Art Judgements: Art on Trial in Russia after Perestroika. By Sandra Frimmel. Michael Turnbull, trans. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2022. xxxvi, 318 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. $69.99, hard bound.
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Sandra Frimmel's book is the English translation (by Michael Turnbull) of her German dissertation published in 2015. It deals with the difficult question of Russian law using contemporary art and living artists as scapegoats and as models of transgressive behavior from 2000. The author has chosen to document and analyze two trials against curators and artists whose works were presented in two exhibitions in Moscow: *Caution, Religion*! (2003) and *Forbidden Art* (2006); the book belongs to the genus of cases studies. Both of these exhibitions were representative of major trends in Russian contemporary art, springing from the 1970–80, that is, Moscow conceptualism. This form of art was persecuted during the Soviet era because of its critical nature, social engagement, and provocative political play with the iconic representations of official ideological topics. During this period, religion was persecuted in the USSR as well as conceptual artists using religious references in a positive way, at the same time for the spiritual content and as a prohibited subject. Around 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church became one of the main producers and sellers of the new nationalist ideology based on "atemporal Russian values." Since then, subversive contemporary artists were punished for offending the "traditional religious feelings of the population." The two exhibitions considered in this study were vandalized but, in place of the thugs, the curators and artists were brought to trial and charged on the basis of article 282 (2.b) of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation. This law (Incitement to national, racial and religious hatred) was utilized before 2013 as one of the legal tools used in the rise of a totalitarian state, before the introduction of article 148 in the Penal Code (Insult of believers' feelings).

The book, clearly written and well translated, is composed of an Introduction and two parts. The first (*Speaking about Art in Court*) is dedicated to the analysis of prosecution and defense, then to artistic strategies. The second (*Staging in Court*) deals with what the author names "staging strategies," once again both of prosecution and defense. The prosecution witnesses' statements are compared with trial traditions of Soviet judiciary practice. The *Closing Remarks* are eventually dedicated to other, more recent, trials against Pussy Riot and Piotr Pavlenskii. The two parts of the book are very well illustrated. In her brief introduction, Sandra Frimmel discloses her challenging task: the trials are featured as an encounter of "two opposing concepts of art, one more academically oriented, the other modernist-progressive" (xxxiv). In the opening of the first part, Sandra Frimmel concludes in three sentences the essence of European art history: "Even with this brief survey, it becomes clear that the division of Eurocentric art history into epochs is ineffective in Russia" (2). This statement is repeated several times (45, for example). In the author's opinion, this non-Eurocentric point of view provides her an objective position. From this point, she takes seriously each assertion of the prosecution experts and witnesses about the "foreign, Western or satanist" nature of contemporary art, incompatible with the mentality of Russian people imbued with Orthodoxy. These affirmations are constantly interpreted by the author as the expression of a specific function of all images in Russia, not only the religious ones. Of course, in the first place, it clearly concerns the function of icons as cult objects, and not as works of art. It seems to me, however, that this position cannot be considered as objective but merely results from lack of historical knowledge. Russian art is backed by more than three centuries of western artistic concepts, forms, and institutions. And even before westernization in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the art of painting religious icons in Russia had undergone a significant

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evolution under various influences and was everything but an art “contrary of free artistic creation” (46). Denying this (on the basis of Hans Belting’s theories) means to deform Russian art history and to adjust the Russian past to the Russian present; that is, the absence in contemporary Russia of creative freedom. To emphasize the originality of Russian art from this perspective does not mean to be objective, but to take a very questionable position based on atemporality (or, worse, deliberate archaization). After two centuries (eighteenth and nineteenth) of westernized Russian art and one century (twentieth) of massive destruction (often by the “people”) of churches and icons—not to mention sales to the west or the museumification, both done by the non-Orthodox elites, of a very small number of so called “masterpieces of the iconic art”—a serious researcher cannot affirm that the violence against any contemporary art making reference to icons is “spontaneously” provoked by a specific atavistic feeling. At best, such a position for a researcher can be judged as naïve. Because of this initial error, the whole narration is weakened by the constant medley between aesthetic, political, and legal aspects and, within the latter, confusion between the law itself and repression.

Olga Medvedkova
Centre Jean Pépin CNRS-ENS

Rentier Capitalism and its Discontents: Power, Morality and Resistance in Central Asia. By Balihar Sanghera and Elmira Satybaldieva. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. xxvi, 321 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Tables. $149.99, hard bound.
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This important book by Balihar Sanghera and Elmira Satybaldieva provides a sweeping account of how the emergence of rentier capitalism in Central Asia over the last three decades has generated and perpetuated decades of income inequality, poverty and social struggle. The authors outline eight types of rent-seeking activities, introduced by neo-liberal economic reforms that have come to dominate the portfolios of the wealthiest Central Asian elites. Abetted by local and national level political allies, these elites have made the acquisition, control, and monopolization of rents their main strategic focus, creating networks of favoritism and patronage and repurposing the state’s regulatory apparatus. As a result, economies have become skewed to those with this access, denying opportunity and basic social needs to most citizens despite their novel, courageous and persistent bouts of protest.

The book showcases a wealth of groundbreaking empirical research and nuanced theoretical observations on topics too often neglected by the western academy and international economic observers. The rentier economy includes some familiar sectors—like extractive resources and financial services—along with urban development policy and real estate, whose commercialization and expansion in the 2000s generated lucrative new opportunities for the connected. In turn, rentier capitalism has been justified by the introduction of new moral codes into social life that shift the responsibility of socioeconomic survival onto the individual citizen, borrower, oil worker, or economic migrant, rather than the enormous systemic disruptions that remade Central Asian societies over the last three decades. The book effectively explores these themes across contemporaneous cases, sectors, and social movements in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

The pick of the chapters recounts (Chapter 5) how post-Soviet property development created networks of collusion among plutocrat investors, local politicians, and administrators who controlled permits and enabled new forms of US-style securitization in the mortgage markets that disrupted existing residential practices and

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