

Report on the content of the archives
on the painting
***Venus* (1912)**
by Mikhail Larionov

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1. Provenance

There are a few notes on the painting's provenance which are listed in the archive of the Museum Ludwig (comp. table 1). There is no information if the painting was inherited by Alexandra Tomilina-Larionova, Mikhail's widow, on Mikhail Larionov's death in 1964. It is documented that *Venus* was part of Eugen Rubin's private collection in Paris¹. There is also no information listed when the painting was acquired by the Gallery Gmurzynska which was located in Cologne that time.² *Venus* was part of the gallery's collection until 1982. The painting was acquired by Peter and Irene Ludwig (Ludwig collection in Aachen) in 1982. In December 2011 it was donated as artistic legacy to the Museum Ludwig in Cologne after Irene Ludwig's death in 2010 (28th November 2010).

table 1: listing of the painting's provenance.

undated	Paris, private collection of Eugène Rubin (1906-2001)
until 1982	Cologne, Gallery Gmurzynska (Galerie Gmurzynska)
since 1982	Aachen, collection Ludwig (collection of Peter and Irene Ludwig) 1982-2011: loan to the Museum Ludwig in Cologne
since 20.12.2011	Donation/ artistic legacy to the Museum Ludwig, Cologne

References in general for the painting's exhibition history and bibliography,
see: <<https://www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05020021>

¹ This information is mentioned on an old index card (archive Ludwig collection, Aachen).

² Founded in 1965 in Cologne, Germany Gallery Gmurzynska is now located in Switzerland.



Plate 1. Mikhail Larionov, Venus, 1912, collection Museum Ludwig: Inv. Nr. ML 1332.
Verso, visible light.

Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, Patrick Schwarz, rba_d050874_02, www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05020021

The painting has been lined (no original material is visible).

2. Art historical information: a few notes

After 1910 Larionov developed a primitivist style which was a fusion of his interests in Fauvism and Expressionism and included decorative elements from folk art, forms borrowed from children's drawings and inscriptions similar to graffiti. Characteristic for this phase is the artwork *Venus*, dated 1912 (Museum Ludwig), a translation of the classical, occidental Venus motif of Western art into a primitivistic idiom. Every classical element has been reduced to schematic terms and elements of Primitivism. (Scheps, Hermann et al. 1996: 406, 408; Weiss 1986: 72).³

A newspaper article published in October 1912 mentions that Larionov had completed a *Katsap Venus*⁴, a *Jewish Venus*⁵ and a *Gypsy Venus*⁶, as well as sketches for Venuses of other nationalities and races. This article notes that these works exemplify Larionov's interest in ethnological canons of beauty. This explanation seems inadequate, for both *Katsap Venus* and *Jewish Venus* are representations of army prostitutes (Parton 1993: 51/52). Concerning the painting *Gypsy Venus* (or *Venus and Mikhail*) the colour yellow itself gives a hint.

The yellow also underlies the fact that this "Venus",..., is a prostitute: in Russia prostitutes were required to carry a yellow card. (Malmstad 1996: 164-166).⁷ In the painting "Venus" (Museum Ludwig) Larionov used an unusual support consisting of straw. Its overall yellowish colour, left unpainted, probably acts as a reference to this.

The painting *Venus* in the Ludwig Collection combines motif and stylistic elements both of *Katsap Venus* and *Gypsy Venus*. It repeats the motif found in the 1912 painting *Katsap Venus*: the Venus lies on her bed in front of a folk art print of a cat, her head covered with a colourful scarf. The hints towards her folk status, as given in the painting *Katsap Venus*, are missing in this version.⁸ The motif of the cat, based upon the 18th century woodcut *The cat of Kazan* in the background is doubled. The reclining nude is reduced to its outlines like in the 1913 publication by Eli Eganbyuri where the painting *Katsap Venus* was reproduced as a lithograph.⁹ But also the *Gypsy Venus* shows what Malmstad called "a radical simplification of the subject."

Another work, titled *Venus with cats* (1925-30), gouache on paper, is found in the collection of the Centre Pompidou¹⁰; it shows similarities to *Venus* (Museum Ludwig) in regard to composition and motif.

³ Scheps, M., Hermann, B., Schilling, C. et al. *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts. Museum Ludwig Köln. Cologne et al.: Taschen (1996)*, pp. 406, 408; *Russische Avantgarde 1910-1930, Sammlung Ludwig, Köln* [exhibition catalogue, 16 April to 11 May 1986, Sammlung Ludwig, Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, Cologne], with text written by Weiss, E. (ed.?) Munich: Prestel (1986), p. 72. Rough translation of the entire section from German text into English.

⁴ *Katsap Venus*, oil on canvas, 99,5 x 129,5 cm, 1912, Nizhny-Novgorod, State Museum of Art.

⁵ *Jewish Venus*, oil on canvas, 103 x 144cm, 1912, [Yekaterinenburg](#), State Museum of Art.

⁶ *Gypsy Venus*, oil on canvas, 68 x 85,5 cm, 1912, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

⁷ Malmstad, John E. *The sacred profaned .Image and Word in the Paintings of Mikhail Larionov*.p.153-173. *Laboratory of Dreams. The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*. Ed. By John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1996.

⁸ The discussion on the Venus series and *Katsap Venus* in detail, see chapter one: Warren, Sarah: *Mikhael Larionov and the Cultural Politics of Late Imperial Russia*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2013.

⁹ Reproduction of the lithograph, see: *Nathalie Gontcharova, Michel Larionov* [exh. cat.], Centre Pompidou Paris (1995), p. 130.

¹⁰ *Venus with cats* (1925-30), Gouache on paper, 35,5 x 50,5 cm, Centre Pompidou, AM 1988-938.

RARP – report on archive review written by Verena Franken(conservator at Museum Ludwig, Cologne), 2/2017

< https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/ressource.action?param.id=FR_R-8f5fc58de6365c6e55380d82a78242¶m.idSource=FR_O-96c9a18d218f3b17632f651173829782>, (16.02.2017).

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