

Winter Recommended Reading Series

David Walsh: Reading Voronsky on art today is to breathe fresh air

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Mehring Books is pleased to announce its Winter Recommended Reading Series, in which WSWs writers have been invited to share thoughts with the web site's readers about works of Marxist literature that have influenced them and explain why. Each week Mehring Books will be featuring a different WSWs author. We begin the series with David Walsh, Arts Editor of the WSWs.

In my view, the essays by Aleksandr Voronsky collected in *Art as the Cognition of Life* (translated and edited by Frederick S. Choate, and published by Mehring Books in 1998) are among the most indispensable written on art and aesthetics in the 20th century.

Pieces such as “Art as the Cognition of Life, and the Contemporary World,” “On Art,” “Notes on Artistic Creativity,” “On Artistic Truth,” and “The Art of Seeing the World” in particular remain a continuous guide and source of illumination.

Voronsky (1884-1937)—revolutionary activist, Soviet critic and editor, Left Oppositionist, and victim of Stalin's purges—and Leon Trotsky (in *Literature and Revolution* and other writings on the subject) were the principal exponents and defenders in a turbulent, often tragic historical period of the Marxist attitude toward creative life.

To read Voronsky today on the questions of art, frankly, is *to breathe fresh air*. The vast majority of “left” writing on such issues (postmodernist, Stalinist, academic, etc.) over the past number of decades reveals no real feeling for or genuine interest in art, or its problems.

Voronsky writes about Tolstoy and Proust, the poets Mayakovsky and Esenin, the errors of Soviet

“Proletcultists” and Freudians alike, with passion and urgency. His aim at all points: to encourage art that engages deeply and truthfully with life. The world must be present in the artist's work, Voronsky wrote, “as it is in itself, so that the beautiful and ugly, the kind and repulsive, the joyful and sorrowful appear to be so, not because that's the way the artist wants it, but because they are contained in real life.”

I strongly recommend this book.

Art as the Cognition of Life can be purchased online through Mehring Books.



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