

The Image of the City of Vyborg in the Engravings of the Martial Artist Mikhail Matorin (1901-1976)

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Abstract: Military printmaker Mikhail Matorin (1901 – 1976) was the first in linocut who captured the image of Vyborg. M. V. Matorin spent the whole war as a martial artist of the Grekov studio of military artists. He has been to different fronts. Sheets of the album of Linoleum Prints «Vyborg», created as a result of his stay on the Finnish front, was dedicated to the city in June 1944. Matorin has seen a powerful «Mannerheim Line», he visited places of recent battles and has commemorated all seen by him. Linocuts of Matorin have a picturesque character, striking colorfulness and temperament.

Keywords: Mikhail Matorin, Linocut, Print, Drawing, Printmaker, Vyborg, Mikhail Sokolnikov, Front-Line Artists, The Grekov Studio of Military Artists

1. Introduction

Mikhail Matorin [1] was born in 1901 in Moscow. Master came into the Soviet print art without special VKHUTEIN education. [2] At the age of 13 he already began to grasp elements of the engraving art at Sytin School of Technical Drawing and lithographic business. Matorin was the son of a petty clerk burdened by a large family. From the childhood Mikhail had an extraordinary love to books and learned to draw very hard.



Figure 1. Mikhail Matorin (1901-1976), 1921. Photoportrait by Robert Iohanson.

At first Mikhail Matorin dreamed to choose the Stroganov specialized school, but life circumstances forced him to enter the Sytin school. [3] All material security of students was completely provided by the management of school, besides this school was in his native Zamoskvorechie not far from home. Twenty-five years later remembering his training, Matorin [5] characterizes the value of this school by warm and appreciative words: «The school was remarkable. There was an extraordinary atmosphere of efficiency and love to art in it. It was perfectly equipped» [4].

2. Beginning of the Creative Way

Starting with lithography, the young artist showed the passion to engraving forms of lines and colors. Receiving his works – A. S. Kasatkin his headmaster said about his drawings for calendars and textbooks, fulfilled in the manner of wood engravings -: «Everything is as prints!».

Soon, he willingly gave his student to I. N. Pavlov, who became to teach a class of prints. It was the third year of Matorin staying at school. The artist and his new teacher I. N. Pavlov met before. Matorin wrote in his autobiographical records «Ivan Nikolaevich came downstairs into school from the top, where he worked as a staff engraver printing on special, independent conditions. He brought sheets of his prints, the first experiments of akvatipeia. They were sheets of «Province», imprinted from linoleum. Prints effected on

me infectiously. I still remember the first smell of linoleum, this smell was charming». [6]

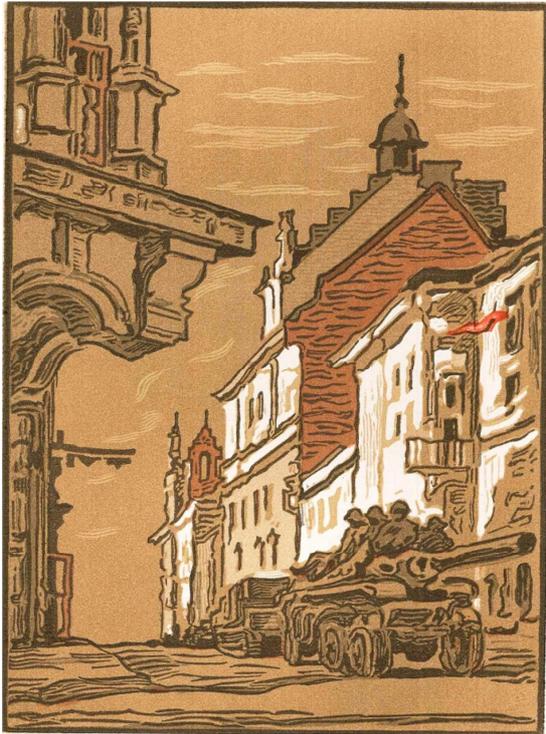


Figure 2. Mikhail Matorin «Linnankatu», 1944. Technique paper, colored linocut. Size 25 × 31 cm.

Working with persistence and passion, Matorin quickly mastered the technique of engraving. Matorin was distinguished by Pavlov among other pupils and brought nearer to himself: the young artist was often invited into his house and given an opportunity to enjoy books on history of engraving from his rich library. One of the best and favorite students, Matorin received a lot from his teacher. Pavlov inculcated in him enthusiasm for drawing and engraving, introduced into professional secrets of engraving craftsmanship, handed traditions, taught how to use perfectly the technique of the carving. The young artist was early involved by his teacher to their joint creative work. After the transformation of Sytin school into the State Art and Industry Workshops of printing, Pavlov left Matorin as his assistant in teaching.

Also Matorin was under the big influence of V. D. Falileev, with whom he studied in addition in Proletkult. It was a Master of the extraordinary temperament, strong color stresses, «Kuindzhi of Russian engravings» - as he was called, Falileev attracted all people, contacting with him by features of his genuine artistic nature. «I was struck by the enthusiasm of this man as a teacher. He burned, burned with fire. We had a profound respect for him. Ignoring time, he pitilessly killed his valuable time, but we did not notice how time flies. Wonderful master, he tried to breathe this consuming fire of creativity into us. The time was not existed for him when something was connected with art. If he thought of an engraving and began to carve it, he did it day

and night, and the second day till it would be already finished. Also he was just the same passionate as a teacher». [6]

Curious and searching student of Sytin school Matorin looked eagerly and attentively at new phenomena of art not missing exhibitions, visiting museums. Serious and extensive knowledge was given him by such teachers as a participant of Peredvizhnik exhibitions V. N. Kurdiunov, impulsive and hot M. M. Zaytsev, well-known Sytin's pencil artist, poster - artist and sculptor G. D. Alekseev. But Matorin gravitated most of all towards S. V. Gerasimov, who entered Sytin school as a teacher on leaving the Moscow Specialized School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. In the eyes of the youth he was a lively, contemporary artist, with fresh views on art. «From Sergei Vasilyevich I got particularly a lot, - said Matorin. - Extremely attentive to students and having his own pedagogical methods, Gerasimov was restrained in his praise, but if somebody was praised by him, this student was in the seventh heaven». The Sytin school created a solid basis for Matorin [7] professional creative work. This school has taught him to draw well, to master a composition and technique of carving, has given knowledge of printing production. All that was necessary to connect together by the firm will of general aesthetics, but during a final ripening of his talent, Matorin was deprived of the only leading art direction, and this fact had an influence on his talent of the artist. In good time, M. S. Bazykin, one of the first critics of his prints, pointed on this «complication» of Matorin creative self-determination. M. S. Bazykin wrote in 1926: «Granted only to himself, the artist had to define his talent by long and hard work. He had to and have to trust only to his own experience». [2]



Figure 3. Mikhail Matorin «Old Castle», 1944. Technique paper, colored linocut. Size 25 × 31 cm.

3. Talented Engraver

We must give Matorin's perseverance and tenacity his due. Despite difficult circumstances in art education, he managed to find himself in the art, to determine his own forms of labour, his own means of graphic expression. Initially, the artist tried his hand as an illustrator. Matorin designed books: Ancient - Russian Chronicles (1935), «Utopia» by Thomas More (1935) for the publishing house «Academia», also he designed several books for the publishing house AKhPP. In the postwar period Matorin granted a lot of time to design the mass publishing series of books for the publishing house «Art». Before Mikhail Matorin this series did not have his face, because popular books on artists came out in gaudy covers. [8]

The boy rushed into the Art boldly and enthusiastically. Already in 1920 he was awarded by the first prize for the poster Long live the world October! At the age of nineteen years old Matorin taught in the Moscow State Art - Industry workshops of Printing. [9]

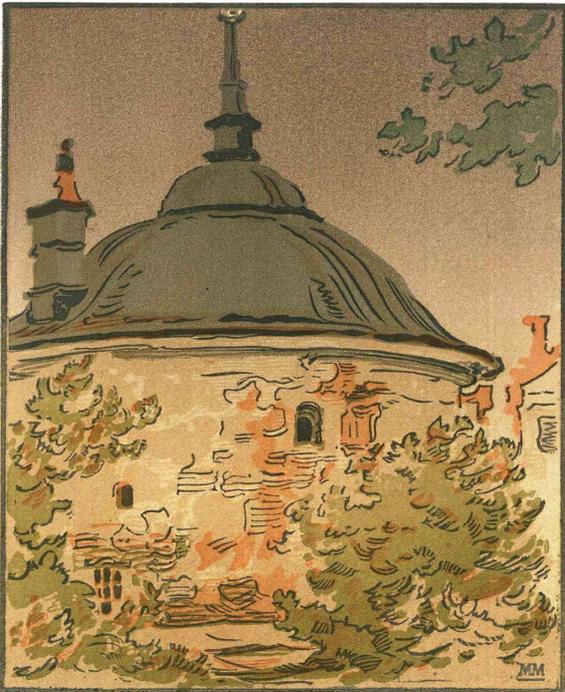


Figure 4. Mikhail Matorin «Tower of the old fortress» (the Round Tower), 1944. Technique paper, colored linocut. Size 25 × 31 cm.

Matorin's art, his creative personality and great technical skills have found a tangible expression in sketch-books and easel-prints of the artist: Auto-prints (1920), Nature-morte, Landscape (1926). Since 1935 Matorin comes close to the work on color prints. Matorin usually performed his color prints in the technique of linoleum. Matorin asserted that «the engraving can be only truly rich when it is laconic till the limit in color. Let it be even an abundance of colors, but the clarity of the formal language is essential». [10]

Note, by the way, that in the style of some Matorin's prints one can feel the traditions of Vl. Sokolov's and A. P. Ostroumova-Lebedeva's art. From the first, who was a great

follower of Levitan, the engraver took the doctrine of national originality of Russian nature, of the delicate realistic representing of the landscape's parts, and of the necessity of putting his own soul into it. From Ostroumova-Lebedeva Mikhail Matorin learned nobility of range of colors and poetic portraying of architectural landscape.

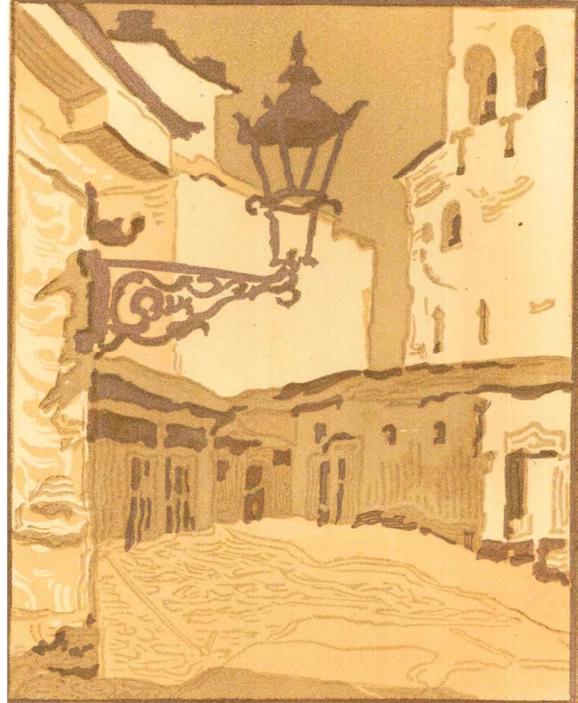


Figure 5. Mikhail Matorin «Patio», 1944. Technique paper, colored linocut. Size 25 × 31 cm.

From 1920 to 1924 Mikhail taught in the Moscow State Art - Industry workshops of Printing. From 1924 to 1930 he taught in the Central printing school of FZU of Borshevskiy, from 1935 to 1941 - in the School of FZU of the integrated plant «Pravda». Since 1935 he was an assistant professor, then a professor of the engraving class of the Moscow Art Institute of Surikov. From 1926 to 1929 Matorin was a member of the Association of Artists-engravers at the Press House in Moscow, from 1928 to 1929 - in the section of engravers in Leningrad, from 1931 to 1932 - into the Union of Soviet Artists in Moscow. The artist's works were exhibited in 1922 (It was the first Russian art exhibition in Berlin in Van Diemen's gallery). Since the 1920s, he performed easel woodcuts and linoleumcuts, depicting Russian and European historical monuments. [11]

Mikhail Matorin has designed about 20 books for the publishing house «Academia». Matorin's works for the publishing house «Academia» are still the standard of taste, elegance of the art of books: Songs of the Great French Revolution, Selected Poems of Gervet, Freiligrath, Weert, and especially - Utopia by Thomas More. High achievements of the artist were due to the fact that he approached to the design of the books integrately. It is interesting, that at the same time, working with prints, Matorin studied painting and drawing: gouache, watercolor, less often oil, more often

tempera, pencil, pastel, charcoal - he did not limit himself by a board and gravers, but he was a versatile talented artist, a passionate lover of arts. Matorin sometimes used up to 12 boards in his color linocuts, achieving the effect of painting. [12]

Matorin never left an engraving, realizing its value as a true humanist and educator. «Among different types of fine art engraving takes a honorary place as the most democratic and mass form of art creation. To create an engraving means to allow simultaneous life to the artistic graphic work in the mass of the authentic copies, in other words, to give a large amount of similar works with exactly similar qualitative significance», - Ivan Pavlov and Mikhail Matorin wrote in their manual for the engravers. [2]

Matorin himself did not aspire to delights, preferring simple language of the expressiveness. As he wrote later: «An engraving can be true rich only when it is up to the limit in color». There is a captivating harmony of tones in the Matorin's easel -prints, which he achieves by serious, long-term work to form layers of paints. Let it be even an abundance of colors, but the clarity of language and forms is necessary», - a friend of of Mikhail Vladimirovich, art-critic M. Sokolnikov aptly remarked. That is why most of the Matorin's works has found a way to the heart of every viewer very quickly. [6]

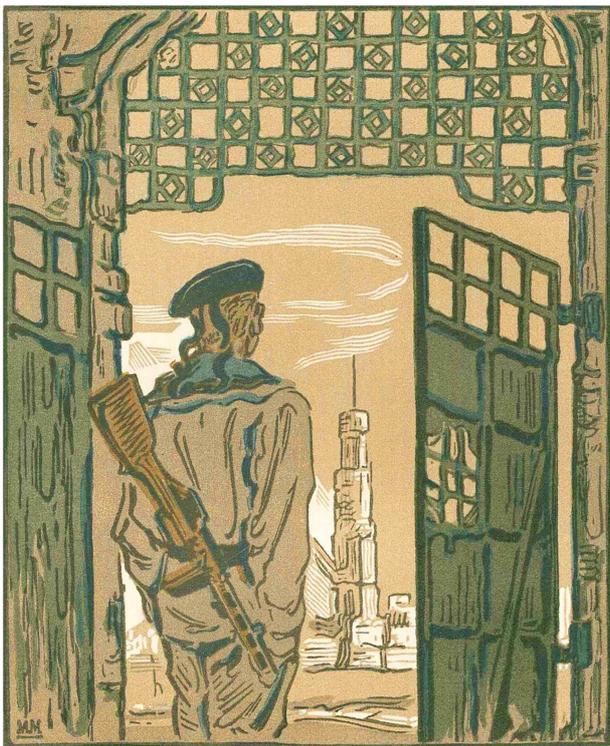


Figure 6. Mikhail Matorin "Patrol", 1944. Technique paper, colored linocut. Size 25 × 31 cm.

4. In military Fronts

As well as for the entire Russian people, the war became a great sorrow to Matorin. «Throughout the war martial artist of the Studio of MB Grekov Mikhail Matorin visited various

fronts of the Great Patriotic War. Made by him at the Leningrad front series of watercolor compositions, in which landscape played the decisive role, has formed the album Vyborg - wrote History of Russian Art by Grabar. [8]

Much stronger Matorin's skill well affected wartime engravings made by sketches and impressions of the front travelling. Artist-World War II veteran from its first year, Matorin was in the defence of Moscow, and then in the tank corps. Matorin was a witness of many battles, including the Battle of the Orel-Kursk direction, of the crossing the Dnieper. Since 1944 (by words of art-critic M. P. Sokolnikov), he was appointed by order of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Army into the military studio of Grekov. Being in the studio gave Matorin an opportunity to make special trips to the Finnish front, as well as to Romania, Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia. These trips allowed him to accumulate valuable documentary material and stimulated his interest to the work on compositional patterns and easel graphics. Transition to the peaceful work created for the artist all the conditions to concentrate deeper on the topic, and to put his subjects by high plastic forms.

5. The Album of Linoleum Prints «Vyborg» (1944)

The album of linoleum prints Vyborg deserves the special attention. Matorin saw powerful «Mannerheim Line», visited places of recent fightings and has commemorated all observed in a number of substantial watercolors and sketches. Later, they were shown at the Grekov studio exhibition, dedicated to the tenth anniversary of its existence. An ancient city, a major port on the bank of the Gulf of Finland, Vyborg attracted Matorin by originality of its northern architectural landscape, the severe beauty of its forms. Finns fled rapidly, and there were absolutely no inhabitants. Bright sunny days of June with white nights even more emphasized epic expression of the architectural ensemble of the city. In Matorin's linocuts the image of Vyborg gets up in front of the audience in the musical beauty of plastic forms, in an epic suspense of the «soul of the city». Language of his prints is sharp, clear and emotional. Sonority of a touch and the rhythm of lines are in tune with the noble tone.

Prints made by Matorin were based on front sketches. They say about a lot creative impulse of the artist in the period of their creation. Panorama of the old Vyborg, with houses, stretched up and piled up close to each other, a deserted port and cold waters of the bay in the background, an old Vyborg fortress with a silhouette of the monument and a red flag set up by Russian troops on the spire of the tower, the tower itself, and then a town hall - all this is served by the artist in an elegant range of colors, with an exact understanding of lighting and time of the day. How delicately the master portrays a summer night in the engraving of Linnakatu - a main street of the city, what sunny combinations of colors Matorin has found for sketches for a

corner of Vyborg with patio! In thoughtful compositions of Matorin there are great used items, - patterned lantern in the Patio, northern ornamental railings in the Sailors patrol. Individual prints are dedicated by the artist to Russian tankers. Soviet tanks on the streets of Vyborg, a meeting of tankers at the town hall, night passing of tanks had the evocative silhouette implementation in the engravings of Matorin.

In one of the linocuts depicting Vyborg in June 1944 (Edition of the Art-estamp/ print workshop of the Moscow Association of Artists in 1945. From front-line sketches in prints on the linoleum), we see a portrayal of the Castle Street (Linnankatu). At the moment these linocuts, in the amount of 12 pieces are presented in the Russian State Library (FGBU «RGB»), in Moscow. In the engraving Linnankatu the representation consists of two plans: a well-developed foreground, in which a self-propelled gun with soldiers is moving, and we note that Matorin portrays it on the same level with the corner of the profitable apartment house. The second plan is formed by buildings to the right down Linnankatu street and sky, which is represented by M. Matorin conditionally with small white massif. The composition is clear enough to read by providing a clear alternation of light and dark spots. Buildings right down the Castle street, Matorin draws in orange- brick tones with splashes of white. In the rest of the composition he uses gray, dark -brown and black colors. The general background is served of beige color tinged with brownish. Matorin draws clouds of light yellow. A moving self-propelled gun with soldiers combines the first and second plans, and if for a moment to cover this object, you can see how this composition will be impoverished, how it is losing its depth, because the first and last -grounds of the picture become closer to each other excessively, how disappears the main connecting link in the composition. The introduction of spots of clouds with indistinct, wavy contours creates the rhythmic variety, brings major notes of good spirits and is the method, making the composition alive. [2] [8]

Engraving's rhythm is portrayed by geometry of forms, by technique of applying paint layers and by space. The artist uses the contrast of color comparisons, actually the easiest of all other types of contrasts, as this type does not make a big demand to color vision, because it can be demonstrated by using pure colors, in their maximum saturation. Black, white and brick colors in this linocut form a strong contrast of light and dark-colored. Meanwhile yellow and beige (light and dark) colors possesses less contrast in the picture. It is worth drawing special attention to the fact, that each of the pure colors in the painting is separated from each other by black lines, and thus their individual character becomes more sharply expressed but mutual radiations, influences are reducing. Each color shows its real concreteness in the work. Take note that the engraver Mikhail Matorin used several colors in his work (achromatic colors: black, white, grey; and chromatic: brick red, beige and yellow). The brick color is the most I concentrated in his work. Using whitening to depict the sunlight on buildings, which are located in the street on

the right, Matorin emphasizes that a sunny summer evening is depicted in the engraving. The perspective drawing is linear, the texture of the work is lustreless, solid. In the picture the horizon runs below, than the geometrical middle of the picture, and the sky occupies the most part of the work. It says, that the artist offers to take a look at the architectural objects, dominating against the sky.

A format of the picture is rectangular and vertical, its height prevails over its wide. Thanks to this format all composition acquires the dynamics. A foreshortening was taken by the artist from the New Outpost street. In the engraving Soviet tanks are depicted in the Castle Street. In the engraving on the left we see a former rental house of E. Buttengoff with a store, which is inhabited at present (7, the Fortress St.). The house was built on a hill by architect Johann Blomqvist for the merchant Emil Buttengoff in 1898. The house was designed as profitable, with a shop, built on the ground floor. The rich merchant and «a trader of overseas cigarettes and wines» Buttengoff, did not grudge the rich decor of his house, which served a good advertisement for his store. Evidently, Mikhail Vladimirovich Matorin, like many other artists who worked on this land, was conquered by ancient architecture of Vyborg.

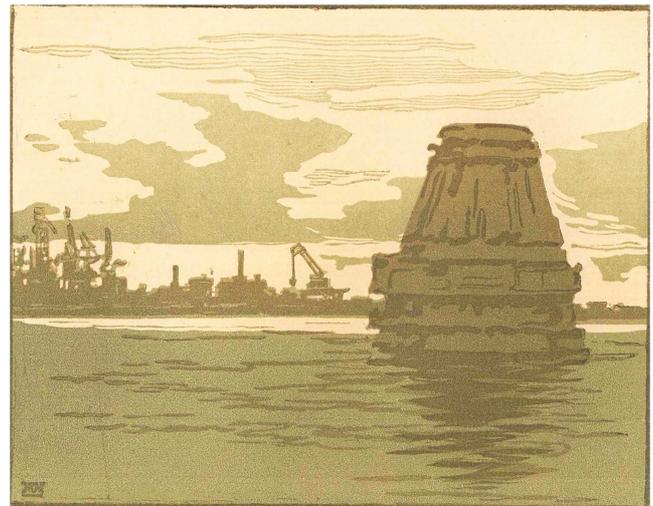


Figure 7. Mikhail Matorin «Port», 1944. Technique paper, colored linocut. Size 25 × 31 cm.

In the other engraving the Tower of the old fortress the Round Tower is shown by the artist M. Matorin from Market Square of Vyborg. The Round Tower was built in 1547-1550 by the engineer -fortifier Khan (Gans) Bergen. This is a monument of medieval fortification with complex and glorious fighting history. This linocut consists of two plans: there is greenery in the foreground and the Round Tower itself, which occupies the most part of the composition is on the second plan. The composition is clear to read, thanks to the clear distribution of mass, the alternation of light and dark spots. In this linocut rhythm is reproduced by geometry of shapes, color and space. With help of rhythmic lines Matorin managed to portray the wind successfully. The artist uses wavy intersecting short lines, creating the impression of

a windy day. The master Mikhail Matorin uses the contrast of color comparisons, each color is separated from each other by black lines, thanks to this fact, the individual character of each color becomes pronounced more sharply. It is interesting that the sky occupies exactly half of the composition and divides the picture's plane in half.

The artist takes the point of view from the bottom of the picture deliberately, noting the massiveness of the «Round Tower», giving greater importance to the architectural structure. A format of the picture is quadrangular. A texture of the canvas is mat, firm. The Ideological conception of both Matorin's engravings became the Vyborg's image of wartime. These woodcuts and linoleum cuts were created by the artist in wartime. Mikhail Matorin tasted his fate at the front line, and he knew firsthandly what the death is.

It is known, in the years of the Great Patriotic War, a considerable part of the artists have been to fronts. A lot of them defended the independence of the Motherland by fighting weapons in their hands; a significant group of painters worked as artists and front-line soldiers in a marching situation. Activity of martial artists of the Grekov studio was particularly fruitful and meaningful. Established in 1934 by the order of the People's Commissar of Defense Kliment Voroshilov, during the war the studio turned into a strong and fighting group of artists -professionals, who took their place in the Red Army. In the incessant communication and interaction with people's soldiers mass, in difficulties of military campaigns, in harsh conditions of everyday front – line's life grekovtsy (martial artists of the Studio of M. B. Grekov) have passed many thousands of kilometers by the roads of war.

Having started their lives as martial artists under Moscow, they had personal experience of combat harvest-time of Stalingrad, moved together with the Red Army from the Volga to the Shpree, were witnesses of battles at Orel and Kursk, crossed the Dnieper, worked in the Crimea, on the Leningrad and Karelian Fronts, have passed East Prussia, the Carpathians and remained on the war until its end, taking part in the storming of Berlin. They saw heroism every day and have depicted the life of the war by watchful and sharp eyes of painters in a series of drawings, watercolors and sketches with oil. Materials collected by martial artists of the Studio of M. B. Grekov are of great value in the sphere of historical and art-documentary interests. The Artists - Patriots have created a lot of series of works, reflected individual events and episodes of heroic struggle of the Red Army against the Nazi hordes. Their works are the artistic chronicle of the World War II, the value of which is increased by the realistic method of artists' creative work, excited attitude to the art and by military plots. [2]

Art sheets from war albums were shown by martial artists of the Studio of M. B. Grekov at various exhibitions and had good success with an audience. These works of art had a great public and political significance and were replicated through newspapers, magazines, postcards and posters. But it would be wrong to restrict the activities of artists only by the «collecting» aspect of their work. Sketch-books, sketches and

drawings from life and water colors of martial artists are rich fountain of materials to go on working on canvases, on compositional drawings, watercolors and easel - graphics.

The album Vyborg can be supposed as the indisputable artistic achievement of Soviet graphic art. Also, it shouldn't be noted an elegant Matorin's design of title pages of the edition. The technique of water-colors and tempera was not avoided by all-round talents of the artist. Every spring, autumn, summer and sometimes winter, he went out of the city into the countryside. Matorin supposed that work from real life must be compulsory for himself. Water-color sketches brightened up colors of his graphics, gave him great material for engravings, taught truthful rendering of complex conditions of landscape. Certainly, Matorin's works have an independent artistic value. They are a special kind of his art. In water-color art of Matorin the picturesque beginning was connected with the graphic one. This graphic beginning can be detected through his painting, as an organic creative feature of the artist.

6. Conclusion

Creative image of Matorin will not be complete without his large, versatile pedagogical activities. Matorin as a teacher supplements Matorin as an artist, because of his disciplined nature was fond of pedagogics from a young age. It was just Matorin, who first put into operation a new subject,- drawing of parts of printing machines for printers and bookbinders. In 1935 he began his serious pedagogical activity in the Moscow Art Institute. He was invited as an assistant professor on the engraving class.

The results of Matorin's methodical work as a teacher were expressed in the manual the Technique of engraving on wood and linoleum, which was written in collaboration with engraver I. N. Pavlov. [12]

Mikhail was a great enthusiast of a print, its furious propagandist and advocate, and at the same time a faithful servant of ksilografskoy and linoleum graphics. Engravings for him are the most democratic of arts. His love for the profession of an engraver was boundless and principled. «To draw, to compose for him meant to cut then. Sometimes he was ordered to make the originals in the usual graphic form, with indian ink, but he would bring them as prints.

«Engraving is always better,- he would say at the same time. -Its forms are more musical and cleaner, and they are incomparable with anything for printing» - art-critic Michail Porfirievich Sokolnikov wrote in 1948. [12]

After the war and until the end of his life Mikhail Matorin taught in the Moscow State Art Institute of V. I. Surikov. Professor, Honored Artist of the RSFSR Matorin M. V. worked hard, not saving forces in the creation. Matorin was a true knight of the engraving, its singer. «Even if he was ordered the original in Indian ink, Matorin brought it as engravings. In this case, he added: «The engraving is always better. It forms are more musical and cleaner, and the print is incomparable with anything» - Olga Nemirovskaya has written down. A student and a friend of Matorin, printmaker

Nikolay Kalita exclaimed: «I always remember Mikhail Vladimirovich with infinite gratitude - a wonderful man, a teacher, Master». Among the students of Mikhail Matorin are: V. I. Andrushkevich, D. P. Dmitriev, Yu. E. Efremov, A. P. Zyryanov, K. I. Kalinycheva, A. P. Lopatin, T. V. Pribylovskaya, M. A. Faydysh and many others.

In his autobiographical notes Mikhail Matorin left enthusiastic pages about unique originality, charm and advantages of engraving art. «What highly range of orchestral qualities this method of printing has! A black and white line, black and white dotted line, keys of different gradations... Do have other ways of such a powerful orchestra of graphical tools?!». [6]

Master-virtuoso being able to use technique of engraving perfectly, Matorin introduced his personal traits, his style into the art of the book, as well as into easel -graphics. In his engravings one can feel the alive, original manner of the impassioned artist. Twenty-five years of fruitful labour of Matorin have contributed their own share into the development and remarkable achievements of Soviet graphics. Unfortunately, today, the name of the great engraver is undeservedly forgotten.

Studying of creative work of engraver Mikhail Vladimirovich Matorin not only promotes the reconstruction of a complete picture of the cultural space in which the domestic art developed in the middle of the XX century, but also allows to expand history of art linocuts qualitatively. The album of Linoleum Prints Vyborg, created as a result of the artist's being on the Finnish front in June 1944, is a valuable documentary material not only for the domestic art-critics, but also for historians, regional ethnographers, artists, teachers. Research into linoleum prints of the Album Vyborg has cultural and historical significance for the restoration of the historical «memory of space» of the town of Vyborg.

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