case, Soviet efforts to redefine French conceptions of Soviet peoples failed to deliver the revolutionary art that many viewers expected. The imagined of conflict between the Nazi and Soviet pavilions shows the importance of external factors such as placement in how a World's Fair display is received. Key elements of the Soviet exhibit, such as repeated appeals to peace and democracy, were drowned out by viewers' reframing of the Soviet pavilion in terms of a conflict with Germany. Thus, the Soviet experience at each exposition attests to the difficulty of crafting a narrative through multiple visual and written media. Each Soviet display attempted to convey multiple messages; however, the experience of fair-goers shows how individuals responded to different messages, both intended and unintended, in forming their own understandings of the key ideas of Soviet self-representation.

Conclusion

The 1925 and 1937 Paris International Expositions each provided opportunities for the USSR to communicate new images of its state, peoples and culture to the French and other foreign visitors in attendance. Beyond providing audiences with representative examples of arts and industry, each exhibit suggested wider conceptions of the emerging socialist state at different stages in its development. In 1925 the Soviet Union remained in a period of political transition and economic instability; however, the Exposition offered a stage for the new state to make a powerful statement about its identity. Thus, the exhibit and its accompanying guidebooks were dedicated to introducing French visitors to the socialist state, its peoples and culture and to correcting false assumptions. 1937, in contrast, marked the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, and so the Exposition allowed the Soviets to share their celebration of progress and achievements with Western Europe.

As mediums of cultural diplomacy, these World's Fairs offered an unparalled stage for self-representation in front of a massive foreign audience. Indeed, the pavilions and their contents functioned much like theatres for displaying a number of interconnected narratives about the socialist state. Speeches, documents and objects on display all served storytelling functions and encouraged visitors to imagine a wider conception of Soviet life and culture. A number of key themes and ideas are identifiable in the stories constructed at each Exposition: that the USSR is a state dedicated to its peoples—the workers and peasants, and the multi-national peoples that make up the Union—, that Bolshevik Party leadership has brought progress and benefits to the people, that the USSR is dedicated to the cause of peace and cooperation with foreign powers. Each of these central ideas was woven into the narratives constructed at each Exposition through a combination of written and visual means of communication; however, they

were stressed in different degrees at each Fair and expressed in different narrative tones—modesty and confidence to match the functions of introduction and celebration.

While Melnikov's constructivist pavilion suggested revolution and experimentation of the arts, the documents and objects held inside affirmed that the Soviet revolution had a different focus: the common people. Soviet self-presentation in 1925 attempted to shift French views of the Soviet Union by exposing what was entirely new: folk art. Further, stress upon the multi-nationality of the USSR insisted that the nation on display was not Russia, but a collective of peoples, each benefitting from the guidance of the Bolshevik Party. Thus, Soviet narratives in 1925 primarily served the purpose of (re)introduction, aiming to improve Franco-Soviet relations through presenting an unthreatening image of the socialist state and its peoples.

If Soviet participation in 1925 focused on introduction, the theme of representation in 1937 was celebration. With twenty years since the October Revolution and considerable progress in the "construction" of socialism, the components of the Soviet display stressed Soviet achievements. Industry played a much more central role, and the example of the electrification of the Soviet Union served as an analogue for modernization. Although the preservation of peace was an important aspect of Soviet narratives, the celebration of modernization and industry also helped to present the USSR as a strong potential ally in the case of military conflict.

Despite Soviet efforts to construct narratives for visitors, the reception of the pavilions shows the central role of interpretation in determining the success of International Expositions as mediums of cultural diplomacy. In their experience of the Soviet exhibits, visitors' preconceptions influenced how they understood and interpreted the various aspects of self-representation. 1937 showed how the French public reinterpreted the Soviet pavilion in terms of its visual confrontation with the German pavilion. Thus, while the World’s Fair medium offers

nations a significant means of communicating with foreign populations, its effectiveness is limited by numerous factors that influence how visitors interpret their experience. By incorporating multiple means of communication, the exhibits at World's Fair both offer increased evidence for the claims of their narratives, but also provided more for audiences to process and interpret. Guidebooks highlighted the key themes and provided a way of understanding the exhibits; however, the responses show their limited effectiveness in controlling how visitors understood the displays.

Soviet participation at the two International Expositions in Paris occurred alongside formal diplomatic efforts and other initiatives of cultural diplomacy. Unlike pilgrimages to the USSR, which targeted only limited audiences, the exhibits at each Fair brought Soviet life and culture directly to the French people, allowing all to see socialism in its development. Thus, the World's Fair differed from other initiatives in terms of its scope and the size of its audience. Further, Soviet participation at each Fair was not isolated, but within an international context that featured dozens of other nations engaged in similar practices of cultural diplomacy. Thus, the analysis of Soviet techniques of self-representation can be useful for understanding the displays of other nations. Using a combination of written and visual sources the Soviets created a series of narratives about their state, people and culture aimed at changing French conceptions of the USSR. Thus, the International Exposition borrows many storytelling techniques from museums; however, it directs these narratives toward foreign populations in order to fulfill specific foreign policy aims. At both Expositions, the Soviet display was one of many; however, through different means, each exhibit captured the attention of French populations and media. While determining the exact success or failure of each Exposition and its impact upon Franco-Soviet relations is outside of the scope of this research, it is clear that the two exhibits succeeded in

sharing Soviet culture with massive audiences and, if not shifting French conceptions of the USSR, at least providing multi-faceted images of the emerging socialist state.

Figures

Figure 1. Konstantin Melnikov's Pavilion.

This photograph from 1925 shows Konstantin Melnikov's Pavilion. Image from Adolphe Dervaux, *L'architecture étrangère à l'exposition internationale des arts décoratifs: 42 planches* (Paris: Editions Charles Moreau, 1925), [No page number assigned] Planche 40.

Figure 2. Boris Iofan's Pavilion and Vera Mukhina's Sculpture.

This is a photograph from 1937 of Boris Iofan's pavilion and Vera Mukhina's sculpture. Image from "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 490.

Figure 3. Boris Iofan's Pavilion and Vera Mukhina's Sculpture Front View.

This photograph from 1937 shows the view of the Soviet pavilion from the top of the German pavilion. Image from "U.R.S.S.," in *Exposition internationale Paris 1937: rapport général tome X* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1938), [no page number assigned] Planche CXX.

Figure 4. Broderies Russes: Russie du Nord.

This image displays examples of embroidery from northern Russia that were displayed in 1925. Image taken from Ernst Henri, *U.R.S.S. Broderies Russes, Tartares, Arméniennes* (Paris: Ernst Henri, 1925), [No page number assigned] Planche 9.

Figure 5. Soviet Porcelain.

This image shows several examples of Soviet porcelain displayed in 1925. Image taken from Dm. Ivanoff, "La nouvelle porcelaine russe," in *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'U.R.S.S.*, ed P.S. Kogan, Victor Nicolsky and J. Tugenhold, (Moscow: [publisher not identified], 1925), 53.

Section du "*Gosizdat*". Lenghiz (Éditions d'État à Léningrad).
Affiche (dessin de A. RODTCHENKO).

Figure 6. Gosizdat Section. A Rodtchenko's Poster.

This image shows A. Rodtchenko's poster that was displayed in the Gosizdat section in 1925. The poster reads: "Books on all branches of knowledge." Image from P. S. Kogan, *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes: Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes catalogue* (Paris: Imprimerie Kapp, 1925), 169.

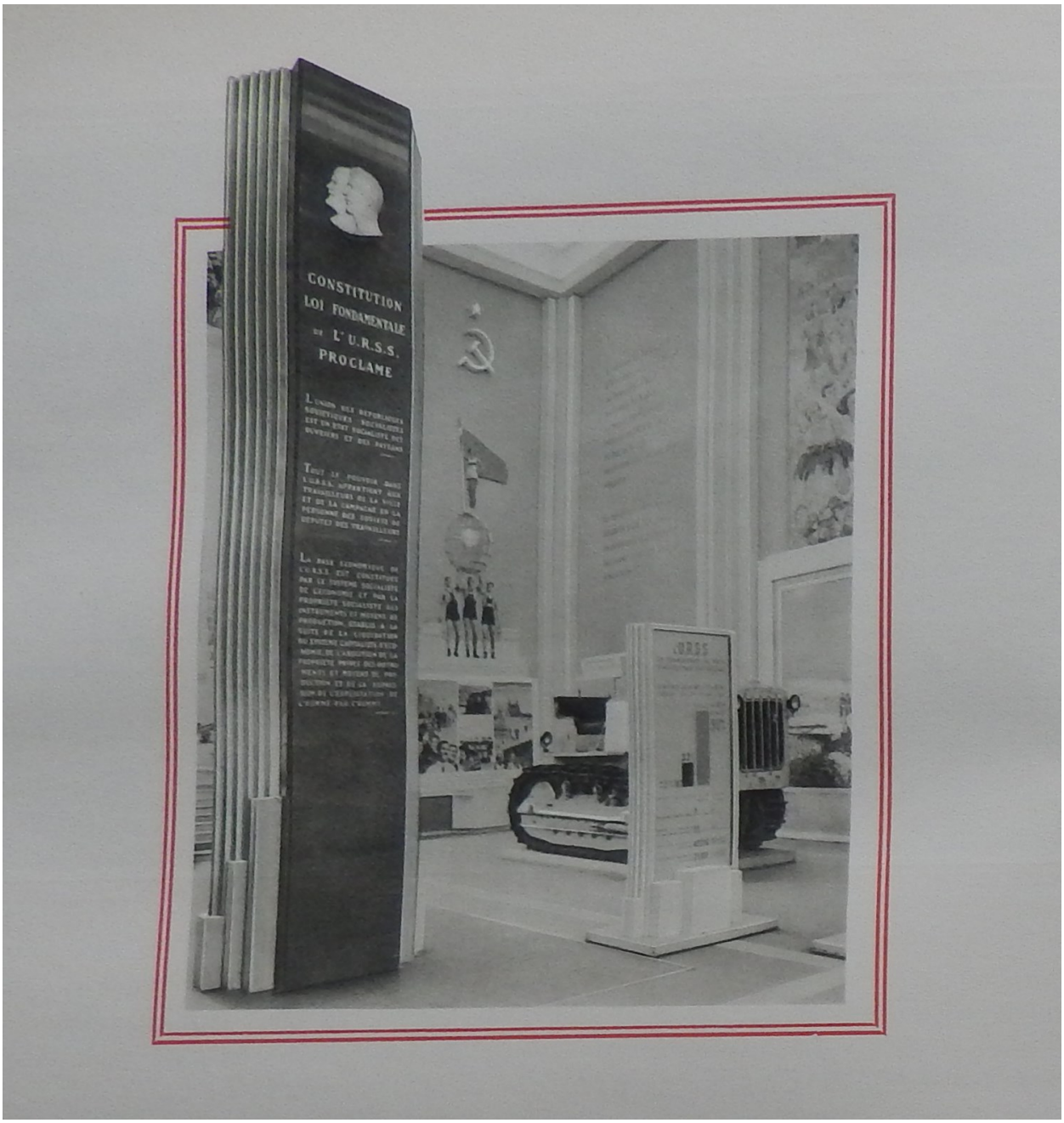

Figure 7. The Stalin Constitution.

This photograph from 1937 shows the Stalin Constitution displayed on an obelisk in the Soviet pavilion. Image from "La participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 496.

Figure 8. Sergei Murkhurov's Statue of Stalin.

This photograph from 1937 shows Sergei Murkhurov's statue of Stalin from the final room of the Soviet pavilion. Image from "La Participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 514.

Figure 9. "Stalinets Diesel" Tractor.

This photograph from 1937 shows the "Stalinets Diesel" tractor that was featured in the Soviet pavilion. Image from "La Participation de l'U.R.S.S.," in *Livre d'or officiel de l'exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, *Paris 1937* (Paris: France Ministre du Commerce, 1938), 497.

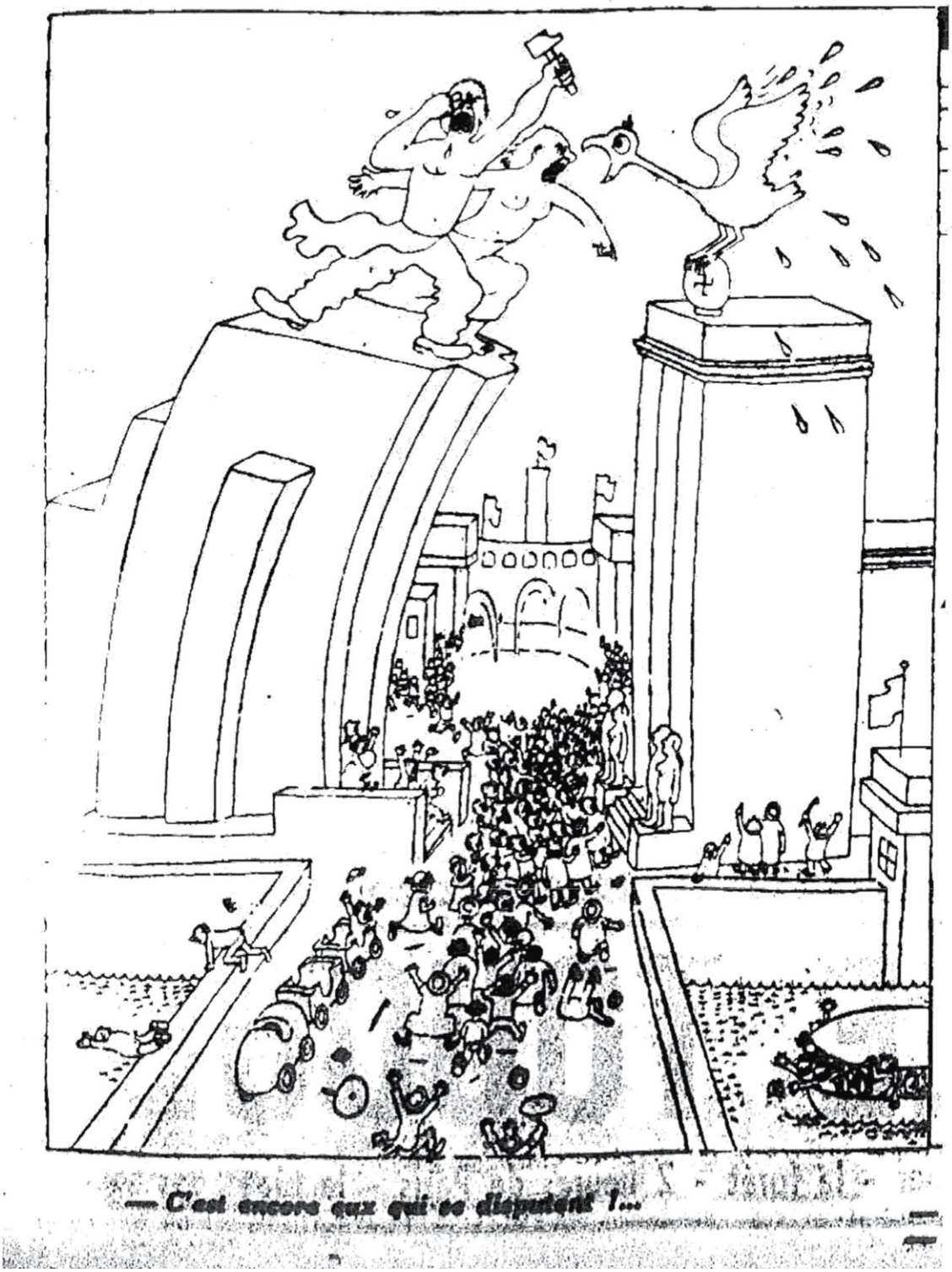

Figure 10. A. Dubout, "It's still those two that are fighting."

This cartoon by A. Dubout was featured in the French newspaper *Candide*. It shows the Soviet and German pavilions arguing. Image from A. Dubout, "À l'expo: c'est encore eux qui se disputent," *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire,*" July 15, 1937.

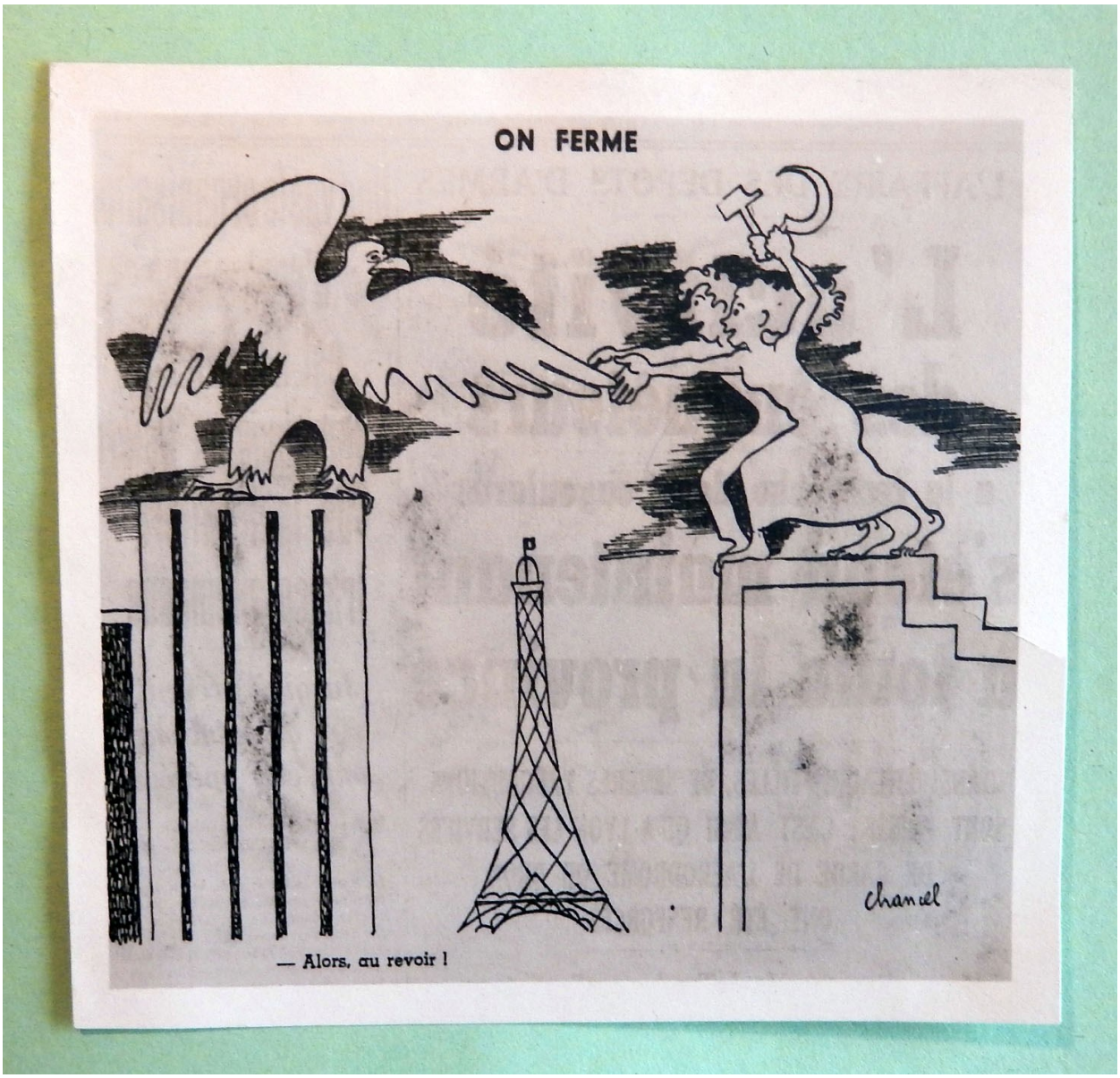

Figure 11. Chanel, "On Ferme."

This cartoon by Chanel shows the statues atop the Soviet and German pavilions shaking hands. The caption below reads: "Good-bye, then!" Image from Chanel, "On Ferme," Archives Nationales, Site de Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 20140260/34-20140260/54.

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