

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM  
ANNUAL REPORT *2004*

## Year of Scythian Tattoos



Like every year in the life of the Hermitage Museum, 2004 was very eventful, especially in research and scholarly activities, which it brought into focus.

The successful presentation of the Kandidat theses by ten staff members, who were awarded Kandidat degrees, is a major development demonstrating a revival of research initiative and ambition. This means that the Hermitage traditions are not mere declarations. We are constantly proving and demonstrating it that the Museum is much more than a storage place or a display gallery. In the repositories of the Hermitage, important research work is continuously going on, discoveries are being made and new exhibit items created. The year's sensation was the discovery of wonderful tattoo designs, previously invisible because of the darkened skins, on the well-known Early Scythian mummies from Pazyryk.

The successful method of reflected infra-red-ray analysis which had been applied to the mummies from the Oglakhty mound was used in the new study of the three famous mummies from the Altai Mountains. Miraculously, figures of lions, snow leopards, ibex rams, horses and fantastic animals entwined in a dynamic composition came to light. They

were all represented in the well-known "animal style", but with clear traces of Chinese tradition. Thus the long universally known exhibits were transformed as it were and the researchers were provided with most valuable materials for thought, rationalization and study.

Equally valuable materials have been yielded by the Hermitage fifteen archaeological expeditions as they carried out their work and with increasing frequency duly implemented their assigned mission of publishing reports for each season of field work. Research monographs and catalogues raisonné feature more and more importantly in the long list of the Museum's publications. These were joined by first small-size books in the series of popularizing essays. Based on latest theoretical findings, they are fine books at reasonable prices and are therefore very popular with the visitors.

Also in 2004 our visitors saw the next few renovated halls, including the Twenty-Column Hall with Italian vases, the Van Dyck Room and the new extremely well-appointed exhibition hall of Indian Art. The opening of the Picket Hall after its restoration returned to us the unique appearance of the Armorial Hall. Free from display cases now, it looks very solemn, as it used to. Real art lovers were given a chance to enjoy two superb paintings by Rembrandt: *Abraham's Sacrifice* from Munich and *The Blinding of Samson* from Frankfurt, as well as by Raphael's *The Alba Madonna*, which had belonged to the Hermitage at one time.

An event of world significance was the show of works by Ilya and Emily Kabakov, the only Russian painters of the second half of the twentieth century who had won indisputable world acknowledgement. Another development of global importance was

the inauguration of the Hermitage Exhibition Centre in Amsterdam. It was welcome by the Dutch public and the world media as an excellent example of Russia's dynamic cultural policy. The *Greek Gold* and *Nicholas and Alexandra* exhibitions in Amsterdam were great successes too. In the Hermitage Halls in London an important event was the exhibit of Moslem art. The Hermitage – Guggenheim Halls in Las Vegas were invariably crowded in 2004.

In St. Petersburg new buildings and displays were added to the ever crammed halls of the main buildings: the new exhibitions in the General Staff building (including the unique Museum of the Guards), the expanding Porcelain Museum on the territory of the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory and two museums in the Konstantin Palace – the Heraldry Museum and the Awards Museum. The thematic displays of these unusual museums make it possible to considerably widen the accessibility range of our collections and therefore diversify and heighten the cultural life of different parts of the city of St. Petersburg and address more specialized audiences.

A qualitative breakthrough in making the collections more accessible was the launching of the Staraya Derevnya Centre for Restoration, Conservation and Storage for public use. Its frequent visitors are organized groups of children and adults. We are constantly expanding facilities for display. Recently the Theatre of Tapestries began functioning. The Staraya Derevnya Centre accommodated, among other things, the plants from the Hanging Garden, which is under restoration at present.

We are happy that we have been able to create possibilities for launching exhibition events in different parts of Russia, and 2004 also became a year of qualitative breakthrough in this respect, for we held specially prepared exhibitions in Great Novgorod, Kazan, Lipetsk, Kaliningrad, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Kemerovo and Abakan. A major project of this kind for the South of Russia is under preparation.

Students of many Russian institutions of higher education learn drawing and painting in the halls and rooms of the Hermitage. They have been recently joined by design students from Rhode Island, USA. Children from all parts of Russia come to the Museum to learn and rest their souls here. Children from Beslan were among them in 2004. Treatment by means of art is gradually becoming one of the directions in the popularizing work of the Hermitage.

One room after another, one façade after another is getting renovated, but the renovation leaves intact the Museum's traditional appearance and spirit. It only makes the dialogue of the Museum with its visitor increasingly more coherent and rich in nuances.



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