

THE STATE  
HERMITAGE  
MUSEUM  
INTERNATIONAL  
ADVISORY BOARD

20 YEARS

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# Mikhail PIOTROVSKY

General Director, The State Hermitage Museum

The International Advisory Board of the State Hermitage Museum is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the post-Soviet period in terms of relations between Russia and the rest of the world. It is the ideal embodiment of cooperation between the Hermitage and leading figures in the field of culture; and it has entirely done away with the feeling we previously had of belonging to two different worlds.

For me, as Director of the Hermitage, it has been a great pleasure to meet over the course of many years with directors of the world's major museums and to discuss with them the most important issues concerning the Hermitage's development. The list of names at the end of this book is impressive — and for me it is a great happiness that I can consider all these people my friends.

My colleagues from the International Advisory Board and I have discussed both small, very urgent issues and large projects. For instance, the problem of labels: when foreign tourists began to stream through the Hermitage, it became apparent that we needed to change our system of labels. Ted Pillsbury was especially involved in this. We several times discussed this matter and it was eventually decided that the labels should be in different colours and in two languages — Russian and English — with the English text written underneath and in a smaller font. This was an ideal solution and one which was immediately put into practice.

The largest project discussed by the International Advisory Board over the course of many years was the restoration of the General Staff Building and the question of what to display in it. After numerous discussions it was decided to move the Shchukin-Morozov collec-

tion to this building. The late Carter Brown, one of the most legendary museum directors in the world, emphasized two aspects of this decision: the Hermitage's collection of Impressionist and Postimpressionist works deserves to be shown in new, light rooms and, secondly, the fact that visitors who will not want to miss these collections will buy a second entrance ticket, which is important from the point of view of the museum's finances. In fact, this is a complex issue and it is very important that in such cases we are able to refer to proposals made by the Advisory Board as support for the Hermitage's point of view. An extremely important discussion took place after a theft was discovered at the Hermitage. Incidentally, my colleagues from the Advisory Board were among the first to find out about this. We discussed to what extent it is or is not possible to trust museum curators.

The Advisory Board has heard various proposals regarding the strategic development of the Hermitage, including ideas regarding an alliance between the Hermitage and the Guggenheim Museum, ideas for the General Staff Building — the proposal by the St Petersburg architecture firm Studiya 44 and the alternative proposal by Rem Koolhaas — and the master plan for the Hermitage's development. As a result, to a considerable extent everything that has been done at the Hermitage over the last 20 years — the General Staff Building, the new Storage Facility, and many other projects — has had the 'blessing' of the Advisory Board. The board is made up of very knowledgeable people, people with very authoritative opinions which provide valuable support for the museum's point of view. In this sense the Advisory Board is a symbol of the Hermitage's autonomy as a cultural institution.

But the main thing is that this is an absolutely wonderful company of people. I derive great pleasure from the fact that for so many years my colleagues have been coming to St Petersburg and doing their best to attend every single meeting, and I see that they are truly interested — because it really is fascinating to watch one of the most interesting museums in the world developing before your eyes over the course of 20 years. And I think that my colleagues have not simply fallen in love with the Hermitage, but have also spread throughout the rest of the world their love for our museum, which is the child of Russian and European culture and thus of world culture in general.

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Compiled by Svetlana Philippova, Elena Kolovskaya  
Interviews and editing: Elena Kolovskaya

Translation: John Nicolson  
Preparation of materials: Alexandra Davydova, Oksana Meleshkina

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