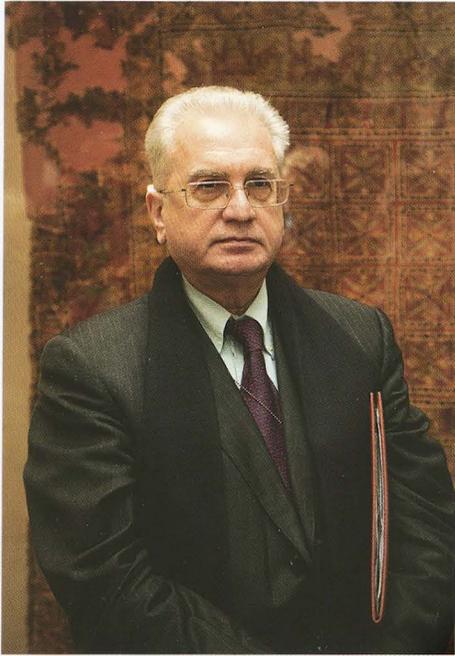


THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM ANNUAL REPORT ■ 2010



A YEAR OF TWO STAIRCASES

This year, the Hermitage can be proud of two symbolic achievements – the restoration of the Jordan Staircase and the erection of an as yet unnamed grand staircase in the eastern wing of the General Staff building. One is a symbol of a tradition preserved and transformed. The other is a new construction in a former courtyard. It, too, brings about a transformation, a harmony between the courtyard and the great suites of the Hermitage. The work on both staircases was very time-consuming and skill-intensive; it required many of the techniques of the new century. We have held competitions, installed state-of-the-art energy-saving lighting systems, and benefited from the input of international organizations. All of this is symbolic for the Hermitage, which is starting to prepare to celebrate its 250th anniversary as a model innovative museum of the 21st century.

This Hermitage anniversary celebration will be an international event, as the museum's work has a worldwide significance. A dozen of exhibitions have been held in Russia, including a special one, an anniversary present to the Saratov Museum of Fine Arts. And – most importantly – we have opened a new museum centre Hermitage • Vyborg. It uses the experience of the Hermitage • Kazan Centre (an exhibition of French art) and Hermitage • Amsterdam Centre (*Alexander the Great*). The Hermitage • Italy Centre has produced new catalogues and organized new conferences this year. For the first time, a Hermitage archaeological team was working in Italy, an addition to the twenty earlier expeditions. All of these contribute to the museum's unique research potential, which also manifests itself in dozens of books and extraordinary restoration projects. Bringing back to life the exceptionally fine glass beads from the Glass Bead Room in Oranienbaum and the laser cleaning of the silver "treasure hoard" of the industrialist Likhachyova are truly miraculous achievements.

The Hermitage research once again presented its spectacular findings in a permanent exhibition of ancient Central Asia and the great Pazyryk burials featuring the oldest carpet and the oldest tattoos in the world. An exhibition of ancient Korean art was a revelation which showed us masterpieces which had never before been seen here on the banks of the Neva; and a gala exhibition of Picasso's works in the state rooms of the Winter Palace was a real celebration. In return, we sent to Paris an impressive collection of items on the Russian Imperial Guard.

The summer reception at the Winter Palace was dedicated to modern art, where works by Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, Zurab Tsereteli (a portrait of Sobchak), along with wonderful works by young artists, were all on display

together. The Hermitage continues its experiments with the 21st century – we recently amazed our visitors (and shocked some of them perhaps) with our Pompidou Centre Festival.

This year, the Hermitage Board of Trustees made a decision to create an endowment. We have finally reached the stage where we can use this modern instrument for funding our culture and research. Another efficient innovation is a “ring” of councils which undertake preliminary scrutiny of all plans and ideas, from exhibition design to grant allocation.

This year, we have had to concentrate specially on the museum entrance area, where a special regime was introduced. We have many visitors, and queues are often inevitable. The Hermitage has run a social programme for a long time. The museum provides discounts for those who find it hard to afford a trip to the museum but would still benefit from one. The museum is free for children and students from all countries as well as for Russian old-age pensioners. Once a month, we have a day when admission is free for all. Nearly half of all our visitors do not pay admission fees. Russian citizens tend to be impecunious, which is why we have discounts for them. They bring the price down to a level below the standard internationally accepted basic fee.

Such a difference in pricing proves a magnet to frauds and crooks who try to make a living out of the Hermitage. They get free and discounted tickets and flog them in the queue at exorbitant prices. It is not surprising that this causes indignation among the visitors. This is why we are introducing stricter regulations for discount ticket sales, which require proof of age, student or pensioner status, and citizenship. This also causes protest, but this time, I believe, from those interested in backdoor sales. Alas, some people are impervious even to the ennobling influence of Palace Square and the Great Courtyard. But others are not. The vast majority of our visitors are appreciative people with cultural values. We are very glad that our numerous special programmes, music festivals, special exhibitions and events find a gracious response in their hearts. The museum lives for them and for the treasures entrusted to our loving care.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mikhail Piotrovsky', written in a cursive style.

Mikhail Piotrovsky,
Director of the State Hermitage Museum