

'Bonjour', 'Drázdvoutye'. Yes, I am Russian! Maria Konstantinovna Bashkirtseff, born Poltava in 1858.

Mama, my aunt, cousin Dina and I left Russia when my parents divorced and we travelled – all around Europe: France, Italy, Germany too when I was unwell.

I loved Italy – in Rome studied painting with Katorbinsky and began singing lessons. So ambitious! Singing I can have the triumph I thirst for.

Not to be – my voice failed me!

Began my journals aged 14 – vowed to write honestly.

Crushes on the famous men we met - the handsome Duke of Hamilton and many others.

Had governesses but drew up my own plan of studies – languages, literature, art.

What joy when we four wanderers arrived in Paris in 1877. French society opened its doors to us, though the Russian Embassy took longer. Family scandals concerning 'Uncle George'.

To see Bernhardt and the plays of Molière and go to concerts and balls!

I am not ugly, rather pretty, have the body of a statue and beautiful hair. I love to dress in gowns of silk mull.

To be seen and observe others!

At the Académie Julian which accepts women students. Most girls are poor and how they mock me in words and sketches: 'prancing into class with my little dog and my maid.' They will see – I shall work hard to succeed.

I paint a fine picture of us all in the studio.

My only rival Louise Breslau; I am jealous!

I receive encouragement from Julian himself and our artist/tutor Tony Robert-Fleury.

Main stumbling-block to my progress is my health. First my voice – now I cough constantly and spit blood. They say I suffer from laryngitis and must rest and go for cures.

Ugh, the blisters and burnings. Hearing, too, a problem and so embarrassing – especially difficult to hide when painting portraits.

Am in shock – Gambetta dead! Who will succeed him? I loved him because he defended the poor. I fight for equality in education for women: write articles for 'La Citoyenne' and go to 'Rights of Women' meetings. I even implore Julian to allow us into the men's art classes to study the nude. Could lead to us doing more interesting works.

Oh why am I not a man? Women are SO much to be pitied.

At last – some success: Salon accepts my paintings in 1880, 1881 and 1882.

Thrilled to see my works hung. Admire the sculptures of St. Marceaux who inspires me create my *Nausicäa*. And the paintings of Jules-Bastien-Lepage – this man is a poet; his works breathe life. The boy in his *Pas Mèche* looks at you and you listen as if he were going to speak - he is alive.

Jules and I have become good friends and he and his brother come to dine often.

My work *Le Meeting* attracts much attention at the Salon in 1884.

Many requests to photograph it – it's reproduced in newspapers, even in Russia. 'New Times' of St Petersburg wanted an interview. 'Le Figaro Illustré' wanted a painting and published it.

Cholera in Paris! Seventy people a day dying in Marseille and 30 in Toulon. WHY do they not close these ports?

But here, all is not well with Jules – he too is ill, seriously I fear. I have been visiting him every day.

Alas! Now I too am bedridden – the doctors finally admit that I am consumptive.

Jules' brother Emile carries him up my stairs to sit with me.

I am so tired! It is only a few weeks to my 26<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Please let Emile bring Jules to see me tomorrow.

'Bonne nuit' - 'Dobroy nochi'.

**Marie Bashkirtseff**

**Agnes Ness**

References:

*Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young artist 1860-1884*, English translation by Mary J Serrano, New York: Cassell, 1889

*The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff: I Am the Most Interesting Book of All (Volume 1) and Lust for Glory (Volume 11)*. English Translation by Katherine Kernberger. E-book version: ISBN 978-1-62652-076-9. Publisher: Fonthill Press, 2013

