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The season's most satisfying art books transport you back in time to...

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The season's most satisfying art books transport you back in time to distant lands and foreign cultures that continue to affect world events today.

Some of these books are timed to supplement traveling art exhibits. Others chronicle periods of importance to the development of the arts, and are so well-written and beautifully illustrated that they're a pleasure to read and to peruse repeatedly.

This being the season to give, all of them make great gifts, too.

Here's a round-up of those with most relevance to South Florida:

Moscow & St. Petersburg: 1900-1920 Art, Life & Culture of the Russian Silver Age. John Bowl. Vendome. 396 pages. \$50.

If the *Russian Dreams* exhibit at the Bass Museum of Art in Miami Beach inspired you to get to better know the once arch-rival of the United States, the book *Moscow & St. Petersburg: 1900-1920 Art, Life & Culture of the Russian Silver Age* is the perfect supplementary reading. Lavishly illustrated, the book chronicles the cultural renaissance -- a period of high achievements in art, architecture, music, dance, literature and theater -- just before the collapse of czarist reign in Russia and the rise of communism. Much of the work of this Silver Age is credited to Russian Symbolists, who "lived and created on the edge, which often earned them the sobriquet of Decadent or Degenerate," says author Bowl, a professor at the University of Southern California. One of the legendary cultural institutions to come out of this period was the Ballets Russes, which celebrates its centennial in 2009.

The book's cover is a 1911 costume design by Leon Bakst for a bacchante in *Narcisse*, a pencil and watercolor now at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and a tribute to how all of the arts intertwined to create a national culture in Russia.