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Anonymous US Businessman Donates \$3 mln for a State Heritage exhibition



The exhibition "Roberto Matta and the Fourth Dimension" has opened at the General Staff building of the State Hermitage in Saint Petersburg: 91 works from 23 private collections from Mexico, Chile, Argentina, France, Israel, Great Britain and the US are on display for the first time in Russia.

Chilean by birth, Basque by origin, denizen of New York and Paris, Matta has always tried to break social, cultural, and geographical borders. Matta was born in Chile in 1911. He graduated from the architecture department of the Catholic University in Santiago. Always open to new trends in art, analyzing technological advances and human psychology, Roberto Matta has never completely joined any one trend: experimenting on the edge of art and science, he has never fully become a Surrealist. His interest in the subconscious and the irrational distanced him from the Abstract Expressionists as well.

Rejecting formal stylistic boundaries, Matta has always done a reality check on his art, trying to experience the depths of human nature. Refusing to call himself an artist, Matta would say: "I am not an artist. I am someone trying to construct the images that will once help us realize

the essence of the verb 'to see'."

Contemporary art critics have put Matta into the Latin American art category. At this moment, there are three more Matta exhibitions going on in the world. But for the curators of the Saint Petersburg exhibition—Oksana Salamatina and Dmitry Ozerkov, head of the contemporary art department of the State Hermitage—the important thing was the Russian and Soviet traces in Matta's legacy. Working for Le Corbusier in Paris in 1930s, the artist made friends with Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Andre Breton in late 1930s, and he then became interested in the works of Russian mystic philosopher Pyotr Ouspensky and his "fourth dimension" theory.

It is likely that the artist may have visited Leningrad in 1936. His family archive has a Leningrad postcard with a picture of the hammer and sickle drawn by Matta's hand on the flipside.

"We have carefully studied the archives of Le Corbusier and Pyotr Ouspensky but, unfortunately, found no documented evidence of Roberto Matta visiting the USSR," said Oksana Salamatina, the sponsor and the curator of the exhibition. She is a gallerist living in Russia and the US, and the founder of Salamatina LLC. Her projects in Russia include the exhibition of US female artists at the Solyanka gallery.

Ms. Salamatina has worked for about nine years to set up Matta's exhibition at the State Hermitage. The initial idea was to set it up at a different place and in a different country, but Nick Ilyin, a kulturtraeger of Russian art, convinced her that the first Russian exhibition of Matta should be held in the State Hermitage. And the idea of "the Russian trace" came up later in her conversations with Dmitry Ozerkov, who covers contemporary art in the State Hermitage.



The items in the exhibition were provided by 23 collectors from different countries. Two Americans backed out at the last moment and decided not to send their contribution to Saint Petersburg. However, Thomas Monahan, an art dealer who has collaborated with the artist for 25 years and is a careful researcher of his art, came to see the opening and show his support. He provided Matta's three major pieces from the 1940s, a time when Matta started his painting experiments. "Almost half of this exhibition either comes from me or has been in my hands at some point. Matta even designed the logo for my gallery. The most important thing for me is to show that Matta was the first one to do many art experiments. He showed Pollock that one can paint with stains, putting the canvas on the floor, he effected Arshile Gorky, the New York school," he said.

Olivier Malingue, an art dealer who owns a gallery on Bond Street, says that his family has been collecting Matta's works for years. "In my father's lounge, at my grandma's in Paris, and in my brother's gallery in Hong Kong, we have Roberto Matta's works everywhere. Had my father decided to put them up for auction in the 1960s, they would have cost more than Pollock. But seeing *The Prisoner of Light* (1943) every day in his apartment is more important for my father than anything else."

According to Mutualart.com, the average price for Matta's works nowadays is \$35,000. The largest price tag was recorded in 2012 at Christie's, for his painting *La revolte des contraires* (1944).

"Roberto Matta is a first tier artist, the scale of his creative legacy is comparable to that of Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, and Andre Breton," says Thomas Monahan.

Thomas Monahan supported the Hermitage exhibition. All transportation and insurance cost were covered by an American businessman and art collector who chose to stay anonymous. The benefactor did not attend the opening of the exhibition, unlike ten collectors who had donated Matta's paintings for the event, but he promised to do so later.