

In Search of Roubakine ©

A documentary film by Thomas Lahusen and Susan Solomon.

Color & b/w; French, English, and Russian (French & English subtitles), Digital HD 16:9; 55 min. Chemodan Films. In production.



Academy of Medical Sciences in Moscow favoured with the privilege of foreign travel. .

The film chronicles a double odyssey—the kaleidoscope of passages of Roubakine and his pursuit by the filmmakers, who are always a step behind their quarry. The film, shot in Paris, Moscow, Geneva, Lausanne, and New York, contrasts the “voice” of Roubakine that sounds from his autobiography against interviews with surviving family members, personal photos and letters, and official Soviet-era documents.

The search for a 20th century Russian, whose world was the “no place” of border crossings. Alexander Roubakine was a refugee from Tsarist prison, loyal servant of the Soviet government in France, member by marriage of an illustrious high bourgeois (and left-leaning) French family, expert at the League of Nations in Geneva, fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, World War II prisoner in French concentration camps in the Pyrenees and Algeria and, finally, researcher in the



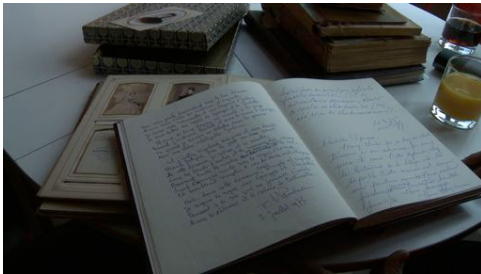
Photomontage by Alexander Roubakine, 1933



The film brings to life Russian and French avant-garde culture of the ‘twenties and thirties in Paris (a book of Roubakine’s poetry was illustrated by Natalia Goncharova). The camera pans to the studio of Isadora Duncan who revolutionized modern dance (the immense hall with its reflecting mirrors is



now being renovated as a meeting hall for Centre National de Recherche Scientifique); it pauses in the sumptuous gardens at Courance with their fluid line between sky, trees and water, designed by Roubakine's father-in-law, the paysagiste Achille Duchene who had done the gardens at Blenheim Palace. The film captures the experimental school in Meudon run by Roubakine's wife (now inhabited by a physician turned big-game hunter whose salon contains a 12-foot stuffed alligator he bagged in Africa). A door is slammed in the face of the filmmakers trying to access the flat in Lausanne that housed the 100,000-volume library of Roubakine's father, where Lenin and Trotsky came to call.



Historical retrieval has its dangers. In pursuit of the traces of Roubakine, who had fled Paris in 1941 to avoid arrest, the filmmakers suffered a near fatal accident (filmed in detail) when a 15 ton truck hit their car.