

SPORT AND ART IN THE USSR

by Alexander Dobrov

Thanks to the courtesy of the Olympic Committee of the U.S. S.R. and its secretary general, Mr. Vladimir Savvin, we are able to publish, in our "Sport and Art" series, an article written specially for the "Olympic Bulletin" by the Soviet journalist Alexander Dobrov, showing the popularity of sport — as a source of inspiration — in Soviet artistic circles.

Since ancient times, world culture has left us important artistic masterpieces dedicated to sport. To the Greeks we owe immortal monuments celebrating the virility, beauty and poetry of sporting achievements. Created at the peak of Hellenic Olympism, they have an eternal aesthetic value as we are reminded by universally known works such as Myron's *Discobolos* and the *Diadumenos* and *Doryphoros* of Polyclitus. The painters of the Renaissance

as well as the neo-classical painters of the 18th century were influenced by antique beauty. The work of the French painter Louis David (1748-1823) bears witness to his admiration for strong, courageous and handsome men (*The Oath of the Horaces*, *Brutus Condemning his Sons to Death for their Betrayal of the Republic*).

In Russia, the works of several painters and sculptors, A. Ivanov, A. Loganovski, N. Pimenov and many others, are also inspired by the ancient interpretation of the naked body and movement. After the great socialist revolution in October 1917, sport in Russia became one of the means of educating youth to be strong, brave, energetic and persevering. From this time on, works dedicated to sporting themes have regularly been seen at exhibitions.

A section devoted to the themes of physical culture and sport was inaugurated at "The Industry

of Socialism" Exhibition in Moscow, in 1940. Today, these themes have assumed an independent resonance reflecting one of the aspects of the life of Soviet man.

Painters and Sculptors

Several painters have remained faithful to these themes for a long time. However we do not intend to classify painters according to their thematic tendencies. No great painter can be defined as "essentially sporting" because of the subjects he paints. But the majority of Soviet painters and sculptors, in one way or another, at one time or another, have placed their gifts at the service of sport.

The first of them, whose work is continually inspired by sporting subjects, is Alexander Deyneka, today People's Painter and Vice-President of the Academy of Fine Arts of the U.S.S.R. Deyneka, filled with enthusiasm, was seized with an irresistible urge to draw what at the time was new and seemed contagious: sport. The Soviet State was then entering on its second decade. Sport was about to soar. And the painter, the enthusiastic interpreter of his age, whose art exalts the great human ideals by creating works in which perfection of mind and physical health are harmoniously combined, could not help being inspired by sport.

"I love sport" wrote Alexander Deyneka. "I can spend hours watching runners, swimmers, skiers. It seems to me that sport, like everything beautiful, ennobles man."

When, in 1964, the academician was awarded the Lenin Prize, the highest distinction in the U.S.S.R., for his mosaics "Fine Morning" and "Hockey Players", the joy of the admirers of this great master was shared by sportsmen too.

In speaking of the painters and sculptors dealing with sporting subjects, we must mention the



Hockey players, mosaic by Alexander Deyneka.

work of the academician G. Nissky, who was a keen sportsman himself, as well as of the Lithuanian painter, the academician E. Kalkinia, the People's Painter of the Ukraine, T. Yablonskaja, the emeritus Master of the Arts R.S.F.S.R., the sculptor I. Tchaïkov, the U.S.S.R. People's Painter, the academician M. Maniser, and others besides.

Their works inspired by sport are presented as a whole at the traditional exhibition of "Physical Culture and Sport in the Fine Arts" regularly held on the occasion of the big sports events in our country — the Spartakiades of the Peoples of the U.S.S.R. — which take place every four years.

At the last exhibition organized in Moscow in the month of August 1963, during the finals of the IIIrd Spartakiade, six hundred works were shown, varying in type and style, and created by painters of different generations and trends but united by a com-

mon enthusiasm for sporting subjects. After visiting the exhibition, Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, wrote in the Book of Honour: "My best wishes to the Masters of the Fine Arts who have devoted their work to sport."

The next exhibition will be held

in Moscow in 1967 during the IVth Spartakiade. Painters and sports associations of all the republics in the U.S.S.R. are already busily preparing for this event.

Film too

At the same time as the traditional exhibition "Physical Cul-



Meeting with sun and wind, by Seredine (1961).



Gymnast, by Janson-Maniser (1953).

ture and Sport in the Fine Arts", another exhibition will be organized in Moscow entitled "Sport in Art Photography", where the best work of Soviet photographers will be on display.

"At the Spartakiade..." These words will not be heard in the exhibition halls alone. While the sports elite of the U.S.S.R. will be gathered together in Moscow, a festival of sports films will be held in a number of cinemas in the capital. Sport and Cinema...

No one will be surprised at such a combination. No literary description, no news report no matter how detailed, no series of even the most expressive photographs is capable of reproducing the evolution of a sporting combat or an athletic event with such force of persuasion, accuracy, and evocation as the cinema. It is no matter of chance that from its birth the cinema has been closely linked with sport.

As the French historian of the cinema, Georges Sadoul has written "... boxers, wrestlers, galloping horses, gymnasts, tight-rope walkers — these are the most popular subjects of the first films."

Every year, Soviet film producers make from twenty-five to thirty artistic and documentary films devoted to sport. Cinema audiences in the U.S.S.R. have always loved films devoted to sport. Films like "The Goalkeeper of the Republic", "The First Boxing Glove", "The Centre Forward" and others have met with great success at different periods and, more recently, "Half-Time" produced by E. Karelov, "Hockey players" by L. Goldine, "The Silver Trainer" by N. Ivchenko, while Y. Tchoulukin is at present producing "The Royal Regatta" in the Mosfilm studios.

We have also seen documentary films devoted to the most famous Soviet sportsmen : Brumel, Vlassov, Papentchenko, Prosoumentshikova, Zhabotinski, Yachine.

The achievements of our film producers have been highly appreciated at traditional festivals of sports films at Cortina d'Ampezzo, in Italy. Since 1962, the U.S.S.R.'s delegation has three times been awarded the Grand Prix of the Festival — the Ministry of Tourism Cup — for the best film. In 1965, in addition to the Grand Prix, Soviet films won five other distinctions.

The Masters of the cinema, like the Masters of the Fine Arts and photography, also show an interest in sporting themes. Their works bear witness to the popularity of sport in the Soviet Union.

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