

Volume

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Nick Lawrence, John W. Wronoski, Lorenzo Scala

3 April 2003 for immediate release...

**re: Alexandre Alexeieff: Illustrator of the Fantastic.
Exhibition to be held at Volume, May 1st through June 7th, 2003.**

Volume is pleased to announce the first U.S. exhibition of the prints and illustrated books of master printmaker and experimental filmmaker Alexandre Alexeieff (1901-1982). On view will be approximately forty books illustrated between 1926 and 1991, using a variety of printmaking techniques, including woodcut, linocut, lithography, etching, aquatint, as well as works illustrated using his innovative pin screen technique, a method first developed for his work in experimental animation. Nearly 50 prints, including rare proof and test prints will be exhibited as well. The collection represents the personal archive of the artist. Duplicate individual items will be offered for sale. The extensive personal archive of Alexeieff is available for purchase as a unit.

Alexeieff, a Russian who fled the aftermath of the revolution and moved to Paris, illustrated works by authors including Poe, Baudelaire, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Pushkin and Flaubert, as well as the works of his friends Andre Malraux and Philippe Soupault. Rare prints from the archive of his estate, including test and proof prints never before exhibited, and prints from several unpublished works, including Gogol's *Le Nez* (his first book illustrations, 1926), and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, will be exhibited.

An opening reception will be held Thursday, May 1st, 6-8pm. Refreshments will be served. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11-6, or by appointment.

The exhibition was curated and installed by Don Lindgren and Jan Van der Donk of Jan Van der Donk – Rare Books, Inc.

Volume is a new space dedicated to the exhibition of works that occupy the intersection of text and image. Proprietors: Nick Lawrence, owner of LFLGallery (NYC) and DNA Gallery (Provincetown) and John W. Wronoski owner of Lame Duck Books (Boston) and co-owner of Locus Solus Rare Books Inc. and Jan Van der Donk - Rare Books, Inc. (both NYC).

For additional information, please contact Lorenzo Scala at the gallery.

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Alexandre Alexeieff (1901-1982)

Alexandre Alexeieff was born in Ufi (Russia), and spent his early childhood in Constantinople, the son of a military attaché in the Russian embassy there. At the time of the Revolution he was in Cadet school in St. Petersburg. In 1921 he left Russia for France. In the early years in France his artistic output was prodigious and varied. Alexeieff designed costumes for the Ballet Suedois and the Ballet Russe, he created book illustrations in woodcut, linocut, lithography, etching and aquatint, and he began his lifelong involvement with experimental animation.

Alexeieff was increasingly engaged by the films of the time, including *Caligari*, the early films of Chaplin, *The Blue Angel*, three of Man Ray's films and in particular Bartosch's *I'Idée*, adapted from a book by Masereel, and subtitled, 'animated engraving'. It was this concept that enabled him to make the leap from his print experiments in xylography to animation, and which led to his invention of *l'écran épingle*, or the pin screen. His work on the pin screen, a large mechanical device that enabled him to rapidly change images, culminated in the experimental animation masterpiece, *Night on Bald Mountain* (completed six years prior to the release of the same name by Disney). The pin board "is an upright perforated board in which a million headless pins have been inserted. When the pins are pushed forward and are lit obliquely, they create an entirely black surface. When they are pushed back, the white of the board shows through... in between, they create greys." (Cecile Starr).

But in the same space of time that Alexeieff was inventing a new form of expression through film, he was becoming a master etcher and aquatint artist. Combining sensibilities at once surrealist and classical, ancient and modern, with characters from ancient Siberian Shamans to Paris' Montmartre, Alexeieff chose to illustrate books representing his personal journeys, including works of Poe, Baudelaire, Apollinaire, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Pushkin, Hans Christian Andersen, Tolstoy, Pasternak, as well as those of his friends, Andre Malraux and Philippe Soupault. The illustrations ran spanned the spectrum of printmaking techniques and demonstrated an unstoppable desire for technical innovation. His innovations include the electrolytic deposit etching, (a technique used to create a sense of depth, by depositing copper on copper). The technique was used to magisterial effect in the illustrations for the medieval Russian

epic *Prince Igor*, and the application of pin screen imagery to book illustration, most effectively used to illustrate Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

Alexeieff's output was more than impressive: he illustrated forty-one books, including the massive projects *Les Freres Karamazov* and *Anna Karenina*, each with over one hundred prints, and he created eight animated films and dozens of short films for advertising clients. Together with Clare Parker, he built twelve pin screens over the 49 years spanning 1931 to 1980. His publishers and printers could hardly keep up with his output, and he left behind several complete but unpublished works at the time of his death in 1982, including Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Gogol's *Le Nez* (his first book illustrations, executed in 1926).