

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
June 1987

BOOK EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART CELEBRATES THE YEAR OF THE READER

Celebrating "1987--The Year of the Reader," The Museum of Modern Art presents the first major exhibition devoted to the books designed and published by the Russian Iliazd (1894 - 1975). ILIAZD AND THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK, on view from June 18 to August 18, 1987, presents the remarkable publications of this multi-faceted figure who, in his lifetime, created twenty de luxe volumes adorned with original prints by the artists Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Jacques Villon, and others. Organized by Audrey Isselbacher, assistant curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, the exhibition reveals some of the most innovative illustrated books of the twentieth century.

Although Iliazd was a poet, playwright, publisher, book designer, student of archeology and medieval architecture, and one of the most dynamic figures of the modern movement, he has remained generally unknown. Born Ilia Zdanevitch in Tiflis, Georgia, he emigrated from the Soviet Union to Paris in 1921. His early espousal of Marinetti's Futurist theories and involvement with Russian avant-garde poetry were instrumental in formulating his unique approach to the illustrated book. He remained steadfast in his belief in the power of the book to revise human values.

- more -

- 2 -

The exhibition features a selection of preparatory maquettes, typographical designs and proofs, original woodblocks, and copperplates used in the production of the works. It focuses on the twenty extraordinary "livres de peintres" (painter's books), published by Iliazd between 1940 and 1974. The volumes range from his first deluxe edition Afat, a suite of his own sonnets illustrated with engravings by Picasso, to his final effort Adrian de Monluc's Le Courtisan grotesque, a satiric seventeenth-century tale vibrantly illustrated with color etchings by Miró. Under the imprint The 41st Degree, Iliazd published eight of his works with his own writings, and twelve by writers such as Paul Eluard, Raoul Hausmann, and Tristan Tzara, who appealed to his eclectic literary sensibilities.

Iliazd created a particular rhythm and internal architecture for each of his volumes through his inventive manipulation of type and unconventional folding and arrangement of pages. He himself decided the precise number, format, and placement of the illustrations, frequently providing artists with woodblocks or copperplates already cut to size. It was Iliazd's attention to detail and use of fine and often rare materials that resulted in volumes of notable quality and refinement.

In the catalog accompanying the exhibition Ms. Isselbacher writes, "In spite of the many conceptual and material considerations implicit in Iliazd's innovative approach to book publishing and design, his hallmark remains the endowment of each publication with a predominant sense of clarity and purpose. Brutally plain. . . devoid of the seductively decorative initials, chapter headings, or separate suites of illustrations, Iliazd's livres de peintres' nevertheless possess a monumental quality in which the harmonious coexistence of text and image prevails. Through his unique synthesis of two opposite

- more -

traditions, the Russian utilitarian booklet and the deluxe French illustrated book, Iliazd championed esoteric yet humanistic causes in a sumptuous format."

* * *

*Catalog: Iliazd and the Illustrated Book.by Audrey Isselbacher. Essay by Françoise LeGris-Bergmann. Chronology, bibliography, and catalog of works. 80 pages. 70 black-and-white illustrations. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Paperbound, \$10.

No. 52

For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.