

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Boris Dmitrievich Grigoriev (Moscow 1886 - Cagnes-sur-Mer, France 1939)

Two Views of Chile

both signed 'Boris Grigoriev' (one lower right, the other lower left)
gouache and ink on card
37.5 x 50.5 cm (14¾ x 20 in); 34.5 x 50.5 cm (13½ x 20 in) (2)

In the first of these two works, a group of narrow boats is moored on a sandy shore. In one of the smaller boats, a splash of turquoise marks the fisherman's net, or perhaps even the silvery glint of his catch. It provides a dash of vibrancy to the otherwise predominantly earthy palette. In the second of the gouaches, Boris Dmitrievich Grigoriev provides a detailed insight into Chilean domestic life. Executed with considerable detail, the work is split horizontally in two levels, consistent with the building's two floors. Below the hut, various animals rummage for food. Two contented sows and their piglets forage and feast on scraps, whilst to the left, an emaciated goat appears too weak to move.

In the upper half of the work, we are given a private glimpse into the straw and wooden hut. A girl perches on the edge of a table, an adult just visible to her right, whilst on the rickety deck, a younger child, dressed in white, waves to the figures taking rest in the shade.

Grigoriev's *oeuvre* reflects the influence of both German Expressionism and French post-Impressionism, as well as an interest in Critical Realism, Symbolism, Cubo-Futurism, and icon painting. The simplicity of line used to delineate the boats, bodies of the animals and figures in the two present works is similar to that used by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) in their drawings. Grigoriev tended towards the simplification of the elements, and yet his figures do not suffer as a result, instead they demonstrate considerable psychological expression. If anything, his naive style, present in both works, connects with the people, and imbues the works with a certain nostalgia.

Two Views of Chile belong to a group of around 300 gouaches from Grigoriev's Latin-American series. Grigoriev travelled to South America twice, in 1928 and again in 1936. His fame preceded him, and Grigoriev's arrival in Chile was marked in a local paper, where the artist was referred to as the 'gran pintor ruso'. Grigoriev and his wife, Elizabeth, spent a number of years living and teaching in Chile. This included a paid post at the Chilean Art Academy, at the invitation of the Chilean government, whilst

his wife taught in the Department of Applied Arts at the Academy. In 1928 he exhibited at the Museo de Belles Artes in Santiago.

Several conservative critics in Chile called Grigoriev's work flamboyant and of limited taste, however they could not fail to praise his incredible plasticity and expressiveness. Despite his relatively short stay in Chile, Grigoriev made a significant impact on the Chilean people, not only through his exhibitions, but also by his teachings. One of his best known pupils was the artist Maria Tupper (1898-1965).

When Grigoriev exhibited his South American landscapes in the Lilienfeld Galleries in New York in January 1938, they were compared to the works of Raoul Dufy (1877-1953), and caused critics to comment 'where is the painter of *The Brothers Karamazov*? Where is the dirtiness of Gorky's face? Where is the stiffness of the *Faces of Russia*? We cannot find them anymore, we can see a very different Grigoriev, different and new.'¹

¹ Kamishnikov, L., 'Neugomonnaia dusha, Na Vistavke Khudozhnika Borisa Grigorieva,' *Novoia Russkoe Slova*, 1938.

Artist description:

Grigoriev was born in Moscow and studied at the Stroganov Art School from 1903 to 1907. Grigoriev went on to study at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg under Aleksandr Kiselyov, Dmitry Kardovsky and Abram Arkhipov from 1907 to 1912. He began exhibiting his work in 1909 as a member of Union of Impressionists group, and became a member of the World of Art movement in 1913. At that time he also was interesting in literature, writing the novel *Young Rays*.

Grigoriev lived for a time in Paris, where he attended the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. In Paris he was strongly influenced by Paul Cézanne.

After his return to Saint Petersburg in 1913 he became part of the Bohemian scene in St. Petersburg and was close to many artists and writers of the time, such as Sergey Sudeykin, Velimir Khlebnikov and the poet Anna Akhmatova, often painting their portraits.

Grigoriev was also interested in the Russian countryside, its peasants and village life. From 1916 to 1918 he created a series of paintings and graphic works, *Russia (Raseja)*, depicting the poverty and strength of the Russian peasantry and village life. The album was started by Grigoriev's poem *To her stepsons*. The album won a praise from influential art-critic Alexandre Benois. According to Benois, Grigoriev had shown the very essence of Russia in the period before the revolutionary upheaval.

From 1919, Grigoriev travelled and lived abroad in many countries including Finland, Germany, France, USA, Central and South Americas. In 1934 he published his poem *Russia* in the American Russian-language newspaper *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*. The poem was a poetic reflection of his famous *Russia* series of paintings. He also wrote the poem *America* published only in 2003.

Grigoriev died in Cagnes-sur-Mer in 1939.

Collections

Grigoriev is represented in the following collections: State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; Gorkii Museum, Moscow and many other private collections, amongst others.