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1 – The Winter Palace was the residence of Russian Tsars during the winter. It was built between 1754 and 1762 in the Russian baroque style by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli. Except for the façades, the palace was completely destroyed by a huge fire in 1837 and was reconstructed by Vassili Stassov and Alexander Bruylov.

# | The Hermitage through the Centuries

*by Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director of the State Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg*

The State Hermitage Museum is one of the most conservative museums, successfully preserving the spirit and symbolism of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia. It is a living memorial to that history. The Russian Empire unfolded within the very walls of the Winter Palace, and it was within those same walls that it came to an end. Here is where Czar Peter I died, the study where the mortally wounded Alexander II drew his last breath, the salons in which Catherine the Great entertained, the Throne Room where the first Russian Duma (Parliament) was proclaimed, the room where the Provisional Government surrendered, and the 1812 Gallery created to celebrate Russia's victory over Napoleon. Perhaps the Hermitage's most unique characteristic is its magnificent collections representing a universe of peoples and cultures, and which blend perfectly with the museum's stunning architecture and interiors. The museum boasts exceptional collections of works by Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, Matisse, Rubens, Scythian and Greek gold work, Buddhist frescoes, Islamic and Oriental artefacts, and Roman and Greek antiquities.

The Hermitage is also a symbol of Russia's attitude towards art and culture, of Russia's cultural openness and pride. For Russians the Hermitage is a great deal more than just a museum. At no point in the country's history was this more poignantly evident than during the blockade of Leningrad during the Second World War, when the museum was a symbol of the victory of culture.

During the Soviet period, the Hermitage managed to preserve its traditions and passion for history and research despite the efforts of the state to impose its ideology. Thus at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Hermitage remains an incredible source of historical information essential for interpreting Russia's past. The museum has always influenced the tastes of artists and the Russian public and never more so than during the twentieth century. It was in the Hermitage in the 1960s that the works of the Impressionists such as Gauguin, Picasso, and Matisse were made available to Russia's youth, creating a fragile link with contemporary world culture, and thus nourishing the country during the darkest years of Soviet power. Even today the Hermitage continues to follow the tradition of Catherine the Great, educating artists and visitors in

contemporary art with exhibitions of works by Andy Warhol, Louise Bourgeois, and George Segal. The Hermitage has always been a symbol of the Russian people's penchant for cultural openness and ties with other cultures.

The Hermitage has demonstrated time and again its ability to survive the most difficult challenges. It survived the fire of 1837 that destroyed the Hermitage, two World Wars, and a civil war. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the museum confronted new challenges. The most severe of these challenges was the museum's need to reorganise in order to better respond to the political and economic changes unfolding in Russia in the 1990s. Fortunately, the international community responded. One of the first organisations to come forward was UNESCO. Under the aegis of the Hermitage UNESCO Project, UNESCO contributed its considerable experience and expertise and assisted the Hermitage in laying the foundation for the museum's future. Exploiting its international role, UNESCO created an International Advisory Board that, over the past eight years has guided the Hermitage in developing policies that meet the highest international standards. Recognising the critical importance of developing a strong fiscal policy, UNESCO was instrumental in assisting the museum in revamping its budgeting and financial procedures. The museum quickly realised that if it was to survive the economic turmoil of the early 1990s, it would have to supplement government funding. This was an alien world for the museum. UNESCO worked closely with the museum and introduced fund-raising policies leading to the establishment of a Development Department and an international network of friends organisations. UNESCO organised seminars, workshops and study exchanges where Hermitage staff were introduced to new ideas in marketing, merchandising, exhibition management, conservation, and preservation. UNESCO encouraged the museum to engage new international partners and develop new technologies. As a result, the museum has one of the finest museum websites in the world and, building upon earlier work undertaken with UNESCO, is in the process of computerising its collections. UNESCO encouraged the museum to develop an overall strategic development plan. The first manifestation of which was the Greater Hermitage Project, an ambitious plan for developing the General Staff Building and Palace Square and thus lifting the museum into the twenty-first century. Over the last decade, the Hermitage has engaged many partners; however, none has had such a pervasive impact on the museum as UNESCO.

As the Hermitage continues to exploit new development paths, it also recognises its responsibility to share the wealth of experience it has acquired over the past decade with other museums in Russia and the FSU (former Soviet Union). Encouraged once again by UNESCO and with its assistance, the museum is expanding its Educational

Department to include innovative programmes focusing on management policies and skills tailored specifically to museums in the former Soviet Union.

The Hermitage also realises that it is a museum of world culture. As such, it must guarantee that its collections are accessible to the general public, specialists, and scholars. The Hermitage continues to expand its exhibition space, in particular into the General Staff Building as part of the Greater Hermitage Project. The museum is also reorganising its depository management. Its new open-storage facility will provide specialists and scholars access to those parts of the collections not on permanent display. The museum has inaugurated a new policy for rotating objects in its permanent exhibitions with objects from the museum's storerooms. The Hermitage continues to exploit exhibitions abroad through collaboration with museums world wide. And as mentioned above, the museum's website, developed in collaboration with IBM, provides 'visitors' around the world with access to the Hermitage's collections, exhibitions, scholarly research, and publications.

Over the past decade the Hermitage has succeeded in creating something new, and yet something utterly faithful to its traditions. The Hermitage is Russian history projected through universal culture. The museum has and continues to reach out to other cultures in an effort to verify its own identity. In May of this year, the Hermitage and all of St Petersburg will celebrate the 300th anniversary of the foundation of our unique city. As we celebrate, we pause to acknowledge UNESCO's key role in preserving, supporting, and challenging the Hermitage and, by extension, cultural institutions throughout Russia. We look forward to UNESCO's continued collaboration as we endeavour to embrace the cultural diversity that continuously replenishes our cultural identity.

# | The Hermitage in the Context of the City

by Mikhail Piotrovsky

*Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovsky graduated from the Oriental Faculty of Leningrad State University, specialising in Arabic Studies, in 1967. He entered the Leningrad branch of the Institute for Oriental Studies as a research assistant, obtained a doctorate in history, and worked there until 1991 when he joined the Hermitage staff as the first Deputy Director. In July 1992, he was appointed Director of the Museum by a decree of the Prime Minister. Dr Piotrovsky is a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Art, and a full member of the Russian Academy of Humanities. He is currently professor at St Petersburg State University, and is on the boards of the President's Council for Art and Culture, the Foundation for Research in the Humanities, and the Exhibitions Experts Committee for the Council of Europe. His publications include: Southern Arabia in the Early Middle Ages (1985), Islam: An Encyclopedia (1991), and Tales of the Koran (1991). He is the co-author, with Oleg Neverov, of The Hermitage: Essays on the History of the Collection (1997); and has edited Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam (2000).*

As St Petersburg celebrates the 300th anniversary of its foundation this year, the significance of the Hermitage as not only the cultural heart of the city but also as its physical heart, seems to me all the more poignant. Today, the Hermitage palace and museum is part of the map of world culture.

There has always been a museum of some importance in the centre of St Petersburg. In Catherine the Great's time the collections of the Hermitage were spread throughout the Empress's main residence, the Winter Palace. During her reign three new buildings were constructed along the Neva Embankment next to the Winter Palace to contain the museum – the Small Hermitage (1764), the Old Hermitage (1771–87), and the Hermitage Theatre (1783–87). The New Hermitage was added in 1852.

## THE HERMITAGE AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES

These buildings performed a dual purpose. They served not only as home and workplace to nearly a thousand people, including the Imperial family, but were also a unique showplace for imperial Russia's relics and its cultural splendour and wealth. The Winter Palace played host to masquerades for the nobility, and its halls were used for grand receptions and important state ceremonies. Catherine created a great 'Hermitage complex', where festivities took place in the palace, the theatre, and even in the museum itself. This merging of the museum with the imperial residence guaranteed that the Hermitage would remain a symbol and memorial to the imperial Russian state into the twenty-first century. The palace is now an integral part of the museum, just as the museum is an integral part of the palace.

### **The Hermitage in the history of the city**

The Winter Palace is a seminal part of the Palace Square architectural ensemble which is the most important of its kind in St Petersburg. Palace Square could be described as the city's nerve centre, linking all the city's most important and architecturally significant buildings. It also shares an affinity with the churches, ministries, and theatre and forms St Petersburg's monumental core. It is said that monumental St Petersburg represents the best of planned European urban space, a symbol of elegance and humanity and the centre of Russian democracy.

After 1917, Palace Square was less a nerve centre for the city, but its symbolic value was preserved. Palace Square was the scene of many historical events from the storming of the Winter Palace to revolutionary festivals and military

parades. During the Soviet era these mass gatherings became more formal. The Square's spirit as the nucleus of the city had begun to evaporate and the heart of St. Petersburg began to beat to a slower rhythm. At the same time, the new Leningrad, which drastically expanded in the 1930s, mirrored different and non-historic urban values. Ironically, the abandon of the historic city turned out to benefit the cultural myth of St. Petersburg. With the end of the Soviet era, Palace Square began to revive. It once more became the venue for numerous meetings, festivals, spontaneous gatherings, as well as host to rock concerts.

Given the prominence of the Hermitage and Palace Square in this long urban evolution, and recognising the Hermitage's role in defining the character of the square, and by extension the character of the city as a whole, the museum was allotted the East Wing of the General Staff Building on Palace Square. This was also done in recognition of the increasing esteem for the Hermitage both in Russia and abroad, and to support the museum's long-term development. The building is being renovated and will house parts of the museum's collections, educational facilities, and lecture halls.

### **The new Hermitage complex**

The acquisition of the East Wing fundamentally changed the structure of the Hermitage complex. It now gravitates towards and envelops Palace Square. Since the development of Palace Square in the nineteenth century, most people approached the Winter Palace from across the square. This is still true today and most visitors to the museum approach from the square. It was therefore natural

for the museum to decide to transfer the main entrance of the museum from the Neva River Embankment to Palace Square where the main entrance is now located through the Winter Palace's Great Courtyard. When this entrance is opened to the public in May 2003, Palace Square will function as a grand *entrance court* to the museum *per se*. The spirit of the museum will thenceforward be defined by the square as well as by the museum's interiors and great collections. This new union between the museum and Palace Square will also be reflected in the square itself. Culture and traditions dating back centuries echo through the Hermitage. As the museum embraces Palace Square, these traditions are now also echoing across the square. More and more frequently the square is hosting military ceremonies, and grand classical concerts are now being performed on the square and the adjacent Great Courtyard of the Winter Palace.

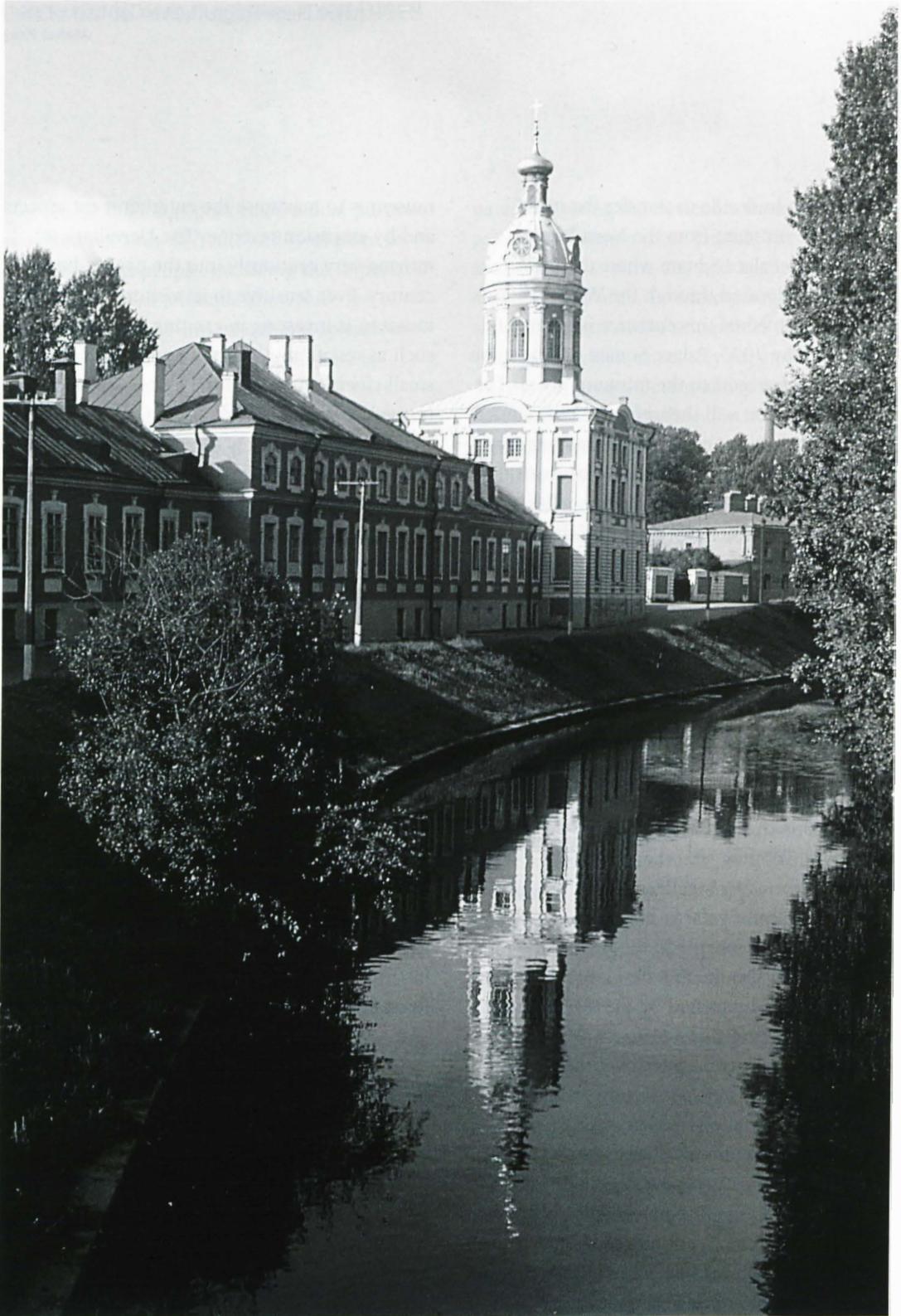
The museum's increased presence on Palace Square has consequently involved it progressively more in town planning, and there is much underway. To the east of the Hermitage, the Russian Museum's complex of palaces and parks is undergoing redevelopment. To the west of the museum, there is also much redevelopment leading to Theatre Square dominated by the Mariinsky Theatre. From Theatre Square, the streets, gardens and boulevards have come alive over the past few years. The slumbering city is starting to stir, reviving the cultural life of St Petersburg. The Hermitage has begun to revitalise Palace Square, but its ultimate success will depend upon the public and its support. Visitors come to the museum for enrichment, but also to be entertained. The balance between the two is not always easy to achieve, and there is often a temptation for

museums to maximise the entertainment aspects and by extension revenue. The Hermitage is moving very cautiously into the twenty-first century. Ever sensitive to its visitors' needs, the museum is investing in exciting new retail projects such as restaurants, museum gift- and bookshops, small cinemas, and cultural clubs. These will be housed in the East Wing of the General Staff Building. All these new elements are being designed and integrated into the larger museum in a way that guarantees overall harmony and sensitivity to the museum's educational traditions and cultural mission in a historic city that provides cultural roots for an urban future.

### **Expansion of its presence in the city**

The museum is also in the process of developing new facilities in other parts of the city. On Vasilievsky Island, the museum has re-created the spirit of Peter The Great's magnificent city in the Menshikov Palace, the residence of the first governor of St Petersburg and now part of the Hermitage Museum. In addition to restoring the palace to its original splendour, it is also now home to artefacts, works of art and period musical instruments celebrating the historical ties between Russia and the Netherlands.

Further down on the banks of the Neva River, the Hermitage is working closely with the Lomonosov Factory. The Hermitage is helping create a new museum for the factory's splendid collection of imperial porcelain dating back to the time of Catherine The Great. Located in an industrial zone of the city, the Lomonosov Factory has quickly become an independent cultural centre drawing local residents as well as foreign tourists.



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13 – The Alexander Nevski Monastery dates back to the thirteenth century. Today, it is a noteworthy element of the historic urban landscape of St Petersburg.

North of the city centre around Staraya Derevnya (Old Village), the Hermitage is creating a new storage complex, of which the first building has already been completed. The complex's ambitious open storage design will enable visitors to examine its depositories. The complex will also accommodate exhibitions and lectures. The Hermitage has made the area around the complex into a special pedestrian zone. The overall aim is to create another stimulating cultural centre contributing to the enrichment of the cultural life of the entire city. The Hermitage development plan therefore integrates strategies which would blend the museum into a wider urban structure, extending beyond its immediate surroundings, and which would eventually be a bridge between the different urban realities of St Petersburg and former Leningrad.

contributed to fostering the visible signs of an applied urban planning. As such, the museum's destiny is forever locked with that of the city of St Petersburg. Each is defined by the other. Much has been accomplished over the past few years, but many challenges remain and many hard choices lie ahead. If the past few years are any indication, St Petersburg, and the Hermitage, will be able to meet the challenge.

The economic confusion following the collapse of the Soviet Union was in many respects the impetus for the cultural revival of St Petersburg. Confronting what at times appeared to be insurmountable problems, the people of St Petersburg and their cultural institutions exploited their new political freedoms and breathed new life into the city's cultural heritage. Starting in the late 1980s, the subject of the quality of urban life gradually pervaded local politics and the city adopted new creative approaches to the city's architecture while diligently preserving St Petersburg's legacy as a world heritage site. Today, St Petersburg's urban planning has repositioned the historic city at the core of its development. The Hermitage sits at the epicentre of this World Heritage Site and it continues to develop facilities throughout the city. The project for the rehabilitation of the historic city centre greatly