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Title: A Cold War Curiosity? The Soviet Collection at the Darwin Memorial Museum, Down House, Kent (Author's Original Version)

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Abstract:

In the late 1950s-early 1960s, the Charles Darwin memorial museum at Down House in Kent acquired a collection of Soviet paintings, sculptures and photographic albums, none of which are currently on display to the public. These artefacts were sent to the UK from the State Darwin Museum in Moscow, by its directors, the ornithologist Professor Aleksandr Kots and his wife, the animal behaviourist, Dr Nadezhda Ladygina-Kots. The ostensible reasons for the gifts were largely connected to anniversary celebrations of Darwin's life and work. The focus on art works related to the Darwin Museum's particular concern with the use of art to stimulate and inform visitors without the use of too much text in the displays. This article explores the potential impact of the contemporary, Soviet and international, 'Cold War' debates over 'Lysenkoism' and 'Soviet Darwinism', on the short-lived display at Down House, entitled the 'Russian Room' (c.1961-1964).

Introduction

Down House in Kent was once the home of the famous British evolutionary theorist, Charles Darwin, and became a memorial museum to him in 1929.¹ During the 'Cold War' it was owned by the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSE). Under their regime took place an intriguing, significant, but little known chapter in the history of this important British collection. Briefly, between c.1961 and 1964, Down House had a so-called 'Russian Room'.

¹ After the death of Emma Darwin in 1896 the house had a varied history of tenancies, including two schools, until the British Association for the Advancement of Science campaigned to raise funds to buy it with a view to creating a 'national memorial to Darwin', <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/history/>

In this room were displayed commemorative paintings and monumental sculpture busts relating to the life of Darwin, as well as photographic albums representing the scientific and populist work of the Soviet State Darwin Museum in Moscow. These items are not on public display at Down, although images of twelve of the paintings are now available to view on the Art UK website.² They were all sent to Britain between c.1958 and c.1963 by the ornithologist, Professor Aleksandr Kots and his wife, the animal behaviourist, Dr Nadezhda Ladygina-Kots, the co-directors of the Darwin Museum. For Aleksandr Kots, the creation of the 'Russian Room' at Down House marked the high point of the Darwin Museum's attempts to re-establish cultural exchange with British individuals, institutions and organisations connected with bio-science between the mid-1950s and early 1960s. These attempts were made in the wake of the communications rift between Soviet and western bio-scientists created by the triumph of Trofim Lysenko's 'Michurinist biology' in 1948.

Kots' pursuit of cultural exchange with Britain was both enabled and problematized by the 'Cold War' context of the 1950s-1960s, which was fraught with contradictions in terms of political, scientific, cultural and trade relationships between the West and the USSR. On the one hand, the period was characterised by Nikita Khrushchev's 'Thaw'. This included the tentative resumption of Anglo-Soviet cultural and scientific relations, a temporary decrease in Lysenko's power over Soviet bio-science, a relaxation of the rules on Soviet Socialist Realist art practice, and the introduction of exchange art exhibitions between western countries and the USSR. On the other hand, these years were also marked by a number of events that enhanced Western perceptions of the Soviet Union as a threatening power. In such circumstances, any cultural exchanges between Britain and the USSR were highly unlikely to be perceived by either side as being ideologically neutral. As I will argue, this appears to

² See, 'Viktor Eustaphieff 1916-1989', Art UK, retrieved from, <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/actor:eustaphieff-viktor-19161989>.

have been the case in relation to the rendering, reception and display of the Darwin Museum's gifts to Down House during the period.³

This article examines some aspects of the possible strategic motivations for the Soviet gifts to Down House from the Darwin Museum, their display, and the eventual closure of the 'Russian Room' in late 1964, in relation to the history and vagaries of Anglo-Soviet cultural exchange in the period c.1958-1963. The approach is necessarily interdisciplinary, using sometimes fragmentary archival evidence from Russian and British sources, and also drawing on secondary sources within the disciplines of the social histories of art and culture, as well as from political history and the histories of science.

Each of the five sections of the article pursues a distinct research question. The discussion begins by exploring what the 'Russian Room' may be argued to have contained and looked like, using a variety of archival, visual and textual materials, as well as the physical evidence of some key art works to support the arguments. The second section considers the possible reasons why the Darwin Museum chose to send works of art to Down House, both in relation to its own unique display policy, and to its relatively successful pre-World War II strategy of using art works as a currency of cultural exchange with western scientists and institutions. This is followed by an investigation of the possible, specific strategic motivations for sending the art works and photographic albums to Down House within the time-frame of 1958-1963. The fourth section of the article then examines the possible British strategic motives for the instatement of the 'Russian Room' c.1961 at Down House, in the conflicted context of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' and Lysenko's apparent resumption of power over Soviet bio-science in that year. The final section looks at the potential reasons for the closure of the 'Russian Room' in late 1964, and the resulting dispersal of the art works and albums to other spaces in

³ Other British recipients of similar gifts included the British Museum of Natural History (BMNH), Christ's College Cambridge, the Linnean Society of London, Sir Charles Darwin and Julian Huxley. Not all of these gifts were enthusiastically received and some of the art works have so far proved untraceable.

the museum and elsewhere, in relation to both the ‘Lysenko Affair’, and to British critical denigration of Soviet Socialist Realism.

The article concludes that the gifts successfully fulfilled the Darwin Museum’s intentions to commemorate and communicate shared values and interests between Soviet and British scientists and institutions, which the directors hoped would lead to better and closer relations with the West. Ultimately, however, it would seem that this message was compromised by the political context of the exchange, in the spheres of both art and bio-politics. Maybe for this reason, although a significant part of the ‘Cold War’ process at the time, and thus as genuine a cultural exchange as was possible in the circumstances, the story of the ‘Russian Room’ at Down House has unfortunately dropped out of view for contemporary historians, art historians and curators.

The ‘Russian Room’

This section seeks to establish briefly what the ‘Russian Room’ at Down House may have contained over the period c.1961-1964, and what the display may have looked like. It focuses particularly on the paintings and sculptures, using the contents of the contextualising albums as a springboard to the next sections of the discussion. The primary evidence on which the discussion is based comprises eighteen Soviet art works and nine photographic albums held by English Heritage (EHDHA), as well as a small number of photographs relating to the ‘Russian Room’ held in the archives of the Linnean Society of London (LSL) and the RCSE, and fragmentary items of associated correspondence. Because the materials on which the article is based are largely unavailable to the general public, the section is necessarily mainly descriptive. Some of the points raised about the style, subject matter and potential significance of the art works in relation to the contextualisation provided by the albums will be followed up in more detail in further sections of the article. In addition, there

are two important provisos to make regarding the ensuing discussion: firstly that it is not currently possible to identify accurately from the archival materials, when some gifts from the Darwin Museum were sent to/arrived at Down House; and secondly, when – or if – all of the gifts were all incorporated into the ‘Russian Room’ display at any point in its history. Thus, no detailed contextual sense can be gained about how the display may have mutated historically during the brief period of its existence.

It is likely that two of the earliest Soviet gifts to be displayed at Down House, were a pair of monumental sculptural busts of *Young Emma Darwin* and *Young Charles Darwin*. These were created especially for Down House in 1958 by a Darwin Museum resident artist, Viktor Evstaf’ev, and sent to the RCSE in late 1958-early 1959. The preparation for their transit was recorded by a photograph from the Darwin Museum reproduced in one of the photographic albums sent to Down House (Fig.1), and their initial installation at Down House was celebrated by an undated photograph held in the archives of the RCSE (Fig. 2).

Evstaf’ev’s plaster busts were clever three-dimensional constructions based on reproductions of the nineteenth-century artist, George Richmond’s well-known, tiny two-dimensional chalk and watercolour portraits of Charles and Emma Darwin on their wedding day (1840), held at Down House. The sculptures were smoothly executed, with a lot of detail of dress and physiognomy, giving a strong illusion of naturalism despite the huge, more than twice life-size nature of the busts. The monumental scale is visually underlined by the contrast between the sizes of the busts in relation to the human figure of Aleksandr Kots in Fig. 1. As will be seen later, the scale can be linked to the display practices of the Darwin Museum, and more broadly to the contemporary practices of Soviet Socialist Realism.

The undated photograph held in the Linnean Society archive (Fig. 3), shows a large painting of Darwin at work, located as the centrepiece on one wall of the ‘Russian Room’. This was

one of two large, framed, oil on canvas paintings that are known to have featured in the early construction of the 'Russian Room' display.⁴ The central work in the photograph is *Middle Aged Darwin in His Study* (Fig. 4). According to a photograph in the RCSE archive,⁵ the other painting, *Alfred Russel Wallace on the Malayan Archipelago* (Fig. 5), hung over the mantelpiece at the opposite end of the room. These large paintings were also made in 1958 by Evstaf'ev, who indeed executed all of the other paintings that were sent to Down House. Like the busts, the paintings were carefully researched with particular attention to physiognomic and other details.

The portrait of Darwin would seem to be largely based on a painting by S. Uranova (*Darwin at His Desk*, 1930) held at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. Even so, the facial features and dress referred to a well-known photograph of Darwin in middle-age, and the setting alluded to available photographs of Darwin's study and of the reconstructed display of the study at Down House. The aspect of copying here suggests that the Darwin Museum and Evstaf'ev prioritized perceived accuracy of documentary detail over originality of composition or approach, something which may be seen also in the dependence on photographs and reproductions of other artistic representations, in the art works sent to Down House from the Darwin Museum. Notwithstanding this general point, however, the portrait of Wallace appears to have been a more imaginative creation than the Darwin portrait. The physiognomy and pose were derived from a currently available photograph of Wallace, Darwin's specimen collector and potential rival evolutionary theorist, but the depiction of the

⁴ Initially sent to the BMNH in late 1958-early 1959, they were given to Down House on 'indefinite loan' by consent of the BMNH Trustees on March 21, 1959: R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, Letter to Sir Gavin de Beer, February 27, (1959 a), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, Letter to Sir Gavin de Beer, April 7, (1959 c), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; G. de Beer, Letter to R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, March 11, (1959 a), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; G. de Beer, Letter to R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, April 6, (1959 b) RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9. Both of the paintings now hang in the Down House 'Boardroom', an area which is not open to the general public.

⁵ RCSE RCS-MUS/14/3.

setting presumably relied on the Darwin Museum's extensive anthropological, zoological and botanical knowledge, as there is no known image of Wallace in the Malaysian jungle.

In terms of subject matter, and in relation to their context of display, the two paintings constituted a very specific historical narrative, depicting aspects of the 'habitats' in which the two scientists developed quite similar views on evolution, expressed in a joint paper at a historic meeting of the Linnean Society in 1858, following which, Darwin's theory of evolution, rather than Wallace's, was given primacy in British scientific discourse. This narratively matched pair of works, perhaps unsurprisingly, share similar technical and stylistic characteristics. They are naturalistic, with accurate representations of spatial illusion and recognisable depicted objects. Sparingly painted, with not much use of impasto, the works nevertheless have some areas of faintly impressionistic brushwork, although they appear on first sight, and particularly through reproductions, to be highly finished objects.

The precise stylistic characteristics of these two keynote paintings were not entirely replicated in all of the other 16 smaller painted works in oil on board, card or paper that were sent to Down House. These other works were equally concerned with accurate, historically sourced representations of contextual and physiognomic detail, in order to present a series of convincing narrative historical scenarios. But, rather than being new works within the Darwin Museum's purview of its artistic collection, these were all (smaller scale) copies of works that there were already extant therein. Thus, occasionally other criteria were involved.

A notable example of this, registered in the photograph of the 'Russian Room' display (Fig. 3), relates to the painted copy by Evstaf'ev of an image of *Darwin's First Encounter with a Tier Lander [Tierra del Fuegian]* (Fig. 6). The original on which it was based, was done in the 1920s by an early Darwin Museum artist, Mikhail Ezuchevskii,⁶ as part of a series of

⁶ Udal'tsova, V. 'Mikhail Dimitrivich Ezuchevskii', in *Gosudarstvennyi*

narrative works on the life of Darwin. The painted copy of the work by Evstav'ev attempted to replicate not just the content, but also Ezuchevskii's freer and more sketchy, impressionistic style of representation. Evstav'ev's own, more conservative style, exemplified in the portraits of Darwin and Wallace (Figs 4 and 5), was, however, dominantly represented in the veritable 'iconostasis' of images around the central portrait of Darwin illustrated in Fig. 3. This featured copies of works from Evstav'ev's own series of illustrations of the life of Darwin 1948-c.1958,⁷ such as *Darwin and K.A. Timiriazev* (Fig. 10), a work which will be discussed later.

The art works, taken as a group, presented a well-researched, narrative hagiography of Charles Darwin that can be seen as potentially appropriate to the contemporary Darwin centenary celebrations, as well as to the function of Down House as the British Darwin memorial museum. The photographic albums that were displayed in the 'Russian Room's' glass cases not only provided contextual information about the professional and scientific concerns of the Darwin Museum as a natural history museum, but may also be argued to offer some clues as to why hagiographic paintings and sculptures might feature so largely in Kots's attempts at cultural exchange.

Art and the Darwin Museum

The albums show that the Darwin Museum made copious use of art works⁸ of various kinds within its museum displays. Indeed, it had done so since its foundation c.1907 at the Women's Higher Courses Institute of Moscow University.⁹ The works ranged from

Darvinovskii Muzei Moskva: Sokrovishcha russkogo iskusstva, (Moscow, 2007), p.28.

⁷ EHDHA, HOMS List of Russian works (undated).

⁸ The use of the word 'art' in this article refers principally to imaginative and/or illustrative paintings and sculptures.

⁹ Even after the deaths of Ladygina-Kots in 1963, and of Kots in 1964, their vision lived on, and is still alive in the displays and policies of the current State Darwin Museum, which is now one of the foremost natural history museums in Russia. Large numbers of art works by Vatagin and other museum artists of the past, as well as

imaginatively staged taxidermy accompanied by illustrative paintings and drawings of contemporary plants, creatures and their habitats, through ‘reconstructive’ narrative paintings and sculptures representing early hominids and prehistoric flora and fauna (see Fig. 7), to dramatic depictions of the lives of evolutionary theorists, including Darwin, and monumental commemorative portrait busts of past and contemporary international bio-scientists. This style of museum display related to the Kotses very particular vision of the natural history museum as an exciting visual experience for visitors during the process of the guided lecture tours, which were the only form of public access to the collection.¹⁰ In relation to this process, it was theorised by Kots that encounters with illustrative pictures and sculptures, with a minimum of textual information in the displays, would best stimulate the visitors’ imaginations, and hence their inclinations both to question their assumptions about evolution, and to study natural science.

This vision had been nurtured initially by the Kotses acquaintance with displays in natural history museums in England, Germany, Belgium and France before the Russian Revolution, particularly on their honeymoon visit to Europe in 1913.¹¹ On this occasion they may have encountered such works as Emmanuel Fremiet’s fantastical *Gorilla Carrying off a Woman* (1887) in the Parisian Jardin des Plantes.¹² They certainly saw Eugene Rutot and Louis Mascrae’s more scholarly ‘reconstructions’ (1909-1914) of early hominids in the Institut

creations by the earliest museum taxidermists are still integral parts of the contemporary Darwin Museum displays.

¹⁰ A.F. Kots, *Muzei evoliutsionnoi istorii moskovskikh vysshikh kursov za 1913-1914 god (The Museum of Evolutionary History of the Moscow Higher Courses [Institute] for 1913-1914)*, (Moscow, 1914); A.E. Kohts, ‘The Museum Darwinianum on the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Foundation by Professor Alexander Kohts, Dr. Sc (Biology) Founder and Director of the Museum Darwinianum’, *VOKS Bulletin*, 6 ,95, November-December (1955), pp.28-32, EHDHA P2 37, 88203381, 88203383, 88203390. This was apparently the only mode in which the Darwin Museum operated in the Soviet period.

¹¹ A.F. Kots, ‘Darvinovskii muzei do oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii 1907-1917’ (‘The Darwin Museum up to the October Revolution 1907-1917’), in N.I. Tregub, *Darvinovskii Muzei. 100 Let so dnia osnovaniia 1907-2007 (The Darwin Museum. 100 Years Since the Day of its Foundation, 1907-2007)*, *Trudi gosudarstvennogo Darvinovskogo muzeia*, 11. (Moscow, 2007), pp.18-19.

¹² See: Bridgeman Images, accessed June 29, 2016. https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-GB/search?filter_text=Fremiet+jARDIN+DES+PLANTES&filter_group=all#close .

Royale des Histoires Naturelles Belgique in Brussels.¹³ They were also probably aware of late 19th-early 20th century large-scale ‘reconstructive’ and illustrational museum paintings about prehistoric life, that were created not only by French Salon painters such as Fernand Cormon,¹⁴ but also notably by the Russian artist Viktor Vasnetsov for the Historical Museum in Moscow during the 1880s,¹⁵ and by the American artist Charles R. Knight for the American Museum of Natural History, New York, in the early 1900s.¹⁶ On the basis of these sorts of visual stimuli, Kots and his wife set out to create a museum that rapidly became unique among contemporary natural history museums, both in the Soviet Union and in the West, because of the sheer quantity and diversity of the paintings and sculptures packed into the displays. After the 1917 Revolution, these displays were specifically designed to create an immersive experience for visiting groups of workers, soldiers and teachers.

While this unusual display policy was perhaps comprehensible to any viewer of the photographic albums as a possible explanation of why the Darwin Museum would send art works to Down House, some images in the albums implied another, more strategic function for hagiographic sculptures in particular, about which most British viewers of the ‘Russian Room’ may have been unaware.

In the 1920s-1930s selected examples of such sculptures had been used by the Darwin Museum to commemorate visits from, or contacts with, western scientists. This might have been as a setting for documentary photographs, as in the case of the visit by Sir Charles

¹³ See A. Hurel, ‘The Paleoanthropologist and the Artist (1)’, *Arts and Societies*, Seminar 1, (undated) accessed June 29, 2016, retrieved from, <http://www.artsetsocietes.org/a/a-hurel.html>.

¹⁴ A.P. Gindart, ‘Fleshing out the museum: Fernand Cormon’s painting cycle for the new galleries of comparative anatomy, paleontology and anthropology’, *Nineteenth Century Artworlds*, 7, 2 (19th Century Art World Wide, 2008,), retrieved from, <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn08/38-autumn08/autumn08article/92-fleshing-out-the-museum-fernand-cormons-painting-cycle-for-the-new-galleries-of-comparative-anatomy-paleontology-and-anthropology>.

¹⁵ See Viktor Vasnetsov, *Stone Age Feast*, 1883, State Historical Museum Moscow, retrieved from, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B9_%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BA._%D0%9F%D0%B8%D1%80%D1%88%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE.jpg.

¹⁶ See ‘The World of Charles R. Knight’, retrieved from, <http://www.charlesrknight.com/AMNH.htm>.

Galton Darwin in August 1928. One album photograph, for instance, had him posed against the recently completed large-scale *Seated Darwin* sculpture by the museum's senior artist, Vasilii Vatagin,¹⁷ an art work, which for Kots, was equivalent and equal to Sir Joseph de Boehme's sculpture *Seated Darwin* (1884), in the BMNH. More commonly, however, the commemorations were done through monumental plaster busts of western visitors or correspondents, largely also created by Vatagin.

Thus, for example, the Museum's extensive collection of portrait busts celebrating the history of evolutionary theory and bio-science, contained a bust of the British scientist and coiner of the term "genetics", William Bateson,¹⁸ who had visited the museum in 1925.¹⁹ While the relationship with Bateson was not to develop further because he died in 1926, the bust in the Museum's collection both commemorated the visit of this distinguished British scientist, and symbolically represented the Darwin Museum's developing professional interest in western genetics in the 1920s. This visit and its artistic commemoration, as recorded in the albums sent to Britain, was something that would arguably be useful to the museum in the late 1950s, as a means of registering its long-term alignment with western, and particularly British constructs of genetics.

Equally significant was the fact that in 1929 a copy of a bust of Francis Galton – the British founder of eugenics - was sent to Henry Fairfield Osborn.²⁰ Osborn was the director of the American Museum of Natural History in New York (AMNH), and was also an eugenicist and

¹⁷ A.E. Kohts, Album inscribed 'To Mr. Charles Darwin with profound respect and unbounded admiration', EHDHA P2 49 88203380, (n.d. 1950s-early 1960s b).

¹⁸ BMNHA MSS Mus 8 Vols. (undated).

¹⁹ Bateson was in the USSR as part of a delegation of British scientists from the Royal Society, who had been invited to participate in the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences. A.E. Kohts, Letter to William Bateson, Royal Society Visit to Russia, John Innes Archive Norwich [JICA], G6E, William Bateson Papers, (undated, 1925).

²⁰ A.E. Kohts, Letter to H.F. Osborn (undated, 1920s-early 1930s b), AGDM f.492, o.10141, ed.khr.1239.

leading member of the American Galton Society.²¹ The bust was a strategically appropriate ‘thank-you’ gift from Kots for Osborn’s generous responses to his requests for current western scientific publications that were unobtainable in the USSR during the early 1920s.²² It was appropriate on two counts. It represented a novel contribution to the AMNH’s ‘hall of fame’, in which were displayed busts of famous natural historians and bio-scientists. It also symbolically signified Kots’s engagement with Soviet and international eugenics discourse – an engagement shared with the majority of contemporary bio-scientists around the world, including Bateson.²³ Osborn’s acknowledgement of this message was implicit in the prominent position given to the bust at the entrance to the exhibition accompanying the Third International Eugenics Congress at AMNH in 1932.²⁴ In return for Kots’s gift, c.1935 Osborn sent the Darwin Museum a copy of a bust of himself, by the American sculptor Chester Beach²⁵ for Kots’ own ‘hall of fame’. The exchange of busts appeared to confirm the existence of shared interests between the two museums and their directors, although this was not to last past Osborn’s death in November 1935.

Perhaps the most successful use of art to memorialise the Darwin Museum’s international communications, however, was a bust of Robert Yerkes, an American ape-researcher and eugenicist. Yerkes visited the museum in 1929 to discuss Nadezhda Ladygina-Kots’s comparative behavioural psychological study of an infant chimpanzee and her own son

²¹ ‘Leading Eugenicists’, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Image Archive of the American Eugenics Movement, undated), accessed June 29, 2016.

<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/static/themes/14.html>.

²² A.E. Kohts, Correspondence with colleagues at the American Museum of Natural History, AGDM f.376, 492-494, o.10141, ed.khr.1239, and f.1077-1081, o.12497, ed.khr.1239, (undated, 1920s-1930s a).

²³ Such engagement is supported by the presence of editions of the *Russian Eugenics Journal* in the library of the Darwin Museum as well other materials relating to eugenics in the Kotses private library catalogues: A.F. Kots, Handwritten personal library catalogue, 4 vols, (undated), AGDM, f.1243, o.0.21, ed.khr.107; I.P. Kalacheva, *Archivnyi fond Ladygina-Kots, Nadezhda Nikolaevna (1889-1963) (The Archive Fond on Ladygina-Kots, Nadezhda Nikolaevna (1889-1963))*, Opis 1, October 7, (2010), pp.286-288.

²⁴ *A Decade of Progress. Third International Congress of Eugenics, American Museum of Natural History, New York City, August 22-September 23, 1932*, (Baltimore,1934), p.487.

²⁵ A.E. Kohts, Letter to W.K. Gregory, November 9, (1934), AGDM, f.12497, o.1079, ed.khr.1239; W.K. Gregory, Letter to A.E. Kohts, January 7, (1935), AMNHA Ms. G7441. William King Gregory Correspondence 1920-1947.

Rudi.²⁶ Yerkes and his daughter stayed with the Kotses for several days and thereafter carried on correspondence with them until 1942.²⁷ One important element of the interchange of communications was a copy of the bust, which Yerkes received with delight in January 1930.²⁸ This copy, and its original, symbolically commemorated a cross-cultural relationship that had extended from the purely scientific (and pseudo-scientific) to the personal.

Thus, between the 1920s and 1930s, from Kots's perspective, art works in the form of sculptural busts had become a relatively successful currency for consolidating scientific and intellectual relationships between the Darwin Museum and western scientists and institutions. The art works, by their subject-matter apparently indicated and confirmed a generic commonality of values and interests with the intended recipients. Moreover, both the originals remaining at the Darwin Museum, and the copies sent abroad, arguably took on symbolic communicative resonances in their different locations. These resonances were not always long-lasting in the West and usually did not survive the demise of the main contact person. Arguably however, the former strategic policy did provide the Darwin Museum with a potentially useful model on which to build a new strategy for its own re-inclusion in British scientific discourse during the late 1950s-early 1960s 'Thaw'. Therein, art, including photographic reproductions of art works could act symbolically as commemorations of past connections, and hence as potential catalysts for further East-West bio-scientific communications. In the post-war context, although the types of work used by the Darwin Museum to consolidate cultural exchange were extended to include narrative, hagiographical paintings as well as sculptures, as will be seen, subject matter was still of paramount strategic importance as symbolisations of shared East-West concerns and interests.

²⁶ Published in the USSR in 1935, and in English translation in 2001. N.N. Ladygina-Kohts, *Infant Chimpanzee and Human Child*, F. de Waal, ed. B. Vekker trans. (Oxford, 2001).

²⁷ A.E. Kohts, N.N. Ladygina-Kots, and R. Yerkes, Correspondence, (undated/varied dates late 1920s-1942), AGDM f.12497, o. 650, 651, 653-655, 647-649, ed. khr.1304; f.10141, o. 502- 504, ed. khr.1304.

²⁸ R. Yerkes, Letter to A.E. Kots, January 30, (1930), AGDM f.502, o.10141, ed.khr.1304.

Motivations behind the Darwin Museum's gifts to Down House

The context in which the art works and photographic albums were sent from the Darwin Museum to Down House, was suffused with potential opportunities for a Soviet natural history museum deliberately named after Charles Darwin, to make bids for international prominence. Since Britain was the birthplace of Darwin and Darwinism, it seems logical that in relation to the centenary celebrations, Kots should have exclusively targeted British institutions and individuals in these bids, particularly, as will be seen, when his most recent and fruitful professional contacts with the West had been with Britain.

The initial trigger for the Darwin Museum's gifts was the 15th International Congress of Zoology held at the BMNH in 1958, which included in its published *Proceedings* an abstract of a paper by Ladygina-Kots, a copy of which was sent in an album to Down House in 1961.²⁹ The Congress was a huge affair,³⁰ designed to celebrate the centenary of the presentation to the Linnean Society (July 1, 1858) of the ground-breaking joint paper by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace: 'On the tendency of species to form varieties and on the perpetuation of varieties and species by natural means of selection'. It also commemorated the bicentenary of the publication of the 10th edition of *Systema Naturae*

²⁹ N.N. Ladygina-Kots, Album inscribed 'To the library of Down House in memory of the great naturalist philosopher, Charles Darwin, founder of comparative psychology, from a modest investigator of this field of science. Dr N. Ladygina-Kohts, Moscow Museum Darwinianum', July 16 (1961), EHDHA P2 47 88203381. She was not allowed by the Soviet authorities to attend and give her paper in person, but the abstract was published in the Congress *Proceedings* in 1959. Ladygina-Kohts, N.N. (1958), 'The handling of objects by primates in the light of anthropogenesis', in H.R. Hewer, and N.D. Riley, eds, *Proceedings: XVth International Congress of Zoology, London, 16-23 July 1958*, London: XVth International Congress of Zoology, section X, paper 21, (London, 1959), pp. 855-857, with the cryptic rider: 'Author not present. Paper included here to complete the symposial analysis', p.855. The album also contains an offprint of another paper in Russian, published in the proceedings of the Institute of Genetics' Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences USSR in 1961. N.N. Ladygina-Kots, N.N. 'Darvinizm i problema proiskhozhdeniia soznaniia' ('Darwinism and the Problem of the Origin of Consciousness') *Darvinizm zhivet i rastaetsiia (Darwinism lives and grows)*, Akademiia nauk SSSR institut genetiki institut filosofii, (Moscow, 1961), pp.191-202.

³⁰ The congress was attended by over 1,900 international scientists from various countries including the USSR and the Soviet bloc. C.F.A. Pantin, 'The International Zoological Congress: Some Reflections', *New Scientist*, July 31 (1958), pp.535-536.

(1758, first published in 1736) by the Swedish medical doctor, zoologist and botanist Carl Linnaeus.³¹

The following year, 1959, was the global centenary of the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* [1859] and the 150th anniversary of his birth [1809]. Both were celebrated widely in the USSR,³² where Kots and Ladygina-Kots both made scientific contributions to scholarly events in Moscow. These anniversaries were also commemorated both at Down House and globally. The anniversaries provided further legitimate excuses for the Darwin Museum to send more materials to Down House – and indeed to the Royal College of Surgeons, the BMNH, the LSL, Sir Julian Huxley, and also to Darwin's *alma mater*, Christ's College in Cambridge. 1962 presented a third Darwin-orientated opportunity to send to the RSCE more photographs of art works relating to the life of Darwin, to commemorate the 180th anniversary of Darwin's death in 1882. This was followed in 1963 by a more personally motivated album in memory of Ladygina-Kots, who sadly, had died on November 2, 1963.³³

Correspondence between Kots and VOKS³⁴ - the Soviet agency through which the gifts were sent to Britain – centred on the global relevance of the British Darwin celebrations to Soviet alignment with Darwinism, as a powerful reason for sending the crates and packages to

³¹ The congress formed the high point of a series of commemorative events organised in London by the Royal Society, the Linnean Society and the Geological Society, which included an exhibition of 'Darwiniana' and 'Wallaceana' at the Linnean Society's premises at Burlington House. Pantin, op.cit. (note 29). The exhibition formed the setting for the Congresses' evening receptions, and was also available to delegates during the day. Hewer and Riley, eds, op.cit. (note 28), p.7.

³² E.N. Pavlovskii, Two Albums inscribed 'From E.N. Pavlovsky 1963'. EHDHA P2 31 88203389 and P2 42 88203388.

³³ A.E. Kohts, Album, *In Memoriam: Esperantia Coates, Doctor of Biology, Foundress of the Department of Comparative Psychology at the 'Museum Darwinianum' of Moscow and at the Institute of Philosophy at the Academy of Sciences USSR 2.11.63*, (1963 b), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/29. This was accompanied by a seemingly unfulfilled request for an obituary to be published in Anglophone scientific publications. A.E. Kohts., Letter to Lady Jessie Dobson, November 12, (1963a), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/29.

³⁴ VOKS, the acronym of the Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul'turnoi svyazi s zagranitsei (All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries). VOKS were officially in charge of cultural relations between the USSR and the West.

Britain.³⁵ Official support for the Darwin Museum as some sort of scientific ambassador to the Anglophone world of bio-science, however, apparently dated back to 1955. In this year, the *VOKS Bulletin*, a propaganda vehicle produced in English for western consumption, published an illustrated article by Kots about the Darwin Museum.³⁶ This emphasised the value of using art works to engage museum visitors, and delineated plans for the projected (but ultimately unrealised) construction of a new and more adequate building to house the Darwin Museum collection. Most importantly, it boasted of the museum's long history of good relationships with western scientists. This latter statement was very significant in relation to shifts in the contemporary politico-scientific climate in the USSR in the mid-1950s, particularly with regard to western bio-science and Soviet interpretations of Darwinism. In effect, the article implied that there was now potential for better relations between Soviet and western bio-scientists, in which Kots and the Darwin Museum could play a significant role. Embedded in this implication was also a signal that Lysenkoist criteria regarding Soviet bio-science were now to be seen outside the USSR as less important than they had been.

To backtrack briefly regarding the relationship of this implication to the context of the 1940s-1950s for the Darwin Museum: relations between Soviet and western scientists had been interrupted when political relations soured between the countries as a result of the Molotov-von Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939). During World War II the links between the Darwin Museum and its western contacts had been cut. In 1945, the eminent British bio-scientist, Julian Huxley, visited the USSR and re-forged his long-standing connection with the Darwin

³⁵ A.F. Kots, Letter to Tatiana Mikhailovna (VOKS), (undated, late 1950s a), AGDM, f. 251, o.12497, ed.khr.1244; A.F. Kots, Letters to N. Gromyko (VOKS), (undated, late 1950s b), AGDM f. 290, 292, 299, o.10141, ed.khr.1248, (undated, late 1950s c); A.F. Kots, 2 letters to the Obshchestvo kul'turnoi svyazi (Society for Cultural Relations), (undated, late 1950s c), AGDM f. 702-703, o. 2116, ed.khr.1244; A.F.Kots., Letter to Tatiana Mikhailovna (VOKS), (undated, late 1950s d), AGDM f. 251, o.12497, ed.khr.1244; N. Gromyko, VOKS letter to the USSR-Great Britain Society, February 13, (1959), AGDM f. 293, o. 10141, ed.khr. 1248.

³⁶ Kohts, op.cit. (note 9), 28-32.

Museum.³⁷ When Huxley returned to Britain from his celebrated post-war visit to the USSR,³⁸ he wrote glowingly about the quality of the Darwin Museum's collection in the authoritative international scientific journal *Nature*.³⁹ Moreover, in response to Aleksandr Kots's pleas for support in re-gaining entry to western scientific discourse, Huxley enabled him to publish two papers written in 1946 in the *Journal of the Zoological Society of London*.⁴⁰ Also within the brief time-frame of 1945-1946, professional communications between the Darwin Museum and the BMNH, which had existed in intensive but sporadic bursts from 1913 to c.1935,⁴¹ were re-opened. This resulted in a shipment of rare Soviet mammalian and avian specimens exemplifying variety and variation in colouring of fur or plumage in relation to region,⁴² from Moscow to London in October 1945.⁴³ By August 1948, however, the links between the Darwin Museum and its British contacts, and indeed, between all Soviet and western bio-scientists and institutions had again been severed.

³⁷ The relationship had been initiated in early 1928 through the auspices of the Secretary of the British Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR, Catherine Rabinovich. A.E. Kohts, Letter to Catherine Rabinovich, (undated, 1928), AGDM f.244, o.12497, ed.khr.1292. It had been strengthened by Huxley's visit to the museum in 1931. Kohts, op.cit. (note 9), p.31; J.S. Huxley, Letter to A.E. Kots January 10, (1932), AGDM f.142, o.12497, ed.khr.1203.

³⁸ N. Kremenstov, 'A "Second Front" in Soviet genetics: The International Dimension of the Lysenko Controversy', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 29, 2 (1996), pp. 236-237.

³⁹ J.S. Huxley, (1945). 'Science in the USSR: Evolutionary biology and related subjects', *Nature*, 156, September 1 (1945), pp.254-256. doi: 10.1038/156254a0

⁴⁰ K.R. Dronamraju, *If I Am To Be Remembered: The Life and Work of Julian Huxley*, (London, 1993), p.111; A.E. Kohts, 'Analogical variations in the plumage of domestic fowls and grouse: A contribution to the problem of the Inter-relation of Darwinism and genetics', *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, 117, 4 (1948), pp.742-747; A.E. Kohts, 'The variation of colour in the common wolf and its hybrids with domestic dogs', *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, 117, 4 (1948), pp.784-790. Both articles carried the legends 'Received October 17, 1946', and 'Submitted through the British Council and published at their request'.

⁴¹ The State Darwin Museum Archive catalogue has many pages listing correspondence with the BMNH in sporadic bursts: starting with correspondence with Kots in 1905, then with Kots in relation to the museum in 1913, before 1918, 1923, 1931-1932, 1935, and then 1945-1946, as well as 1956-1960, 1962-1963.

⁴² This related to the focus of Kots's personal research as illustrated in albums sent to Down House. A.E. Kohts, Album inscribed 'To the Royal College of Surgeons with Respectful and Cordial Greetings from the Founder (1905) and Director of the Museum Darwinianum of Moscow, Prof. Dr Alexander Eric Kohts/Coates, Moscou', (undated, late 1950s d), EHDHA P2 46 88203379; Kohts, op.cit. (note 16).

⁴³ C.G. Goodwin, Letter to A.E. Kohts January 10, (1935), AGDM f.494. o.10141. ed.khr.1244; G. de Beer, Letter to A.E. Kohts, October 31, (1945), AGDM f.1173, o.12497.ed.khr.1244; Stahlschmidt, F. & Co. (general shipping and forwarding agents and 'official agents to the British Museum of Natural History'), Letter and inventory on behalf of the BMNH to A.E. Kohts, September 26, (1956), AGDM f.11171, o.12497, ed.khr.1244; A.F. Kots, draft list of preserved mammalian and avian specimens to be sent to the BMNH, (undated, mid-late 1950s), AGDM, Card Index, Scientific-Historical Archive, f.19, 2358, kod.2.4, 1990.

The reason for this was that, at the annual conference of the Soviet All-Union Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNIL) July 31- August 7, 1948, the Director of the Institute of Genetics of the Academy of Sciences USSR, Trofim Lysenko, effectively brought about the abolition of Soviet genetics research. Instead, there was to be an enforced adoption of his own theory of ‘Michurinist biology’ - defined as ‘Creative Darwinism’ - as the exclusive future model for Soviet bio-science.⁴⁴ Lysenko’s ideas had parallels with Neo-Lamarckism and focused on the notion that permanent genetic change could be forced by changes of environment. He claimed to have authoritative support for this hypothesis from the ideas and practices of Ivan Michurin, a fruit-tree grafter and plant breeder,⁴⁵ largely regarded in his lifetime as a ‘crank’ by Soviet geneticists.⁴⁶ Following the VASKhNIL session, and with the personal support of Stalin,⁴⁷ Lysenko’s ‘Michurinist biology’, became the sole approved mode of Soviet bio-science.⁴⁸ In addition, Soviet geneticists, as well as all of the western bio-scientists who featured in the Darwin Museum’s hagiographic pantheon of monumental busts and narrative paintings – particularly William Bateson, Gregor Mendel, and also anyone such as Yerkes and Osborn, who had engaged with discourse on eugenics – were now to be regarded as ‘enemies’ of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹

In a forced response to the VASKhNIL outcome in August 1948,⁵⁰ rapid adjustments were made to the Darwin Museum’s displays. This can be seen in a photograph from the museum

⁴⁴ T.D. Lysenko, ‘The situation in biological science: Address delivered to the VASKhNIL session, 31 July 1948’, in T.D. Lysenko. *Agrobiological Essays on Problems of Genetics, Plant Breeding and Seed Growing*, (Moscow, 1954), pp.515-554.

⁴⁵ Lysenko, op.cit. (note 42), pp.521, 527-530, 532-554.

⁴⁶ D. Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair*, (Chicago, 1986), pp. 40-53.

⁴⁷ K.O. Rossianov, ‘Editing nature: Joseph Stalin and the New Soviet biology’, *Isis*, 84, 4, December (1983), pp.728-745.

⁴⁸ Joravsky, op.cit.

⁴⁹ Lysenko, op.cit. (note 42); E. Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, (Princeton, 2006), p.47.

⁵⁰ A.F. Kots, ‘Doklad na rasshirennom zasedanii itogam sessii VASKhNIL po dokladu akademika Lysenko “O polozhenii v biologicheskoi nauke” ’ (Paper to the enlarged meeting on the results of the VASKhNIL session, through Academician Lysenko’s paper ‘The situation in biological science’), August 12, (1948), AGDM f.1014, o.101, ed.khr.33, pp.1-3; A.F. Kots, ‘Ob itogakh sessii vsesoiuznoi Akademii s.kh. Nauk po dokladu

archive (Fig. 8). The photograph shows a display of stuffed albinoid foxes and rabbits, flanked by busts of Lysenko and Michurin made by Vasilii Vatagin in August 1948, and features the museum's taxidermist of small animals, Dmitri Fedulov, looking worshipfully at the bust of Lysenko.⁵¹ By the end of the year, the painter Viktor Evstaf'ev had produced a quantity of oil sketches for an exhibition of a series of paintings charting the life of Michurin. These works formed the basis for a new hagiographic series of paintings, which, in terms of subject matter, were deliberately matched as far as possible with the two existing series of narrative representations about the life of Darwin by himself and Ezuchevskii. The series culminated c.1956 in the Darwin Museum display of the 'Michurinist' iconostasis illustrated in Fig. 9. After this point, however, the production of Michurin images ceased, and tellingly, Evstaf'ev's next big commissions between 1956 and 1957 were for portraits of 'Eminent Russian Darwinists' - illustrated in an album sent to Down House.⁵² These portraits included images of Nikolai Vavilov⁵³ and Nikolai Kol'tsov, Soviet geneticists known in the West, who had been fatal victims of Lysenko's rise to power,⁵⁴ but were being 'reinstated' at the time.⁵⁵

The change in the Darwin Museum's commissioning policy was driven by Nikita Khrushchev's 'Thaw' period of the 'Cold War', Lysenko's temporary loss of the Presidency of

Akademika Lysenko; "O polozhenii biolog. Nauka' v primenenii k eksponature Gosudarstvennogo Darwinovskogo muzeia" ("Regarding the outcomes of the session of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Science, according to Academician Lysenko's paper "On the situation in biol. Science", in application to the displays of the State Darwin Museum'), August 12, (1948), AGDM, f.1014, o.101, ed.khr.33,1-6.

⁵¹ The Lysenko and Michurin busts were commissioned by Kots from Vatagin in response to the VASKhNIL outcome, and this was emphasised on August 12, 1948 in Kots's speeches to the museum council and staff (see note 54). Because Vatagin was able to make busts very quickly, it is likely that this display was in place by the end of August 1948. Certainly, it would have been politically expedient to have done so. A.F. Kots, 'Vasilii Alekseevich Vatagin i ego raboty v Darwinovskom muzee 1902-1952' ('Vasilii Alekseevich Vatagin and his work in the Darwin Museum 1902-1952'), (undated, 1952?), AGDM, f.10141, o.623, ed.khr.215, p.43.

⁵² *Museum Darwinianum Moscow*, (1959), photo album, LSLA LS MS 639.

⁵³ Vavilov had studied briefly with William Bateson who was also reviled by Lysenko.

⁵⁴ P. Pringle, *The Murder of Nikolai Vavilov*, (New York, 2011), pp.36-37.

⁵⁵ Pringle, op.cit. (note 53), p.339; V.N. Soyfer, 'The Consequences of Political Dictatorship for Russian Science', *Nature Reviews Genetics*, 2, September (2001), pp. 723-729. doi: 10.1038/35088598; N. Roll-Hansen, 'A New Perspective on Lysenko', *Annals of Science*, 42 (1985), pp. 262-278.

VASKhNIL in 1956,⁵⁶ and a strengthening of the moves to remake connections between Soviet and western scientists that had begun in earnest after the death of Stalin in 1953.⁵⁷ In 1955, while Kots's article in the *VOKS Bulletin*⁵⁸ still used elements of the Lysenkoist rhetoric of what Kremontsov has termed 'Marxist Darwinism',⁵⁹ it was severely toned down in comparison with the politically correct, Lysenkoist language of his lecture notes between late 1948 and the early 1950s.⁶⁰ Also in Kots' 1955 article, although a copy of the Lysenkoist display photograph shown in Fig. 8 was included, it was reversed and carefully cropped to exclude the busts of both Michurin and Lysenko.⁶¹

It hardly seems accidental that it was in this context correspondence between Kots and the BMNH was resumed between 1955 and 1963. In 1956, for example, ten years after receiving the consignment of specimens from the Darwin Museum, the BMNH finally reciprocated by sending the Darwin Museum two crates of much needed plaster casts of paleontological specimens.⁶² This apparently prompted the delivery to the BMNH of a further four crates of materials from the Darwin Museum in 1957.⁶³ The interchange seemingly endorsed the possibility implied in Kots's *VOKS Bulletin* article of 1955, that the Darwin Museum could take a leading role in the re-establishment of bio-scientific relations between the USSR and the West.

⁵⁶ C. Zirkle, "L'Affaire Lysenko", *Journal of Heredity*, 47, 2 (1956), p. 47.

⁵⁷ Kremontsov, op.cit. (note 42); A. Bone, 'Introduction', in A. Bone, (ed.) *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol.28, *Man's Peril 1954-1955*, (Abingdon and New York, 2003), no page numbers.

⁵⁸ Kohts, op.cit. (note 9).

⁵⁹ Kremontsov, op.cit. (note 42).

⁶⁰ See for example, A.F. Kots, 'Tezise soderzhanii dvukh lektcii. Lektsiia I. Osnovy darvinizma i michurinskaia biologii: Lektsiia II. Proiskhozhdenie cheloveka v svete darvinizma, May 29 (1950)' ('The theses of two lectures. Lecture I. The Bases of Darwinism and Michurinist Biology. Lecture II. The Origin of Mankind in the Light of Darwinism'), AGDM, f.12430, o.6, ed.khr.39, pp.1-2.

⁶¹ Kohts, op.cit. (note 9), p.29.

⁶² Stahlschmidt & Co. op.cit (note 47).

⁶³ Kohts, op.cit. (note 16).

The ensuing deluge of art works and photographic albums from the Darwin Museum to Britain, indicate that with the official blessing of VOKS, Kots was taking strategic advantage not only of the new, 'Cold War' political context and the Darwin celebrations, but also of the museum's renewed professional and museological relations with Britain. The aim seemed to be to establish even closer relationships with British scientists and institutions, and also to proclaim both the international status of the Darwin Museum, and of the research of its co-directors, using an extended form of the art-based cultural exchange strategy established before WWII, supported by the contextualising evidence of the photographic albums. The temporary success of Kots's strategy was arguably indicated by the creation of the 'Russian Room' at Down House in the early 1960s.

The Creation of the 'Russian Room' at Down House

At one level, the installation of the 'Russian Room' c.1961 would seem to represent the fulfilment of Kots's strategic ambitions, with the compliance of the RCSE. As such, it also might be seen to offer a sign of international recognition for the Darwin Museum that could [but did not] lead on to deeper, permanent partnership between the two museums dedicated to Darwin, or indeed to enduring relationships with any other institution in the UK with which Kots regained contact in the period. It might even have indicated a positive appreciation of the value – aesthetic, or museological, of the art works that were received from the Darwin Museum. On another level, however, given the context, there is no reason to suppose that the creation of the 'Russian Room' at Down House was not an equally strategic move on the part of the RCSE, albeit differently orientated to a western rather than a Soviet, politicised sense of the values associated with the exhibit.

There is a hint of this sort of strategic thinking on the part of the RSCE in a letter dated February 27, 1959 from Mr Johnson-Gilbert, the Assistant Secretary of the RCSE, to the

Director of the BMNH, Sir Gavin de Beer,⁶⁴ in which Johnson-Gilbert expressed the desire to ‘keep the museum [at Down House] alive’, by introducing novelty into the displays through exhibiting the paintings illustrated in Figs 4 and 5.⁶⁵ Superficially, the styles and techniques of these paintings, the other paintings and sculptures sent to Down House, and indeed those illustrated in the albums were very traditional by the late 1950s, in terms of naturalistic representation and attention to physiognomical and contextual detail. In this sense, they were largely aligned with the stylistic characteristics of the other art works already on display at Down House, so were unlikely to cause comprehension problems for the visitors. Moreover, as has already been argued, the subject matter was suitably committed to the commemoration of Darwin’s career and family life, making visual homage to art works held at Down House, as well as to known photographs of Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. Yet they were undeniably novel, both in relation to what the albums implied about the use of art works in their home museum setting and, perhaps most importantly, what the albums implied about the museum’s apparent orientation to Darwin’s ideas.

Superficially, the albums showed that the art works sent to Down House signified a very different, foreign approach to structuring natural history museum displays than was used in the West at the time. By contrast with the Darwin Museum, for example, the array of hagiographical portrait busts in the AMNH ‘hall of fame’ had been done away with by 1960.⁶⁶ Moreover, the BMNH never really had such a feature. Although it gave prime space to De Boehme’s sculpture of *Seated Darwin*, an original homage to which was commissioned by Kots from Vatagin in 1927-1928, there was no extensive focus on narrative or hagiographical paintings and sculptures in its displays. Arguably it was this element of

⁶⁴ Formerly one of Julian Huxley’s students.

⁶⁵ R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, *op.cit.* (note 3).

⁶⁶ This included the destruction of the bust of Galton in 1960, which had languished in store-rooms after the eugenics exhibition at AMNH in 1932. G.E. Pindar, ‘Memorandum’, March 5, 1930, AMNHA, William King Gregory Papers, Box 48, Folder 17; W. Hersey, ‘Memorandum’, February 13, (1935), AMNHA William King Gregory Papers, Box 48, Folder 17; K. Benker, (1960). ‘Memorandum to Dr James A. Oliver on the Report of the Committee for Evaluation of Disposable Materials’, (1960), AMNHA, 1232, 1, 1958-1960.

‘otherness’ regarding display policy, added to the primary fact that the art works and supporting albums originated from behind the feared ‘Iron Curtain’, which made the exhibited gifts from the Darwin Museum exotic and topical, curiosities from a potentially dangerous and technologically advanced, but largely unknown foreign power that was currently much in the news.

The period when the contents of the ‘Russian Room’ arrived and were displayed included the failure of the Paris summit conference between the USSR, the USA, France and Britain in May 1960, the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, and the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. On a potentially more benign note, it also included the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty between the USSR, Britain and the USA in 1963,⁶⁷ the publication in the West of results from the three Russian ‘Sputnik’ flights,⁶⁸ as well as the huge *Soviet Industrial Exhibition* staged at Earls Court in 1961, and the reciprocal British trade fair in Moscow’s Sokolniki Park in the same year,⁶⁹ as well as the exchange art and trade exhibitions between the USSR and the USA during the period.⁷⁰

In the specific realms of bio-science and Darwinism, there was another equally topical and very powerful, potential strategic reason for the creation of the ‘Russian Room’ by the RCSE. This was connected with Lysenko’s brief resumption of the VASKhNIL Presidency from 1961 to 1962, with support from Khrushchev. Western scientists⁷¹ and, as will be seen, some

⁶⁷ Editorial, ‘1960: East-West Summit in Tatters after Spy Plane Row’, BBC News Archive for May 17 (1960), accessed June 29, 2016.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/17/newsid_2512000/2512335.stm; M. Heller, and A. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: A History of the USSR from 1917 to the Present*, trans. P. B. Carlos, (London, Melbourne, Auckland, Johannesburg. 1986), pp. 564, 573, 578.

⁶⁸ Editorial, ‘Sputnik Results’, *New Scientist*, 4, 89, July 31 (1958), p. 537.

⁶⁹ V. Clarkson, ‘“Sputniks and Sideboards” : Exhibiting the Soviet “Way of Life” in Cold War Britain 1961-1979’, in A. Cross, ed. *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*, (Open Book Publishing, 2012), pp.285-300, accessed June 29, 2016. <http://openbookpublishers.com/htmlreader/PPR/chap20.html>.

⁷⁰ D. Caute, *The Dancer Defects: the Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, (New York, 2003), p.40; U.S. Department of State, ‘50th Anniversary of American Exhibits to the USSR’, (2009), accessed June 29, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/c26472.htm>.

⁷¹ W. de Jong-Lambert, ‘Biological Utopias East and West: Trofim D. Lysenko and his Critics’, in, P. Romijn et al, eds, *Divided Dreamworlds*, (Chicago, 2012), pp. 33-52.

leading Soviet scientists were deeply opposed to Lysenko's 'Michurinist biology'. Sir Julian Huxley was a particularly significant, vociferous and influential British campaigner against Lysenkoism in the journal *Nature* and elsewhere.⁷² As a supporter of the Darwin Museum, he believed that Kots was 'a real Darwinian'⁷³ – and thus no advocate of Lysenkoism – which was probably true. Indeed, it may have been Huxley who had facilitated the publication of Ladygina-Kots's abstract in the International Congress of Zoology *Proceedings* (1959), despite the fact that the paper had not been publicly delivered at the event in 1958, as he was involved in the Congress as the deliverer of the 'Inaugural Lecture'.⁷⁴ The publication of Ladygina-Kots's abstract in this volume was also an implicit, political criticism of a regime that had refused permission for her to attend the congress to deliver the paper, as well as an important public endorsement in the West of the scientific credibility of her research in the field of animal behaviourism.

There was little in any of the albums and art works sent by the Darwin Museum to Down House, or anywhere else in Britain in this period, to gainsay Huxley's faith in the western-style Darwinist integrity of the museum or its directorate. The only image with an implicit but ambiguous linkage to Lysenkoism sent to Down House was Evstaf'ev's small painting of *Darwin and K.A Timiriazev* (Fig. 10). The connection, which would have been obvious to the delegations of Soviet bio-scientists who visited Down House in the late 1950s-early 1960s, related to Lysenko's exclusive emphasis on Timiriazev as the 'founder' of Russian and Soviet Darwinism, because he was the only pre-Revolutionary Russian Darwinist to engage explicitly with Marxism.⁷⁵ Yet in a non-Soviet context, rather than signifying alignment with Lysenkoism, the painting perhaps stood more as a tribute to the shared

⁷² See for example J.S. Huxley, 'Soviet Genetics: The Real Issue', *Nature*, 163, June 25, (1949), pp.974-982.

⁷³ J.S. Huxley, Letter to H.J. Muller, December 12, (1956), in Dronamraju, op.cit. (note 44), p.109.

⁷⁴ Hewer and Riley, op.cit. (note 28) pp.11-29.

⁷⁵ N. Kremensov, 'Darwinism, Marxism and Genetics in the Soviet Union', in D. Alexander and R. Numbers, eds, *Biology and Ideology from Descartes to Dawkins*, Chicago and (London, 2010), pp.215-246.

Russian and Soviet obsession with Darwin and Darwinism.⁷⁶ Moreover, it implicitly drew attention to the personal connections that had existed between Charles Darwin, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and pre-Revolutionary Russian scientists.⁷⁷ The artistic revelation of such historical connections, little known to a British audience, symbolically spoke of a significant precedent for closer communications between British and Soviet bio-scientists, that could be spearheaded by the Darwin Museum.

As if to support this implication, none of the albums sent to Down House gave any hint of the previously mentioned, overtly ‘Michurinist’ displays hastily assembled at the Darwin Museum in August 1948 and thereafter. There were no images of Lysenko, Michurin or any of the Soviet scientists who supported Lysenko. Instead, the album representations of ‘Eminent Evolutionists of Russia’ included images of recently painted portraits of Lysenko’s victims, Vavilov and Kol’tsov by Evstaf’ev, while images of ‘Eminent Western Darwinists’ included photographs of monumental busts by Vatagin of Hugo De Vries, William Bateson, Gregor Mendel, Wilhelm Johannsen, and Francis Galton – all of whom had been anathematised in Lysenko’s 1948 speech to VASKhNIL.⁷⁸ In addition, the albums contained visual allusions to the work of another Soviet scientist criticised by Lysenko in 1948 – the research of M.M. Zavadovskii into sexual dimorphism in chickens⁷⁹ - the tangible results of which had been taxidermised and preserved at the Darwin Museum.⁸⁰ These implicitly politicised nuances of the album images might not have been obvious to the general public in Britain. They would, however, arguably have been understood by the British scientific

⁷⁶ See A. Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1989).

⁷⁷ See for example C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, vol.1, (London, 1881), pp.205-206, accessed June 29, 2016, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?pageseq=1&itemID=F937.1&viewtype=text>; A.I. Tauber and L. Chernyak, *Metchnikoff and the Origins of Immunology: From Metaphor to Theory*. (New York, 1991), p.214; Pavlovskii, op.cit, (note 31).

⁷⁸ *Museum Darwinianum*, op.cit. (note 51).

⁷⁹ Lysenko, op.cit. (note 42), pp.525-526.

⁸⁰ Kohts, op.cit. (note 16).

community – including the members of the RCSE - who were by then aware of the published, translated transcript of the 1948 VASSKhNIL session,⁸¹ and hence would know the names of the Russian and European scientists that Lysenko had castigated.

The absence of overt Lysenkoist content in the albums, however, may not have been an entirely accurate representation of the contemporary displays at the Darwin Museum. For instance, it is likely that the Michurin iconostasis (Fig. 9) created in 1955⁸² may have still been in place in the late 1950s-early 1960s. Lysenko and his supporters remained very influential despite his temporary loss of the VASKhNIL presidency, and Kots, always politically canny, would have been hedging his bets to preserve the existence of the Darwin Museum in a very difficult time. Thus the choice of imagery in the Darwin Museum albums sent to the UK, appears to have been strategically orientated by a form of self-censorship, to signify a lack of allegiance to Lysenko on the part of the museum and its directors.

Notwithstanding any remaining ‘Michurinist’ elements of the museum display, however, Kots’s lack of sympathy with Lysenko as implied by the album contents, was also corroborated by foreign visitors to the Darwin Museum. In November 1959, for example, William Swinton, curator of fossil amphibians, reptiles and birds at the BMNH, visited Moscow.⁸³ On his return, Swinton’s enthusiastic discussion of the Darwin Museum’s collection as ‘unique and remarkable’, published in *New Scientist* on January 14, 1960, adamantly supported closer relations between British and Soviet scientists,⁸⁴ and implicitly with those at the Darwin Museum. In doing so, he further endorsed Huxley’s opinion of Kots

⁸¹ Foreign Languages Publishing House, *The Situation in Biological Science: Proceedings of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences USSR, Session July31-August 7, 1948, Verbatim Report*, (Moscow, 1949).

⁸² Shubina, op.cit. (note 55), p.72.

⁸³ At the time, Swinton was in the USSR as a guest of the USSR Academy of Sciences, to receive a medal commemorating the centenary of the publication of *Origin of Species*, at a special ceremony at Moscow University.

⁸⁴ W.E. Swinton, ‘Some Impressions of a Visit to the USSR’, *New Scientist*, 7 165, February 14 (1960), pp.94-95.

and the Darwin Museum, and the anti-Lysenkoist impression given by the contents of the photographic albums sent to Britain.

This level of public support for the Darwin Museum by eminent British scientists is highly likely to have influenced the decision-making amongst the leading RCSE members. The leadership of the RCSE were antipathetic to Lysenkoism⁸⁵ and aware that Lysenko remained a powerful, albeit increasingly contested force in the Soviet scientific realm. This situation, combined with the novelty and topicality of the items sent from the Darwin Museum, may have prompted the creation of the 'Russian Room' c.1961, in order to demonstrate that there were, nevertheless, 'right-thinking' and truly 'Darwinian' - that is to say, genetically-orientated Soviet scientists in the USSR.

The Closure of the Russian Room 1964

The 'Russian Room' exhibit was closed down in late 1964, to be replaced by the 'Erasmus Darwin Room', a display dedicated to Charles Darwin's famous grandfather, another significant British natural historian. In the absence of sufficiently documented explanations of why this happened, this final section speculatively explores the possible contextual motivations for the closure, in relation to the issues of strategic value, novelty and topicality introduced in the previous sections. It also considers the Darwin Museum's art gifts in relation to constructs of the aesthetic value of Soviet art works in Britain within the period, as a possible factor influencing the dispersal of the 'Russian Room's' contents into other display rooms or into storage.

As a preface to the ensuing discussion, it needs to be acknowledged that it is unclear whether the 'Russian Room' was ever intended to be more than a temporary display. Given the

⁸⁵ See for example, E.I. Glushchenko, Letter to the RSCE on behalf of the editorial board of the journal *Agrobiologia*, February 3 (1959), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, Letter to Sir Geoffrey Keynes, February 27, (1959 b), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9.

concerns of the RCSE expressed by Johnson-Gilbert (1959) with injecting novelty into the displays at Down House to keep it ‘alive’, it is entirely conceivable that the ‘Russian Room’ was only ever thought of as a short-term, politically topical exhibition to make convenient use of a room well overdue for redecoration. In this sense, its inevitable closure at some point may have been naturally assumed, and therefore not subject to question or discussion in the RCSE records.

Such an assumption, indeed, seems implicit in the correspondence from the resident curator of Down House, Professor Hedley Atkins of Guy’s Hospital, to Johnson-Gilbert between September 14 and October 2, 1964.⁸⁶ The letters merely note that the room was in serious need of re-decoration, that this should be strongly recommended at the next committee meeting in November, and that after re-decoration the room should become the ‘Erasmus Darwin Room’, as it would be particularly ‘suitable’ for this role.⁸⁷ Yet, in relation to this correspondence, even if the ‘Russian Room’ exhibit was conceived of as topical and ephemeral – shown for its novelty value including its anti-Lysenkoist bio-political implications - there remains the question of why this should have happened in late 1964 and not at any other time.

In relation to this date, there seems to be another strong connexion with Lysenkoism. In 1962 Lysenko permanently lost the Presidency of VASKhNIL. His ideas had been denounced as ‘false science’ by three leading Soviet atomic physicists, Yakov Zel’dovich, Vitalii Ginsburg and Piotr Kapitsa. There followed a purge of the Stalinist structures that had been put in place to control Soviet science and ensure the dominance of Lysenko’s influence. Moreover, at the General Assembly of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in June 1964, the nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov denounced Lysenko and his follower Nikolai Nuzhdin. At the

⁸⁶ H. Atkins, Letter to R.S. Johnson Gilbert, September 14, (1964), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; H. Atkins, Letter to R.S. Johnson Gilbert, October 2, (1964), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9.

⁸⁷ Atkins, *op.cit.* (note 85)

time Nuzhdin was a candidate for election to the Academy of Sciences, and the result was that his application was rejected by a huge majority.⁸⁸

It must have been evident in Britain at this point that Lysenko's period of power was over, as was confirmed by subsequent events. Khrushchev, Lysenko's leading political supporter and fellow Ukrainian, was dismissed as the Soviet Communist Party Secretary on October 14, 1964, and the end of Lysenko's immunity from criticism was thereafter declared by the Academy of Sciences. By early 1965, Lysenko had been removed from office at the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute of Genetics,⁸⁹ which effectively put paid to Lysenkoism as a significant element in Cold War politics. Thereafter, the East/West scientific manoeuvring shifted to focus more completely on the politics of nuclear physics. After all, the latter had been a significant underlying current in the controversies over Lysenkoism, in the sense that some of the strongest oppositional voices on both sides of the 'Iron Curtain' had been nuclear physicists rather than biologists.⁹⁰ These events effectively obviated whatever strategic bio-political motives may have informed the creation of the 'Russian Room' with its crucially contextualising albums c.1961. Moreover, Aleksandr Kots had died on September 17, 1964, so any sentimental or personal motives within the RCSE for keeping the 'Russian Room,' open had also been cancelled out.

Potentially, however, the paintings and sculptures remained relevant to the function of Down House as a memorial to the life and work of Darwin. By their Soviet origin the works were

⁸⁸ J. Mosterin, 'Social factors in the Development of Genetics and the Lysenko Affair', in E. Agazzi, et al. (eds), *Epistemology and the Social*, (Amsterdam and New York, 2008), p.152.

⁸⁹ Mosterin, op.cit. (note 87).

⁹⁰ Rabinowitch, E. 'The Purge of Genetics in the Soviet Union', *American Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 5, May (1949), p.130; Anonymous, 'History of the Genetics Conflict', op.cit., pp.131-140; Wright, S. 'Commentary by American Geneticists: Dogma or Opportunism?', op.cit., pp.141-142; Dunn, L.C. 'Commentary by American Geneticists: Motives for the Purge', op.cit., pp.142-143; Dobzhansky, T. 'The Suppression of a Science', op.cit., pp.144-146; Sax, K. 'Commentary by American Geneticists: Genetics and Agriculture', op.cit., pp.143 & 146; Crane, M. B. 'Lysenko's Experiments', op.cit., pp.147-149, 156; Goldschmidt, R.B. 'Research and Politics', *American Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 5, May (1949), op.cit., pp.150-155.

still intrinsically topical, as the USSR continued to be spectacularly newsworthy throughout the 1960s. The works also conceivably retained a level of novelty value, in the sense that it was unusual for Soviet art work to be displayed in the West for more than a few weeks. It would seem, however, that the RCSE did not place much value on the Soviet paintings and sculpture busts as art works *per se*, by comparison with some of the other paintings and sculptures by western artists that were held in the collection, which may have put their continued display as a group into question after the fall of Lysenko.

In October 1960, for instance, Mrs Dagmar Cooper, a Russian emigré connected with the nearby Borough of Hove, wrote to Down House concerning a proposed exhibition of Russian art to be held in Hove in June-July 1961. She had heard that the museum might have some ‘Russian art treasures’ such as ‘paintings and sculptures’, and inquired whether they could be loaned for display in the exhibition.⁹¹ By this time both the large paintings of Darwin and Wallace (Figs 4 and 5) and the two sculpture busts of *Young Charles Darwin* and *Young Emma Darwin* (Figs 1 and 2) had certainly arrived at Down House, and probably some of the smaller paintings as well. These may already have been exhibited in the Down House display. Yet, the terse reply from Johnson-Gilbert stated baldly that there were ‘no Russian art treasures at Down House’.⁹² This reply may have been given to avoid the extra administrative trouble that would have been incurred by the RCSE in loaning the works to a short-term provincial exhibition. Although in 1960 it did loan a painting by Joseph Wright of

⁹¹ D. Cooper, Letter to the Caretaker and Warden of Down House, October 15 (1960), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9. The exhibition, finally entitled *Russian Art and Life*, involved Mary Chamot, a Russian emigré and Tate Gallery Curator, who had contributed to a special edition of the *Burlington Magazine* on Russian and Soviet art in 1959: Editorial, *The Burlington Magazine* (special issue devoted to Russian art and artistic activity in the USSR with contributions from David Talbot Rice, Mary Chamot, Tamara Talbot Rice and Hans Werther Grohn), C1, (671), (1959), p.43. Chamot was also to be involved in the British Council exhibition *British Art 1770-1960* shown in Moscow and Leningrad in 1960, to which Down House lent *The Blacksmith's Shop* (1771) by Joseph Wright of Derby: M. Mcleod, (Fine Arts Department British Council), Letter to R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, 15 February, (1960), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; L. Somerville, Letter to R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, June 2, (1960), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; J.S. Acton (Fine Arts Department British Council) Letter to R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, August 18, (1960), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9; R.S. Johnson Gilbert, Letter to Sydney Robinson, June 1, (1960), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/9.

⁹² R.S. Johnson-Gilbert, op.cit. (note 84).

Derby to a British Council exhibition of British art shown in Moscow and Leningrad, Down House was not strictly an art museum, and its curators and administrators were scientists. But there may have been other reasons why the Soviet works were not regarded as ‘art treasures’ by the RCSE.

One possible reason for this may be that the paintings and sculptures sent to Down House via the official channel of VOKS effectively counted as Soviet Socialist Realist art. This mode of practice had received largely negative British critical responses⁹³ in relation to the exhibition *Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Century* at the Royal Academy in 1959, expressed in a wide range of newspapers as well as other media.⁹⁴ Socialist Realism, imposed in 1934 as the sole official method of Soviet cultural production, gave great importance to art as a way to communicate with and educate the masses. It therefore demanded that, in order to fulfil these functions, visual art should be easily legible, figurative and optimistic. The most highly regarded genres in painting and sculpture were therefore narrative scenes and portraiture, with an emphasis on monumental representations of persons regarded as cultural, scientific or political ‘heroes’.

Evstaf’ev’s monumental plaster portrait busts (Figs 1 and 2) fulfilled the latter requirement and also related to the long post-Revolutionary tradition of heroic, hagiographic sculpture at the Darwin Museum recorded in the albums, while his equally hagiographic paintings (Figs 4,5, 6,10), were legible historical narratives. Moreover, the faint element of impressionistic technique in the paintings arguably reflected a recent loosening of the strictures on the level of detailed ‘finish’ required in Soviet art during the ‘Thaw’, particularly after 1956,⁹⁵

⁹³ David Caute’s extensive research on the reviews of the exhibition cites only two enthusiasts for Socialist Realism, the painter Sir Alfred Munnings and the ex-director of the Barber Institute, Professor Thomas Bodkin: Caute, op.cit. (note 69) p.532.

⁹⁴ See Caute, op.cit. (note 69), pp.33, 530, 533-534, 596; Editorial, *Burlington Magazine*, p.3; ‘At the Royal Academy – Seven Hundred Years of Russian Painting’, *London Illustrated News*, (1959), pp.15-18.

⁹⁵ S.E. Reid, ‘Toward a New (Socialist) Realism’, in R. P. Blakesley and S.E. Reid, eds, *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture and the Decorative Arts*, (Dekalb Illinois, 2007), pp.217-

although in a more cautious way than was used by some other contemporary artists exhibiting in Moscow.⁹⁶ Evstaf'ev's works lacked the overt propagandistic content that many British critics of the Royal Academy 1959 exhibition had disliked,⁹⁷ and were focused on portraiture, an element of Soviet art that found critical approval in the British context of 1959.⁹⁸ Yet, the naturalistic style of the paintings and sculptures, as well as the faintly impressionistic techniques of the paintings, also may have been seen to support the general British critical opinion, that in this respect, contemporary Soviet art was at least 50 years out of date in relation to both western and early Soviet avant-garde art.⁹⁹ Because of the broad spread of such views in contemporary newspapers, it is possible that the RCSE officers, while probably conservative in their personal artistic tastes, nevertheless may have been influenced by such opinions regarding the perceived, potential low aesthetic value of Soviet art works, and hence of those that had been donated to Down House by the Darwin Museum.

Once the fall of Lysenko was assured, a few of the paintings (including Figs 4, 5 and 6) were dispersed to other rooms, where they would have been less clearly identifiable as Soviet works from the Darwin Museum, while the rest of the art works and albums were stored, as they still are, out of the public eye.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

221; A. Hilton, 'Holiday on the Kolkhoz: Socialist Realism's Dialogue with Impressionism', in Blakesley and Reid, op.cit. pp.195-216.

⁹⁶ M. Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, (New Haven and London, 1998), pp.308-309.

⁹⁷ See for example, Editorial op.cit. (note 93), p.18.

⁹⁸ Editorial op.cit. (note 93), p.18.

⁹⁹ Cauter, op.cit. (note 69), p.533. See also M. Cullerne Bown, and B. Taylor, eds, 'Introduction', in *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-party State 1917-1992*, (Manchester and New York, 1993), pp.7-8; C. Lindey, *Art in the Cold War*. London, 1990; F. Frascina, ed. *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, (London, 1985).

¹⁰⁰ By 1990, only six of the larger paintings, including Figures 4, 5 and 6 were recorded by a Sotheby's insurance inventory as being on public display in the 'Charles Darwin Room' and the 'Drawing Room'. Eight of the smaller works had been relegated to the 'Curator's Office', and there was no mention of the remaining two small paintings and the sculpture busts. All of the works recorded were given low market values. Sotheby's, *Inventory of Down House for insurance purposes*, (1990), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/24; Sotheby's, *Additions to Sotheby's catalogue and inventory of Down House* (undated), RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/24.

Art work was an officially acceptable currency of cultural exchange in the period, as is borne out by the examples of the Anglo-Soviet exchange of art exhibitions in 1959-60, which involved works from the established collection at Down House. The Moscow Darwin Museum seems to have engaged wholeheartedly with this possibility, based on a relatively successful, pre-WWII strategic use of art works to commemorate and celebrate professional and private correspondence with western scientists and institutions. This strategy was revived and elaborated upon in the late 1950s-early 1960s through gifts of paintings, sculptures and photographic albums to UK institutions, particularly Down House, in relation to a number of Darwin-related celebrations. The contents of the 'Russian Room' established at Down House mainly underlined shared Anglo-Soviet narratives on the life and ideas of Darwin, while Evstaf'ev's painting *Darwin and K.A. Timiriazev* (Fig. 10) also indicated a significant historical precedent for the currently desired closer links between British and Soviet bio-scientists. The Darwin Museum materials also symbolically commemorated successful collegial communications between the Kotses and British scientists, including papers published in British scientific publications, and the exchange of specimens between the Darwin Museum and the BMNH. For a brief time from c.1961 to 1964 the 'Russian Room' appeared to indicate the fulfilment of Kots's aim of re-inclusion in western scientific discourse, and the possibility of a leading role for the Darwin Museum in encouraging closer communications between Soviet and British bio-scientists.

There are two levels of deep irony, however, that pervade the fleeting history of the 'Russian Room' at Down House. One of these relates to the 'Lysenko affair'. On the one hand, the context of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' and Lysenko's temporary loss of the VASKhNIL Presidency 1956-1961 provided the conditions which enabled the Darwin Museum to send the gifts of albums and art works to Down House, the RCSE and BMNH, as well as elsewhere in Britain. Yet, on the other hand, it was the period when Lysenko regained the

VASKhNIL Presidency between 1961 and 1962 that seemed to prompt the RCSE to use the materials sent from the Darwin Museum, strategically, to create the 'Russian Room' at Down House, in order to bring topicality and novelty to the displays. The exhibit exemplified the fact that, despite Lysenkoist propaganda, there were 'right-thinking' Soviet scientists who were engaged with western-style discourse on genetics and Darwinism. This assumption about Aleksandr Kots and the Darwin Museum was supported by the self-censored absence of overtly Lysenkoist material in the albums and art works sent to the UK. It was also corroborated by the eminent British scientists Julian Huxley and William Swinton, both personally acquainted with Kots and the Darwin Museum displays. By autumn 1964, however, when Lysenko's final downfall appeared inevitable, the 'Russian Room' was closed. In effect, the very circumstances that should have enhanced the significance of the Darwin Museum in Britain, as a focus of viable bio-scientific liaison with the USSR, caused its eclipse from British public knowledge.

The second level of irony regarding the 'Russian Room', concerns the potential signification of the art works – the ostensible primary currency of exchange - when exhibited in a British context. In their Soviet cultural context, the paintings and sculptures were perceived as significant works of functional fine art, highly valued by Kots in relation to both his own museological concerns, and to his immersion in Soviet discourse on the functions and appearance of Soviet Socialist Realist art. Such values were successfully communicated by the works with the supporting evidence of the albums.

Yet, in relation to the developing, authoritative and largely antagonistic, contemporary western discourse on Soviet Socialist Realism, the communication of these values potentially identified the Darwin Museum art works as lacking in aesthetic value. Indeed, such a view of

anything connected to Soviet Socialist Realism is still prevalent.¹⁰¹ As I have argued, this may have impacted marginally on the closure of the 'Russian Room'. It may also have influenced the initial selection of a small number of Soviet art works to be dispersed into different display rooms at Down House - where they were no longer so clearly identified as Soviet in origin - as well as the eventual removal of all of the Soviet works from the publicly accessible displays.

In the circumstances, the relationships between the Darwin Museum and the RCSE/Down House were inevitably politicised on both sides. Ultimately, there is a sense in which this cultural exchange was as genuine as possible in the given context, and is a rich and complex episode in the history of the 'Cold War' in Britain that has undeservedly fallen into obscurity.

Fig. 1 Photograph of Aleksandr Kots with busts of Emma and Charles Darwin by Viktor Evstaf'ev ready for shipping from the Darwin Museum, late 1958-early1959.¹⁰² By permission of English Heritage, 2016. Reproduction © the author.

Fig. 2 Undated photograph of Viktor Evstaf'ev, *Bust of Young Emma Darwin*, 1958, plaster, 26.8 X 27.2 X 14.6 inches/68 x 69 x 37cm, and *Bust of Young Charles Darwin*, 1958, plaster 27.2 x 22.4 x 15 inches/69 x 57 x 38cm, in situ at Down House, Kent.¹⁰³ By permission of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, 2016. Photograph provided by the Royal College of Surgeons, England.

¹⁰¹ Alastair Sooke, 'The Royal Academy Epic Russian Revolution Exhibition', *The Telegraph*, February 6, 2017, retrieved from, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/royal-academys-epic-russian-revolution-retrospective-just-history/>; Sarah Kent, 'Revolution: Russian Art 1917-1932, Royal Academy. An Exhibition of Russian Art Purged of the Artists Who Promoted the Revolution', *The Art Desk* (2017), retrieved from, <http://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/revolution-russian-art-1917-1932-royal-academy>.

¹⁰² A.E. Kohts, Album, (1960), EHDHA P2 37 88203384.

¹⁰³ RCSEA, RCS-MUS/14/3 (undated).

Fig. 3, Photograph of the 'Russian Room' at Down House early 1960s (before 1964).¹⁰⁴ By permission of the Linnean Society of London, 2016. Photograph provided by the Linnean Society of London.

Fig. 4, Viktor Evstaf'ev, *Charles Darwin in His Study*, 1958, oil on canvas, 42.9 x 32.5 inches/109 x 82.5cm. Down House Collection, Downe, Kent. Photograph © Historic England Archive, 2016.

Fig. 5, Viktor Evstaf'ev, *Portrait of Alfred Wallace*, 1958, oil on canvas, 42.5 x 32.5 inches/108 x 82.5cm. Down House Collection, Downe, Kent. Photograph © Historic England Archive, 2016.

Fig. 6, Viktor Evstafiev, 1948-1958, copy of M. Ezuchevskii, *Darwin's First Encounter with a Tier Lander [Tierra del Fuegian]*, 1920, oil on paper. Down House Collection, Downe, Kent. Photograph © Historic England Archive, 2016.

Fig. 7, Darwin Museum display on 'The New Stone Age', sculptures and paintings mainly by Vasilii Vatagin (seated in the display) c.1920, with inset photograph of Aleksandr Kots.¹⁰⁵ By permission of English Heritage, 2016. Reproduction © the author.

Fig. 8, Photograph of taxidermist Dimitri Fedulov with display of variation in domestic and farmed fur-bearing animals, overlooked by busts of Lysenko and Michurin by Vasilii

¹⁰⁴ A.E. Kohts, Album dated November 19 (1960 c), LSLA LS MS 638, photo no.10.

¹⁰⁵ A.E. Kohts, Album, (1960 b), EHDHA, P2 3788203384.

Vatagin, with a quote from Michurin, c. August 1948. State Darwin Museum Photographic Archive, Moscow. By permission of the State Darwin Museum, Moscow, 2016.¹⁰⁶

Fig. 9, Alexander Kots and Nadezhda Ladygina-Kots with a group of school teachers, flanked by the busts of Lysenko [left] and Michurin [right] and portrait of Michurin [centre], early-mid 1950s.¹⁰⁷ State Darwin Museum Photographic Archive. By permission of the State Darwin Museum, Moscow, 2016. Reproduction © the author.

Fig. 10, Viktor Evstaf'ev, *Charles Darwin and K.A. Timiriazev*, 1948-1958, oil on paper, c.11.8 x 5.9 inches/c.30 x 15cm. Down House Collection, Downe, Kent. Photograph © Historic England Archive, 2016. Photograph provided by Historic England Archive.

¹⁰⁶ Reproduced from K. Nasledkin, 'Taxidermy in Russia by example of the Darwin Museum', International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History, ICOM-NATHIST, 2006, online newsletter no.21, January 2007. The online version of this article is no longer available on the ICOM website, but a copy of it has been saved on the 'Taxidermy for Cash' website, accessed June 29, 2016. <http://www.taxidermy4cash.com/moscow.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Captioned, 'Group of school teachers in the museum exposition that has been forcedly created after the slashing VASKhNIL Session of 1948 (early 1950s)', in Iu.V. Shubina, *Vek darvinovskogo muzeia v faktakh i fotografiakh*, (A Century of the Darwin Museum in Facts and Photographs) (Moscow, 2008), p. 72.

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