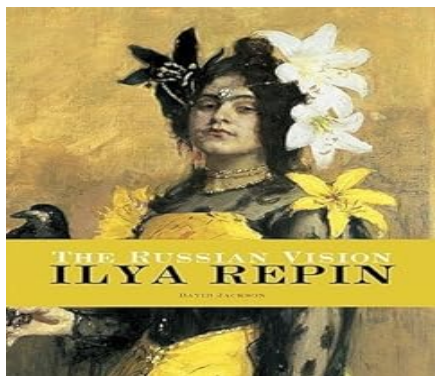


The Russian Vision: The Art of Ilya Repin By David Jackson I was so taken with the paintings that I immediately went to Waterstones on Piccadilly and searched for a book containing the most paintings in this collection and purchased a copy. 304 This well-written beautifully put together coffee-table sized volume surveys the entirety of the 19th and early 20th century Russian realist artist's life and work - largely unknown in the West but regarded as a national treasure in Imperial.

As well as the rousing nationalism of others - which probably appeal to Russians of all political persuasions. has been a major casualty of the once dominant modernist paradigm of cultural critique which consigned to oblivion the output of this supposedly inartistic literary epoch of painted narratives as incompatible with the autonomous and self-determining nature of 'art'. the formation of the Peredvizhniki in 1870 (the Itinerants or Wanderers as they are known in the West).



Ilya Repin's vibrant colourful and highly topical canvases offer a fascinating panorama of life in late-Tsarist Russia bearing witness to the challenge to Russian autocracy the coming of the October Revolution and the dawn of the Soviet Union. We went to three art galleries: The National Gallery The National Portrait Gallery and the Royal Academy of Arts (Painting the Garden: Monet to Matisse including the monumental Agapanthus Triptych Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Some works may be known or referenced in other art surveys such as the famous Barge-haulers on the Volga but in general Repin is not a household word in the West - perhaps underlining the chasm between the Eastern and Western art worlds no matter what the ideology in effect in the East at any given time. Ilya Repin rose from a humble background in the Ukraine then part of the Russian Empire to begin work as an icon painter at the age of 13 following three years' study at the Military Topographical School in his home town of Chuguev Kharkov Province Ukraine. I will stop here with a chronological summation of his career highlights - suffice it to say that Repin was prolific technically dazzling and constantly searching for ways to portray the truth - each painting tells a story and many offer psychological insights into historic or legendary characters or actual contemporary people of all social classes portrayed. Many of his works - especially in pre-Revolutionary times - were humanitarian critiques of the atrocious conditions of the working class as well as idealized depictions of the revolutionaries or reformers of that era yet Repin also painted accepted numerous commissions for portraits of society figures - the very people the revolutionaries were rebelling against as well as executed several official portraits of the Tsar and the Imperial government (state council) in session. He still managed to be respected as a humanist and counted among his friends Tolstoy Gorky and a number of Russian intellectual and musical luminaries of the era such as Mussorgsky. Repin despite a lack of a formal education (other than art training) turned himself into an intellectual by dint of will - reading on his own and associating with various intellectuals. He was a non-dogmatic humanist who sympathized with the revolutionary cause although he also benefited greatly from his ties with what would today be called the oligarch class in Russia what was in those days mostly a hereditary nobility and moneyed bourgeois upper class some of whom philanthropically supported the arts (just as many of the rich today likewise are ardent supporters of art and art education). In 1903 Repin settled at Kuokkala (now Repino Russia) which was then part of Russia (and is now part of Russia being part of the territory ceded by Finland to Russia in the

aftermath of the Winter and Continuation Wars of 1939-1944). He was then 74 and perhaps was lucky that he found himself outside the borders of the USSR - although he continued to be part of the Russian art scene from afar receiving visitors at Penaty including Mayakovsky in 1915. Despite the iconoclastic trends in society and art that had shattered the traditions especially in the post-war era and his criticism of much of modern art as formalist or merely amusing - Repin was open to meeting with and learning from them until the end of his life although he never produced non-objective art. Modern art perhaps was the visual arts reaction to the revolutionary changes sweeping Europe as the First World War and subsequent disintegration of empires wiped away illusions pretensions titles property etc. Anything prior was possibly regarded as too closely linked with empires and social structures that were now regarded as odious originators of the utterly pointless widespread misery and destruction of the First World War. This is an extremely interesting if not eye-opening volume about a Russian artist who is little-known in the West - which also affords a look through the story of his life associations art and writings into the centrifugal 19th Century trends in Russia that would eventually engulf the country in revolution beginning in 1905 and culminating in 1917 when the Bolshevik establishment of the USSR tried to keep the country together in the aftermath of the catastrophe of the First World War. The world of privilege and luxury and the hereditary and moneyed elites had been swept away by the war and empires which had completely lost the support of their subjects the subsequently disintegrated. Despite the sweeping social economic and political decades of change through which Repin lived he has continued to be honored by Imperial Soviet and post-Soviet Russian society - undoubtedly because of the humanism and social critique of his key works of art Russia's first truly independent artistic society.

Petersburg Unlike their University-educated counterparts in music and literature the majority of artists came from the poorest backgrounds and lowest of castes in Russia's rigidly tiered social system: at best from the meshchanstvo (which translates unsatisfactorily as petit bourgeoisie) or more readily as in Repin's case from the peasantry. artists began heeding injunctions to cease the academic preoccupation with religion antiquity and mythology and the embrace contemporary themes during a period of discernible historic and social change. In 1850 the Ministry of the Imperial Household arrogated administration of the Academy from the Ministry of Education and through a nationwide program of central supervision gained an asphyxiating control over the visual arts in Russia. Foreign Travels and Reactions to Western Art Only when relieved of the pressures of living up to the expectations of others or his own exacting standards did his work show signs of the spontaneity and naturalism of the French painters. 16 November 1881] coupled with the picture's removal from exhibition greatly enhanced Repin's reputation in radical circles and a reactionary campaign was mounted to discredit both the painting and its author. From Chapter 4 - Peasant Life: Contemporary Russia In France the democratization of history painting was strengthened by the Revolution of 1848 as politics and art united in espousing the dignity of labor. Courbet's Burial at Ornans (1849 Musee d'Orsay) provided a paradigm for this new found respect for the laborer especially the agrarian peasant; a detached view of the mundanity of working class life on a scale hitherto reserved for significant historical events. was struck by the gaiety of the [Neva] river scenery - stylish dachas orderly gardens brilliant flowers and brightly attired picnicker - but this vision was marred by the appearance of the barge-haulers; filthy disheveled and worn out. (perhaps the earliest intervention of environmentalist issues in art) was to form an eloquent metaphor on the rural mismanagement which had transformed a one time colorful spectacle into a desperate appeal for miraculous relief. Repin had not anticipated that two decades on from the liberation of the serfs and the students' revolt against the Academy the Peredvizhnik ethos of social awareness held little fascination for the new generation of talent. Repin proved his willingness to risk official censure by making plain on a grand scale a strength of social criticism which in previous works had been implicit rather than outspoken. From Chapter 5 - Political Paintings - The Art of Dissent The figure of the revolutionary later became a characterizing feature of Peredvizhnik art but for a long while artists failed to heed the injunctions of liberal thinkers campaigning for greater political involvement. The fact that Repin met many individuals of a revolutionary political persuasion is

interesting but he also met and painted members of the Imperial family and its official representatives; and his personal contacts with revolutionaries were most often limited to emigre figures. The spirit of his works especially *Spurning Confession* and *They Did Not Expect Him* suggests however that he was politically astute enough to see the increasingly tragic writing on the wall. artistry whilst asserting its ideological content as: 'a collection of rascally generals scoundrels villains mutilators of the country instigators of shameless abominations and crimes rejoicing in evil and madness. When the [Bolshevik] Revolution broke he was seventy three years old and physically cut off from events but he was later wooed by the new regime in the shape of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR) heirs to a strictly politically-tendentious realism. To see a lifetime's earnest endeavor swept aside by a new generation scornful of his artistic and ethical beliefs was a distressing business and Repin felt inclined towards the cogent realism of the AkhRR since the cultural anarchy ushered in by the revolution had seen the ascendancy of trends which he considered detrimental to art. They show an early disillusionment with the revolution referring to the Bolsheviks as a 'thieving mob' and 'out-and-out criminals robbers' before criticizing Lenin and Trotsky and their secret police the Cheka as a 'boorocracy' lamenting: 'We have sunk to this!!' The discrepancy between these sentiments and the Soviet 'official version' is intriguing and illustrates the ambiguity of Repin's political allegiances after 1917. From Chapter 6 - Portraiture: The Face of Russia

Repin's childhood experiences would not allow him to accept Tolstoy's denigration of Western civilization and his espousal of the simplicity and honesty of an agrarian peasant existence. Tolstoy's advocacy of the harsh bleak background from which Repin had extricated himself and his condemnation of the artificial and superficial 'civilized' life to which Repin considered himself elevated was something the artists refused to countenance but which he viewed with some irony.

304 Acknowledgements--The Russian Vision: The Art of Ilya Repin

Chronology

Notes

Select Bibliography

Illustrations

Index

304 This book presents the images and backgrounds of the remarkable paintings and sketches of Ilya Repin a Russian artist of the late 19th and early 20th Century whose works of life in the Russian Empire are in the style of the French Romantic period.

304 This first comprehensive survey of Ilya Repin's work to be overseen by a Western art historian features a wealth of previously unseen paintings eye-catching and dramatic works that bring to life Russian society in the last years of the tsars. Repin who lived from 1844 to 1930 was the finest and most celebrated painter of his generation and an important influence in shaping a distinctly Russian school within nineteenth-century Realism. His often-controversial works addressed subjects including the hard lives of the peasants the fates of revolutionary activists loaded episodes of Russian history and some of the nation's greatest cultural figures many of whom he counted as personal friends including Tolstoy Musorgsky and Gorky. His vibrant colorful and topical canvases offer a fascinating panorama of the issues that were swirling in the minds of his contemporaries and an unusual view of all strata of life during this crucial period of historical change:

The purchase of this rather expensive but magnificent book was the result of going to the National Portrait Gallery to see *Russia and the Arts: The Age of Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky*: This would prove to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see masterpieces from the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, The three paintings that really stood out were: *Baroness Varvara von Hildenbant* -vibrant colours and such a striking woman (detail by Ilya Repin), *Anton Chehov* by Osip Braz - this was my clear favourite and I was mesmerised: His eyes reminded me of paradise and I couldn't stop looking at the painting: So I'm searching for a print at the moment but they are all so small. I had a wonderful time looking at the paintings first in the book and then reading it: Here are some interesting quotes from the book:

From the Introduction:, Repin was a painter whose dramatic and eye-catching works were designed to appeal to a wide audience: A painter of immense technical and aesthetic talent Repin (1844-1930) became a key figure of Russian 19th-century realism. I really had a marvellous time in London over Easter thanks to a friend who loves museums and art galleries wherever she goes in the world. A naturally gifted artist he proceeded to gain entrance to the Imperial Academy of Arts (St, Petersburg) at age 20 and in five years received a Minor Gold Medal for his painting *Job's Comforters*: Two years later his powerful *Burlaki* (Volga barge-haulers) earned him a three year

scholarship for foreign travel. After traveling to Italy Venice he settled in Paris; in 1875 exhibited *A Parisian Cafe* at the Paris Salon: Petersburg in 1876 and at 32 received the title of Academician for his painting *Sadko a tour-de-force* which portrays a fantasy underwater scene from a Russian legend, Repin read and wrote prolifically as well as painted and drew - he has left behind a large body of writings letters articles etc, from which the author of the volume has drawn many quotes, In 1905 Repin worked on themes relating to Bloody Sunday signed a petition calling for judicial and administrative reform and quit the Academy: In 1906 at age 62 he built a studio called Penaty at the Kuokkala property he had purchased northeast of St, Petersburg; in a part of Russia that in 1917 became part of independent Finland; in 1918 the border between Finland and Russia was closed, addressing contemporary issues and depicting modern Russia in a realistic and often critical fashion: Repin was elevated by Stalinist historiography to a position of cultural superiority; an exemplar to Soviet artists of the critical socially-committed and politically-aware practitioner: were retrospectively placed within the emerging framework of Socialist Realism and communist doctrine and in the West were maligned or ignored for the same misdemeanor. Sensitive questions such as Repin's return to the reformed Academy in 1894 and his supposedly laissez-faire reactions to the political upheavals of 1905-1917 received scant attention. In the West a Francophile bias subjected Repin to unfavorable comparisons with the divine yardstick of Impressionism, lived through a time when peasant ancestry had been transformed from a mark of social shame to a badge of native distinction, the social chasm which existed between the majority of artists and the class which governed the artistic establishments, the [free-thinking] Artel established by [the artist] Kramskoy and other secessionists. did not recognize the lower orders as fit subjects for art, followed the intellectual path traced by writers such as Pushkin Griboedev and Gogol and by liberal or radical thinkers such as Belinsky Pisarev Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov: all forms of striving towards greater freedom and individuality were regarded as at best suspicious at worst subversive, The aims set out in the *Peredvizhniki's* statutes included circulating exhibits to the provinces to 'broaden the circle of art-lovers' and widening the financial market for artists, From Chapter 3 - History Painting: Interrogating the Past The liberal-left intellectual trends , maintained that the observable present took priority over an imagined past and that critical comments should be made openly rather than analogously: The official disapproval [of Repin's painting *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan*. Repin's history paintings all share the same careful literary construction passing through various rough drafts based on extensive painstaking researches to arrive at the finished work: The constituents which predominate in each of his three major historical paintings are drama and psychology. The emotive yet humane paintings of Millet such as the monumental *Man with a Hoe* (1859-1862 Private Collection) sought similarly to extract nobility from a brutal existence: It is doubtful as to how politically astute art students were during the 1860s since many came from poor and uneducated backgrounds, In a country of overwhelmingly rural composition and a predominantly serf population just recently emancipated [the] . focus [of Russian artists] was consistently on the peasant or muzhik, In the shocking contrast between these pitiful men and the joyful holidaymakers Repin saw potential for a painting that would express his indignation: It seems clear from Repin's account that he was driven by a humanitarian concern and genuine fascination for this subjects: The experiences of Repin's childhood allowed him no delusions about the rapacious and venal nature of the rural clergy: had written [about Kursk province]: 'The stillness here is really fabulous an amazing 'kingdom of sleep', Only the exploiters of the land are not sleeping the kulaks! They have cut down my beloved woods so full of childhood memories: where normally artists stressed colorful spectacle or religious unity the socio-critical element of Repin's painting highlighting the earthly inequities differentiates it from those of his peers. Many regarded it as an assault on all but the lower orders of Russian society, the painting [*Religious Procession in the Province of Kursk 1880-1883*] , assumed the status of a great national work of art a secular icon and an accurate mirror of post reform Russia. Chekhov's short story *Peasants* a portrayal of the average Russian village as home to all manner of barbarity and disease a place where domestic violence fueled by drink is routine. in the eyes of contemporary critics the verisimilitude of his works earned him the reputation of being an

uncompromising documentor of social ills, The priest [in Repin's painting Spurning Confession (1879-1885)] is usually interpreted as a condemnation of the Orthodox church and its role in upholding the autocracy: Nevertheless he showed an abiding commitment to and fascination with the image of the revolutionary and followed their trials and subsequent sentencing closely. Repin was by nature a sympathizer not an extremist and had no time for terrorism, Stasov praised [Formal Session of the State Council in Honor of Its Centenary on May 7 1901's] : '[Repin:] 'It is impossible for anyone with a European education to sincerely support this ridiculous [Russian] autocracy which has lost all meaning in our complicated life, This antediluvian method of government is suitable only for primitive tribes incapable of culture. was begun in 1905 following [Tsar] Nicholas's proclamation which contained concessions towards freedom of speech and association and the establishment of an elected assembly the Duma, During the early twentieth century he had been the target of scathing abuse from the modernist trends, He clearly had contacts with the new regime which wanted to enlist his services : and could find common ground in his antipathy towards autocracy and the artistic avant-garde but the picture is far from simple: Two letters by the artist published in Estonia in Tallinn's 'Evening Post' on 29 May 1920 (a busy emigre community) resurfaced in 1989 as glasnost gathered pace. The outburst of his Estonian letters is remarkable but inconsistent: Similarly his commendations of [artist Isaak] Brodsky and the AkhRR suggest of an artistic affinity with these upholders of the realist tradition rather than their communist ideology, The years of reaction following Aleksandr II's assassination though severely limiting artistic expression were but a further tightening of an already asphyxiating tyranny: Stasov's comparison between Repin and Millet as artists preeminently embroiled in considerations of human existence is perhaps the most fitting. Though drawn to each other by a common humanitarian outlook the two were divided by fundamental differences: The Russian Vision: The Art of Ilya Repin There are several authors with this name. Thriller author: {site_link} David Jackson (DS Nathan Cody and Callum Doyle series 2 space profile) There are several authors with this name: Thriller author: {site_link} David Jackson (DS Nathan Cody and Callum Doyle series 2 space profile) {site_link}.

[1]

Reunited specifically for the exhibition). The nearest I could come to was this book. Fedor Dostoevsky by Vasily Perov (1872) - he looked so sad. I wanted to touch it. The nineteenth century . After visiting London he returned to St. [The Peredvizhniki] became a popular success . In the USSR [the Peredvizhniki] . From Chapter 1 - Rural Beginnings and the Road to St. Repin. The Academy . The visual arts. From Chapter 2 - A Russian in Paris. in the 1860s molded the first generation of realist artists. [The art critic] Stasov . [In 1868 Repin] . In 1876 [Repin]. 'The wasted landscape .in 1899 [Repin illustrated] . ' [Repin's painting] The Demonstration of 17 October 1905