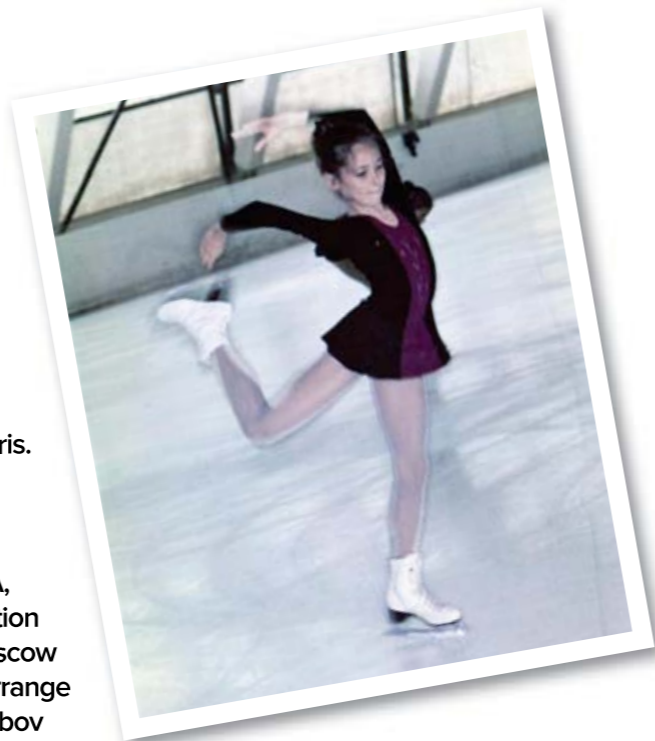


NALUTUESHA, OR A WOMAN WHO BRINGS RAIN

Interview by Sergey Kononov
Photos by Michel Rubinel,
from the archive of Lyubov Stupakova-Wildenstein
Location: the Rodin Museum park in Paris

When Lyubov Stupakova-Wildenstein (International Law, 1995) is asked whether she received what she expected from MGIMO, she says: "I've received something that I didn't expect, it exceeded all of my expectations! International relations have become part of my life; they are part of my social, cultural, philanthropic, and even family life."

She got her family name Wildenstein from her husband Alec, an art dealer, an art historian from a family of well-known art collectors. Suffice it to say, in 1918, the Wildensteins discovered Picasso as an artist and even rented an apartment for him in Paris. In 2008 Alec died from a severe illness. Since then, Lyubov has devoted to his memory all of her achievements, which are numerous, in particular, in art. Lyubov has become a sculptor; her works can be found in private collections in Russia, the USA, France, Great Britain. Her sculpture was chosen for the celebration of the 260th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Arts in Moscow and the 70th anniversary of its art workshops. "I would like to arrange an exhibition of sculptures devoted to the memory of Alec," Lyubov shares her plans.



Lyubov's life has been connected with art since childhood. At school, she collected stamps with the art masterpieces, often visited lectures at the Pushkin Museum, jumping the queue to the most exciting exhibitions as one of her grandmothers worked there as an attendant.

Lyubov studied at a special French school which she graduated with honors. She came first in school competitions on literature and physics. She was equally keen on sports; she did figure skating. Her coach was the world's champion Vladimir Kovalev. "I didn't like to be late for classes or workouts. When an opportunity arose to study at the school closer to the Dinamo stadium (where I had my workouts), my parents seized it right away. In case I couldn't make it on time – the rules were strict, and I wouldn't be allowed to join the class – my parents made a deal with a school staff, who would drag me through the window on the

ground floor with my backpack and ice skates".

The school Lyubov got enrolled in was a French one, and it predetermined her destiny. The girl fell in love with the French language. "In our classroom, there was a picture of a mysterious castle in the Loire Valley. I was dreaming, wanting to know what life is like there. Then, I started reading Hugo and Balzac in French, and desperately wanted to go to France."

When Lyubov turned 15, she took part in the essay competition on "Liberty and equality mean...". It was organized in the Soviet schools. Lyubov was among the 15 students who went to France to celebrate the French Revolution's 200th anniversary. "The French Federation of the Parents' School Councils invited Soviet and American students in Paris, who wrote the best essays about whether liberty and equality have already been achieved or you need to fight for them every minute. We

were very warmly welcomed, they showed us the country, and I saw the Azay-le-Rideau Palace – the one I'd been admiring for ten years at school. So, I can definitely say that dreams come true!"

Very soon, Lyubov realized that she would like to choose international relations and diplomacy as her future career. In 1990, she entered the School of International Law. Why did she go for international law? By that time, Lyubov was keenly interested in human rights, the idea of equity.

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The studies in MGIMO were intense. "At the public law program, I was surrounded by smart, ambitious, and very prepared peers. The assignments were huge: I had to thoroughly examine tens of textbooks, spending the whole day at the MGIMO library. At the same time, I managed to play tennis."



Once they announced on the radio the French College opening at the MSU, and Lyubov heard that the best professors of political and social sciences from the Sorbonne were invited with Marek Halter, a French writer and a public person, becoming its president. Lyubov entered this College, though she has always considered it as an addition to her MGIMO degree. In 1994, she graduated from the College and became a specialist in the French language and country studies, having defended the thesis on the following topic: "From the human right violations under communism to

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human rights violations under ultra-liberalism" (her supervisor was a famous historian H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse. One of the brightest memories is connected with the visit of Jacques Chirac to the MSU in 1993. Remembering her from their meeting in Paris (he was the city mayor at that time), Mr. Chirac gladly chatted with Lyubov.

Meanwhile, in 1994, Lyubov learned from her friends and acquaintances that Strasbourg would host the Ren  Cassin European Human Rights Competition in the Palace of Europe. She gathered a team of MGIMO law students who went there. So, Russia took part in this competition for the first time, with Lyubov helping her teammates get an internship in France. She was offered a training in the political department of the Council of Europe.

In general, Lyubov had a lot of internships during her studies. In 1992, she was an intern and participated in the work of the 1st International Summer University for Training Instructors on Human Rights and Democratic Civil Society, organized by the Versailles University under the supervision of Marc Agie, Doctor of Humanities, writer, member of the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights.

In 1993, she became the winner and the grant-holder of the 1st competition of Young Women in Public Affairs, organized in Russia by Zonta International Foundation, a leading global organization aiming to improve the professional, political and economic position of women in the world. Lyubov is one of the founding members of Zonta Golden Club for young women of Zonta International in Moscow. The Club took under its patronage an orphanage in Moscow. Later, when Lyubov moved to France, she maintained warm relations with Zonta's women-members in Paris, and when she got the necessary funding, she equipped that orphanage with computers.

In the College, she developed an interest in the new for Russia topic



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of franchising, writing articles that were published in France. Her MGIMO thesis focused on a comparative legal study of franchising in both countries. She also defended a thesis entitled "Franchising in Russia: Theory, Practice, and Prospects."

Lyubov's academic activities caught the attention of a well-known Sorbonne Professor Christian Gavald , who invited her to do a Ph.D. She agreed and used her scholarship received in the College. "I was studying at the Sorbonne while preparing for the state exams in MGIMO. When I came to Moscow, I passed all of them and defended my graduation thesis with flying colors."

After graduating from MGIMO, Lyubov returned to Paris to continue doing her Ph.D. Later, she successfully defended a thesis on franchising. "But I had always associated my future with Russia. I planned to study abroad and then come back and find an interesting job in Moscow," she says.

But life had other plans. Being a student in Moscow and Sorbonne, Lyubov was receiving offers from fashion designers to work as a model, but she was rejecting them ("I was very busy studying").

However, when Louis F raud's fashion house contacted her, she finally agreed. "I believed that the most interesting haute couture houses do art, which I have always admired since my childhood impressed by paintings in the Pushkin Museum. I considered my work in fashion as the continuation of my passion for art, my aspiration for creative self-fulfillment, as I was cooperating with such famous fashion houses as Yves Saint-Laurent, Louis F raud, Chanel, Dior, Cartier.

I liked how designers worked in the studio, creating a dress as a masterpiece, being an artist: first, an idea emerged, which was put on paper, finding the right proportions, materials, and colors. During the photoshoots, I was especially interested in how



photos were made: how lights were arranged, how a composition was created."

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The fashion world was also a means of international communication, which Lyubov always aspired to. Once, Ford Models agency director, with whom she cooperated, invited her to dinner to celebrate his wife's birthday. That's where Lyubov's future husband saw her for the first time.

"After the next show in London, I suddenly received a huge bouquet of orchids. I was told Alec Wildenstein sent it. Later, I noticed that at each show I took part in, he sat on the floor, together with journalists (Alec made himself a press card). As he was keen on photography, he always took pictures to later give them out to fashion designers and models."

Lyubov appeared on the cover of an Air France in-flight magazine, which Alec saw traveling from New York to Paris.

The magazine's posters with Lyubov's photos were everywhere in Paris. What did Alec do? He begged the editors for a poster to put it in his family palace later. "This is my love!", he told his friends

Letting the flight attendant into his secret, he collected all of the magazines from the cabin and brought them to Lyubov. This story happened again when *Avantages* fashion magazine published a pictorial with Lyubov in a desert in Tunisia. The posters with these photos were everywhere in Paris. What did Alec do? He went to the editors' office and begged for a poster to put it in his family

palace later. "This is my love!" he told his friends. "I want to marry her and move to Paris," he said to his father.

"He proposed to me during our third meeting. Alec brought me to the palace, dropped on one knee, and told me that he would be happy if I agreed to take his family name. I thanked him, but rejected, as I didn't have much time because of studies and work". After that, he traveled to all the places where Lyubov had fashion shows. He sent her poems and letters by fax. "Just imagine, reels of poems! Alec turned out to be a very romantic person, but most importantly, a hunter, and he achieved his aim when a couple of months later, I said "yes."

More than 20 years have passed since then. Recalling what attracted her, as a young student, in him, a mature man, Lyubov answers without a moment of hesitation: "His kindness, his heart. Simplicity and modesty. Profound respect towards me and others. Alec had lots of talents: he was a good pilot: he could

fly an airplane and a helicopter. He could tell real things from fakes in all areas. He had a great sense of humor. He won in a dance competition in Harlem and in a competition on cutting crabs. He was a very brave person. He wasn't afraid to fight one on one with a wild predator in an African savanna. I never got bored with him. I married Alec because he truly loved me."

"Alec was christened, and we went to Moscow to get married at the Epiphany Cathedral. Then we went to Africa, dressed as the Maasai and had a party, with Alec being called the Tribal Leader and me being called Nalutuesha, which means a Woman who Brings Rain in their tongue."

But that came later. At first, Lyubov didn't know much about him. "I didn't have a clue that he was an expert not only in art, but also in horse-breeding: he raised horses, and bred them so that they would become champions. The Wildenstein family is known for two things: art collecting and their passion for horses. The Wildenstein stables took all the prizes in the world in three disciplines: flat racing, jump racing and harness racing, including the tournament in Ascot, where Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, herself bestowed a prestigious trophy on my father-in-law Daniel Wildenstein in 1976. In 2005 this trophy was given to Alec by her daughter, Elizabeth II."

What truly united Lyubov and Alec was the love for art. "During our first date, Alec was impressed by my knowledge in the

art. I told him about the lectures in the Pushkin museum, about my interest in the convergence of different types of art: music, sculpture, painting. We talked about the Russian wives of famous artists: Dali's spouse was Gala, Picasso was married to Khokhlova."

Alec also had something to surprise Lyubov with. "He told me that he wanted to convert from Judaism to Orthodox Christianity. He said that once he found himself in the Russian Church on rue Daru, where a funeral service was performed for a Russian aristocrat. It seemed so beautiful to him: priests, candles, icons, flowers. He came back home and told his father that he wanted his funerals to be as beautiful."

They had a civil ceremony at the mayor's office in the XVIth arrondissement in Paris. Alec was christened, and they went to Moscow to get married at the Epiphany Cathedral.

Alec went to church with Lyubov and became a significant donor of the Russian Orthodox Church in France. The spouses were very happy to see Patriarch Alexy II come to Paris and welcomed a historic decision to build a new Orthodox church on the banks of the Seine. They especially helped Reverend Innokenty (also a MGIMO graduate), who was at that time the Metropolitan of the Eparchy of Chersonesus (now he is the Metropolitan of the Eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania).



Photo: Paris Match

"Alec liked everything Russian: he wore Russian shirts, found Russian clients, helped the Russian government organize the first horse-race for the prize of the Russian President in 2004 when Moscow Hippodrome celebrated its 170th anniversary (previously such a large horse-race was held under tzar Nicholas II, in 1916). By the way, there was also an informal CIS leaders summit on the sidelines of this event.

Alec contributed a lot to the development of horse-breeding and horse-races in Russia, as many cities started building new racecourses or restoring old ones.

Finally, we became friends with the Moscow Zoo. We offered it two giraffes, who were brought by plane



from Florida. To show his appreciation, Vladimir Spitsyn, Director of the Zoo, offered us a Russian bear Potap, who later lived on the rancho in Kenia, where Alec did a lot to save the wild nature and animals. African students came to look at it."

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Alec died from cancer in 2008 and was buried in accordance with the Orthodox ritual on the Montparnasse cemetery. During ten years of marriage, five of which Lyubov spent looking after her sick husband, she participated in many charitable acts thanks to him. In Africa, they provided support for schools, where they equipped modern classrooms, established scholarships, created schools for teaching crafts, built dormitories for students. One of Lyubov's students won in the international art competition, organized by the UN World Food Programme. They helped Maasai tribes and even held another wedding by their traditions. "Alec had lived in Africa for a long time, it became part of my life as well, that's why we dressed as the Maasai, putting on the clothes offered by the students' parents. And they organized a true party for us, with Alec being called the Tribal Leader and me being called Nalutuesha, which means a Woman who Brings Rain in their tongue. I wasn't given

this name by chance. When a drought begins in Africa, it's a disaster. To help the locals somehow, we invited the bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church Rev. Makarii. And after the service it rained! Since then, the Maasai tribes have given me this very respected name."

But most of all, Lyubov is grateful to Alec for what he had taught her in art. Someone said the following about him: "Finally, Alec has found a girl, who is ready to spend five hours with him, looking at paintings at the museum." From dawn to sunset, they met with artists (including Russian ones), gallerists, art collectors, museum directors, and art experts. Following the advice of fashion historian Alexander Vasiliev, she took up painting. And then, to her surprise, she grew keen on sculpture.

"I watched the artists and sculptors work when I posed for Tatiana Nazarenko and Mikhail Solomatin in Moscow. I liked their technique, how they used brushes, colors, and chisels. I switched from painting to sculpture during the workshops of Vladimir Tsigal in the Academy of Arts, when he asked me to join his workshop. At that time, my husband became ill, and I found a certain consolation in art, that absorbed me. Moreover, when you suffer, your works reflect the work of your soul."

Lyubov uses bronze for her work, casting animal figurines. "It takes time to find your style. I think that in sculpture you shouldn't just copy the form. It's important that animals seem alive and that you could feel the ambiance: trampled grass and bushes. My first sculpture was a giraffe. I made it from nature in Kenya. It was going around me, looking at my work with curiosity. It seems that I have managed to catch the vibe: the public liked the sculpture, which was exhibited in the Sladmore Gallery, the best gallery in London for bronze sculptures. An American art collector bought it."

But Lyubov understands that she is at the very beginning of her journey. "Reaching creative heights might take the whole life. As Anna Golubkina said (she was also the student of the great Rodin, as was Vera Mukhina), after



“ try to live in hope and joy, because I know, as the New Testament goes, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

the first success, you would have a decade of trials and errors, and only after that things would be good. You shouldn't forget the words of Salvador Dali: «Have no fear of perfection – you'll never reach it.»

Lyubov Stupakova-Wildenstein is also interested in spiritual art and literature. "Only when I came to church and God did my life become meaningful," she says.

Lyubov often recalls her years in MGIMO,

feeling thankful to her teachers.

"The institute gave me friends that I cherish. I keep in touch with graduates in France and other countries, we are all united by the MGIMO spirit. Though we all work in different areas, we find common ground very easily."

The degree in international relations helps her implement projects involving both Russia, France and other countries, putting into practice the ideas connected with the spiritual life and art, for example, by cooperating with the Trianon dialog between Russia and France.

Thanks to the acquired knowledge and experience that Lyubov got from her husband, she deals with art consulting. She says: "Keeping the memory about him, I try to live in hope and joy, because I know, as the New Testament goes, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." ☑