

ZINAIDA EVGENIEVNA SEREBRIAKOVA

(Neskuchnoye Estate, Kursk 1884 - Paris 1967)

Working in Soil in the Apple Orchard

signed in Cyrillic and dated '1908' (lower right)
gouache over pencil on paper
33 x 54 cm (13 x 21¼ in)

Literature: V. P. Kniazeva, *Zinaida Evgenieva Serebriakova*, Moscow, 1979, illustrated pl. 10.

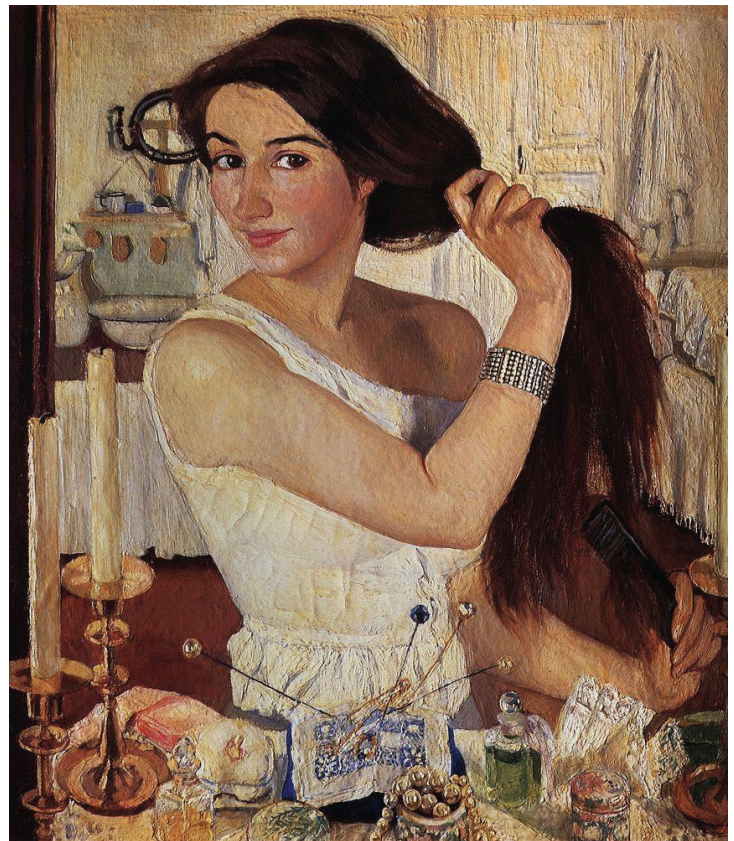
LOOKING THROUGH A LINE OF TREES IN AN APPLE orchard, Zinaida Evgenievna Serebriakova depicts a group of women busy tilling the soil. The expressive quality of the composition is characteristic of her paintings, particularly her landscape and peasant scenes. Rather than conveying the harsher realities of the natural world, Serebriakova sought to harness the beauty of the land and the people who worked it through expressive forms. The painting is possessed of a strong sense of freedom, employing bold and unnatural colours, blocks of paint and fluid brushstrokes.

From an early age, Serebriakova felt a deep attachment to her homeland and the characters that inhabited it. Her paintings seek to express and celebrate their qualities. The subject matter and stylistic qualities of *Working in Soil in the Apple Orchard* are evidence of this desire. She was delighted by the pure colours of the local countryside, its leisurely nature and the freedom and plasticity of the movements of the peasants at work. Serebriakova recognised the importance of simplicity and inner harmony in painting landscapes and peasants, which she viewed as traits inseparable from Russian nature. Though young at the time of its execution, Serebriakova displays in *Working in Soil in the Apple Orchard*, a confidence and boldness that was characteristic of her work and signalled an extraordinary talent.

A Russian painter, Serebriakova was born into the prestigious Lansere family of artists. Her father, Yevgeni Lansere (1848-1886), was a famous sculptor, while her grandfather Nikolai Leontjewitsch Benois (see cat. no. xxx) was an Academician and chairman of St. Petersburg Association of Architects. She was also sister to Yevgeny Lansere (1875-1946), who held an important place in Russian and Soviet art as a master of monumental painting and graphic art; and Nikolai Lansere (1879-1942), a talented architect and art historian. She studied at the Princess Tenisheva Art School in St. Petersburg after which she lived in Italy from 1902 to 1903. She then went to the studio of the well-known portrait painter Osip Braz (1872-1936) in St. Petersburg (1903-1905) and from there on to the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris (1905-1906).

She achieved broad recognition when she exhibited *At the Dressing Table: Self-Portrait* in St. Petersburg at an exhibition mounted by the Union of Russian Artists in 1910 (fig. 1). An unusual composition, it emanates youthful exuberance and displays the influence of her uncle Alexandre Benois, a member of the Russian society World of Art (active 1898-1906), which stressed vigour and elegance simultaneously. Serebriakova's work was not, however, to express the same level of interest in the Art Nouveau and Symbolist movements.

Serebriakova had a chequered life. Widowed in 1919, she struggled to raise



Zinaida Evgenievna Serebriakova, *At the Dressing Table: Self-Portrait*, 1909, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Figure 1)

her four children alone and in 1920 moved to Petrograd. In 1924 she went to Paris on receiving a commission there but was unable to return to Russia as planned. She proceeded to travel extensively elsewhere visiting exotic locations such as Algeria and Morocco. In her paintings of this period, it was common folk that appealed most strongly to her. Indeed, the artist's paintings reveal a deep desire to celebrate her love of beauty, whether in nature or man, through expressive means. A large collection of her work was finally exhibited in 1966 to great acclaim, receiving comparisons to Sandro Botticelli (c.1445-1510) and Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). She died at the age of eighty-two in Paris.

