During the summer of 1905 in Dresden, after Vasilii Kandinsky’s trip with Gabriele Münter to Tunisia, he completed the gouache *Arrival of the Merchants* (Fig. 1). In his later recollections, he connected this first large many-figured picture with *Motley Life* (1907; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich) and *Composition II* (1910; destroyed) as the three stages in his attempts to embody his idea of a composition as a complex of corresponding forms, combining musical and spiritual aspects that expressed his “inner vibrations” and “prayer.” In this context, *Arrival of the Merchants* is vitally important for understanding Kandinsky’s complicated inner process of forming a composition out of his many symbolical images and motifs.

According to Kandinsky, *Arrival of the Merchants* expressed his “longing for Russia” and “the musical nature of Russia.” In this painting, he depicted the life of a rich Old Russian city with its many colored towers, houses, palaces, and golden-headed churches, surrounded by powerful walls, and he represented the Russian people in all the variety of their types and characters. Small cities on a high hill surrounded by a river were characteristic of Old Russia. Later, they developed into large towns that became cultural centers with powerful fortresses and a rich trade. This was the history of Moscow as well as of the old northern trade towns, such as Vologda, Velikii Ustiug, and Sol’vychegodsk, through which Kandinsky had traveled in 1889. The authentic historical aspect of *Arrival of the Merchants* is stressed through the narrative depiction of a concrete event, an important day in the city’s life. The merchants, whose colored sailing ships are portrayed in the right middle ground, have arrived from far lands, and the wharf has become a bustling market place. The motley crowd shown in the upper part of the picture as many colored dots, moves out of the city gate down the hill and across the

3. For more details on Kandinsky’s journey to Vologda Province, see I. Aronov, “Kandinsky’s Early Symbolism.” Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem, 2002, pp. 36-79.
bridge into the market place, the anonymous people gradually developing faces and becoming identifiable as persons of different ages and estates: noblemen,burghers, merchants, and peasants.

Arrival of the Merchants, as a panoramic image of multifaceted Russia, is comparable to Il’ia Repin’s Religious Procession in Kursk Province (1883; Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow) and Vasilii Surikov’s Bolshaya Morozova (1887; Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow). Both Repin’s contemporary scene and Surikov’s historical one represent Russia as possessing the same complex variety of different types as does Kandinsky’s image, although Kandinsky’s heroes do not display the Realists’ psychological elaboration of these characters. On the other hand, the motifs, scenes, types, and costumes in Kandinsky’s image are close to those in Apollinarii Vasnetsov’s historical painting Market, Seventeenth Century of 1903 (Fig. 2), which depicts the market place in Old Moscow. Therefore, Kandinsky’s work must also represent the epoch of the flowering of Old Russian life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Kandinsky, thus, chose this historical everyday event as the starting point for his symbolical image of Old Russia, but its characters have sources in his own artistic and spiritual worlds. This gouache develops the 1903 woodcut Hubbub (Fig. 3) from the album Poems without Words into a colorful composition. The main elements of Arrival of the Merchants are already in Hubbub: a bustling Old Russian market in front of the city walls, a huge noisy crowd of various characters and types, a merchant ship in the middle ground, and many genre scenes between sellers and buyers. Through the image of a bustling crowd, Kandinsky wished to express the idea of the vital power of the human world stressed in the title — Hubbub — that can be interpreted as the noise of life in all its variety and wealth. Thus, Hubbub expresses the external side of life, full of material energy, in contrast to the idea of silence needed to penetrate into the inner spiritual realms of life. The contrasting colors in the gouache Arrival of the Merchants clarify all the forms and details, so that such elements as the blue river in the left middle ground that are not clear in the woodcut, are now distinct. Other details and motifs are new: the hill with its trees, the crowd emerging from the city, the bridge over the river in the central middle ground, and the wharf on the right of the bridge, where steps lead down to the ships. Thus, the colors add a more clear-cut depiction, while

5. On this epoch, see N. Kostomarov, Ocherk domashney zhizni i nравов velkorusskogo naroda v XVI i XVII stoletiah (1860; reprint, Moscow: Respublika, 1992).
6. On the Symbolist idea of silence as the realm of the soul, see, for example, M. Maeterlinck, Le tresor des humbles (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1898), pp. 8-18.