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**Title:** ‘Lysenko, “Michurinism” and Art at the Moscow Darwin Museum 1930s-1950s’

## [SLIDE 1] Introduction

The triumph of Lysenko’s ‘Michurinism’ in 1948 did not just affect Soviet biological sciences *per se*, it also affected the ways in which bio-science and Darwinian evolutionary theory were presented for mass consumption in Soviet natural history museums. This paper offers a case study of one such museum – the Darwin Museum in Moscow.

From its foundation in 1907 at the Women’s Higher Courses Institute of Moscow University, the Museum was committed to using art works to illuminate interpretations of Darwin. Nationalised in 1917 as an adjunct of Moscow State University, the museum remained under the direction of its founder, Professor Aleksandr Kots. Kots commissioned and supervised the creation of paintings and sculptures to support the versions of Darwinism being projected at any time up to his death in 1964, ensuring that the displays at the Museum were always politically correct in relation to the shifting demands of the Soviet regime. Since art was so fundamental to the museum displays it was also through art, often in terms of sculpture busts, portraits and narrative paintings of scientific ‘heroes’, that the Museum both declared its allegiances, and hedged its bets in relation to contemporary scientific debates.

As I will argue, nothing exemplifies Kots’ keen nose for political correctness better than his lightning response in August 1948 to the decision of the All-Union Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNIL) to abolish ‘reactionary’ genetic science.<sup>1</sup> I will also argue that the production of these and other art works between the 1930s and late 1950s, viewed in conjunction with certain archival sources<sup>2</sup> might be seen, to some extent, as a sensitive gauge to chart the gradual, and by no means uncontested, rise and fall of Lysenko.

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<sup>1</sup> resulting in a plethora of paintings and some sculpture busts, produced and displayed within a very short time-span.

<sup>2</sup> from the archives of the Darwin Museum, British Natural History Museum, Royal College of Surgeons and John Innes Centre

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## The Impact of VASKhNIL August 1948 on the displays at the Darwin Museum Moscow

**[SLIDE 2]** On August 12<sup>th</sup> 1948, eight days after the VASKhNIL session closed, the impact of Lysenko’s speech on ‘The Situation in The Science of Biology’ was formally registered at the Darwin Museum Moscow in papers given to the museum staff, and to the Museum’s Scholarly *Soviet* by the Director, Professor Aleksandr Kots.<sup>3</sup> His carefully crafted speeches began by outlining the two immediately pressing issues for the museum, as handed down from above. These were: firstly, to review the current displays, and weed out any elements that could be interpreted as supporting ‘Weismanism (Mendelism-Morganism)’;<sup>4</sup> secondly, to ‘discuss measures for the reconstruction’ of the Museum displays in the light of the VASKhNIL session’s outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> Kot’s address to the Scholarly *Soviet* asserted that the Museum had no ‘reactionary materials.<sup>6</sup> This was not quite true. **[SLIDE 3]** It contained a series of commissioned busts, mainly made by the artist and zoologist Vasilii Vatagin in the 1920s-1930s, representing heroes of Darwinian science, including Weisman, Mendel, Johannsen, and William Bateson<sup>7</sup>, all of whom were identified by Lysenko in 1948 as ‘reactionary’ interpreters of Darwin. **[SLIDE 4]** There were also busts depicting exponents of the anathematised disciplines of eugenics and racism, such as the inventor of eugenics, Francis Galton, the ape-researcher Robert Yerkes, and the director of the American Museum of Natural History, Henry Fairfield Osborn.

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<sup>3</sup> The delay regarding these speeches presumably related to the time taken by the preliminary bureaucratic processes. After all, Kots was responding to a directive from the Committee for the Affairs of Cultural Enlightenment Institutions of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, which had been discussed and endorsed by the museum Directorate.

<sup>4</sup> namely anything to do with what we now know as genetics.

<sup>5</sup> Neither of Kots’ papers admitted the presence of any ‘reactionary’ materials in the museum. Indeed, his

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<sup>7</sup> JIC Archive: why did Lysenko target Bateson? Bateson coined the term ‘genetics’, was deeply concerned with hybridisation, cross-breeding and variation, was a Mendelian [with his own twist] suspicious of neo Lamarckism, and was a supporter of eugenics. Most saliently perhaps, he had been elected to the Academy of Sciences as an honorary member in 1924, visited the USSR with the Royal Society delegation to the celebrations of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Academy in September 1925 – during which he had visited the Darwin Museum and been photographed for the bust – and had associations with the Russian geneticists whose downfall Lysenko had caused – Nikolai Kol’tsov, and most particularly, Nikolai Vavilov.

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**[SLIDE 5]** Additionally, there was a bust of another of Lysenko’s targets for abuse, the Russian eugenicist and geneticist Nikolai Kol’tsov, a work that had been donated to the museum by the famous Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina in the late 1920s-early 1930s. But, as Kots observed in 1938, images are vehicles of ideology.<sup>8</sup> It was not that the names of these scientists could not be mentioned, or images of them could not be displayed. What was important, was that the display of the images should be suitably framed, or perhaps re-framed, as representing a part of the historical development of Darwinism that had now been rejected by the Soviet Union. In which case, by 1948 the overall museum display may already have had some of the basic ingredients.<sup>9</sup>

For example, it is clear from Kots’ notes on the structure of a 10 hour course on ‘Human Evolution’ for school teachers, that by the mid-1930s he was advocating criticism of racism and ‘social Darwinism’. **[SLIDE 6]** Curiously, this was despite his ongoing correspondence with Henry Fairfield Osborn<sup>10</sup> regarding the delivery to the Darwin Museum of a bust of Osborn by the American sculptor Chester Beach. It was also despite the equally ongoing correspondence between Robert Yerkes and Kots’ wife, the zoo-psychologist and ape-researcher Nadezhda Ladigina-Kots.

**[SLIDE 7]** In the course outline Kots also emphasised the importance of Engels’ views, both on labour as defining the difference between humans and animals, and on Darwin’s Malthusian ‘error’ regarding the intra-species ‘struggle for existence’ as necessarily applicable to humans. Within the museum display, existing sculptures and paintings made by Vatagin in the early 1920s depicted cooperation and labour in the evolution of primitive humans, while a treatise on the behaviour of Macaques published in 1928 by Kots’ wife, emphasised contemporary monkeys’ aversion to labour as indicating their ‘degeneration’ from the progenitors of humankind.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> With reference to some of the materials in the Darwin Museum archive relating to the 1930s and 1940s, it is indeed highly possible that some of this re-framing had already taken place.

<sup>10</sup> the American eugenicist and Director of the American Museum of Natural History,

<sup>11</sup> N.N. Ladygina-Kots, ‘Prispособитељные моторные навыки макака в условиях эксперимента: к вопросу о “трудовых пропсессах” низших обезьян’, Труды зоопсихологической лаборатории, Государственный дарвиновский музей, Москва, 1928, pp.351-352.

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**[SLIDE 8]** As visual reinforcement, in 1936 two busts of Engels had been commissioned from Vatagin.

The emphasis on Engels was a line of argument that emerged increasingly strongly in the early 1930s out of the debates on Darwinism during the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’, and was notable in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*’s entry on ‘Darwinism’ in 1938.<sup>12</sup> While it had been studiously inculcated into Lysenko by his Party mentor Ivan Prezent,<sup>13</sup> it was not an invention of Lysenkoism, and there is no evidence that Kots, who had been given some of Lysenko’s early publications by a certain V. Nikolaev (no date), initially derived the ideas from Prezent or Lysenko, but rather was that he was responding to the contemporary political context of debate in a broader sense. A key clue to this is that his ‘recommended reading for teachers’ in the course outline does not refer to either, but rather to a raft of Party publications from 1932-1933.<sup>14</sup>

In relation to Michurin, rather than ‘Michurinism’, it would seem from Kots’ personal library that he was well aware of Michurin’s works through publications dated from 1936-1941. While the museum itself had no image of Michurin before 1948, Vatagin, the museum’s main artist, had made a concrete bust of Michurin in the mid-late 1930s for the Moscow Zoological Gardens, with which the museum had research connections.<sup>15</sup> Finally, with regard to the Michurinist stress on cooperation in the animal and plant kingdoms and on the role of environment and habit in evolutionary development, both of these elements had roots in pre-Revolutionary Russian Darwinism, and had been rife in the scientific discourse of the 1920s. Both of these inclinations can be seen, for example, in the 1926 *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*’s entry for ‘Struggle for Existence’. **[SLIDE 8]** Kots himself had been dubious in the early 1920s about the connection between Mendel’s ideas and those of Darwin forged by Russian geneticists such as Serebrovskii, and maintained a respect for Lamarck as

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<sup>14</sup> The lecture notes are undated but these recommended texts suggest that the notes were written between 1933 and 1935. The texts were:

<sup>15</sup> According to Vatagin’s ‘Memoires’, this was eventually destroyed and replaced with a statue by Matvei Manizer:

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an important precursor of Darwin.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, within the museum display the only two monumental, full-size portrait sculptures, were of *Lamarck and his Daughters* (c1921) and of *Seated Darwin* (1928).

**[SLIDE 9]** Kots’ August 1948 speeches focused on three ‘positive’ actions to be taken to demonstrate the museum’s full compliance with the required focus on ‘creative Darwinism’ set out by Lysenko in his exposition of ‘Michurinism’ as the ‘true and scientific’ pathway for Soviet biology.<sup>17</sup> One aspect of the plan was to commission monumental sculptural busts of Michurin, **[SLIDE 10]** Lysenko, and the Russian Darwinist most favoured by Lysenko, Kliment Timiriazev. These busts were all probably produced in short order before the end of the year, possibly even before the end of the month, since the sculptor, Vasilii Vatagin, was known for his ability to make such busts in a matter of days, working from photographs.<sup>18</sup>

**[SLIDE 11]** Another part of the plan was effectively to refocus the displays of variety and variation in wild and farmed fur-bearing animals to demonstrate ‘Michurinist’ concepts of the effect of ‘environment’ and ‘hybridisation’. This photograph shows taxidermist Dimitri Fedulov, the museum’s specialist in small wild and domestic animals, with a display of some of his creations. The carefully posed image exemplifies how the shift from ‘reactionary’ genetics to ‘creative Darwinism’ could be accomplished relatively painlessly, by restaging a display of stuffed animals using Vatagin’s busts of Lysenko and Michurin and a quote from Michurin. Fedulov’s pose appears to offer suitable homage to Lysenko, whose shadow looms large over the display, seeming like a metaphorical allusion to his apparent power over Soviet bio-science at the time. <sup>19</sup>

Kot’s plan for the revised display also contained two other ingredients. The third element of his public expositions was the proposal for a new exhibit entitled ‘30 Years of Soviet Cattle-breeding’. This would involve the production of coloured tables, genealogies and pictures, including coverage of the new, high yielding

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<sup>16</sup> See letter from Serebrovskii 1921.

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<sup>19</sup> The photograph itself is part of the museum’s painstaking visual records of displays and activities, used to demonstrate its scientific and political correctness and significance to its funders.

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‘Kostromskoi’ breed of horned cattle that Lysenko had implicitly alluded to in his speech as a model result of Michurinist practices.<sup>20</sup> But the most ingenious and instantaneous part of Kots’ plan, however, was indicated as a post-script to the written draft of his speech to the museum staff. He had, in fact, already commissioned the artist V.M. Efstafov, the day after the end of the VASKhNIL session, to go to Michurinsk from August 5<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>21</sup> Efstafov’s task was to make ‘sketches and studies’, in preparation for a ‘special exhibition of pictures – portraits’ celebrating the life and work of Michurin.

**[SLIDE 12]** Efstafov returned with a number of small oil sketches, one example of which was this painting of the *House Where Michurin Lived*, representing the Michurin House Museum. By 1949, the studies were being translated into a series of larger paintings, all 98 x 75cm and mainly narrative historical ‘reconstructions’ of Michurin’s life. **[SLIDE 13]** Some of the themes paralleled elements of a series of paintings and pastel drawings on the life of Darwin commissioned by Kots from M. Ezuchevskii in the 1920s. For example Efstafov’s *Michurin In The Orangery* (1949) has echoes of Ezuchevskii’s *Darwin in the Orangery*. **[SLIDE 14]** On a more populist level, some works were about Michurin’s personal quirks – for instance, his predilection for mending watches, demonstrating his technological prowess and understanding. **[SLIDE 15]** There were also, necessarily, images, such as *Michurin and Kalinin* (1949), that underlined Lysenko’s emphasis on Michurin as having been ‘discovered’ by Lenin and Stalin, and thus his status as approved by both Party and state.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> These had been generated at the Karavaevo sovkhoz in the Kostoma Oblast’: D. Lecourt, Proletarian Science, p. 98

<sup>21</sup> Michurinsk was a town in the Tambov Province (formerly Kozlov) named after Michurin before he died in 1935, and the site of his plant hybridisation institute.

<sup>22</sup> What interests me as an art historian about the works from 1948-49, is that they are quite Impressionistic in style, and Efstafov, like the other artists who worked for the museum, was a member of the Union of Artists, whose practices were to some extent constrained by the dictates of the restructured Academy of Arts USSR. 1948 marked the peak of the so-called *Zhdanovshchina*, when, guided by the Party’s cultural watchdog Andrei Zhdanov, the Academy was (officially) most narrowly opposed to Impressionism as a corrupting western influence on Soviet art – although it must be admitted that both the Academy’s Director, Aleksandr Gerasimov, and Sergei Gerasimov, the head of the Moscow Union of Artists were both inclined towards Impressionism. Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp.

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**[SLIDE 16]** Last in the series of narrative reconstructions was *Ten year-old Michurin in a Wood* 1951. At this point Efstafov's patience with the series was apparently becoming exhausted, and Kots was not happy with the results. Two increasingly angry letters from Kots in 1952 indicate that Efstafov was supposed to have done another version of this painting, but it never materialised. **[SLIDE 17]** However in 1955, Efstafov produced one final image of Michurin, a monumental, more-than life-size portrait in the approved Socialist Realist style.

Between 1948 and 1955 there were also other indicators of compliance. One such was Kots' commission to Vatagin in 1949 for a sculptural bust of Professor Semen Chernenko of the I.V. Michurin Fruit and Vegetable Institute, Michurinsk, who had won a State Prize in 1947 for developing new varieties of apples and pears. In 1952, Kots also commissioned from Efstafov busts of the behavioural psychologist Ivan Pavlov and his tutor Ivan Sechenov. These two works may have been connected to the adoption and, as Klementsev has argued, the relocation of Pavlov in relation to Michurinist biology, in which case the commissions indicate that Kots was keeping abreast of the discourse.<sup>25</sup> In relation to this, and again with reference to Klementsev, it is interesting that Kots' personal library catalogue records the acquisition of Pavlov's *Selected Works* (1951), and also a work linking Pavlov with Timiriazev. Kots' notes for a lecture on 'Human Evolution in the light of Darwinism' dated May 29 1950, suggest that he was aware of the 'Michurinist' take on Pavlov even before he bought the books, for, after the obligatory reference to Engels and denunciations of 'reactionary' 'foreign' interpretations of Darwin, he gave particular

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<sup>23</sup> In relation to this, 1948 also marked the closure of the Museum of Modern Western Art in Moscow. M. Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp.280-286. While the full force of the *Zhanovshchina* began to recede after Zhdanov's death in August 1948, Impressionistic painting remained debateable ground.

<sup>24</sup> Public display of Efstafov's paintings in autumn 1948 could be excused on the grounds that they were only sketches and studies for future, finished works. When these began to materialise in 1949, however, there were still elements of Impressionist brushwork. It may be the case that this fault might have been offset by the high level of 'party-mindedness' – a crucial ingredient of Socialist Realism – displayed by the themes of the works. It may also be important that they were made for the museum display, rather than to be shown in art galleries, and were thus less likely to be targeted by Soviet art critics. Additionally, in relation to the venue of display, it would seem, from the writings of both Kots and Vatagin that if adverse criticism was forthcoming, work produced for the Museum any aesthetic deviations or stylistic 'infelicities' might be excused on the grounds that it was 'illustration' and not art *per se*.

<sup>25</sup> Klementsev p. 287.

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emphasis to the work done by the I.P. Pavlov laboratory ‘and its school’.<sup>26</sup> It is also conceivable that Kots’ discussion of early hominids in the lecture may have referenced the book by palaeontologist and Lysenko supporter Davitashvili, acquired for his own library in 1948.<sup>27</sup>

Certainly the notes for a companion lecture on ‘The Bases of Darwinism and Michurinist Biology’ were slavishly compliant with the language and tenets of Lysenko’s speech. It differentiated between ‘classical Darwinism and Soviet ‘creative Darwinism’, emphasising the Michurinist idea of the ‘unity of organism and environment’ and also ‘factors of training’ in relation to matters of artificial selection. It also rejected Darwin’s Malthusian idea of ‘struggle for existence’ within species.

<sup>28</sup> Yet, in a private letter dated 17 December 1949, addressed to Aleksandr Komarov, a painter who did a lot of work for the Darwin Museum in the 1940s, there is a playful hint that neither he nor Komarov were whole-heartedly in tune with Michurinism. Komarov produced no works about Michurin, and yet Kots’ opening line was ‘to the all-honoured proselytiser of the Great Michurin’...

### **1956-1964 at the DMM: Strategic Equivocation between Michurinism and Genetics**

In view of this, it should not be surprising that Lysenko’s loss of the VASKhNIL Presidency in 1956 seems to be a significant factor in the sudden cease in production of Michurin images at the Darwin Museum. Following on from the final portrait of Michurin, Efstafov’s next commission between 1956 and 1957 was for a series of portraits of eminent Russian Darwinists, quite extraordinarily including three Russian scientists who had fallen victim to Lysenko’s climb to power.

**[SLIDE 18]** On the left is a portrait of Nikolai Kol’tsov (1956) who had been defeated by Lysenko in the 1938 elections for membership of the Academy of Sciences, lost his position as a result of a smear campaign by Lysenko and his

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<sup>27</sup> At the beginning of the lecture, in relation to Engels’ idea that labour defined the transition from ape to human, Kots intended to talk about early hominids and paleontology, conceivably with reference to the book by palaeontologist and Lysenko supporter L. Sh. Davitashvili, acquired for his own library in 1948. L. Sh. Davitashvili,

<sup>28</sup> Apparently, as Director of the Darwin Museum, Kots could not afford to put a foot wrong.

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supporters, and died, possibly in mysterious circumstances in 1940.<sup>29</sup><sup>30</sup> The portrait in the centre is of Professor Mikhail Menzbir (1956). He was one of the four leading pre-Revolutionary Russian Darwinists adopted by the Bolsheviks [the other three were the brothers A. and W. Kovalevskii and Timiriazev].<sup>31</sup> But, Menzbir’s ideas on Darwin had effectively been sidelined in Lysenko’s speech, by the pointed and exclusive references to the Darwinist writings of Timiriazev. The portrait on the right is of plant geneticist Nikolai Vavilov, painted by Efstafov in 1957. In 1913-14 Vavilov had studied with Lysenko’s English bugbear and inventor of the term ‘genetics’, William Bateson.<sup>32</sup> Vavilov was also the most tragic victim of Lysenkoism, having actually supported, and indeed, commended Lysenko in the 1930s, contributing unwittingly, both to Lysenko’s rise in prominence, and to his own descent into hell. In the late 1930s, Vavilov, like Kol’tsov, was subjected to a smear campaign in relation to his 1920s connexions with state funded eugenics research. When this official approval for eugenics research ceased around 1930, Vavilov remained the head of the Genetics Research Institute he had founded. But in the purges of the late 1930s he was tried and sentenced, ending up in Saratov prison, where he died of starvation in 1943.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> That he was nevertheless still castigated in Lysenko’s 1948 speech, suggests that Lysenko regarded Kol’tsov’s writings on genetics as still having a potentially dangerous influence on the Soviet bio-scientific community.

<sup>30</sup> In relation to this possibility, it is worth noting that in 1958 Kots wrote to Professor Dubinin, another target for criticism in Lysenko’s speech, who eventually took over the Directorship of a revamped Institute of Genetics from Lysenko in 1965. asking for pre-Revolutionary photographs of Kol’tsov – Kots’ fellow lecturer at the Women’s Higher Courses Institute of Moscow University. Kots’ intention was to write a ‘nekrology’ of eminent Russian scientists – by implication including those who had been excluded from the history of Soviet bio-science by the official adoption of Michurinism. Pre-Revolutionary images of Kol’tsov would, of course, have allowed Kots’ ‘nekrology’ to have glossed over the politically embarrassing facts of Kol’tsov’s leading role in the Soviet eugenics movement in the 1920s. From the evidence in the Darwin Museum Archives, it is clear that Dubinin supplied the images, but Kots’ intention was unfulfilled. Perhaps it was too soon at this point for a celebratory publication that would so seriously challenge the canon of Soviet bio-science as revised by Lysenko.

<sup>31</sup> Again, Menzbir had been a colleague of Kots, both at the Women’s Higher Courses Institute and within the structure of Moscow University after the Revolution. Moreover, he had taught both Kots and Vasili Vatagin as undergraduates. [who – to be fair - also had taught both Kots and Vatagin as undergraduates]. Lysenkoism had not had a totally crushing effect on his career – as it had on that of Kol’tsov – because he had died in 1935.

<sup>32</sup> Vavilov had invented the terms ‘micro-evolution’ and macro-evolution’ which are still internationally in use today.

<sup>33</sup> January 26 1943.

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The paintings themselves do not look any different from other Socialist Realist portraits of the period. In a sense there is no reason why they should. Efstaf'ev was, after all, a member of the Moscow Union of Artists.<sup>34</sup> The sheer fact of the commissioning and production of these works is, however, extremely remarkable given the recent context of the museum's public display of close attention to the fine detail of Lysenko's 1948 speech.

In the late 1950s Kots was also busy remaking the museum's former connections with British Darwinists, bio-scientists and museums.<sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup> He was especially keen to make a significant contribution to the Museum dedicated to Darwin at Down House in Kent, and to the British centenary celebrations of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1959)<sup>37</sup>. Through the official channel VOKS, he sent albums of photographs about the Darwin Museum, sculptural busts and paintings to Down House (via the Royal College of Surgeons), and also to the British Museum of Natural History for its own collection. None of these packages – or indeed anything that Kots sent to the UK between 1956 and 1963 - hold any explicit reference to Lysenko or Michurinism. Implicitly, however, they contain intimations of the demise of Lysenkoism.

**[SLIDE 19]** Perhaps the most telling implications are to be found in the two albums sent to the Natural History Museum to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> International Zoological Congress in London, 1958. One<sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup> used a quotation from Thomas Huxley to caption

<sup>34</sup> Stylistically, they refer to the currently recommended models from Russian Classicism and the works of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century artists of the *Itinerants* [Perevizhniki] group of Russian Realists, characterised by a high degree of illusory resemblance to things in the world, combined with an equally high degree of polished and accurate finish.

<sup>35</sup> which had been started in the pre-revolutionary period, continued in the mid-1920s to 1930s, and revived briefly after World War II.

<sup>36</sup> Kots was not only anxious to re-establish the scientific credibility of his own research and that of his wife, The albums included images of N.N. Ladygina Kot's research, publications, and of foreign journals in which the work had been reviewed. Kots also sent a presentation album of the illustrations to his work on variation in grouse plumage, *Problema vida na uzmenchivosti teterrevinykh ptits*, chast' II, Gosudarstvennii darvinovskii muzei, 1956, to the British Museum of Natural History, as a follow up to the publication of his research paper in the *Journal of the Royal Zoological Society* (vol.?, no.? 1948, pp.), of which he was an honorary member. The BMNH library also had copies of N.N. Kots' zoopsychological studies of Macaques(1928) and of *Infant Chimpanzee and Human Child* (1935), presumably sent from Moscow close to the dates of publication.

<sup>37</sup> As well as to Darwin and Christ's Colleges Cambridge, and to the Linnaean Society – of which he was an honorary member.

<sup>38</sup> of these, bound in dark red mock-crocodile skin,

<sup>39</sup> devotes a page to T.H. and Julian Huxley, and

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a photo of Julian Huxley at the Darwin Museum in 1939, as ‘A great seer’. The final page illustrates a painting by M. Ezuchevskii entitled *The Triumphal March of Science*, depicting a phalanx of evolutionary theorists of the past – including Thomas Huxley and Darwin.<sup>40</sup> Taken in context these images might be understood by their British audience, as hinting both at the correctness of Julian Huxley’s critique of Lysenkoism in the book *Soviet Genetics and World Science* (1949), and the resumption of Soviet participation in the ‘triumphant march of science’.

**[SLIDE 20]** The other album,<sup>41 42 43 44</sup> dedicated a page to the research into sexual dimorphism in chickens carried out by Mikhail Zavadovsky – another bio-scientist who had been criticised by Lysenko in 1948, but whose specimens had been taxidermised and preserved by the Darwin Museum. In addition, on the page entitled ‘Albino and Albinoid Foxes’, one photo seems to indicate a new display reusing of some of the stuffed foxes in the 1948 display of Michurinist hybridisation. This is not to say, however, that the busts of Michurin and Lysenko were no longer prominent in the museum.

Kots activities were enabled by the gradual opening up of scientific communications between the USSR and the West after 1956. The implicit anti-Lysenkoist nuances of the albums strategically targeted the interests of his intended audience, maintaining Kot’s position in British eyes as his acquaintance and correspondent

<sup>40</sup> By kind permission of the British Museum (Natural History), MSS MUS 1, 8vols, red mock crocodile album 1958.

<sup>41</sup> The other album rather confusingly decorated on the front cover by a gold painted plaque inscribed ‘State Darwin Museum 1917-1947’, contains several significant pages. One page, captioned ‘Some Eminent Darwinists of Russia’, displays photos of Efstav’ev’s series of portraits from 1956-1957: Kol’tsov, Vavilov, the Kovalevskii brothers, P. Sushkin, Fr. N. Severtsov, E. Meshnikov and Mikhail Menzbir (not Timiriazev). Its companion page ‘Some Eminent Evolutionists of Western Europe and America’ illustrates Vasilii Vatagin’s busts of: Mendel, Charles Marsh; Osborn; Edward Cope; Hugo de Vries (also a portrait of him by Ezuchevskii); W. Johannsen; T. Huxley; Galton; and Bateson. In both cases the named scientists lay outside the Lysenkoist canon. . This may indicate that the album was in preparation in 1947 but was not sent as a result of the increasingly poor relations between the USSR and the West, and exacerbated by the VASKhNIL announcement in 1948. The decision to use or re-use the inscription may well have been political, a means to flag up a distance between Lysenkoism and the album contents - some of which are dated 1952, 1957 and 1958 - and to signify both the constraints on Soviet evolutionary science imposed in 1948, and their relaxation by 1958 accompanied by the beginnings of communications with the West.

<sup>42</sup> Some indeed had been castigated as ‘reactionary’ For instance Mendel, de Vries, Bateson  
<sup>43</sup>

<sup>44</sup> and some represented the forbidden ‘fascist’ field of eugenics, with which the Darwin Museum was arguably involved in the 1920s, as was the album’s recipient Sir Gavin de Beer, the Director of the Natural History Museum, and as the ‘great seer’ Julian Huxley continued to be.

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Julian Huxley had described him to H.J. Müller in December 1956 – ‘a real Darwinian’ – and by implication therefore, no Michurinist.<sup>45</sup> Kots may have been impelled by the belief, articulated by Huxley to Müller, that ‘there is no question that the real geneticists are coming back’.<sup>46</sup> But he knew, better than Huxley, that Lysenko and his supporters were still very powerful. Kots’ notes for a lecture ‘On the Theory of Darwin in the Light of Contemporary Genetics’, dated August 1958, were circumspect. While there was no explicit reference to Engels, Michurin or Lysenko, there was a passing reference to ‘creative Darwinism’ and a cursory critical reference to the anti-Lamarckism of ‘Neo-Darwinists’ such as Weisman, thus implicitly referring to Lysenko’s 1948 speech. Thus, at home Kots was continuing to hedge his bets – wisely as it turned out – for Lysenko was reinstated as President of VASKhNIL 1960-1961.

**[SLIDE 22]** This appears to have prompted a last gasp of apparent commitment to Michurinism from Kots who was desperate to gain a new site and larger building for the museum. State Decrees in 1926 and 1946 had made unrealised promises.<sup>47</sup> However, in the late 1950s-early 1960s there was a possibility that a new building would materialise in the form shown by this photo of an architectural maquette.<sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup>

**[SLIDE 23]** The Darwin Museum archive holds some interesting very faint pencil-drawn designs by Kots for the proposed hall of ‘Darwin and the Russian Darwinists’. Effectively, there were to be two iconostases made up of sculpture busts and narrative paintings facing each other. One would focus on Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace, the other would relate to Russian Darwinism and include representations of Michurin, Lysenko, Timiriazev and others. It is extremely difficult to read the all of the faded traces of Kots’ writing on these sketch plans, and thus to

<sup>45</sup> J.S. Huxley, Letter to H.J. Muller December 12, in K.R. Dronamraju, *The Life and Work of Julian Huxley*, Singapore, New Jersey and London, World Scientific Publishing Co., 1993, p.215.

<sup>46</sup> J.S. Huxley, Letter to H.J. Muller December 12, in K.R. Dronamraju, *The Life and Work of Julian Huxley*, Singapore, New Jersey and London, World Scientific Publishing Co., 1993, p.215.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed the new building did not materialise until after the fall of the Soviet Union, in the 1990s.

<sup>48</sup> In 1956 Kots had told Huxley of his hopes for the museum to open on the new site in 1959. An article in *Pravda* forwarded to the BMNH promised the building would be opening at the end of 1960A. Stepanets, ‘Muzei Darvina’ *Pravda?* 1959?, in BMNH archive , MSS MUS 1, LSS MUS 1.

<sup>49</sup> This was accompanied by photos of the building site and of a maquette of the building. In December 1960 the President of the Royal College of Surgeons even wrote to the Soviet Ambassador requesting the opening date so that he could send Kots his best wishes. Letter Sir James Porritt to the Soviet Ambassador, December 7 1960, RCS MSS46 Box 1, yellow folder 1.

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identify all of the scientists that he wanted to be represented in this ‘Hall of Fame’, but there are some names that do not seem to fit – notably those of Kol’tsov, Vavilov and Menzbir. At this point in the game Kots was very old and perhaps losing his former political astuteness. In his anxiety to secure the long-promised new building, he perhaps over-emphasised the Michurinist theme in the plans. Lysenko lost the Presidency of VASHKhNIL after 1961. Denounced in 1964, he was removed from the Directorship of the Institute of Genetics, which was reconstituted under Professor Dubinin in 1965. The Darwin Museum did not get its new building until 1994.<sup>50 51</sup>

## **Summary/Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has been to use a case study of the Moscow Darwin Museum to give some insight into the potential impact of Lysenko’s Michurinist biology between the 1930s and 1960s, within institutions responsible for representing Darwin’s evolutionary theory. Admittedly, it was an unique museum within the Soviet system – for its central focus on art as a means to communicate with the public, for the longevity of Kots’ rule as Director, and for the particularity of Kots’ contacts amongst Russian and foreign bio-scientists. Yet, some of the coping strategies revealed by the art works and other archival materials are likely to have

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<sup>50</sup> As a sad postscript, it needs to be noted that by 1964-1965 the British bio-scientific world also seems to have lost interest in it, perhaps because with Lysenkoism in abeyance and the increase in contacts between the USSR and the UK, the Darwin Museum was perhaps no longer important as signifying the existence of ‘right-minded’ scientists in the USSR. The celebration of the centenary of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1959 appeared to mark a new phase in Anglo-Soviet scientific relations in which the Director of the Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences USSR, E.N. Pavlovskii played a leading role. He was involved in the invitation of W. Swinton to Moscow to participate in the Academy of Sciences’ celebration and then, accompanied by 36 other Russians he attended a garden party at Down House on Jul 19 1959. In 1961, 25 Soviet scientists who were attending the 5<sup>th</sup> Embryological Conference in London, visited Down on September 25. Pavlovskii returned to Down with his wife in November 1963.

<sup>51</sup> What had been the ‘Russian Room’ at Down House, filled with Kots’ sculptural and pictorial gifts, had been redecorated and renamed the ‘Erasmus Darwin Room’ by 1965. While some of the pictures have been retained the sculptures were eventually shunted off to a repository. Kots was aware, and proud of the existence of the ‘Russian Room’ at Down: Letter A.F. Kots to VOKS, nd, 1963, RCS archive MSS46, Box 1, white envelope from the Darwin Museum addressed to Lady Jessie Dobson. Regarding the decision to refurbish and rename the room see: ‘Russian Room to be Renamed Erasmus Darwin Room’ nd; Letter H. Atkins to R.S. Johnson Gilbert, September 14 1964; Letter H. Atkins to R.S. Johnson Gilbert, October 2 1964 all in RCS archive, MSS46, Box 2, yellow folder 1, D (Down House) Museum and Contents.

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been utilised in other Soviet natural history museums.<sup>52</sup> This is an area worthy of further study.

Specifically in relation to the Darwin Museum, I have suggested that by 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1948, the display, and certainly its exposition by Kots, had already encompassed some of the basic tenets of Lysenko’s idea of ‘Soviet biology’. That is to say, it had incorporated the emphasis on Engels’ ideas on Darwin including opposition to the Malthusian element in Darwin’s theory, and hence downplayed the notion of an intra-species ‘struggle for existence’, particularly in relation to humans. Additionally, the expositions of the display rejected the ‘reactionary’ aspects of foreign racist and eugenicist interpretations of Darwin – despite the actual connections between the museum and significant foreign exponents of these trajectories – indicating that the displays were to be read in a certain manner.

While these tweaks to the museum’s position on Darwin indicate Kots’ close attention to ensuring the museum’s political correctness. His sensitivity to ideological shifts is best exemplified by the speed with which he sent the artist Efstafov to Michurinsk the day after Lysenko’s speech, and before the formal publication of the museum’s response to the ensuing directives. The museum’s ‘positive’ goal resulting from that speech, was effectively to ensure that Lysenko and Michurin had more central profiles in the display. This was done very speedily through the works of Vatagin and Efstafov between 1948 and 1955, and by using these works to restage certain displays, such as that of variation in fur-bearing animals.<sup>53</sup> The archival evidence from 1956-1959 suggests that Kots, in commissioning portraits of Kol’tsov, Menzbir and Vavilov, was conscious of a loosening of the Lysenko factions’ power over Soviet bio-science. This understanding was also indicated by Kots’ success in re-establishing contact with British institutions such as the British Museum of Natural History, and the Royal College of Surgeons, and with the influential, deeply anti-Lysenkoist British scientist

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<sup>52</sup> such as that of the Timiriazev Institute, the Zoology Museum of the Lomonosov University in Moscow founded in the 1930s, and the Leningrad Museum of Zoology.

<sup>53</sup> With regard to the style of the paintings produced by Efstafov in 1949, the Impressionist element may not even have been contentious, I suggest, since the paintings were shown in a museum as ‘illustrations’ rather than in an art gallery, for consideration as ‘art’.

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and eugenicist, Julian Huxley.<sup>54</sup> Kots, as a very old man in his 80s, clearly had his own problems with the long-promised new building for the museum. Arguably, he failed to get it, because of the ideological mismatch between his deliberately egregious display plan in relation to Michurinism, and the rapidly lessening status of Michurinism in the early 1960s. Overall, however, it is remarkable how the production and display of art works at the Darwin Museum can be seen to chart the rise and fall of Lysenkoism.

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<sup>54</sup> While Kots was eventually successful in sending out the contributions of his museum to those of the West, it is both important and deeply sad, that these seem to have been regarded as minor and unimportant by those who received them in Britain.