

Food Studies in Russia

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“Mysterious” Russian Cuisine: Historical Origins of Present Situation

Traditionally the food in Russia is regarded to be neither for pleasure nor for gourmandize. Russian food is considered by the rest world to be too simple, heavy, fatty and lacking flavours. Surprisingly, the Russian people very often share this opinion. Two main features characterize Russian food tradition in general, and at the first sight they are mutually exclusive. On the one hand, Russian cuisine is very traditional, not to say conservative. It has been true to its general preferences for centuries. On the other hand, it is widely open to outside influences, absorbing and adjusting various dishes to its tastes.

Russia has always been a multicultural conglomerate. All its main peoples – Slavs, Finno-Ugric People, Turks, Mongols, Caucasians and many others – added something special to what finally has formed a traditional Russian cuisine. At the same time, despite the years of unification (Soviet Constitution of 1977 proclaimed the formation of a new unity – “the Soviet people”) different people living in Russia have saved their unique food preferences. Their cooking traditions are practically unknown not only to the world but to the many people living in Russia as well.

However, the Russian cuisine keeps some secrets and at the end it is not so simple as it seems at the first sight. Many traditions and foodways are hidden in the rich Russian history and culture and very often they are a mystery even for those who eat this food every day.

Irina Rutsinskaya & Galina Smirnova

Tea Party in Russian Painting in the Second Part of the Nineteenth Century: Reflections of Everyday Life and History

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tea party was a common topic of the Russian paintings. This fact is explicable as tea is a one of the symbols of Russian Culture and the major element of the national way of life.

When analysing the most well known Russian paintings of genre art of the second part of the nineteenth century (V. Perov, A. Korzukhin, M. Makovskiy, V. Vasnetsov) as well as the works of not very famous regional painters, one can easily trace the existence of two key tendencies in reflecting realities. One group of artists used depiction of tea parties to illustrate social injustice whereas the other group preferred to monitor social and cultural aspects of reality: presenting scenes from daily life of the representatives of different social groups (peasants, bourgeoisie and nobility). In parallel there certainly existed one more way to illustrate the topic: tea party as a space of family pleasures. Moreover, depicting tea parties the artist emphasised historical aspects behind everyday life issues. Economic problems, social and cultural transformations, ugliness of everyday existence became the main heroes of the canvases.

Due to the peculiarities of the Russian national character it was impossible for Russian painters of that age to reflect on the pleasant or family aspects of everyday life as they were considered to be insignificant, trivial and banal. Each topic, even the most routine one, had to

make people contemplate about global historical problems. And only in this way it could be valuable for arts.

Raziyat Tsinpaeva

Food Trends in Social Media: Global Food Choices or Culturally Conditioned Eating Habits?

The fact that social media is gaining greater influence on our daily life and choices has been widely acknowledged and discussed in various contexts. And food is no exception. Within a couple of years, we have been witnessing how numerous food trends come and go, food aesthetics change, diets go viral, food influencers appear, and gastronomy become an integral part of our digital self-concept.

Although the way social media shape our relationship with food has not yet been investigated enough there are apparent signs of its predominant nature. To begin with the social media ritual of taking pictures of food before actually eating it has become the fact of our life. Besides some studies suggest evidence that online social circles implicitly influence our eating habits with people eating more indulgent foods if they feel their social circles approved of such eating patterns and eating cleaner if they believe their friends are on a healthy diet.

All these tendencies have been fueled during pandemic lockdowns. Cooking becomes a more therapeutic action which helps to overcome psychological burdens of social isolation while enhanced social media presence driven by the chase for “likes” and comments substitutes social interaction.

In this context social media food trends are becoming more distinct and massive. Still a closer look at English-speaking and Russian speaking social media accounts brings us some food for thought whether these global food trends are that global.