

Title: The Politics of Somov's Pastoral

Author: Djamilia Nazyrova, University of Southern California

Idealized landscape becomes a powerful theme in the artistic culture of the turn of the 20th century. Its spread is concomitant with the economic and cultural rise of the Russian country estate. As Maria Nashchokina demonstrates (*Russkaia usad'ba Serebrianogo veka*, Moskva 2007), the declining country estate of the second half of the 19th century is invested with new cultural optimism as it acquires symbolic value in capitalist culture. One of the ideological myths that promotes living in the country is the return of the “golden age” of architecture and landscape design of the 18th century palaces, as expressed, for example, in the magazine *Stolitsa i usad'ba* (1914-1917).

In the present paper I consider how Konstantin Somov's pastoral landscapes respond to this ideology. First, I aim to demonstrate that Somov's pastoral has an ironic and debunking dimension, similar to his 18th century scenes. While addressing exquisite modernist aesthetic tastes in constructing beautiful pastoral landscapes, Somov sneaks in irony through the schematic and conventional treatment of nature. His lack of poetic and romantic attitude to landscape is especially clear in comparison with such western predecessors, as the Pre-Raphaelites, Jean-François Millet and the Nabis. The element of mockery also manifests itself in the combination of erotic motifs with religious and sublime allusions of pastoral landscape.

Second, I claim that the politics of Somov's pastoral expresses frustration with the bourgeois myth of the 18th century's “golden age”. Somov's subliminal rejection of traditional pastoral patterns subverts the classical Augustan paradigm of this genre which claims a harmony of both the poetry of nature and values of the state (“If your song is of the woodland, let the woods be worthy of a consul”, Vergil, Eclogue 4). In Somov, as I aim to show, the Augustan pastoral is associated with the myth of the ideal landscape of the 18th century palace.