

**THE BORIS  
ANISFELD  
EXHIBITION**

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The Boris Anisfeld Exhibition by Christian Brinton

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**CHRISTIAN BRINTON**

**THE BORIS  
ANISFELD  
EXHIBITION**





SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST  
WITH SUNFLOWER AND CAT

THE  
BORIS ANISFELD  
EXHIBITION

WITH INTRODUCTION AND CATALOGUE  
OF THE PAINTINGS

By

CHRISTIAN BRINTON



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1918

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SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST  
PAINTED AT CAPRI





SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST  
WITH MANNIKIN



## INTRODUCTION

BY CHRISTIAN BRINTON

### I—CRITICAL

*Les formes, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent.*

WHEN, a scant decade ago, the Russian Ballet first flung across the European artistic firmament its fresh effulgence, the general public considered it a purely exotic phenomenon. Those familiar with Russia only through the sermonizing of Tolstoy, the stark pathology of Dostoievsky, and the peace propaganda painting of Vassili Vereshchagin were ill prepared for this exhilarating fusion of colour, sound, and movement. The chromatic opulence, the choreographic perfection, and the frankly pagan appeal of these performances were indeed in sharp contrast to the sober teachings of the prophet of Yasnaya Polyana, who, clad in rough smock and round cap, sat beneath the Tree of the Poor expounding to naive muzhiki the gospel according to Liev Nikolaievich.

By the close of a brief, triumphant season—it was at the

Châtelet, in Paris, in 1909—the conventional, West European conception of the Slavonic temperament had undergone a change. The preachments of the humanitarians, and the interminable analyses of the great, turgid realists were forgotten in the free enjoyment of an art swift, sensuous, and synthetic—the art of the choreodrama. As though by magic, one was transported from church, courtroom, and clinic into a wonder-world of romance and passion, to Samarkand and Bagdad, to Persia, India, and China. That paralysis of purpose and that tyranny of the actual so typical of certain phases of Russian thought and life were suddenly dissipated. The soul tortures of Anna Karenina vanished before the exultant seduction of Semiramis, Zobeide, and Salome. What was of chief importance however was the fact that a new and vigorous art form had come out of the East bearing, Magi-like, its bountiful offering. The cumbersome Wagnerian claptrap so long in vogue was superseded by something logical and organic. Petrograd had taken precedence over Bayreuth. The philosophic premonitions of Baudelaire, and the *spectacle de rêve* of that purest of aestheticians, Stéphane Mallarmé, had virtually been realized.

While in the popular mind this transformation had taken place overnight as it were, the moment was long preparing. Contemporary Russian art, of which the ballet is but a single manifestation, represents, in common with all art that is inherently vital, the relentless process of reaction. In this land of extremes, taste, too, has its extremes, and the men of to-day have but risen against the trammels of a sterile, plebeian past. You will in brief fail to grasp the significance of contemporary Slavonic art in all its colour and complexity, if you do not remember the fact that it constitutes, first and