On the 11 of October, 1931, the government of the USSR declared the complete ban on private trade. Private stores were nationalized; entrepreneurs and traders of the NEP epoch were disenfranchised, banished to Siberia or imprisoned in camps. From that time on, and until the end of the 1980s, there existed only one legal form of private commerce: the so called ‘collective farm marketplace’ was the space for small-scale retail trade. The given name was a Soviet euphemism as the goods on sale in the marketplace were not those grown by collective farms but those produced in private gardens of the farmers and the town dwellers who managed to get a bumper harvest at their dachas (600 square metres of land rendered by the State).

For many Soviet people marketplaces became the only way to survive a total supply deficit. Understanding the situation, the State permitted their existence: they allowed for space in cities, built the pavilions, and established strict control. There existed loads of instructions, regulations and limitations for sellers; there were years when, for example, sale of flour and bread was prohibited. Suits were filed for frivolous and sometimes absurd reasons. The Soviet media worked hard in creating propaganda to paint a negative image of the private trader: the idea that these people were thieves, profiteers and enemies of the Soviet system was proliferated across the society. In this kind of paradox, marketplaces existed in the Soviet Union for more than fifty years, which was reflected in language, literature and arts.

Therefore, it is interesting to consider how the marketplace was depicted by the Soviet and post-Soviet painters. The works of art are able to preserve the images of the past by giving the idea of different aspects of the marketplace functioning by providing us with the vivid pictures of its space, people’s behaviour and other elements of the epoch’s everyday culture. It is worth mentioning that painting has the ability to capture visual information; more importantly, it can transplant people’s attitude to the depicted event, stereotypes, antagonisms, prejudices of the society.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century the image of the marketplace has been quite common in the European painting. And it was only in the second part of the nineteenth century when these images became popular in the Russian painting. Two approaches are clearly defined: the critical one, which reflects the marketplace as a space
The Marketplace in Soviet and Post-Soviet Painting

of social injustice; and the picturesque one, which creates bright visual patterns providing joyful and colourful effects.

Although Critical Realism became the main stream in Russian visual arts in the second part of the nineteenth century the marketplace was more often the subject of admiration rather than the reason for condemnation. Russian painters depicted festivities vividly and colourfully, highlighting people’s joy and happiness (Boris Kustodiey, *The Marketplace*, 1910).

During the Soviet period the interest in the topic didn’t dwindle. This may seem surprising when taking into account the State policy which aimed to abolish all forms of private trade. While researching the subject, about 130 paintings were studied, most of them not by well-known painters, as in these so-called ‘second-class paintings’, usually created by provincial artists, it is not the artistic value which is of primary importance. The choice of the sources is not accidental as these are the works that grant the possibility to reveal not only the personal vision of the object but also adequate and common views, judgments and stereotypes existing in the society.

Before referring to the analysis of the works by the Soviet artists it is worth mentioning the fact that there are three main ways of depicting scenes of the marketplaces in the European arts as well as marketplaces themselves. Applying photo and cinematography terms we can identify them as close-ups, mediums and long shots due to the distance the artist uses to portray the object. The most vivid examples of the close-ups are Frans Snyders’s masterpieces. Although called ‘marketplace scenes’ they are, *per se*, sumptuous still lives (Frans Snyders, *The Fishmonger*, 1657). The painter concentrates on the depiction of the shop boards with goods on them while the canvas itself tells a story about earth and sea generosity. A man appears in these pictures only to clarify the context in which all these loads of foodstuffs appear. Medium shot compositions primarily demonstrate human interaction and negotiations – specific marketplace atmosphere (Frans Josef Luckx, *At The Vegetable Market*, 1843). They are mostly used to depict daily routine life, while close-ups, on the contrary, are full of poetry, they seem to be solemn hymns to nature, metaphors of prosperity and well-being. Long shots are used by the artist when they want to show the marketplace as a picturesque element or a moving human crowd (Balthazar Nebot, *Covent Garden Market*, 1737). The ways of depicting reality refer to different artistic genres: still life, genre painting and town and or city landscape. However, it is possible for the genres to overlap: for example in the background of the marketplace scenery one might see ordinary life images.

It is worth emphasizing that the medium shot is the most popular way of depicting reality in the European arts, which is quite explicable as this method provides the painters with limitless opportunities to fix human types and ways of communication within certain frames and environment.

Studying the mass of Soviet painters’ works (1920s to 1980s) the first thing that captures the attention is the abundance of panoramic views. The artists seemed to observe the
space of the marketplace from a distance, not willing to get closer to it. And this is not only the interest in creating abstract pictures that makes them refuse to enter and reveal the marketplace area. This approach to reflecting the reality allowed the painter to show the marketplace itself along with people moving in it chaotically like a bright impressionistic canvas distancing oneself from this occurrence and avoiding concentrating on the details. One of the consequences of, or possibly the reasons for this approach, was the absence of the portraits of traders in the pictures. Before the Revolution (1917) portraying of merchants, market traders, different types of people was of great interest for the painters. However in the post-Revolution period an image such as ‘the Soviet private trader’ could not exist. The Socialist Realism method required praising and glorifying the person portrayed. The portraits had to present not only individuality but to reflect the professional and social status of a person: Soviet teacher, Soviet miner, Soviet deputy. All these collocations stood proudly. There was no possibility to create images of the ones criticized in such an exalted manner.

Soviet press used to call marketplace sellers ‘profiteers’, ‘swindlers’, ‘pilferers’; Soviet power was fighting them stubbornly. Article number 107 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1926) on agricultural products speculation was the ground for imprisonment of thousands of people involved in trade. There was nothing illegal if a person living in the South of the USSR grew a rich harvest of fruit in a warm climate and sold it single-handedly in the North of the country. But if the same person sold not only his own but also his neighbour’s harvest or, what is worse, bought and resold products of a few suppliers he became a criminal. Under Soviet law only those growing goods themselves had the right to sell them in the marketplaces. All middlemen were considered perpetrators; the process of buying up and selling agricultural or other goods with the aim of getting profit could result in imprisonment for two to seven years along with the confiscation of all the property.

Consequently there were collective farmers, pensioners, people on leave or those involved in agriculture during their free time who sold goods in the marketplaces; but anyway all these people were tender the watchful eye of the society. When suspected to be selling too much one was checked immediately and iteratively and punished administratively. It was quite often an occurrence that a collective farmer in order to sell his own harvest needed the certificate granted by the head of the kolkhoz to prove the origin of the products. It was considered that the duty of a kolkhoz member was to sell goods to procurement centres where the prices were not profitable at all.

Surprisingly enough, under these circumstances there still existed people who brought goods to the marketplaces, but Soviet citizens used to be wary of them and faced them with suspicion. Being brought up by the USSR propaganda, many Soviets believed that there could be no honest people among private traders.

The question is how was it possible in those times to make a marketplace trader the main character of work of art? And also, was there any chance to portray marketplace itself
without a seller? Soviet painters came up with an endless number of ways to overcome the
collision. One of them was to make a marketplace space itself the centre of the composition,
not a single man but a moving crowded area with indistinguishable personages.

Nevertheless, if a painter decided to enter the marketplace’s environment, to get closer
to shop boards and traders he had to think of some ways out of the dilemma. For example,
they used compositions with only buyers seen in the foreground (Anna Cherednitchenko,
In The Marketplace, 1947). With hands full of goods consumers were hurrying away home.
Somewhere in the background you can only notice counters and sellers preoccupied with
something. One could watch them from a distance, only seeing their backs or half-faces.
Consumers, happy citizens of the Soviet country, march proudly towards the viewers. We
can see each detail of their fair images. You can hardly notice somewhere in the back people
who supplied them with all the goods they carry. By no means could the sellers be the
centre of the painting or its meaning.

Even when approaching a sales desk the artist never depicted buying and selling process
itself. If you by chance find and inspect the close-up images of the trader and the buyer
in the picture they appear gossiping, flirting, discussing abstract topics not relating to the
commodity (Fedot Sitchkov, Kolkhoz Marketplace, 1936). The painters shamefully avoided
any depiction of haggling, examination of products and money exchange. As a result the very
function of the marketplace, its meaning and purpose became hidden and concealed. This
approach correlated with the State’s approach to the matter: in all Soviet official documents
the sale of agricultural production was called ‘exchange between city and village’.

The desire to speak as little as possible about private trade that was considered to be ‘the
remnant of the bourgeois past’ impelled the government to use various methods and clauses.

To avoid unwanted emphasis the artists referred to the depiction of a road: subjects like
You can hardly find these plots in pre-Revolutionary Russian arts, but by using them Soviet
painters obtained the possibility to show the marketplace without depicting it. And the
entire process of buying and selling is outside the picture, far away, beyond ones vision. The
spectator notices only the preparation or the result of the case. Mostly the paintings on
the theme of ‘The Way to the Marketplace’ depicted the sellers carrying their goods to the
marketplace (Hsar Gassiev, To The Marketplace, 1973). But to guess the topic one had to
read the title of the picture. Pre his arrival at the marketplace the seller acted as a common
Soviet toiler or a peasant, which was accented in the picture. The carried merchandise was
shown quite shamefacedly, the volume of agricultural goods was never emphasized.

The plot ‘Way Back from the Marketplace’ was devoted to the consumers. The painters
seemed not to be ashamed of placing heavy bags into people’s hands (Konstantin Britov,
Back from The Marketplace, 1985). The painters themselves were not conscious of the fact
that their works traced the way of harvest from the producer to the consumer excluding
the selling process. There is another detail to be mentioned watching these pictures: when depicting the way to marketplace and back the painters felt freer in choosing ways of artistic expression. The characters could be tired, cheerful, thoughtful and amorous (Piotr Konchalovskiy, *Way Back From The Marketplace*, 1926), the landscape was either night, winter or rainy (Andrei Kotzka, *From The Marketplace*, 1969). In the marketplace the weather was always depicted as fine and warm, the sun was shining, people (with rare exceptions) were in a good mood, calm, joyful and satisfied (Alexander Pushnin, *In The Marketplace*, 1960). The marketplace was considered to be a social space where a man and weather should have been positive.

As mentioned before, still life played an important role in the European arts devoted to marketplaces. As a rule there were no close-up views of shop boards in the Soviet art. The spectator had no opportunity to admire a single fruit or to examine its details thoroughly: he could only view a stall in distance (Mikhail Volodin, *Collective Farm Marketplace*, 1973). These were the signs of profusion but not visual evidence. In an environment where people of many regions of the country used ration cards in order to obtain their food supply, where indeed people had no idea what profusion meant it was difficult to portray it in details.

In 1949, a famous Soviet film producer Ivan Pyryev presented his masterpiece, *The Cossacks of Kuban*. Once and forever the film became the symbol of embellishment of the reality, a myth about wealthy life of the Soviet village. The action took place in the marketplace in Kuban. The shop boards full of goods captivated the imagination of the audience. In reality in those period people in the country were starving, a lot of cities were still in ruins after the cruel war. In the lean time of the country it was impossible to get enough fruit and vegetables for shooting. The film painters made a great number of plaster casts to portray the desired profusion. Stalin liked the film; having seen it, as the legend said, he pronounced: ‘As I can see the situation in agricultural sphere in our country is not so bad’. That was how the State presented the model of depicting marketplace environment. It implied sun, joy, songs, happy full life and ostensible prosperity. And the paintings of Stalin’s period often correspond with the images from *The Cossacks of Kuban*. It seems that the counters are full of fakes so the painters keep clear of them to hide the illusion.

Taking into account the huge territory of the USSR it is quite within reason to suppose that visual art had to reflect the regional peculiarities of the depicted objects as there were obvious differences both in the population’s ethnography and in the types of the products on sale. It makes no sense to compare poor marketplaces in the North of the USSR with the ones in the South. But the Soviet art levelled the obvious differences considerably. Judging by the pictures, one could barely guess where the action took place. It was somewhere in the Central Russia, in a common Russian city. There was no precise information given in the titles of the pictures, rather the marketplace was generalized and no exact place names were
given, for example: To the Marketplace; In the Marketplace; In the Marketplace Square; the Kolkhoz Marketplace; In the Market; Marketplace.

Only the depictions of Central Asian and Ukrainian markets possessed regional peculiarities. The authors were captivated by the national flavour, the brightness of the Southern sun, exotic surroundings and distinctive characters (Oganes Tatevosjan, Market in Fergana, 1929).

Statistical analysis of the paintings devoted to the Soviet marketplace indicates the surge in interest in the topic in the 1930s, 1960s and 1970s. The periods coincide with those when the Soviet State proclaimed the policy to ‘satisfy the vital needs of the Soviet people’.

Surprisingly enough, there are not so many scenes devoted to marketplace in the paintings of the 1920s. It was the period of The New Economic Policy; the relatively high freedom in the Economy and the boom in the commercial sphere had to attract painters’ attention to the topic. But this didn’t happen because of the advancement of Avant-garde trend in visual art. It was formed in the beginning of the twentieth century; the followers were full of revolutionary enthusiasm and ready to solve universal problems. Everyday life and daily routine were out of their interest. In the 1930s, a new trend – Socialist Realism – arrived, while the Avant-garde approach suffered a regression in the face of new, emerging style. The artists responded to the call of the Soviet power to ‘reflect Soviet reality’ in their works. The amount of pictures depicting marketplace scenes increased. But it was impossible to receive State rewards or prizes for them as they were privately regarded as the second-class. The portraits of Soviet leaders or depictions of workers’ heroic deeds won the top-level positions.

Nevertheless the painters yielded to the temptation to depict bright and colourful life of marketplaces. Even taking into account existing limitations and antagonisms, Soviet art reflects the flavour of the epoch, visualizes the realities and reveals the contemporaries’ attitude to it.

The post-Soviet period in Russian history was highlighted with many economic and ideological changes. One of the fundamental changes was the rebirth of private property and the market.

The changes were painful for the community as they affected habitual way of life and basic social trends. Private traders, who used to be criminal offenders and was labelled ‘profiteer’ contemptuously, became an everyday reality.

In 1990s Russia suffered an economic crisis when the population had to survive. For both buyers and sellers private trade became the escape. People had loads of depreciated money while the counter desks of the State stores were empty. For many years the State had been in charge of supplying the country with products; under new realities it was unable to fulfil the duty. The citizens of the country took matters into their own hands. They cultivated land around the cities and planted potatoes, carried goods from one part of the
country to another or from abroad for sale. The new term was coined: ‘a shuttle-trader’. The name stood for people who changed their habitual jobs and occupations, went to buy goods in Greece, Turkey or Poland, carried these goods in their own luggage with their own hands and then sold them in the marketplaces. Former engineers or teachers started selling goods. Small marketplaces arose spontaneously near underground stations, along country roads, by bus stops. It became impossible to despise or to denounce this activity: the entire country was involved in it.

It is little wonder then, that during the post-Soviet period the marketplace topic has remained vital for many Russian artists. There are no more limitations, concealing or euphemisms which were commonplace in the Soviet era; new realities are invading the paintings. The State is no longer in control of the topics, the subjects, the characters, the style or the accents of the artistic works. Consequently, there is no single format in marketplace depictions: different visions, options and manners are brought together. Sometimes they seem mutually exclusive. On the one hand, for example, many contemporary artists emphasize levelling tendencies of globalization with all the marketplaces in every part of the country obtaining the same kind of goods. Peaches, watermelons and melons are no longer a distinctive feature of the Central Asian and of the Ukrainian markets, but also typical of those in Siberia. On the other hand, it is important to accentuate the unique surroundings and character of each marketplace. The church or any other conspicuous object is positioned by the marketplace to highlight its location. Geographic names begin to appear frequently in titles: Marketplace in Zdemirovo; Kalitnikovskiy Market; Marketplace in Omsk; Market Day in Torzhok.

Nowadays, Socialist Realism is no longer an obligatory trend that painters had to follow in the USSR and could not avoid due to ideological guidelines. The artists are free to express disposition, any values and ideas freely and in any suitable manner. The marketplace topic motivates to express emotions in colours. The variegated and noisy sphere inspires the creation of bright and abstract compositions with commonly no attention to details. As a result exultant and optimistic pictures have been created (Nikolai Komarov, Summer Breathing, 2012). Some painters tend to simplify forms (Vladimir Lubarov, Winter Marketplace, 2008). Pathos and seriousness are left in the Soviet past. New intonations including irony, mockery and sometimes even nostalgia appear.

Now in the foreground it is possible to see interaction typical of the market. The buyers demand goods and even (surprise, surprise!) give money to the seller!

One of the most vivid acknowledgement of changes is a seller who nowadays is the main character of the paintings. Quite often his image is the centre of the composition. There is a significant amount of pictures that could be called ‘marketplace portraits’. First and foremost this is a man himself, his psychological state and his mood that worries the author. Surprisingly enough most of the sellers are women. Old and young, cheerful and sad they
The figures of buyers prevailed in the pictures of the Soviet painters while quite a few sellers appear in the background. In post-Soviet art the situation is the opposite. It sometimes seems that there are no buyers in the compositions at all (Anastasiya Lobanova, Autumn’s Gifts, 2012). It is the portrait of the private trader that reflects the double treatment of the attitude to the marketplace, towards the new values, and new way of life that has existed since Perestroika. Two models of behaviour and self expression of people belonging to two epochs are fixed together: ‘two Russias’, a new and an old one. In one type of the pictures elderly women are frozen in silence, demonstrate statics, rigidity and unnaturalness (Georgiy Kichigin, Bazar in Omsk, 2004). In the other we can see girls and young women behaving dynamically, happily and harmoniously (Tatjana Potvorovova, A Fish Seller, 2010). One part of the community is still true to the Soviet ideals and does not share new life modes and strategies. The other part feels absolutely free in the market environment.