

Russian Visual Art Criticism, 1800-1913
Primary text in Translation

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The Itinerant Exhibition of 1871¹

I.

The greatest news in art in Petersburg at the moment is *the itinerant exhibition*. Whichever way you look at it, it is unusual and novel: in its initial idea, in its goal, in the collaborative efforts of the artists themselves—for whom no one from outside set the tone—and in its astonishing collection of remarkable works, amongst which there shine several stars of the first magnitude. All this is unheard of and unprecedented, all this is a staggering innovation.

Even recently, who would have thought that the time would come, and would come so quickly, when Russian artists would no longer want to restrict themselves to their personal affairs alone? When they would no longer want only to sit in their studios, bringing out a painting or statue from time to time to sell, then locking themselves up in their studios again, far away from the world, deaf to everything that goes on it, and unaware of the life that pulses within it? Who would have thought that these artists, each of whom made himself out to be a carefree idler, a naive child, aware of only ‘the divine Raphael’ and prospective buyers, preoccupied only with busts of Hercules and their own paintings, or engrossed in vague and lofty discussions with their comrades about ‘the ideal’ and ‘art’—who would have thought that these would suddenly quit their artists’ lairs and want to plunge themselves into the ocean of real life, to attach themselves to its upsurges, its currents, and to reflect upon their comrades, the simple folk?! It is true that this has occurred to others many times before, and we, the author of these lines, have also

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repeatedly called upon our artists to do this and have tried to outline their task to them, but, of course, no one expected that artists would respond to the challenge so swiftly, and would, along with their palette and chisel, also take up the public concern as well as their own private concern.

It is specifically this last point that seems to me to be most important of all: the artists' resolution to bring together and educate their own sphere and the masses, with the firmly recognized aim, and the burning desire, not only to make beautiful paintings and statues because people will pay money for them, but also to create with those paintings and statues something significant and important for the mind and emotions of the people. This attitude means that artists are beginning to think not only about buyers, but about the people; not only about rubles, but about those whose hearts will cleave to their paintings and who will begin to live by them.

Two years ago, in 1869, the initial idea for *itinerant art exhibitions* emerged; i.e., exhibitions which would not be restricted to the two major Russian cities of Petersburg and Moscow alone, but which would be transported from town to town. Nothing could in fact have been simpler than the idea that people do not just live in Petersburg and Moscow, but that in other places too there are many folk who are capable of understanding and admiring the marvellous, and that is high time to think specifically of them since they are separated from us (drowning as we are in comforts and delights of every sort) not only by distances of hundreds and thousands of versts, but by hundreds and thousands of shortages and impossibilities. The artist Miasoedov² in Moscow was the first to talk about this, and he was soon joined in this by another artist whose name—Perov³—was already loudly acclaimed, but for a long time their venture did not get off the ground. They approached the Academy of Arts; the Academy, however, was preoccupied with its own affairs and, viewing this unusual plan with indifference, remained shamefully aloof from this new, important business, and it took place in spite of the Academy. Meanwhile, various Petersburg and Muscovite artists were gradually

² Grigorii Grigor'evich Miasoedov (1834-1911).

³ Vasilii Grigor'evich Perov (1833/34-82) [Perov was born in late December 1833 Old Style, which accounts for the fact that both 1833 and, sometimes, 1834 are given as the year of his birth, since twelve days have to be added to nineteenth-century dates in order to arrive at the New Style dates adopted in 1918.]

associating themselves with the undertaking, and the draft constitution of the Association of Itinerant Art Exhibitions was put together and confirmed. We are now present at the beginning of its activity. The first exhibition of this Association opened several days ago in the halls of the Academy of Arts, because the Academy (it must be said, to its credit) has not been envious of this new undertaking, and has understood that the exhibition does not damage or undermine it, that it contains nothing that is contrary to its own efforts and principles, and that one must try one's utmost to help those who want to do something new and good.

After Petersburg, the itinerant exhibition will soon appear in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa and other towns, and will of course inspire the same gratitude and sympathy everywhere. That it will take place not for the sake of money alone, but from other, more profound motives, is best shown by the fact that now, even in its very first days, the majority of the paintings are sold. This means that if it were just about profit then it would already be in the bag, and it would not be worth bothering to go on. However, although we have faith in the success of the undertaking, and find its statutes satisfactory in all details, we nevertheless consider it necessary to point out a clause which, in our eyes, is essential, and which the Association should instantly include in its statutes. We would wish to see a clause there to the effect that in each Russian town where there is an exhibition of the Association, entry *should be free of charge* for several days, even if only two or three. This is essential. Let the artists themselves work out how many poor people there are who would find it difficult to pay even a penny,⁴ although most likely they have no less poetic and artistic feeling than those who come to the exhibition on horses that cost thousands, and who even buy a painting for a great deal of money. How many people might one find amongst poor provincials for whom artistic feeling will spark for the first time at an *itinerant exhibition*, and, for whom awareness will ignite for the first time—I *will* be an artist, they will think! Many times, over the course of many years, we have reminded the Academy of Arts about free entry to its exhibitions, convinced this is even its duty and its obligation, but our voice has remained that of one crying out in the wilderness. We hope that the Association of Itinerant Exhibitions will pay heed to this guidance, which, in its sympathy for and concern about the common

good, is so utterly cognate with the ideas of its statutes. We do not even doubt that the members of the Association will say to us: ‘we are in complete agreement with you, and we have even determined that this should be so; but it has not been put into the statutes.’ But we shall reply: ‘No, sirs, that is not enough: we specifically hope of you, we *demand* of you, that this beneficial decree—with which (we have no doubt) each of you sympathizes to the depths of his soul—be placed firmly and indestructibly at the very foundation of your enterprise; that it should not depend on any general meetings, debates, or protocols, or even on individuals who come and go from the Association. Let it be stated, in the statute, that you want and intend to benefit not only the Russian public, but the Russian people, and that you wish to help, with your glorious, noble works of art, those thousands of unknown talents who are, for the time being, buried in its depths.’

Let us turn now to the exhibition itself, since it has fallen to us, the inhabitants of Petersburg, to be the first to see the Association’s first exhibition.

The exhibition is astonishing not in its beautiful intention alone, but also in the excellent realization of it. Why? Because the current generation of artists is different. These are people with as much talent as before, but their mindset is different. How recently it was that Gogol drew a brilliant portrait of a contemporary Russian artist, and the portrait was undoubtedly a good likeness, like all portraits done by the hand of the great writer. But how things have changed since then, how the artists of the present are unlike those then! Do you recall the artist Piskarev, do you remember the artist Chartkov, do you remember the artist who became the monk Grigorii?⁵ How all this has sunk in oblivion, never to return again! How distant from the present, and how laughable and pitiable does the present make everything that could previously be used for the artist’s merit and glory—the childish, endless naivete to the point of stupidity, the night-blindness to surrounding reality, the absence of all interests, however serious, and the a nonsensical, fruitless dreaminess that called itself poetry!

Before us now is a different breed, a healthy and thinking breed, which, having brushed trinkets and idle amusements aside with its art, has cast its gaze upon what

⁴ *Grivennik*: a ten-copeck piece.

surrounds it and what is taking place around it, and which has fixed its serious eyes upon history in order to extract not only the political shell but the deep features of the life of old, or which draws on its canvas those characters, types and events of everyday life which Gogol first taught us to see and to produce.

Yet another distinctive feature of the new exhibition is the fact that, here, before us, is a whole group of professors who are working and progressing. We hope that our readers will recall how often we have had cause to complain of the intolerable torpor which comes upon many Russian artists at the point when they achieve higher artistic rank. From that point onwards, farewell work, exercises, attempts to discover something and to move forward! Our professors are frequently a sort of wondrous antipode of Western professors, who constantly toil, burrow, read, write books, look, think, compare, burn with ideas, undertake new projects, just as if they were still college registrars in the field of art. With us it is completely different—rank is inscribed on the face and the entire life of a professor, and from books he can barely recall (and that half inaccurately) what he saw when he was twenty years old; now it's been a long time since he has had anything new or passionate which would carry him forward or dig deep within him. What sort of creations can there be and what sort of artistry can come from the hands of the living dead who just place barriers across the path!

The new generation of artists which has come together in the Association does not want this any more. They have told themselves that the only artist who is worthy of being a member of our new brotherhood is he who works, who works constantly, who does not want to know what rest, accursed sloth, and cards are, but who wakes up every day thinking about work, and who every day advances both his understanding and his ability. And for that reason, he who does not work, who wishes to be an artistic functionary, and who does not intend to bring anything new to the Association immediately excludes himself from its sphere and ceases to be a member of it.

⁵ These are all fictional figures of artists from tales by Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol' (1809-52). Piskarev is the hero of *Nevskii Prospekt* (1835), Chartkov (or Chertkov) is the principal character in *The Portrait* (*Portret*, 1842), and the monk Grigorii is an unnamed former artist and icon-painter from the same tale.

The highest of all amongst those whose paintings now have appeared at the exhibition are the St Petersburg professor Mr Ge,⁶ and the Moscow professor Mr Perov. Both have long been well-known among us, both have long been considered the glory of Russian art, but never before have they created works on a par with those that they have created now, regardless of their rank. Only now has their talent attained its highest elevation and maturity. Now, even before admiring their marvelous works the thought flies into our head: if only these two might not stop, as so many others have! If only they would continue without pause, and without reducing the power of their progression, if only they would not rest on their laurels and decay! May he who has reached the height of his powers, and whose strength is great—may he go forward, at full steam, to be carried into new conquests and new discoveries.

Mr Ge's painting represents a scene from the life of Peter I:⁷ in Peterhof, in his small palace of Mon Plaisir, he interrogates his son, the Tsarevich Aleksei, who has been brought back from his flight to Austria and Naples. The terrible Tsar, who has already begun to go gray, sits by a table on which there lies a letter establishing the guilt of the Tsarevich in his intrigues and treacherous dealings. Before him stands his son, repenting truly, or perhaps pretending to repent; he is lanky and scraggy, a real figure of a dull-witted, narrow-headed sexton, despite his rich outfit of black velvet. Father and son are alone: there is no one else in this low-ceilinged room, with its cold marble floor and Dutch paintings on the wall. But what a drama is going on in there! It is just as if two extremes of humanity had come together from different ends of the earth. One is energy itself, all unbending and powerful will, a handsome giant in a tunic of the Preobrazhenskii Guards Regiment and in tall military boots, utterly agitated, turning his wonderful, flushed face upon this son, this foolish enemy who thought to stand in his path. Rage, reproof, contempt—all these burn in his gaze, and the colourless head of the young criminal seems to have drooped and fallen under this gaze, unable to look directly at the terrible Tsar. He is insignificant, contemptible, loathsome in his pallor and his Old Believer cowardice. One cannot admire enough how all this has been painted and

⁶ Nikolai Nikolaevich Ge (1831-94).

⁷ *Peter I Interrogates the Tsarevich Aleksei in Peterhof* (*Petr I doprashivaet tsarevicha Alekseia Petrovicha v Petergofe*, 1871, Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow).

represented. Not one of Mr Ge's previous paintings ever bore such a stamp of maturity and mastery as this. The strength and palette of the painting, even in such details as, for instance, the multicolored cloth on the table, the simplicity and unusual veracity of each detail, from Peter's head (a true *chef d'oeuvre* in every line), to his dusty boots and tunic, make this painting one of Russia's treasures, on a par with the best historical paintings of the new Western art. Delaroche's *Cromwell*, or *The English Elizabeth* or *Jane Grey* are no higher than this painting.⁸

Visitors to the *itinerant exhibition* will see a laconic sign underneath Mr Ge's painting reading 'sold'. We think it is apropos to say here to whom this new remarkable painting of ours now belongs. It was bought by Mr Tret'iakov⁹ even before the last strokes of the brush had time to dry and when its creator had still not parted with it. Mr Tret'iakov is one of the most dread enemies of Petersburg because, at the very first opportunity, he buys up and carries off to Moscow, to his outstanding gallery of Russian art, everything of note that appears here in Petersburg; but at the same time he is one of those people whose name will not be forgotten in the history of our art, because he values and loves it as hardly anyone does, and in a short period he has compiled, from his own vast means, a gallery of new Russian painting and sculpture the likes of which has never been seen anywhere before—even in the Academy and in the Hermitage, where, for some reason, with all their Raphaels and Guido Renis, they have completely forgotten the fact that the Russians may now have similar talents. Thus, a private individual has taken upon himself the task of doing what the largest public institutions are not doing, and he executes this with passion, fervor, enthusiasm, and, most surprisingly of all, with intelligence. They say that there are no weak or bad pictures in his collections, but in order to select in this way one must have taste and knowledge. Furthermore, no one has so toiled for and cared about the personalities and needs of Russian artists as Mr Tret'iakov. In our Public Library there now is one hall of honour—the Merchant Larin Hall; perhaps at some point the Moscow Public Museum will be able to boast a hall that will be no less dear to every Russian—the Merchant Tret'iakov Hall. Not all Russian

⁸Paul Delaroche (1797-1856). The paintings referred to are usually known in English as *Death of Queen Elizabeth* (1827), and *Execution of Lady Jane Grey* (1833).

merchants are indifferent to the higher interest of knowledge and art. Perhaps some followers and imitators of Mr Tret'iakov will soon emerge from their ranks. They say that examples are contagious. Of the number of pictures bought at the present itinerant exhibition almost all the best belong to that same Mr Tret'iakov.

Let us return, however, to Mr Ge's painting once more. We have attempted to explain the ways in which it seems to us to be important and remarkable, and how much talent and success we see in it. But nevertheless, we would consider it inappropriate if we were silent here on what we cannot agree with in this picture and what seems to us to be displeasing in it.

This is the artist's own view of his subject, of his task in hand. It seems to us that Mr Ge has looked at the relationship between Peter I and his son only from the point of view of the former, and that is not enough. There is also the view of history, the view of posterity, which can and should be just, and which no glories or honours should be able to procure. No one doubts that Peter I was a great person, a person of genius; but this is still no reason to behave barbarically and despotically towards his son and in the end to order him to be suffocated with a pillow in a casemate after having had him tortured (as Mr Ustrialov¹⁰ tells us in his sixth volume). Tsarevich Aleksei was an insignificant, limited man, an enthusiast for everything old, intemperate, uncomprehending of his father's great innovations, and he perhaps tried in his way to oppose him. But what was this opposition? It was a straw thrown across the path of a lion's menacing pace. It could do nothing: it was insignificant and powerless. For what did Peter I reproach his son, what did he want of him? He reproached him for his weakness, for his lack of energy, for his dislike of work, but how was the unfortunate Aleksei to blame for the fact that he was born like this? How could he make himself reborn? What did Peter want from his son? He wanted him to be the same as himself, a second Peter. 'But I can't, I don't want to', replied poor Aleksei with tears in his eyes. 'Take the crown from me, I was not born to bear its weight. It does not interest me. Give me peace, let me live in my own way, far from everything—if I only had my Afrosin'iushka beside me I could live as far as

⁹ Pavel Tret'iakov (1832-98). Wealthy Moscow merchant and art collector. Co-founder with his brother Sergei of the Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

¹⁰ Nikolai Gerasimovich Ustrialov (1805-70), historian, professor of St Petersburg University.

possible from war, from soldiers, and from all this grandeur and power that is alien to me'. But no, Peter wouldn't listen, and at the instigation of Ekaterina and Menshikov, proceeded to persecute his unhappy, limited son all the more, finally forcing him to flee from his cruelties, and he then had him brought back to Russia with promises of forgiveness which he then did not meet.... How can we be on Peter's side here? Granted, he was a great man, and that Russia was obliged to him, but nevertheless the business with Aleksei is one of those matters from which history averts its eyes in horror. We understand that a meeting between father and son can serve as a subject for a picture; but it must be grasped more deeply than has happened in this instance. Both Aleksei, and Peter himself here appear to be deeply tragic figures. Before us are two people, one of whom who does not understand the other, while the second understands nothing of the nature of the first, and both want to re-do matters in their own way. One wants peace and inaction, and the other wants endless energy and activity. If only each had remained in his own place, or, at least, had asked only that the other did not meddle in his business! But no, there had to be surveillance, and death... We do not deny that this has ever happened on the earth, that this ever took place. But to make an apotheosis of strength out of this, to represent the victorious force as if as he were a victim, because he was not understood or sympathized with by someone who was incapable of understanding or sympathy: in our opinion, this is inaccurate, and this does not respond to the demands of art.

We say it again: the scene of Peter with his son could be taken as a subject for a picture, but in a different way. Incidentally, even if we take the point of view of Peter alone there is something there which we would reproach the artist for. Peter was not the sort of man to be satisfied with indignation, reproaches, or bitter and noble thoughts. For him, thought was immediately deed, and his temper was harsh. This means that at his son's interrogation he was either formal and indifferent, or enraged and menacing to the point of insanity. The *middle* note that the painter has given him, in our opinion, does not correspond at all with his nature and character.

We say all this about Mr Ge's painting because we deeply value the talent of this artistry and his superlative (in all other respects) painting, and would wish that his future works should give no grounds for remarks of this nature.

II.

The general statistics about the itinerant exhibition are as follows. There are forty-six paintings and drawings in all; of them, seven Moscow artists sent sixteen; eight Petersburg artists sent thirteen. These works are systematically divided as follows: there are twenty-four landscapes and views; twelve portraits; and ten compositions on subjects from life. Of the forty-six paintings and drawings, twenty were bought even before the beginning of the exhibition. In addition to this, there is one sculptural piece. There is nothing in the field of architecture. All these figures are very curious, and the conclusions from them which demonstrate the current artistic mood and questions in Russia are obvious, which is why there is no reason to expand on them a great deal.

But we shall draw the readers' attention to two of the most important points. The first is that, despite the fact that the exhibition is composed of barely fifty works, it is more important and interesting than many others, which in previous times consisted of hundreds and perhaps even thousands of pieces. Here, there is none of that junk and rubbish with which the statistics of the majority of exhibitions were inflated to very respectable sizes. Here, all works are either truly excellent, or good, or, at the very worst, not bad and satisfactory. The scrutiny of comrades is the most strict and impartial: one cannot hide from it, one cannot turn away from it. This is not the same as the judgement of one's betters, the authorities; they only glance in a cursory fashion, and sometimes they are not concerned with young people who are on the way up; they do not give their full attention to some who are good, while rushing to honour some who are rather bad. The large Parisian exhibitions of recent years, with their invited *juries*, may serve as an example of this: how many protests and complaints have there been at their judgements! Between fellow-workers the reckoning is utterly different: here, everything is brought into the open, everyone examines everything fully and notices everything, always inquiring about the general direction taken, about success and failure, about all previous works, and about the direction in which the artist's work is now moving.. And complaints are not heard about a court like this.

Another point is the fact that here there is no need to think that, if there are fewer Moscow artists and works than there are Petersburg ones, this means that Moscow is

falling behind Petersburg in art. No, this would be untrue to the highest degree. Moscow is now raised high in painting as never before, and contains a group of remarkable artists with which our Petersburg artists will be able to compete only in time. Everything is there: innovativeness in tasks, strength, deep national feeling, astonishing vitality, a complete absence of former artistic falsity, and talent in abundance.

And so that we should begin with the best, with the very first Muscovite (in artistry), we have at the present exhibition as many as five major paintings by Mr Perov: three portraits and two subjects from life. It goes without saying that the latter are far more important to us. We will start with them, and before anything else we shall say about them that in no single previous painting has Mr Perov raised himself to such Gogolian strength, truth and humour, with the possible exception of *The Bird-Catcher*¹¹ alone, which probably the whole of Russia knows. We consider his *Hunters at Rest*¹² to be the greatest of all his paintings to date, just as in scale it is also the largest of them. We think that this hunter-fibber, who tells tales with such passion, with such genuine inspiration, spreading his fingers wide and making his eyes bulge with his wondrous adventures and unprecedented fantastic stories—is the most inventive double of Gogol's Nozdrev¹³; and meanwhile a peasant hunter chuckles to himself, and scratches his ear, virtually saying: 'Aah, mate! Whatever will that bloke come up with next!'. And there is mama's golden boy, in a hunter's sheepskin coat, with a face that is already the worse for wear, forgetting, in his concentration, to lift the match from the match-box in order to light his cigarette—all this is so faithful and veracious that the picture ceases to be a picture. One seems to be looking through a window at these three utterly different men, who nevertheless spend amicable days together, and this autumn clearing in which golden shocks of slanting straw stick out like a huge, unshaven beard. Here it is, then, that this group sat down and lay down amongst the scattered guns and cartridge belts, the battered hunting-horn, the dog sniffing at something to the side, and amongst the opened food supplies. The face and white teeth of the man who is laughing and winking, is picked out in the very centre of the painting, beneath a crumpled hat with holes in it

¹¹ *Ptistelov* (1870).

¹² Stasov refers to this painting as *Prival okhotnikov*. The accepted title is *Okhotniki na privale* (1871).

¹³ A character in *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*) who is given to wildly fanciful exaggeration.

which has slipped across his forehead at an angle. Equals to this painting in artistry may be found in Spanish galleries amongst the paintings of, for instance, Velasquez or Murillo (particularly the first), but for all their naturalism and simple truth you will not find in them that humour which might well be present given the direction and tasks of their art: after all, Cervantes was just such a precursor for Spanish realist painters as Gogol was for ours. Truly national artistic schools always follow hard on the heels of literature, which is more mature, and which therefore sets off earlier along the road. Only one thing is to be regretted: the fact that Mr Perov's colours continue to be rather harsh.

The other painting¹⁴ scarcely lags behind the first, marvelous painting, and in our eyes, stands on the same level as *The Bird-Catcher* (it seems that even the same life model was used for both paintings). Imagine a middle-aged man who has put on some weight, somewhere in the backwoods, red-faced and grey-haired; he stands over water, under the wide shelter of his old straw hat; he has grasped both knees and leant forward amongst the fishing rods that are sticking out everywhere from the water, and his whole soul peers down, through huge great glasses on his nose, into the stream, where the primary question in the world is being decided: 'are they biting or not?' This old man, with his chin like a brush, is as much an enthusiast in his business as last year's pigeon-fancier; they know nothing else in the world other than their birds and fish, and if you try to touch them, to get in their way, then you will find out what it means to strike out against a man in the highest form of activity on earth, after which the world comes to an end. In literature we have one masterpiece which is utterly equal to these two paintings: that is Turgenev's *Story of the Nightingales*.¹⁵

Of those portraits which Mr Perov sent to the exhibition, two (of Mrs Timasheva and Mr Stepanov) are good; but the three-quarter-length portrait of Ostrovskii,¹⁶ in a Russian sheepskin, is one of the most perfect works of the Russian school, just as surely as, of the three current portraits exhibited by Mr Ge, two are not bad, while the third, of the brother of the famous Italian doctor Schiff¹⁷ (painted in Florence in 1867, and the

¹⁴ *The Fisherman* (Rybolov, 1871).

¹⁵ *Rasskaz o solov'iakh*. Turgenev's short prose work is actually entitled *O solov'iakh* (1854).

¹⁶ Portret pisatel'ia Aleksandra Nikolaevicha Ostrovskogo (1871).

¹⁷ Moriz Schiff (1823-96), a famous physiologist who was a friend of Herzen. Ge's portrait of Schiff, which is in the Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, dates from 1867. Schiff was not an Italian, as Stasov

oldest painting in the exhibition)—this third portrait, which is simply a bust portrait, is so superlative that we must hope that it will become part of a large public collection as soon as possible.

When we talked of portraits everyone will of course have been asking, ‘But what about Kramskoi? Where is Kramskoi?’¹⁸ For now that his portraits are so renowned and marvellous, surely there are some at the exhibition?’ There are. Of course there are: and how could there not be when he is one of the most inexhaustible, talented Russian artists and, together with Prof. Ge has been the true soul of the Petersburg section of the Association of the Itinerant Exhibitions? There are several of his pictures at the exhibition. In the first place, there are three portraits of Petersburg artists: the sculptor Antokol’skii,¹⁹ the landscapist Vasil’ev,²⁰ and Baron M.K. Klodt.²¹ All three portraits are of the first order, and are executed in an utterly original manner, in oil paints, but in a single tone of brown, of a very pleasant and warm shade. The portrait of Antokol’skii has something monumental about it, so astoundingly have the buttoned-up frock-coat and the plaid which lies about his shoulders been grouped together, while above them is his stern, serious, talented-looking face. The three-quarter-length portrait of Vasil’ev the landscapist is simply astonishing in the unusual ease of the pose, and in the youthful, carefree, light expression that lights up his face. The large portrait in oils of Count Litke²² is also very good, as is the study ‘head of a peasant’.²³ But, as an intrinsic creation, all attention turns to Mr Kramskoi’s painting *Scene from Gogol’s ‘May Night’*.²⁴ Remember the pool there, sombrely surrounded by a maple forest and weeping willows with their

suggests, but rather a German. However, he was Professor of Physiology in Florence between 1863 and 1876, the period when Ge’s portrait of him was painted. Stasov’s assertion that the portrait is of Moriz Schiff’s brother rather than of the physiologist himself is not widely accepted, although the precise identity of the sitter is masked by the title: *Portrait of Dr Schiff*.

¹⁸ Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi (1837-87).

¹⁹ Mark Matveevich Antokol’skii (1843-1902). Sculptor from Lithuania whose work was strongly promoted by Stasov.

²⁰ Fedor Aleksandrovich Vasil’ev (1850-73). Talented Russian landscapist who died at an early age of consumption.

²¹ Baron Mikhail Konstantinovich Klodt (1832-1902). Russian landscape painter.

²² Count Fedor Petrovich Litke (1797-1882). Admiral, scholar, and explorer. Especially noted for his descriptions of Novaia Zemlia, the White Sea, Kamchatka, and many other areas. One of the founders of the Russian Geographical Society. President of the Academy of Sciences, 1864-81.

²³ Probably *Portrait of a Peasant* (1868), which is displayed in the Moravian Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic.

²⁴ Also known as *Water-Nymphs (Rusalki, 1871)*.

plaintive branches submerged in the pool... 'Next to the forest, on the hill, there dreams an old wooden house with closed shutters; moss and wild grass has grown over its roof; gnarled apple trees have grown up before its windows; the forest, embracing it in its shadow, has cast a wild gloom upon it, the walnut grove has spread to its feet and has slipped into the pond'.²⁵ This is the very same gloomy and miserable Little Russian wilderness that Mr Kramskoi has painted on the canvas, and over it all he has cast greenish shafts from the most luminous, pale moon. In these shafts of light, amongst the wild greenery that hangs down everywhere, creeping in all directions, there wander and sit, here and there, the shadows of drowned women, carrying their sadness and wrapped up in their suffering, while still others wring their hands in despair. Wilderness, desolation, unassuageable grief has all merged in this poetic, marvellously iridescent painting with its silvery reflections. Only the drowned women are not completely typical Little Russian women.

Having at last returned from his long stay in Paris, Mr Gun²⁶ has exhibited no fewer than five paintings and drawings. There are no notable compositions among them, but everything that is to hand is distinguished, as all Mr Gun's work is, by a remarkable, almost French elegance, taste and unusual mastery of execution. Best of all are a study of a head of an old man in an old French soldier's helmet, perhaps from the times of Bartholomew Night,²⁷ and a street in a Normandy village.

We turn to Moscow again, however, and to Perov's comrades.

In recent years there have been many complaints about the fact that, after his first brilliant painting *Gostinnyi dvor in Moscow*, which instantly made his name renowned, Mr Prianishnikov²⁸ suddenly stopped and even seemed to disappear from the scene. For a long time nothing appeared by him, nothing that was worthy of attention: his *Wandering Minstrels*²⁹ was merely a mediocre thing. Others even began to fear a little for the future

²⁵ A quotation from Chapter 1 ('Ganna') of *Maiskaia noch', ili utoplennitsa* (1831) by Nikolai Gogol'.

²⁶ Karl Fedorovich Gun (1830-77), professor of historical and landscape painting.

²⁷ Refers to Gun's *Kanun Varfolomeevskoi nochi* (*The Eve of St Bartholomew's Night*), which was first displayed at the Paris Salon in 1868.

²⁸ Illarion Mikhailovich Prianishnikov (1840-94). The picture referred to is *Shutniki. Gostinnyi dvor v Moskve* (*Jesters. Gostinnyi dvor in Moscow*, 1865).

²⁹ Stasov erroneously calls this painting *Kaleki perekhozhe*. The title is actually *Kaliki perekhozhe, poiushchie Lazaria* (*Wandering Minstrels Bemoaning their Fate*, 1870).

of this talented man, but suddenly, there is the present exhibition, and Mr Prianishnikov appears in it brilliantly again. He has two pictures: *Burnt out of their Home*³⁰ and *Empty Carts*.³¹ The first is a beautiful and sweet thing, but it is not much of an advance on *Minstrels* in much: a young beggar woman who is beautiful, ruddy, and round-faced, advances straight towards the viewer, with a baby wrapped in the folds of her sheepskin; both she and the children on either side stretch out their hands to the side, and have tears in their eyes: neither their faces nor their voices are yet accustomed to begging and irritating people; they are still novices. Winter is all around and snow covers the trees. But in spite of the successful expression and beauty of the whole there is nothing special in this painting. *Empty Carts* is another matter. Once again it is winter, and again there is snow, but somewhere far off, beyond town, while the scrawny, bare birch-trees can be glimpsed somewhere to the side. And at the point where the road bends off to one side, six empty sledges are being pulled at a gentle trot: they have delivered their goods to the town and they are now returning home. The draymen sit on the floor of the sleds, close to the ground, shrinking away from the cold into the upturned collars of their homespun coats and sheepskins; the shoulder blades and ribs of the village horses protrude under the skin; a shaggy domestic dog runs and digs around in a snow drift with its front paws, while crows leap around in the white snow all around, scratching with their beaks. And there, on the last wide sled, just under the very eye of the viewer, sits a seminary student, frozen through and curled up, with a bundle of books tied up with string, himself barely covered by his coat and the scarf around his neck. He is going home for Christmas or Shrovetide, wrapped up for his 'chance' lift. He is cold, and his eyes, dulled by Latin, gaze out feebly, as if his only thought is: 'Oh, for a coaching inn and some hot tea!' And all around you feel such silence, as if everything in this sombre landscape has died: there is not a sound apart from the monotonous clop of the hooves and the occasional urgings-onwards of the dozing drayman. In expression, in tone, in picturesqueness, and shape this little picture is one of our best paintings of recent times.

Mr Miasoedov has given the exhibition a new work which we consider to be the best of his works since his first remarkable painting *Grishka Otrep'ev, Fleeing on Foot*

³⁰ *Pogorelye*. Sometimes called *Pogorel'tsy* (*Burnt out of their Home*, 1871).

³¹ *Porozhniaki*. (*Empty Carts*, 1871; later version 1872).

from a Tavern on the Border of Lithuania.³² Now Mr Miasoedov has painted the young Peter I in Izmailovo village where he first saw the English boat that later became the ‘grandfather of the Russian fleet’.³³ This picture is effective in the general impression given by its colouring: the young Peter, a red-cheeked, handsome lad, with marvellous eyelashes and quick eyes, dressed in a red Tsarevich’s velvet tunic, still of an Eastern cut, in a fur hat, is seized with burning impatience and throws himself towards the boat, as Timmerman, in a wig and caftan, tells him with German meticulousness, fingers outstretched, what sort of boat this is and how it moves under sail. We particularly like the noblemen in the background, the Tsarevich’s uncles: with elderly affection and kindness they look out from under their sable hats at their fiery fledgling as if he has just torn himself out of their hands; the indifferent old man who yawns in boredom behind their backs and devoutly makes the sign of the cross over his mouth is also good. We genuinely rejoice in Mr Miasoedov’s success, yet we note, nevertheless, that his picture would have been even more successful had he avoided some details which are not fully satisfactory: for instance, why is the young tsar sitting? Where did the chair come from? After all, he arrived in this hut by accident and unexpectedly caught sight of a boat, without any sort of prior invitation, which means that there would have been no time, and even no reason, for him to sit down. Did Peter, particularly as a young man (almost a boy) really have such a temperament? We understand that, by seating Peter, the painter has gained an opportunity to represent him as urgently tearing himself away from that spot and throwing himself towards the boat, but we imagine that this same result could have been achieved without the chair. The figure on the left of the picture in a light blue tunic is an accessory and nothing more, while the two boys in the background are also superfluous, since the boat would probably not have been covered with anything in the settlement, which means that it would not have been necessary to remove covers from it. Despite all this, Mr Miasoedov’s painting is very good, and as we said above, effective.

³² *Grishka Otrep’ev, spasaiushchiisia begstvom iz korchmy na litovskoi granitse* (1862).

³³ The painting is entitled *Dedushka russkogo flota (Botik Petra I) (Grandfather of the Russian Fleet. (Peter the Great’s Little Boat)*, 1871).

We come, finally, to the landscapists. Amongst the Moscow painters the most remarkable, to the highest degree, are Messrs. Savrasov³⁴ and Kamenev.³⁵ The large landscape by the former is delightful; but *The Rooks have Arrived* is probably the best and most original of Mr Sarasov's paintings. The entire foreground of the painting is enclosed, as if with a grid, by slender, fluid, crooked, long saplings, and it seems that they are bent over by their heavy burden of tattered nests, squeezed everywhere amongst their tops; and there, in their high branches, and below on the ground, rooks potter and jump about. Through the net of the trees a wintry village landscape spreads out in the distance, with frozen bell-towers, hills and snow, with little houses here and there in the distance, with silence everywhere, and not a single, living soul, with a dull light glinting, with the wilderness, the cold ... How marvellous this all is, how one senses winter here, its fresh breathing! Mr Kamenev has also presented two paintings: *Spring Arcade*,³⁶ and *A Summer's Night*.³⁷ Both are exceptionally poetic, both are marvelously painted, and perhaps *A Summer's Night* is better, where the effect of the thin clouds tenderly lit up by the moon, the small creek between the dense forest clumps, and the glimmering fires to one side, with a herd of horses grazing in the distance—all this is peerless to the highest degree.

Of the Petersburg landscape artists, all three of the primary ones have appeared at the exhibition: Baron Klodt, Messrs. Shishkin³⁸ and Bogoliubov.³⁹

Although Baron Klodt's *Kiev* includes excellent details (particularly the distance, and the twisting and turning river), it is less of a success than is usual for this excellent landscapist, mostly because of the harsh and strident green of the foreground. However, *Midday*,⁴⁰ his other landscape, is a repeat (at another angle and in what appears to be a somewhat reduced size) of the picture which so rightly was lauded by everyone when it

³⁴ Aleksei Kondrat'ievich Savrasov (1830-97). *Grachi prileteli* (1871).

³⁵ Lev L'vovich Kamenev (1833-86).

³⁶ *Vesennii passazh*.

³⁷ *Letniaia noch'*.

³⁸ Ivan Ivanovich Shishkin (1831-98).

³⁹ Aleksei Petrovich Bogoliubov (1824-1896). Russian landscape and seascape painter.

⁴⁰ *Polden'*. The reference is probably to *Polden'. V okrestnostiakh Moskvyy (Midday. Surroundings of Moscow, 1869)*.

appeared, and produces almost the identical poetic enchantment as its original.⁴¹ Mr Shishkin has presented three things: *The Pine Forest*⁴² is wonderful, as are the majority of landscapes by this excellent landscapist; *Evening*⁴³ is a large painting with excellent effects, with the dying red glimmers of sunlight on the road, fence and on wooden walls; and finally etching using aqua fortis, *View on Valaam Island*,⁴⁴ which in our eyes proves that now Mr Shishkin has already mastered the needle and the effects of engraving (although his board is not printed softly and harmoniously enough in all places), and that, in consequence, we are right to expect him to become an amazing master of this specialism that is so desirable for the Russian school. Finally, Professor Bogoliubov has put forward five pieces: two drawings in black pencil: *Morning After a Storm*⁴⁵ and *Aiu-Dag*,⁴⁶ and three oil paintings: *View of Odessa*,⁴⁷ *Sturgeon-Fishers on the Don*⁴⁸ and *Arnheim in Holland*⁴⁹. All are excellent pictures drawn with that effectiveness of Professor Bogoliubov's that all our public knows well. Amongst them the last seemed to us to be particularly notable.

[..]⁵⁰

Such are the most noteworthy pieces of the new exhibition. We may add just one more thing to everything that we have said: God grant that we will have many more such exhibitions in future, and that the circle of artists who have joined to form the original nucleus of the Association will expand with every year.

We do not doubt that many thousands of people will visit this present exhibition, and we are firmly convinced that the majority will each time call into the neighboring

⁴¹ A possible reference to *Dubovaia roshcha* (*The Oak Tree Grove*, 1863).

⁴² Stasov refers to *Sosnovyi les*. Shishkin painted many scenes in pine forests, including *Sosnovyi bor* (*Pine Forest*, 1872).

⁴³ *Vecher*.

⁴⁴ *Vid na ostrove Valaame*. Shishkin spent five seasons on Valaam Island between 1858 and 1878. The etching discussed here is most likely to be a working of one of several paintings with the title *View on Valaam Island* that were produced by Shishkin between 1858 and 1860, and for which he was awarded silver and gold medals of the Academy of Arts.

⁴⁵ *Utro posle buri*.

⁴⁶ *Aiu-dag*. [Actual title *Aiu-Dag v Krymu*]

⁴⁷ *Vid Odessy*.

⁴⁸ *Lovlia osetrov na Donu*. [Actual title *Lov osetrov na Donu*]

⁴⁹ *Arngeim v Gollandii*. [Actual title *Vid g. Arngeima v Gollandii*]

⁵⁰ A short paragraph on a plaster cast statue by Kamenskii, *Po griby*, is omitted.

hall, where the exhibition of students of the Academy boasts Mr Repin's miraculous programme work, *The Resurrection of Jairus's Daughter*,⁵¹ which is surrounded by an entire company of talented comrades. We were also endlessly heartened by the fact that everything that was good and noteworthy at the exhibition was bought up in the first days. It would seem that for artists nowadays to complain about their public is simply a sin.

1871.

⁵¹ Il'ia Efimovich Repin (1844-1930). *Voskreshenie docheri Iaira* (1871), for which Repin was awarded the Academy's big gold medal.