Scholarship has recognized David Burliuk as the force behind Futurism's crystallization within the boundaries of the Russian Empire. It is generally accepted that he "largely gave Futurism its ideological orientation: to bring art and poetry to the streets and thus yoke art and life, to reject the art and poetry of the past, to see art and poetry as an unending quest for novelty and the creation of new forms."\(^1\) It is also agreed that he provided much of the organizing drive behind the early Futurist movement in the Russian Empire, its landmark exhibitions, its publications and public engagements, and that he often supplied the "promotional" strategies that made it famous. Without him, Markov has written, there would have been no Futurism in the Russian Empire.\(^2\) Yet, he is perhaps the least researched and understood among the major figures of the twentieth-century avant-garde. Scholars have had relatively little to say about him as a writer or artist. Barooshian has written that "The sad irony of Burljuk's life is that he organized an avant-garde movement of the first magnitude while himself failed to achieve significant recognition."\(^3\) Bowlt has also commented that the artist "enjoys an uncertain position in our contemporary appreciation of the avant-garde. Little serious research has been undertaken on Burliuk's career, few publications have been devoted to him, and leading specialists in Russian Cubo-Futurism at best communicate equivocal opinions as to the artistic worth of Burliuk's output."\(^4\)

There are several reasons for the neglect. For one thing, politics intervened to prevent a full, dispassionate account of his life and art. Burliuk escaped the revolution by travelling through Siberia to Vladivostok and Japan, and then emigrating to the USA in 1922. By the mid-1920s, when "heroic" (later called "Socialist") Realism became the mandatory style, Futurism was treated as an embarrasment in the Soviet Union. Whereas a suitably edited and sanitized Maiakovsky was appropriated by the Soviet regime, Burliuk's legacy

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and biography proved less tractable. After all, he had deliberately left the country, choosing to live and create in the USA until his death in 1967. The circumstances of his leaving were interpreted, quite correctly, as flight: the threat of persecution by the Cheka hung over him because his brother Nikolai, who had served as an officer in the White army, had been executed by the Bolsheviks in 1920 simply because he was considered suspicious and a potential enemy.\(^5\) The Burliuk family, moreover, were no proletarians. This alone would have been enough to have them executed during the revolution. On one of his lecture tours through Siberia in 1917-18, Burliuk was told to avoid certain towns because sudden, unannounced inspections of hands had been held there. The artist’s son, in an unpublished account based on his father’s reminiscences, has written: “The entire village would be told to stand up in a single line with their palms up. . . . The commissar and his committee had the citizens shot if their palms and fingers were not as rough with callouses as the bark of a tree.”\(^6\) Moreover, Burliuk was temperamentally opposed to regimentation. In 1919 in a poem dedicated to “the Chuzhaks” (Chuzhak was a leftist critic), he compared the demand that poetry be completely politicized and serve the needs of the day to the practice of whipping peasants in the lord’s stables.\(^7\) In general, his relationship with bolshevism remained uncomfortable, even though in the USA through the twenties and thirties he remained close to communist circles, writing for the Soviet organs *Russkii golos* (Russian Voice) and *Novyi mir* (New World).

In the second place, his enormous artistic and literary legacy, which he once calculated as 17,000 paintings and about the same number of watercolours and drawings,\(^8\) has never been brought together in large or representative enough scope to be adequately studied. Most of his paintings are scattered throughout various cities in Ukraine, Russia, Japan, the USA, and Canada, and there has never been an opportunity to view a substantial number of his works from each period: some 200 works belong to his Ufa (Bashkiria) period from 1915-1918; another 200 were produced in his tours and exhibitions across Siberia in 1918-1920; over 125 works were bought by collectors and museums while he exhibited and lived in Japan in 1920-1922; the works produced when he lived in East Side New York from 1922-1939 and in Hampton Bays, Long Island from 1940-1967 are housed in many private col-

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