

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM  
REPORT FOR *2001*

## *Year of the Spider*

Throughout the autumn and winter of 2001, the courtyard of the Winter Palace was inhabited by a massive spider, a sculpture by Louise Bourgeois. To general amazement, this work by one of today's most controversial artists found itself very much at home amid the trees of the palace courtyard, and against a background of Baroque columns and volutes. This demonstrated once again the very spirit of the Hermitage: its long-standing tradition of mixing the most varied styles and eras – the archaic and the innovative – whether in the architecture of its buildings or in the composition of its collections and exhibitions. The tactful combination of venerable tradition with unobtrusive alteration lies at the very essence of the Hermitage.

The Hermitage is being renewed. This year, another stage in the upgrading of the water supply and hydro-insulation was completed; new and more economical heating systems were installed with the help of our Danish friends. Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands opened the Dutch painting rooms, newly restored and equipped with modern lighting. New lighting systems were also installed in the Maiolica Room and in the Italian Galleries. The British Rooms were also totally reworked and re-lit, allowing our famous collection of English silver to be fully appreciated. And after a long period of closure, the restored Snyders and Rubens Galleries re-opened to the public.

Restoration was also undertaken in the Italian Renaissance Rooms, the Malachite Room, and the Augustus Hall. Intensive work began on designs for the renovation of the Petrovsky Gallery and the Hanging Garden. Work continued on the new entrance. The eagles on the gates were replaced and a new courtyard layout is underway. Part of the vestibule leading out into the courtyard has already been restored. And the completion of one more step towards the opening of the courtyard was marked by grand musical concerts in the courtyard in June under the baton of Krzysztof Penderecki and Saulius Soudetskis.



In December, the Hermitage was the location for an astonishing new film by Alexander Sokurov, *Russian Ark*. An unbroken 90 minutes of film captured the Hermitage filled with characters from St. Petersburg's nearly three hundred-year history. The film, in which the Hermitage is the main hero, was the sole Russian entry in the International Cannes Film Festival competition.

The Hermitage is expanding. The Chapel in the east wing of the General Staff Building has been restored, as has another enfilade of rooms, and a visitor entrance with a café has been completed. The Chariot of Glory atop the arch of the General Staff Building has been restored. Restoration of the arch itself has been completed, and the arch's metal decorative elements have been removed and are undergoing restoration. The creation of a Department of the 20th Century Art in the building is now one of the tasks facing the alliance consummated between the Hermitage, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. As part of this collaboration, a series of joint exhibitions is to be held in each of the three museums, with 'virtual' exhibitions to be shown on the Internet. The union of these renowned, dynamic museums celebrates a new level of international cooperation between cultural institutions in this age of globalisation. In 2001, a joint exhibition space was opened by the Hermitage and the Guggenheim in Las Vegas.

Meanwhile, in the Hermitage Rooms at Somerset House in London the successful exhibition *Treasures of Catherine the Great* closed its doors and another exhibition opened, *French Drawings and Paintings from the Hermitage*. The Hermitage Rooms at Somerset House have now become an important and engaging element in the artistic life of London. In The Netherlands, work continues toward the opening of the first stage of the exhibition centre *Hermitage on the Amstel*. The agreement that forms its basis was signed during Queen Beatrix's visit to St. Petersburg. And negotiations are underway to establish yet another exhibition centre, this time in Kazan.

Back in St. Petersburg, the Hermitage gained a new department when the collection of the privatised Lomonosov Porcelain Factory was transferred to the Hermitage's care.

The collection will remain in the Lomonosov Factory and shall continue to be used, as it always has been, for artistic research and study.

The Hermitage is also expanding with the aid of new technologies. The museum's website and computer gallery continue to grow, a new Internet Centre and Café has opened featuring new computer programmes in different galleries, and a Hermitage Shop is now available on the museum's website.

Excellently representing the Hermitage abroad are the various Friends' associations in the USA, The Netherlands, and Canada. Without their assistance, much of what has been described above would not have been possible.

The Hermitage also continues to participate in the Greater Urals Programme, developing extremely diverse joint exhibitions. The exhibition *Educated Fancy: The Collection of Prince Nikolay Borisovich Yusupov* was developed jointly with the Arkhangelskoc Museum Reserve and the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. Another marvellous joint project was the exhibition *The Golden Deer of Eurasia*. Magnificent works of ancient art were restored in the Hermitage and then shown at exhibitions in New York, Milan, and St. Petersburg together with the famous Scythian objects from the Hermitage.

*The Art of Islam* show in Kazan was another link in a chain of events leading to a permanent presence of the Hermitage in Tatarstan.

It is the responsibility of any world museum to organize exhibitions that make its collections more accessible to the public. To this end, the exhibitions *Treasures of the Golden Horde*, *The Golden Deer of Eurasia*, an exhibition of contemporary Dutch art, and *500 Engraved Gems from the Cabinet of the Duc d'Orléans* proved a great success. And French President Jacques Chirac made a special trip to the Hermitage to see how the dark paintings by French artist Soulages looked in the vast White Hall lit by the summer northern light of St. Petersburg. Toronto hosted a vast Hermitage show, *Rubens and His Age*, while Trieste mounted the exhibition *Siberia*, and Bassano del Grappa received *Paintings by Venetian Artists from the Hermitage Collection*. In the Hermitage-Guggenheim Museum a joint exhibition of masterpieces and their collectors was organized by the two museums.

Remaining somewhat apart from the main exhibitions are showings of individual masterpieces. During 2001, true connoisseurs were able to admire El Greco's *Adoration of the Shepherds*, Picasso's *Moulin de la Galette*, Renoir's *Sisters*, and Vermeer's *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*.

The Hermitage remains ever true to its scholarly mission. The greater part of our exhibition work represents the fruit of many years of scholarly study and restoration work. It has also been possible in recent years to revive publication of the Hermitage's periodicals, its scholarly anthologies and monographs. A special press conference was held to outline the scholarly work realized in 2001. The results amazed even us. It was even possible to produce a highly complex and non-commercial collection of Sumerian texts. And every year we publish reports on the archaeological expeditions undertaken over the past season. These titles form an important part of our Annual Report.

Many new signs have made their appearance in the museum over the past year to assist visitors not acquainted with the Hermitage without, I hope, hindering those who are already familiar with the museum and its layout.

Last year began with a tragedy. A flare released by some New Year merrymaker set fire to the recently restored figure of the goddess on the Chariot of Glory sculpture atop the arch of the General Staff Building. By this past New Year, the Chariot of Glory, symbol of St. Petersburg and the Hermitage, had been fully restored, the scaffolding removed, and the sculpture returned to the people.

Thus it is that, despite all obstacles, the Greater Hermitage Project continues to move forward.



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