

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM  
ANNUAL REPORT

2007



Porcelain is one of the main lines of the Hermitage Museum's collecting, exhibiting and research work. It is precisely the art of porcelain as the symbol of our decorative art collections that this year's outstanding acquisitions of the Hermitage Museum belong to. They also demonstrate how the Hermitage has been steadily and unhurriedly expanding its collections within its means by selecting exactly what it wants and what is significant. Two unique vases made by the Imperial Porcelain Factory in the reign of Catherine the Great caused a real sensation on the antique market because of their rarity and exquisite beauty. Now they are in the Hermitage. Price-wise, another sensation of the world art market was the recent sale of the famous large vases of the Imperial Porcelain Factory produced in the reign of Nicholas I. Two vases of this kind were recently received by the Museum as donation by bequest. They are complemented, as it were, by a large set of 18th-century gilt glass vessels of Russian and Bohemian craftsmanship and the famous Orlov family's letters patents bearing the signatures of Catherine the Great herself. The last of this year's acquisitions is a fine *akinak* sword given as a present by the Head of the Federation Assembly.

New acquisitions provide food for research, which is the Hermitage's main occupation. The Museum commenced work on a complete code of all the scientific catalogues of all the collections of the Hermitage. The austere green volumes have already become famous. All the sixteen archaeological expeditions of the Hermitage have worked fruitfully. The Vladimir Potanin Charitable Foundation's grants have remained an important means of stimulating our research work. The fact that an international congress of Assyriologists was held in St. Petersburg reaffirmed the Hermitage's high reputation in the studies of the Ancient East. A conference on daguerreotypes became a new step in a new direction, that of scientific studies of the Museum's collections of photographs.

The research, exhibitions and displays jointly pursue this encyclopaedic Museum's most important objective – a dialogue of cultures. A vivid example of this was the large-scale exhibition entitled *Alexander the Great. The Road to the East*. This thrilling exhibition demonstrated both the wealth of the Hermitage collections and the fruit of the years-long work of the Hermitage scholars. The Buddhist world came alive in the wonderful exhibition called *Return of Buddha*. It became a sign of the revival of our links with the museums of China, as did the exhibition of Shanghai Museum with exceptionally fine quality of monuments. *The Age of the Merovingians* was a monumental-quality Russo-German undertaking that created a multi-faceted picture of the period of peoples' migration; the exhibition included objects from the old Russian collections and from those displaced from Germany after the war. Never before had this subject found such a full-scale embodiment. Another example of cultural interaction was the history of early Meissen porcelain, which took its beginnings from imitating Chinese work. Multitudes of visitors were attracted by the exhibition of frescoes from Stabiae, the "rival" of Pompeii. Chardin's *House of Cards*, which used to hang on its walls, also revisited the Hermitage.

The *Hermitage 20/21* project, which was intended to work out new methods for exhibiting present-day art in the Hermitage, made a start with



---

a unique combination of the American, British and Russian tastes as it showed the exhibition *USA Today*, a replica of the celebrated display in the Royal Academy in London. For the lovers of the Old Masters, an exhibition of British watercolours was mounted side by side with *USA Today*. The classical tradition in new art was represented by the *The Dance of Quill and Ink* exhibition, which showed how the artists of today transform the traditional art of Arabic calligraphy.

Temporary exhibitions in the Hermitage form an integral whole with its permanent collections. This year we pride ourselves on the fact that the Hermitage has for the first time provided worthy accommodation, layout and design for two collections the like of which exists nowhere else in the world: they are *The Ancient Fabrics from Moshchevaya Balka* and *The Culture of the Golden Horde*.

The sputniks of the Hermitage Museum have, as usual, expanded their exhibition space and audiences. The cultural life of Amsterdam was made more vivid by two splendid exhibitions: *Persia* and *Art Nouveau*. A moving story about human relations and art collecting was presented by the *Empress Josephine* exhibition in London. Kazan mounted a rich encyclopedic exhibition entitled “*My kingdom for a horse!*” In Lisbon, the two Presidents opened a spectacular exhibition: *From Peter the Great to Nicholas II*.

Restoration is indispensable for our research and exhibiting work. Concerted efforts by researchers and restorers returned the wonderful *Madonna* by Lorenzo Lotto the name of its real creator and its pristine beauty. Cima da Conegliano’s *Annunciation*, one of the most celebrated pictures in the Hermitage collection, adored by the visitors, is also being refurbished. Copper statuary on the Hermitage roof undergoes continuous restoration. Changing its colour has become an issue actively discussed. The new halls of antiquity have been restored this year, as well as the former rooms of the Ministry of Finance and the parquet in the hall of Raphael’s school and many others.

The restoration project for the eastern wing of the General Staff building has passed the last stages of approval. Construction of the next stage of our unique Restoration, Conservation and Storage Centre is carried out rapidly. The reconstruction and restoration work for Amstelhof in Amsterdam, the venue of the Hermitage • Amsterdam Centre, is moving ahead.

This is how operates the concept of the “Greater Hermitage”, based on a dynamic combination of permanent displays, new exhibition spaces, rotational exhibitions and open-access storage facilities, exhibitions outside the Hermitage and its satellite centres, the Museum’s publishing house, *The Hermitage News* paper, Radio Hermitage, the Museum’s TV programmes, the project of *The Hermitage on CDs* and *The Virtual Hermitage on the Internet*, etc.



M. Piotrovsky,  
Director of the State Hermitage Museum