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Review: *Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment; Posobiie dlia inostrannykh uchashchikhsia; The Russian Language Journal 68: 3-32*

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- Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Council of Europe.
Iatsenko, Irina. 2006. *Russkaia "netraditsionnaia" proza kontsa XX veka. Posobiie dlia inostrannykh uchashchikhsia*. St. Petersburg: Zlatoust.
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Kudyma, Anna S., and Olga E. Kagan. 2019. *Russian Through Art: For Intermediate to Advanced Students*. London and New York: Routledge. 250 pages.

Both teachers of language and language learners are always on the lookout for a good textbook. The textbook *Russian Through Art: For Intermediate to Advanced Students* is a welcome addition to the textbook pantheon in the field of teaching and learning Russian, and is another major contribution to a very limited number of textbooks for this level of language. According to the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century: "Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs" ("Standards for Foreign Language Learning" 1996). Language teachers introduce students to and lead them through the realms of tenses, cases, vocabulary, and so on, but the real world opens up to students when they can understand the culture of the target language, and the environment in which the language is used. That is exactly what the latest textbook by well-known and respected authors Anna Kudyma and Olga Kagan attempts to do.

The shape of the textbook is straightforward: it is arranged according to the following six modules or chapters, to cover a surprising amount of material: *Museums and Collections, Painting of 19th – Early 20th Century, Art of the 20th and 21st Century, Sculpture, Architecture and Urban Space, and Music and Theatrical Art*. The textbook has an accompanying website with lectures, visual materials, and news clips. Each chapter has a glossary that lists key words and expressions while the textbook itself ends with Russian-English and English-Russian dictionaries.

All chapters are structured similarly: they start with a short summary of what the reader will be introduced to in the coming unit. Then the chapters include some vocabulary exercises, which are followed by pair or group activities, such as surveys and discussions. These exercises help students to activate their previous knowledge about the topic, learn basic terminology needed to engage with the subject matter of the chapter, and serve as a foundation and catalyst for conversation for the rest of the chapter. All this prepares the learner for a perfect pre-listening phase.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the book is the mode in which the authors decided to introduce the content in each chapter: a lecture by an expert from the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg about quintessential examples of Russian art and fundamentals of Russian art history. The lectures are complemented by plentiful images and vary in length from about 4 minutes to 11 minutes. Quite conveniently, all the images mentioned and used in the lectures are also posted in a separate document on the course website. At the end of each lecture, the presenter provides a summary of the main points touched upon during the presentation.

Each module in the printed textbook provides an outline of the online lecture with a short glossary. These abridgements allow the teacher to better cater to students with different levels of the language, as well as to offer students with different learning styles a choice of how to proceed with the material. All this adds to opportunities for more personalized practice and experience.

The authors maintain a fresh approach by supplementing each section with short video excerpts from Russian TV news channels with reports about art events, celebrations, and news. This authenticity of material sparks student interest, provides motivation, and encourages learning.

It is not a secret that developing listening skills does not get enough attention in foreign language classrooms. Therefore, particularly noteworthy (and much appreciated, from the perspective of a teacher) is the quantity and quality of listening activities that follow the lectures, including while-listening and post-listening exercises. The assignments range from listening for the gist (top-down approach) to listening for detailed information (bottom-up approach), as well as in-between tasks that transition between the two. This variety of listening assignments

serves a number of different purposes: to practice communicative skills, to pay attention to the context in which particular words or structures are used, and finally, to stimulate language production. For each assignment, students are asked to listen to the lecture again, which results in multiple listening sessions. Every time students listen to the presentation, they concentrate their attention on different things, but also – and what is ultimately more important – they are exposed to and listen to how native speakers construct their discourse.

Many activities are task-based, as students always learn by acting on their knowledge. For example, students are asked to create multimedia materials to accompany a presentation about an artist. Such tasks involve all four major skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Students must engage with a wide variety of different information sources in Russian, such as official websites, dictionaries, podcast, forums and so on. This task also involves processing information and sharing it with others during the interaction. Moreover, much attention is paid to teaching students how to summarize the content, develop and support their argument, clarify ideas, and synthesize and connect them at the paragraph level. Therefore, each module consistently offers exercises that explicitly tell students to use a variety of cohesive discourse devices, such as *besides*, *moreover*, *at the same time*, *in a word*, *up to now*, etc. In general, the plentiful exercises in each module vary from fill-in activities to self-recordings, discussions, and those that focus on the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of communication.

Each chapter follows a clear structure in terms of presentation of material and the content in each module connects the past with the present. The opening lectures of each unit are about museums, events, and works of art dating back to the 19th century; they let the voices from the past be heard today. The subsequent texts and listening excerpts focus on present times by showing either attitudes of a modern generation to works of the past, or by introducing the learner to contemporary art, exhibits, and discussions. Through these conversations, students are able to learn contemporary perspectives on art and its broad influence on Russian culture across time. Since each chapter is filled with authentic reading selections like survey excerpts, magazine articles, summaries of opinion polls, blogs, and so forth, these firsthand segments provide a deeper insight into the world of Russian art created through well-

known cultural artifacts and reflections of native speakers. This makes the material relatable to students and gives them a richer understanding of Russian culture in general.

Although this textbook does not include many explanations of syntactic constructions practiced in exercises, students at this level likely already have other reference materials. Instructors may want to supplement a course with some review, depending on the overall level of the students. The book is of great interest to a targeted audience of readers – those who want to develop their Russian language skills beyond the Intermediate level and to enhance their understanding of Russian culture, particularly the arts. Being strongly communicative in nature, this textbook will be of great help to any instructor of the Russian language.

This final work is a testament to Dr. Olga Kagan's scholarship, expertise and compassion for Russian as a foreign language. Teachers of Russian as a foreign language will miss her guidance and wisdom, yet they will greatly benefit from her work and the legacy that she has left behind.

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Bowers, Katherine, Connor Doak, and Kate Holland, eds. 2018. *A Dostoevskii Companion: Texts and Contexts*. Boston: Academic Studies Press. 535 pages.

Are you a professor of Russian literature, tired of assigning companions organized novel-by-novel? Are you a reader of Dostoevskii who has forsaken *A Writer's Diary* or "Poor Folk," unconvinced that they were produced by the same author who penned *Crime and Punishment*? Are you an undergraduate, hoping your next course will include less commonly