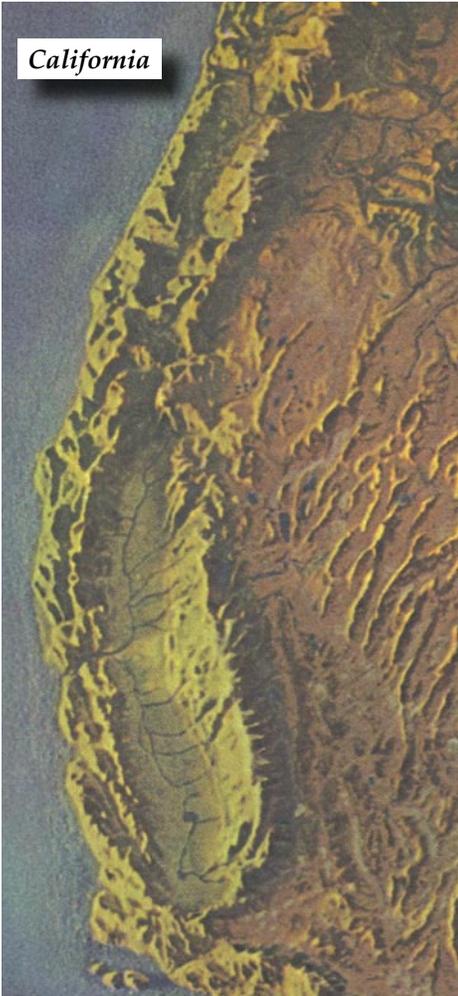


TATYANA APRAKSINA'S CALIFORNIA BULLETIN: 2005

Jubilee Year: Decade One of *Apraksin Blues*



With 2005 came a milestone long anticipated by many: the tenth anniversary of *Apraksin Blues*. Observances of the event, held in Russia, the United States and elsewhere, included a rotating exhibit, organized by Natalia Gladush in St. Petersburg, on Apraksina's work in California; presentations of Apraksina's *California Psalms* by actress Nelly Skvirskaya—including in Moscow, on the stage of Russia's Central House of Professionals in Art—and the publication of *Apraksin Blues* no. 13: Refectory.

Apraksin Blues has come a long way since issue one was released in 1995. Begun as an eight-page, but dense, newspaper, it has become a thick magazine. Its growth has allowed it to accommodate a still greater level of ambition on the part of its authors. It still contains no advertisements.

In the new issue 13, the commitment to longer forms is perhaps most strikingly embodied by Alexander Markovich's "Third Force," a book-length treatise on science, religion and art as complementary forms of knowledge, and Boris Bernstein's magnificent "They Want to See Angels," a study of the depiction of angels in religious and secular art from Biblical and Classical antiquity through the Renaissance in Western Europe, up to the present day.

No. 13 also debuted a new design, shifting *Blues* from the "new underground" feel of the first American issues (nos. 10-12) to a crisp, clean look in the spirit of the first magazine-format issues (nos. 8-9) published in St. Petersburg.

As for constants through the years, for *Blues*, the main constant is always change. The issues are always unpredictable, and always vary. The articles still cover a panoply of topics, still linked by their authors' focus on their



subjects' philosophic basis, still representing "news in no hurry to become day-old," as editor in chief Apraksina noted in her initial interview back in issue one.

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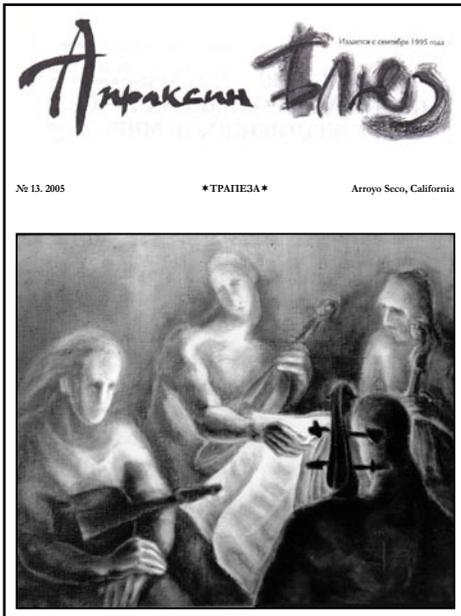
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Jubilee Year for *Blues*

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Readers and collectors of *Apraksin Blues* still prize their back issues, sometimes re-reading them straight through to the present, making new discoveries, finding that every part of every issue has stayed fresh, and their parts suggest new wholes. How many magazines can this be said of? And one senses that after ten years, this will be no less true, and will be noted equally of the first jubilee issue, and of more to come.

Also marking Apraksina's seventh year in America, 2005 brought a sense of coming full circle: uniting the best of different worlds, of old and new. Similarly in evidence, with new presentations and publications of Apraksina's work internationally, was the extent to which Apraksina's work—from the beginning up to her latest writing and art—has its own life in the lives of others.

Other features in *Blues* issue 13 included a pithy survey of the current cultural scene in St. Petersburg; a fresh appraisal of Soviet-era nonconformist art; an investigation into questions of theology and morality by an expert on Judaism; an outstanding translation of a brief lyric by a modern American poet; a take on the relative worth of high and low culture; a look at different societies' view of legs; and a political philosopher's declaration of the outmodedness of traditional concepts of justice and the right. Also in the issue was "Transcendence of Cement," Apraksina's first "Editor's Mondo" since issue nine, and the first written for an American issue of *Apraksin Blues*.

Psalms, Lyric Poems in *Neva*

September 2005 brought the publication in the St. Petersburg journal *Neva* of two of Apraksina's *California Psalms* ("Monk in the Soul," dedicated to the Franciscan padre Junipero Serra, and "Tower," to the California poet Robinson Jeffers) and "These Petersburg walls..." and "Goodbye, Seaside," contrasting

Blues Mondo:

The Transcendence of Cement (from *Apraksin Blues* no. 13: Refectory)

Just ten years of blues, and we have traversed them from the lowest spiral to the highest. From the East to the West, and from the West to the East. We have counted all the floors, starting with the basement. Underground. Up to our own roof, a fine place to arrange a runway for takeoff.

The frame is built; time to bind it with the cement of the refectory.

Sometimes cement is the one dish and the one work to elicit no doubts.

Presence is a question of symmetry between the absence of will and the will. Real presence is unknowable. Conforming to the object—that's what's important. Conforming to one's table. The face of reality is always the same as clothing: whether an angel's or a human's, for the legs or head. Clothing forms its face from the side of the lining.

Any one of us has his own table, his own scale and school. Perhaps it is only hunger that may be one for all. Just as there is only one cement lining reality's interior: from there, we get our future.

This landscape doesn't change in any weather. This table is never bare.

T. Apraksina

(trans. J.W. Mantooth)

final lines by Apraksina in Petersburg before her departure for America and in Seaside before her departure for Arroyo Seco ("I am within you/Forever" and "Bidding you farewell to love another native place."). The publication can be viewed at <http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2005/9/ap8.html>

River Raga

In December 2005 Apraksina completed her final revisions of the book she began writing seven years earlier, first in St. Petersburg, then in Big Sur.

At first read, *River Raga* defies categorization. Declared by Apraksina to be a “book about love,” it is certainly that, but its unity of theme and of structure is achieved by the balancing and integration of a great diversity of modes of discourse, from scenes of childhood, to passionate lyricism, to passages of abstract philosophy, to extended meditations on objects, on “things.”

The book creates a stunning impact in its own right, and also sheds light on the genesis of Apraksina's *California Psalms*, sharing that work's concern with the theme of a “new life” and its deep interest in the dynamics of natural elements, with sections dominated in turn by water, earth and fire. Also like that work, and like her *Lessons for 'Orly*, it possesses its own inner gravity, creates its own rules, slowly and imperceptibly forges a dialogue with the reader. In yielding nothing to custom, it becomes captivating.

River Raga is not easy to summarize or retell, nor does one want to spoil its eventual readers' surprise by noting many features. At times it seems freewheeling, improvisational, as if the author has exempted herself from all formal considerations and restraints, not least among them narrative, as from traditional logic. Yet there is also a feeling of being guided, of necessity, and at moments the work's overarching intent and lines become clear. A second read proves an epiphany, revealing the extent of each detail's sublimation into a structure, actually many overlapping, spiraling structures.

It is a book that seems ready to go on forever—even near the final pages—and in a sense it does, applying its manner of thought beyond the page. At the same time, it reaches an endpoint by which a central change occurs—still concerning the theme of

love—although the trajectory carries back to the beginning as much as away from it.

Big Sur Triptych Translated

The translation of Apraksina's *Big Sur Triptych featuring Kerouac* into English is now complete. Apraksina called the translation “even stronger than the original, in being in the language of Kerouac himself. That makes it more authentic to the material; the element of mediation disappears, everything is brought onto one plane—the excerpts from Kerouac's *Big Sur* together with the discussion that surrounds them.”

Translator J.W. Mantooth also noted the importance of the work's appearance in Kerouac's language and country. He said the essay is “unlike how others write on Kerouac. Apraksina's background and personality allow her to assess him independently, without being bound to familiar conceptions of the Beats and their value. She sees them on the scale of world, not just American, culture, and approaches Kerouac with compassion, without rote reverence or borrowed judgments.”



Mantooth is also pleased with how *Triptych's* passages on California's geography, and on East and West, came out in the translation. He thinks they can easily stand alone, as statements by their author—as they did in literature accompanying 2005's St. Petersburg exhibits on Apraksina. According to Mantooth, “It's the only place where she writes on these subjects so directly, so straightforwardly, and they have resonance for a whole body of her work, and her thinking overall—not to mention for the basic experience of living in California, or living to the East, or West.”

New Paintings in 2005

A fresh group of paintings created by Apraksina in Arroyo Seco took her work in another new direction. Initially, there was a fairy-tale quality—some-what like an illustration to Andersen—fused with a seeming development of the unexpectedly constructivist simplified figuration of her mosaic-like musicians of 2003.

Where the paintings of that year seemed to lead Apraksina into a renewed exploration of human, manufactured environments, however, here she moved still deeper into the world of her original investigations of California—as might be expected, given her return to life in the mountains—but with perhaps a more measured temperament, keeping a greater distance between herself and nature, bringing more of the manmade, planning longer-term.

The move was hinted at in the backdrop to the *Organist* painting of 2003, with its opening into a forested setting. If that forest had something of the cultured wildness of the grounds of a palace or mansion, this wilderness is absolute. Yet its inhabitant seems to match it as an absolute, native to the realm.

In one work, Apraksina has a cathedral spring up from river rock, which tints the composition with gold, creating a monochrome effect. Subsequently, coloration turns even more schematic; the paintings become almost drawings in oils, like the undercoating covered in any of her paintings. They are large, with the gestures of monumental, mural-type art, but understated, filling space without overwhelming it, like her calligraphic drawings on a white screen in 1999. She is working out a visual language for a place that has no such language.

While the totemic violin remains part of her imagery, and the mountains become giant musicians, as in her first California paintings such as *Coast Guard*, they seem still more remote from the conventionally human, unmoved by human expectations.

Lecture on Art in Transition

In July 2005, lecturing at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, Apraksina spoke on the shifting perception of art in her lifetime. While noting that these changes occurred in a social and political context, Apraksina told her audience that as a "person of art," she would keep to her area of expertise. She identified the central factor in the changes in how art was viewed during the Soviet period and after as the accessibility of information about art in the West.

Apraksina described the grouping of artists into "conformist" and "non-conformist" camps, the former of which was sanctioned by membership in an official organization, the latter of which was not. The latter, she said, tended to seek out information about current artistic activities in the West, and because this information was hard to come by, it was prized all the more when acquired. She said that under these conditions, non-conformist artists tended to see the modern art of the West as invested with special significance, as endowed with exceptional virtues.

While identifying herself with neither group, in much of her lecture, Apraksina paid tribute to the non-conformists. For many of them, she said, the significance and virtues they found in contemporary Western art became their own significance, their own virtues, inspiring them to unquestionable bravery, heroism and artistic accomplishment, whatever the actual merit

of the work that inspired it. The risks these artists faced were real, the persecution they endured was real. Some of the non-conformist artists created great work, and among them were artists she had known as remarkable human beings. Apraksina alluded to her own encounters with the "special forces" of the government, but did not concentrate on this experience.

Apraksina said that the means by which art was used for protest may sometimes have been crude, and may not have always served art—the use of flags and other political symbols on the one hand, and of overt religious symbology on the other. She noted that there are many ways a painting can constitute protest, and seemed to suggest that it may be most effective if apolitical, and open to multiple interpretations. There are also, she said, many types of heroism, including going about one's daily business. She also made it clear that for her work, she was interested in artists less than in musicians.

With the advent of a more open climate, Apraksina said, because it became easier for artists to reap financial profit from their work, commercial aspirations provided an additional incentive to orient on Western ideas of artistic innovation and what the art of a liberated society should look like. Artists began to have a more familiar, less idealistic attitude toward Western art and art as a whole, and artistic activity became less prestigious, only one form of commodity. A Soviet-era emigre artist like Alek Rapoport, to whom Apraksina made reference, had to confront this climate for art earlier than others: to discover the thin line between nominal permissiveness and bland indifference.

Apraksina asserted, however, her belief in art's continued importance. She said she thinks art may need to die out, in a sense, for it to come to life again in the future.

Athenian Class: Meetings with American Artists and Musicians

Significant in 2005 was Apraksina's continued contact with creative practitioners native to, and who take a guiding impulse from, the American soil.

There were those who celebrate their festivals with visual offerings to ancestors, experienced not only in observing but in working the California valleys, with the harvest shown as sponsored equally by the Virgin Mary and Aztec deities. There was the principle of conveying the character of nature in the state's mountains through attention to its formation out of microscopic details, making each work's creation a potential infinity. In music, there was the spirit of innovation, of willingness to experiment, putting one's energies at the service of untried models of proportion and harmony, to give them life—"because it's more interesting"—nonchalant, modest and resilient.

Like an extension of *Apraksin Blues*, such meetings were marked by mutual respect, sharing ideas with no obligation to adopt them, while enhancing the world in which each person operates, and building anticipation for new meetings.

Arts Group Hosts Apraksina

In November, Apraksina conducted an educational session in Salinas, California, at the invitation of Alisal Center for the Arts, a regional non-profit arts group.

Special thanks was expressed to Apraksina for sharing her knowledge with students served by the organization, which has supported the arts for nearly two decades.



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