



Russia's Soul
Icons, paintings and drawings of the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
16 May - 26 August 2007

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Exhibition Dates

Duration	16.05.2007 – 26.08.2007
Director	Wenzel Jacob
Managing Director	Wilfried Gatzweiler
Exhibition curators	Lidiya Iovleva Agnieszka Lulinska
Exhibition architecture	Paolo Martellotti
Press officer	Maja Majer-Wallat
Catalogue / Press Copy	€28 / €15
Opening hours	Tuesday and Wednesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday 10 a.m. To 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday 9 a.m. - 10 p.m. Closed on Mondays
Admission	
Standard	€12
Reduced	€7
Family ticket	€19
Public transport	Underground lines 16, 63, 66 to Heussallee, Bus route 852 to Ollenhauerstraße, Routes 610 and 630 to Heussallee
Press information	www.bundeskunsthalle.de Press file (German/English)
Guided group tours	Information and registration: Telephone +49 (0)228-9171-247 Fax +49 (0)228-9171-244 E-mail: paedagogik@kah-bonn.de
General information	Telephone +49 (0)228-9171-200 <u>www.bundeskunsthalle.de</u> (German/English)



Information on the Exhibition

Russia's Soul Icons, paintings and drawings of the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow 16 May - 26 August 2007

In 1856 Moscow merchant Pavel Tretyakov (1832 – 1898) purchased his first painting of a contemporary Russian artist. In doing so, he laid the foundation for his famous picture gallery, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2006. Today the State Tretyakov Gallery is regarded as the most important collection of Russian art in the world. Around 170 outstanding paintings, icons, and drawings have been selected from this rich collection for the exhibition in Bonn, which traces the development of Russian art as it charted its unique course between the pan-European tradition and its own cultural tradition.

The focus of the exhibition is on the latter half of the nineteenth century. During this eventful period all of Moscow was seized by an unprecedented painting fever. The influential collector and art patron Tretyakov especially admired the young generation of realist painters such as Ilya Repin, Ivan Kramskoy, Vassily Polenov, Nikolai Ghe, Isaak Levitan, to name a few, whose social critical scenes of life in Russian society, lyrical landscapes, and psychologically penetrating portraits depict the “true Russia.”

Introducing this extensive group of works are seldom shown paintings from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. A selection of exquisite icons also initiates viewers into the spiritual wellspring of Russian aesthetics. The upheavals that characterised the turn of the century are manifest in the rich diversity of artistic positions. The exhibition tour concludes with an impressive selection of paintings by symbolist Mikhail Vrubel in an overview of subsequent developments that would usher in a new chapter in Russian cultural history.

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Wall Texts

Pavel Tretyakov and his Collection

Pavel Tretyakov (1832–1898) occupies a unique position in the history of 19th-century Russian culture. Born into a prosperous Moscow merchant family, by the 1870s Pavel and his younger brother Sergei (1834–1892) were among the most important industrialists of their time. Guided by the belief that great wealth entails a moral obligation, the twenty-eight-year-old Tretyakov set his sights on establishing a national gallery of art. Although he sought to put together as wide a spectrum of Russian art as possible, his main interest was realist painting of the second half of the 19th century. In 1856 Tretyakov acquired his first two contemporary paintings, which mark the beginning of a unique commitment. In 1892 he presented his outstanding collection of more than 2000 works of art – and the gallery buildings – to the city of Moscow. During the course of the October Revolution the collection was nationalised but retained the name of its founder. Today, the collection comprises more than 150,000 works of art from the 11th to the 20th century.

Holy Russia

The icon is widely seen as the epitome of Russian art. The decision of Vladimir the Great, lord of the Kievan Rus, to receive baptism according to the rites of the Byzantine Church in 988 and raise Christianity to the status of state religion brought his empire under the influence of Byzantine culture. The new churches were decorated with precious Byzantine icons. Over the years, an indigenous school of icon painting with several regional centres emerged which faithfully followed models and formulas hallowed by centuries of usage.

Of the many works of art produced before the Mongol invasion of 1237 only some thirty have come down to us. In the 15th to 17th century, after the consolidation of the Russian empire under the leadership of Moscow, outstanding painters such as Andrey Rublyov, Dionisius and Simon Ushakov took Russian icon painting to new and unparalleled heights.

The ‘St. Petersburg Century’

Founded by Tsar Peter I in 1703, the new capital city of St. Petersburg very quickly became both the political and cultural centre of the Russian empire. In addition to numerous Western European architects who shaped the face of the city, the imperial house and the aristocracy employed scores of artists from Germany, France and Italy who had a formative impact on the development of modern Russian art, particularly portraiture, in the second half of the 18th century. The three pre-eminent portraitists, Fyodor Rokotov, Dmitry Levitsky and Vladimir Borovikovsky, not only adopted the latest trends of Western European painting, they also charted the gradual differentiation of Russian society.

Romanticism and the ‘Children of 1812’

“Vague rumours about some sort of Romanticism began to circulate in Russian magazines from around 1813,” remembered the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky implying just how difficult it was for Romantic ideas to take hold in an artistic environment that was profoundly marked by Neoclassicism. The emergence of Romanticism coincided with Russia’s victory over Napoleon in 1812, which inspired a great resurgence of patriotic feeling and an impassioned rebellion of the sons against the conservative values of their fathers. The young generation of Russian artists focused on the private, the individual and the non-conformist. Their predominantly small genre scenes of bourgeois or peasant life and their intimate portraits reflect the rekindled interest in everyday life and unadulterated immediacy of expression.

Italian Landscapes

At the beginning of the 19th century Rome was a centre of artistic life and principal destination of artists travelling to Italy. Enamoured with the South like all Northern Europeans, students at the St. Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts strove to win one of the coveted Italy scholarships. Inspired by the picturesque surroundings of Rome and Naples, the Russian artists painted light-drenched landscapes that expressed their enthusiasm for the culture of antiquity, the lush vegetation and the brilliant colour effects of the South. In Italy they found Arcadia and sampled the hitherto unknown pleasures of plein-air painting. Their meticulous observation of nature prepared the ground for the emergence of realist landscape painting in



Russia.

The Wanderers

In 1863 the aesthetic supremacy of the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg was severely shaken by the sensational resignation of fourteen rebellious graduates. However, it was not until the foundation of the ‘Society for Travelling Art Exhibitions’ in 1870 that they were able to lend weight to their demands for realist and nationalist art through a series of exhibitions that brought their works to a broader audience in cities beyond the two metropolitan centres of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Wanderers, as the realist artists were called, saw themselves as champions of the social and political reforms that characterised the 1860s in Russia. Their guiding principle was unconditional truth to life. Inspired by their deeply held belief that socially relevant art had the power to change life, they rejected poetic idealisation, advocating instead a critical interpretation of the world.

Society and the Individual

Russian portraiture of the second half of the 19th century exemplifies the old adage that the human face is the ‘key to the soul’. Aware of the fact that truth in portraiture entails more than just the faithful depiction of the physical resemblance of an individual, artists sought to capture an inner truth and convey an insight into the subject’s personality, irrespective of the sitter’s position in society. This interest in psychological character study also distinguished contemporary literature, particularly the novels by Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyewsky. Consequently portraiture and realist genre painting came to be seen as important instruments for the representation of the Russian people as a sum of individuals with equal rights. Particularly striking in this context are the empathetic portraits of simple, ordinary people who are shown as representatives of the true Russian national character.

‘The Finest Sons of the Nation’

At the end of the 1860s Pavel Tretyakov began to collect portraits of the leading figures of Russia’s cultural and social life. This endeavour may have been inspired by similar undertakings across all of Western Europe, which led to the establishment of national portrait galleries. Tretyakov acquired portraits of distinguished writers, composers, artists and scholars. His portrait gallery of the ‘nation’s finest sons’ (Ilya Repin) was intended to serve as a moral compass, an ethical benchmark for his contemporaries as well as for future generations. The high artistic quality and the intellectual aura of these portraits eloquently express the expectations placed in the distinguished sitters who were widely hailed as luminaries and spiritual leaders.

The Search for Russia

The critical scrutiny of the world around them led the realist artists to take a new look at nature – Russian nature. They perceived Russia’s landscape as an essential component of Russian identity. “I love the monotonous nature of my home soil; I love it not just for itself, but also for the people it brings forth and marks forever,” noted the writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. This avowal addresses the key characteristics of contemporary Russian landscape painting. The unpretentious beauty and atmospheric depiction of wide plains and seemingly endless paths, of shady forests and calm stretches of water testify to a deeply felt connection with Russia’s native nature, and explain the genre’s towering success both with the public and the critics.

Rulers, Heroes and Heretics

The heightened patriotic fervour that characterised all of 19th-century Europe gave rise to a form of history painting that was distinguished by a marked preference for dramatic events of the national history. At the same time, each nation was absolutely convinced of the unmistakable distinctness of its own national character. In Russia, this was reflected in the notion of Russia’s unique and separate course through evolution and history, and in the romanticisation of the centuries preceding the enforced westernisation under Tsar Peter the Great. Thus history painters favoured 16th and 17th-century subjects, particularly the momentous episodes of Russian history, such as the schism of the Orthodox Church, or Russia’s more intriguing rulers, such as Ivan IV, better known as the Terrible, but also



depictions of everyday life of the period.

Paths towards Modernism

In the 1890s, the realist artists who had once been at the vanguard of artistic rebellion suffered a serious crisis. A wide range of new artistic positions had superseded the sociocritical pathos of the aging Wanderers. The inner conflict of fin-de-siècle man is manifest in the work of the two great Russian symbolists, Mikhail Vrubel and Victor Borisov-Musatov. Both artists dreamed of the transformation of life through beauty, and sought to access a deeper inner truth hidden beyond the banality of everyday existence. Vrubel focused on the tragic entanglement of the human spirit in paintings that probe the pain and suffering but also the dignity and majesty of the human soul. Borisov-Musatov, on the other hand, gave free rein to his nostalgic yearning for a harmonious coexistence of man and nature.



Preview 2007
subject to alteration

Egypt's Sunken Treasures

5 April 2007 - 27 January 2008

An exhibition of the KAH in collaboration with Franck Goddio and the Hilti Arts & Culture GmbH. This exhibition was made possible by the generous support of the Hilti Foundation.

French underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio explored the seabed off the coast of the modern city of Alexandria in Egypt and in the Bay of Abukir for ten years and discovered magnificent artefacts of Egyptian history dating from 700 to 800 A.D. These objects sank into the sea as a result of a series of natural disasters. Monumental statues as well as coins, jewellery, and cult items were located with state-of-the-art techniques and then salvaged through years of hard, painstaking work. Legendary locations such as the ancient port of Alexandria with its royal quarters, the long-lost city of Herakleion and remnants of the city of Kanopus have been rediscovered. Approximately 500 artefacts from these spectacular underwater excavations will be shown in Bonn. These objects offer insights into 1,500 years of Egyptian history from the last of the Pharaohs to Alexander the Great and the Greek rulers on the Nile up to the Roman era. Their uniqueness also reflects the prestige of the three cities, once famous centres of commerce, science, culture, and religion. Influences from Greece and Rome merged with the several-thousand-year-old culture of the Pharaohs. The result was the emergence of new religious and cultural ways of life that powerfully shaped ancient Egypt. This exhibition also provides a glimpse into the fascinating work of divers and underwater archaeologists.

The exhibition "Egypt's Sunken Treasures" celebrated its world premiere in the summer of 2006 in Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau as a great success. Over 450,000 visitors saw the exhibition in less than four months. An extension in Berlin, however, was not possible. The Art and Exhibition Hall is now offering interested parties another chance to experience "Egypt's Sunken Treasures" up close.

National Geographic - Planet Meer / Planet Ocean

1 June - 30 September 2007

Glittering shoals of fish cavort in the coral reefs, a whale majestically manoeuvres weightlessly through the tides, rays hover like flying saucers in the eternal blue: Laurent Ballesta and Pierre Deschamp have captured the magic of the sea with their priceless photography. Fifty fascinating photos present a magic world with a virtually unfathomable wealth of underwater flora and fauna that reveals the tropical diversity of the oceans as well as the icy depths of the Arctic Sea.

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