Teacher Resource Notes

CLOSE AND FAR
Russian Photography Now

Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky, Alexander Gronsky, Olya Ivanova, Taus Makhacheva, Max Sher and Dmitri Venkov

A touring exhibition from Calvert 22 Gallery curated by Kate Bush

Exhibition open Sat 17 Jan – Sat 7 Mar 2015
Mon – Sat 12 noon – 9 pm

FREE ENTRY
The Mead Gallery is committed to increasing understanding of, and engagement with, international contemporary art. Through our exhibition programme, we encourage young people to engage with key themes and ideas relating to the world they inhabit and offer opportunities for them to meet and work with artists. Every exhibition is supported by a programme of artist-led talks and discussions, workshops and other events. Details are available on our website: meadgallery.co.uk

These notes are designed to support your visit to the Mead Gallery, including planning prior to your visit and suggestions for follow up discussion and activities. They are aimed at all key stages, enabling you to develop them to suit your needs and inspire discussion and practical work.

This resource is designed to

* help you with planning and preparing your class visit to the exhibition
* support you on your visit
* provide information about the artists and their work
* provide ideas for follow-up activities
* encourage individual and collaborative creative work
* encourage cross-curricular work
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Close and Far is an exhibition of photography and film by a new generation of artists from Russia. It is centred around a key figure — Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky (1863-1944) — who was an early pioneer of colour photography. He was commissioned by Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia, to document his vast and varied empire in the years leading up to the Russian Revolution. This meant travelling down the Volga and across the Urals into Siberia, then South to the Caucasus and on to Turkestan and Asian Russia. His photographs are bright, almost gaudy, and thanks to the newest techniques of digital composition, are able to be printed and exhibited (rather than being shown as slides). They look like something imagined – luscious rich colours and almost fairytale landscapes.

Prokudin-Gorsky witnessed the effects of Russian imperialism first-hand. Today, young artists are working in the aftermath of the collapse of both the Romanov and the Soviet empires, in the space of less than a century.

“In this third decade since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia is grappling both with its past and its future. This is the first generation of artists to be making art relatively free of state control. Russia in 2014 is considerably smaller than when Prokudin-Gorsky was photographing — yet it is still the largest country in the world, and still a land of dramatic extremes and dramatic diversity… Many of the contemporary artists are also, like Prokudin-Gorsky, interested in the relationship between tradition and modernity – between history, and the future, or the post-Soviet.”

“The exhibition asks: how are Russia’s young artists and photographers approaching the subject of identity and place, in post-Soviet times?”

Interview extracts with the curator, Kate Bush
Sergei Prokudin-Gorskyy (1863-1944) was a pioneer in the development of colour photography. He created his own methods to capture life of the early 1900 — in colour — using three filters and a tedious sequential exposure method.

Between 1909 and 1915, Prokudin-Gorskyy undertook a photographic survey of the Russian Empire with the support of Tsar Nicholas II. Travelling by boat, train and horse-drawn carriage, he carried with him his large camera, glass plates and developing equipment. He experimented while travelling, mostly in the specially equipped darkroom in his private train compartment. He used a specially-adapted camera to capture three black and white images in fairly quick succession, using red, green and blue filters, allowing them to later be recombined and projected with filtered lanterns to show near true colour images. Any stray movement within the camera’s field of view showed up in the prints as multiple ‘ghosted’ images, since the red, green and blue images were taken of the subject at slightly different times, thus creating the beautiful stripes which frame a number of his photographs. The high quality of the images, combined with the bright colours, make it difficult for us to believe that we are looking back in time over 100 years — these photographs were taken, neither the Russian Revolution nor World War I had yet begun. He was ahead of his time — commercially viable colour photography truly began around 1935 with the Introduction of Kodachrome.
His subjects ranged from the medieval churches and monasteries of old Russia, to the railroads and factories of an emerging industrial power, to the daily life and work of Russia’s diverse population. He took portraits of emirs and sheiks of the southern borders of Russia posing in their palaces, of Chinese immigrants working in plantations, and of Jewish children learning their lessons.

By the eve of World War I, Russia had undergone rapid industrial development, much of it fuelled by foreign investment and the import of technology from Western Europe. Key industries included textiles, metal-working, and chemical and oil production. At the same time, many people lived in appalling conditions, especially in the countryside.

Prokudin-Gorsky is thought to have made over 3,500 images, some 1,600 of which were purchased by the US Library of Congress. He left Russia in 1918 after the Revolution, leaving behind his money, his property and his fame. He eventually settled in Paris and died there on September 27, 1944 shortly after the liberation of the city by the Allies.

Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky
*Group of workers harvesting tea.*
*Greek women. [Chakva]. between 1905 and 1915*

This image shows Greek workers posing while harvesting tea from plants spreading over rolling hills near Chakva, on the east coast of the Black Sea. This region of the Russian Empire, in present day Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, had a significant Greek minority, some families going back many centuries to the Classical and Byzantine eras.
Pinkhus Karlinskii, the supervisor of the Chernigov floodgate, stands by a ferry dock along the Mariinskii Canal system in the northern part of European Russia.

Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii noted that Karlinskii was eighty-four years old and had served for sixty-six years. The canal system, known today as the Volga-Baltic Waterway, was constructed to link the extensive river system of the Volga and its tributaries to provide access from the interior of European Russia to the Baltic Sea.

At an unidentified location, a railroad truss bridge built on stone support columns crosses one of the wide Siberian rivers that flow northwards to the Arctic Ocean — possibly the Irtysh or the Tobol. The rivers were only one of the natural barriers that the builders of the Trans-Siberian Railroad had to conquer in the feat of constructing a railroad over 6,000 miles from central European Russia eastward to the Pacific Ocean. Prokudin-Gorskii’s many photographs of railroad bridges, locomotives, barges, steamers and canals reflect the importance of the transportation system in tying together the vast Russian Empire. The Ministry of Transport operated a network of railroads and steamers, but private companies were also involved in rail, river, and canal transport.
One theme that runs through many of the works in *Close and Far* is the search for national identity. In 2010, a hundred years after Produkin-Gorsky’s journey, Olya Ivanova recorded the lives of people living in a remote village in the North, showing them living out their lives, getting married, working and so on. One smartly dressed old lady, sitting on her neat cottage porch with her hands in her lap, frowns out at the viewer with long-suffering directness. In another image, Vladimir folds his arms defensively over his bare chest above the pushchair he was wheeling down a dusty village street.

Olya Ivanova was born in 1981 in Moscow, where she lives and works.

“I shot a small town in the northern part of Russia named Kich-Gorodok. It is ordinary town with ordinary life, like hundreds of similar towns across the country. I went through villages around it which were almost depopulated and shot portraits of people still living there as well as archive family pictures belonging to them. I tried to shoot in the same style as village professional photographers who were invited to make pictures of weddings, funerals, kids and feasts from the beginning of the 20th century. I wanted to continue local tradition of posed portraits 'in the best dress with serious face'. It helps me to connect all these people in their feeling of being Russian, in common atmosphere of irrationality and some kind of surrealism, in such a Russian combination of absurd and beauty, sadness and kitsch, family and history, life and death.”

Olya Ivanova, *Kich Gorodok, 2010*
Taus Makhacheva has filmed a lone figure, performing choreographed gestures based on epic 19th century battle paintings and Soviet farming manuals, who acts out these symbolic movements amongst the spectacular ruins of Gamsutl, an ancient hilltop village in Dagestan.

Some of the dancer’s movements recreate characters from the panoramic battle paintings of Russian artist Franz Roubaud (1856–1928), renowned for his series of Caucasian War paintings, depicting the area around Gamsutl and soldiers from both warring parties. The dancer takes on various identities, alternately imagining himself as a defender, an invader, a warrior, a citizen of Gamsutl, and a collective farm brigade leader, incorporating symbols of Soviet modernity into his traditional dance and even mimicking inanimate objects, becoming a tombstone, a watchtower and a crack in the wall.

Taus Makhacheva was born in 1983 in Moscow and lives and works in Makhachkala and Moscow. She holds a BA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, London and an MA from the Royal College of Art, London.

This film has been described as:

“an extraordinary meditation on memory, a visual analysis of the relationships between humans and the natural world, strength and fragility, community and individualism.”

Left: Franz Roubaud, A skirmish in the snow
Above: Taus Makhacheva, Dagestan, film still, 2010
History paintings are also an important source for Alexander Gronsky’s *Reconstruction* series of large-scale photographs, but in his scenes the soldiers dotted around the city outskirts brandishing their weapons and striking poses in the snow are amateur war re-enactors, staging scenes from historic conflicts as well as the more recent Soviet-Afghan war before crowds of onlookers – while also checking their mobile phones in between skirmishes.

*Alexander Gronsky, Reconstruction, 2013*
Other images, in a series entitled *Pastoral*, are of people playing and working in the suburbs of Moscow, the edges of a large city that contains polluted riverbanks and edges of forests, with a background of tower blocks. In the liminal areas between town and country, Muscovites swim in frozen, polluted lakes and picnic on threadbare grass.

“It’s about my personal perception of Russian landscape, especially the outskirts and borderline areas. I enjoy spending time there—I feel that I fit there, probably because I don’t really feel that I fit anywhere else.”

In one photograph, families gather beneath a bank of newly excavated, rubbish-encrusted earth on which a man sits in his swimming trunks. Other images are more beautiful—a lone woman sunbathing in a green woodland, another woman lost in reverie in a thicket, both oblivious to the shadows, cast by the ever-present Soviet tower blocks.

“Pastoral is an idea of a perfect world, where people integrate with nature as its necessary part. With this documentary project I explore wastelands within Moscow city. It is here that I am able to see interaction between human and nature in a very dense way. Areas of abandoned land form a big part of Moscow cityscape. Arguably its exactly these areas that define it as being ‘Russian’, but at the same time these areas itself lack definition. They are neither urban, nor rural. Invasion of chaos in human habitat and also the place where people come to enjoy nature in quite sad and touching ways. My focus in this project is people’s detachment and at the same time longing for reuniting with nature.”

Alexander Gronsky was born in 1980 in Tallinn, Estonia. He lives and works in Riga, Latvia. Between 1999 and 2008 he worked as a press photographer for the Russian and international media, covering Russia and the former USSR. Since 2008 he has been developing personal projects.
Although Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky was asked to document the growth within the landscape, St Petersburg-born Max Sher documents the rapidly-changing face of everyday Russia in more than 40 cities across the country as Soviet architecture and pre-revolutionary buildings are replaced or accompanied by ever more generic and mundane post-Soviet petrol stations, office and apartment blocks and shopping malls.

“I was born in St Petersburg and remember well how as a kid I used to roam the area where my grandparents lived. I had a Soviet map of the city, which was deliberately inaccurate. A number of streets were missing from the map including the one where my grandparents’ house stood. It should be said that detailed city maps were hard to come by during the late Soviet era and so I took it upon myself to put the missing streets on my map. I was constructing, unconsciously, my own map and mental image of the city, and by doing so, symbolically defying the erroneous version imposed on me by the state.

My project is to make my own photographic ‘map’ of Russia and create a visual catalogue of our post-Soviet territory ... I want to inspire a shift from the sublime and the dramatic to the everyday — the petrol stations, bridges, warehouses, railway crossings, shopping malls and yes, the prisons.”

His photographs are captioned with the name of the place, date and exact geographical coordinates, linking the project to Google Earth, realising the unbreakable connection of the image of our contemporary landscape and the media space.

Max Sher was born in St Petersburg in 1975, raised in Siberia and educated in Siberia and France. He lives and works in Moscow.

Max Sher
Makariev (31 October 2013), 57°52′13.54″N, 43°47′43.49″E
The film *Mad Mimes*, 2012 is an anthropological study of a fictional community near the Moscow Ring Road that survives by collecting roadside trash. As a result of their social isolation and material dependency on the road a cargo cult developed within the society. The tribe’s lifestyle and rituals are based on those of Melanesian cargo cults and other new religious movements, and is a parody of anthropological documentaries.

Dmitri Venkov was born in 1980 in Novosibirsk, Russia. He lives and works in Moscow. He is a graduate of the Rodchenko School of Photography and Multimedia, Moscow, and holds an MA in Film Studies from the University of Oregon, Eugene.
In the Art and Design curriculum they will support pupils to:

* produce creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences
* evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design
* know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms
* create sketchbooks, journals and other media to record their observations and use them to review and revisit ideas

And specifically for Key Stage 3:

* analyse and evaluate their own work, and that of others, in order to strengthen the visual impact or applications of their work
* learn about the history of art, craft, design and architecture, including periods, styles and major movements from ancient times up to the present day.

The activities in this pack will enable children to explore and develop key areas of the current National Curriculum with a focus on Art & Design, History and English. There are activities that allow them to work on their own and to collaborate with others in small groups.
In the History curriculum the activities will, in part, support pupils to:

* gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales

* gain understanding of how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources, and that different versions of past events may exist

In the English curriculum the activities will support pupils to strengthen the following skills:

* develop ideas thoughtfully, describing events and conveying their opinions clearly

* acquire a wide vocabulary, and begin to vary their expression and vocabulary

* ask relevant questions to clarify, extend and follow up ideas

* elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas

* talk and listen with confidence in an increasing range of contexts

ICT skills will also be supported in pupils’ use of digital cameras and/or iPads to record observations.
Before your visit

1. What is the difference between a snapshot and a portrait? Discuss.

2. Can you take a selfie without taking your portrait?

3. Look at a map of Russia today and compare it with how big the Russian Empire was 100 years ago.

4. Find out as much as you can about Tsar Nicholas II. What did he look like, what did he do?
Questions, Discussions & Activities to Explore— KS2

At the exhibition

You will need sketchbooks or paper; pencils, pens, and, if possible, a camera and/or iPad.

1. Look at all the photographs by Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky. Who is in them? List all the people and guess their roles in life i.e. worker, farmer, wife etc. Is anyone missing?

2. Choose a photograph that you like. Write down your responses to these questions:
   - What colours do you see in the photograph?
   - How do they make you feel?
   - Describe the landscape?
   - What does it remind you of?

3. Draw at least three different kinds of outfits that you can see people wearing in the photographs within the exhibition.

4. Watch the film by Taus Makhacheva, which shows a man performing a range of movements. In pairs try to copy some of these using your own body, helping each other to make the shapes. Take photographs of this.

5. In your sketchbook, do a close up drawing — a detail of something you like in the exhibition. Tell a friend why you like it.
1. Look at these images by Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky, choose one, and then begin a short story with the words: 
   This is me...

2. Invite students to bring in their favourite comic book. Working in pairs, create a short story using just images, that show some kind of action, of a person interacting with the environment, Do a before and after sequence and a close up shot.

3. Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky spent years travelling round the huge continent that was Russia 100 years ago.

   Where have you never been? Scotland? Cornwall? France? Africa?

   Try to imagine what is in these places. Make up an imaginary landscape, using collage materials (travel agencies have lots of brochures you can take away and use).
4. Who is Vladimir?
   Write his story. Think about his family, his past, his job, the mood he is in. Where is he going and what will he do next? Or call it ‘A Day in the Life of Vladimir.’

5. Dressing up
   Much of the work is asking questions about identity – what does it mean to be Russian? Who am I? Set up a dressing up box and a camera. You can look at gender roles, hide faces etc.

6. Photography challenge
   Every day for a week, take a photo of the following themes:
   - Day One  
     faceless self portrait
   - Day Two  
     your bedroom
   - Day Three  
     the sky
   - Day Four  
     something cold
   - Day Five  
     something hot
   - Day Six  
     colour
   - Day Seven  
     shadows

   Print these out and put them on a wall in the classroom. Vote for the best in each category.

7. Journey
   Take a series of images of your journey to school from home – take in details as well as long shots. Print them out as a long line – a visual diary. Write underneath each one what it going on

Olya Ivanova
Before your visit

1. **Bring an object into school that has something to do with your heritage.**
   Discuss what it means to be British; to be Russian; to be Scottish etc.

2. **Define Identity**
   Is it formed over time, constructed or shaped? Who am I? Am I defined by what I wear, read, buy?
Knowledge and Understanding

Questions, Discussions & Activities to Explore— KS3

At the exhibition

You will need sketchbooks or paper; pencils, pens, and, if possible, a camera and/or iPad.

1. Look at the work of Alexander Gronsky
   How do these images communicate something about a way of life?

2. Mad Mimes
   In his film, Mad Mimes, Dimitri Venkov has created a fictional group. Watch the film and make as many notes and observations as you can about this community.

3. Look at all the photographs in the exhibition
   Can you construct a narrative from five of these images? Write a short caption or description for each image that helps tell the story you have created.

4. Choose one of the photographs in the exhibition
   Map out a front page story for a newspaper of your choice that features the photograph you have chosen.
1. Look at work by Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans to compare and contrast with the work of Prokudin-Gorsky. Find out what you can about Lange and Evans.

What do the images have in common? What is so different? Make a list of these.
2. Most phones now have good cameras, and easy and accessible ways to change the look of the image. Take a photograph — a portrait — of your friend, choose the background carefully that it might tell us something more about him or her.

Print out four different versions: in black & white, a highly saturated colour version, a normal colour version and one of your choice.

Give your reasons for preferring one over the other.

Above: Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky
Peasant girls with berries, 1909

Above right: Max Sher, Shopping Centre

3. In this image by Max Sher, he is photographing Russian life in a particular style, as he explains:

“I want to explore, record and accept all this in its entirety and so, I have adopted the deadpan aesthetic conceptualised in the 1950s by a group of German and American photographers who would later come to be known collectively as the New Topographics and the Düsseldorf School of Photography.”

The Düsseldorf School of Photography refers to a group of students at the Kunstkademie Dusseldorf in the mid 1970s that studied under the influential photographers Bernd and Hiller Becher.

Research this group, along with the Bechers, and find out as much as you can about one of them whose work you enjoy. What is it about their photographs that you like?
4. When he travelled round Russia early last century, Prokudin-Gorsky recorded the way of life, the clothes, the faces of the diverse society of the Russian empire. This ethnographic legacy is something that Martin Parr did for the UK in the 1970s: capturing small communities and telling stories that are excluded from the mainstream and from the new narrative of the state.

Have a look at Parr’s work and discuss the similarities and differences between them.

5. Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky spent years travelling round the huge continent that was Russia 100 years ago.

Where have you never been?
Scotland? Cornwall? France? Africa?

Make up an imaginary landscape, using collage materials (travel agencies have lots of brochures you can take away and use) Look at Bosch The Garden of Earthly Delights for inspiration.

6. A project using found images
This involves hunting through junk shops to find old photographs; or looking at home for some old albums. Photocopy these images, and divide them into landscapes and people.
Landscapes – create a collage using a selection of the images.

Write a story to go with it – who lives here?
7. Working in pairs, take photos of each other from different points of view:

- A bird’s eye view
- worm’s eye view

Pretend you’re an animal and take a photo from that point of view

- Your eye view
- Whatever else you can think of

Put all the photos on a table and discuss in groups.

What did it feel like, taking the photos?

8. Taking the idea of capturing a community as inspiration, create a series of photographs or interviews investigating a particular community or group of people.

9. Take a photo of where you live. Then draw what it could look like in 20, 40, 60 years time (you decide).

What could happen there?

Olya Ivanova, *Kich Gorodok*, 2010
How to turn a smartphone into a pin-hole camera

You need: a small piece of cardboard, tape and a sewing needle

1. Poke a hole in the piece of cardboard
2. Tape the hole over the camera lens

When you take the photo on your screen the hole will be small - but you can crop and mess around with the colour etc. afterwards, unless you zoom in. Here’s a few using an iPhone:

If you want to actually make your own pinhole camera, print out this PDF template

http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/empire/
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/prok/
http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/empire/making.html

http://calvert22.org/exhibitions/close-and-far-russian-photography-now/
http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/2709/russia-landscape-photography-prokudin-gorsky#.VGISFkvT22w
https://www.lensculture.com/articles/alexander-gronsky-pastoral-moscow-suburbs

http://www.alexandergronsky.com/#/
https://www.lensculture.com/articles/alexander-gronsky-pastoral-moscow-suburbs

http://www.olyaivanova.com

http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/taus-makhacheva/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBFDCF8_Ck

http://www.maxsher.com
http://www.instituteartist.com/filter/soviet feature-Russian-Palimpsest-Max-Sher

http://new.kandinsky-prize.ru/venkov/?lang=en
http://vimeo.com/user2274808
Planning Your Visit to the Mead Gallery

Contact Details and Opening Hours
Mead Gallery
Warwick Arts Centre
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
Box Office: 024 7652 4524
Open Monday – Saturday
12 noon – 9pm. Free Entry.

For group visits, it is advisable to book in advance. The Mead Gallery is exclusively available for school group bookings Monday – Friday, 9am – 12noon by prior arrangement. Staff and resources are available to support these visits.

Parking at Warwick Arts Centre
Daytime parking on campus can be difficult so please allow plenty of time. For directions to Warwick Arts Centre, go to http://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk/your-visit/getting-here/ For a map of the campus, go to http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/

Coaches
Coaches can drop off and pick up on Library Road. Please follow the signs for the short walk to the Arts Centre. Please inform our Box Office if you are arriving by coach so that effective and safe arrangements can be made with campus security.

Cars
Charges apply for all University of Warwick car parks during the day. The nearest to Warwick Arts Centre is CP7 (free if arriving after 6pm). CP7 has no lift.

Minibuses
CP4 and CP5 (1hr max stay) are not height-restricted. Charges apply. After 6pm, please use CP4 or CP5, which are both free.

Lunch
If necessary, rooms are available where pupils can eat their packed lunches. Let us know in advance if you want us to book one.

Toilets
Public toilets are available in the Arts Centre.
**Risk Assessments**

Risk Assessments are available from the Arts Centre’s Education Team. Contact Brian Bishop on 02476 524252.

**Before Your Visit**

We recommend a preliminary planning visit and are happy to discuss your requirements with you.

Adult supervision of students under 16 is required at all times. An adult student ratio of 1:5 for under 5s, 1:10 for 5-11 year olds, 1:15 for 11-16 year olds and 1:20 for 16-18 year olds is required.

**During Your Visit**

Teachers/group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for their group’s behaviour whilst at Warwick Arts Centre.

Many artworks are fragile and damage easily. Unless you are told otherwise, please take extra care to ensure that your group follows the Gallery guidelines at all times:

- No running
- No touching
- No leaning against walls or plinths
- No photography

**Drawing**

The Mead Gallery has some drawing materials available and can supply a certain amount of clipboards. Please contact Gallery staff on 024 7657 3732 to discuss your needs. We regret that we cannot supply drawing materials with little or no notice.
lightsgoingon ® exists to make contemporary art accessible, run by Gill Nicol who has over twenty five years experience of working with contemporary art and audiences.

This pack has been written by Gill Nicol and Kamina Walton. It has been commissioned and designed by the Mead Gallery.

lightsgoingon.com
December 2014

Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky, Dinner During Haying