

RUSSIAN PAINTING



Peter Leek

Temporis

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Russian Painting

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Leek P.

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From the 18th century to the 20th, this book gives a panorama of Russian painting not equalled anywhere else. Russian culture developed in contact with the wider European influence, but retained strong native intonations. It is a culture between East and West, and both influences in together. The book begins with Icons, and it is precisely Icon-painting which gave Russian artist their peculiar preoccupation with ethical questions and a certain kind of palette. It goes on to expound the duality of their art, and point out the originality of their contribution to world art. The illustrations cover all genres and styles of painting in astonishing variety. Such figures as Borovokovsky, Rokotov, Levitsky, Brullov, Fedatov, Repin, Shishkin and Levitan and many more are in these pages.

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Russian Painting

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Introduction



1. Anonymous, *The Virgin of Vladimir*, 11th – early 12th century. Tempera with eggs on lime-panel, 100 × 76 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The sublime imagery of the great icon painters, the portraiture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the paintings of sea, snow and forest, the scenes of peasant life and the historical works of the Itinerants, the stylishness of the World of Art movement, the bold experimentation of the artists of the early twentieth century... To anyone unfamiliar with Russian painting, its richness and diversity may well come as a surprise or at least an exciting revelation.

Indeed, the creative energy of Russian artists over the past two and a half centuries has been such that a book of this size cannot hope to offer a comprehensive overview of their output. Its aim is therefore to provide a representative selection of Russian painting from the eighteenth century to the start of the post-Revolutionary period (plus some glimpses of more recent work), but without attempting to do more than briefly allude to Russia's rich heritage of icon painting or giving in-depth coverage of Soviet era art.

Icon painting

Although icon painting rapidly became an integral part of Russian culture, initially it was an imported art form, brought to Russia from Constantinople. The name “icon” is itself indicative of its Byzantine origin, being a transliteration of the Greek word for a “likeness” or image. In 988, after sending out envoys to report on the various religious options available, Prince Vladimir of Kiev Rus (the first Russian state) adopted Christianity both for himself and his subjects, staging a mass baptism in the River Dnieper. In order to build and embellish Christian places of worship, he invited Byzantine architects and artists to Kiev. As a result, the grand stone churches in Kiev were endowed with magnificent frescoes and mosaics. However, many of the early Kievan churches were built of wood, which made mural decoration impractical. Instead, religious images were painted on wooden panels. And these were often displayed on a screen separating the sanctuary from the body of the church – which eventually evolved into the iconostasis, an elaborate tiered partition adorned with icons.



2. *The Miracle of St George and the Dragon*. 15th century. Egg tempera on panel, 114 × 79 cm, National Art Museum, Kiev.



3. *The Passion of Christ*. 15th century. Egg tempera on panel, 192 × 133 cm.

The most famous of these early icons, *The Virgin of Vladimir*, (now in the Tretyakov Gallery, in Moscow), is thought to have been painted in Constantinople during the first quarter of the twelfth century. Between then and the time of Simon Ushakov (1626–86), arguably the last icon

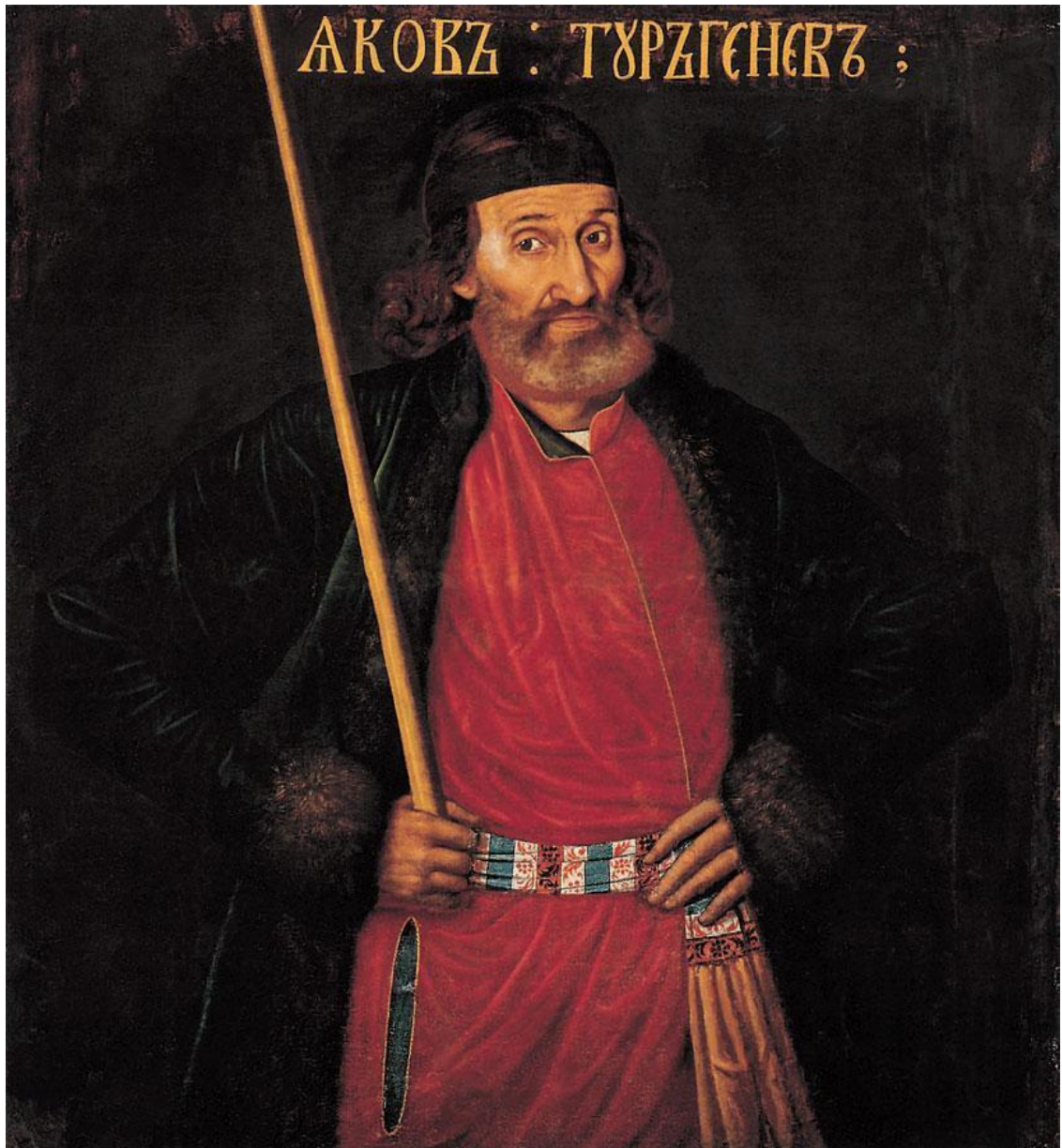
painter of stature, a great variety of schools and styles of icon painting developed, most notably those of Vladimir Suzdal, Yaroslavl, Pskov, Novgorod and Moscow. The earliest icon painters remain anonymous. However, it is known that they were not all monks, and before long workshops specializing in icons and other forms of church decoration were common in many parts of Russia.

Of the masters of icon painting, Theophanes the Greek (c. 1340–1405) came from Constantinople to Russia and greatly influenced both the Novgorod and Moscow schools. Other well-known masters include Andreï Rublev whose most famous work, the *Old Testament Trinity*, is in the Tretyakov Gallery; his friend and collaborator Daniel Cherniy (a monk, as was Rublev); and Dionysius (c. 1440–1508), one of the first laymen to become a leading icon painter.

At the time when Dionysius and his sons were active, ownership of icons became increasingly common. Previously nobles and merchants had begun the practice of displaying them in a place of honour in their homes, sometimes even in a special room, but now peasant families who could afford it also began to hang icons in a *krasny ugol*, or “beautiful corner”.



4. Andreï Roublev, *Old Testament Trinity*, 1422–1427. Tempera with eggs on lime-panel, 142 × 114 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

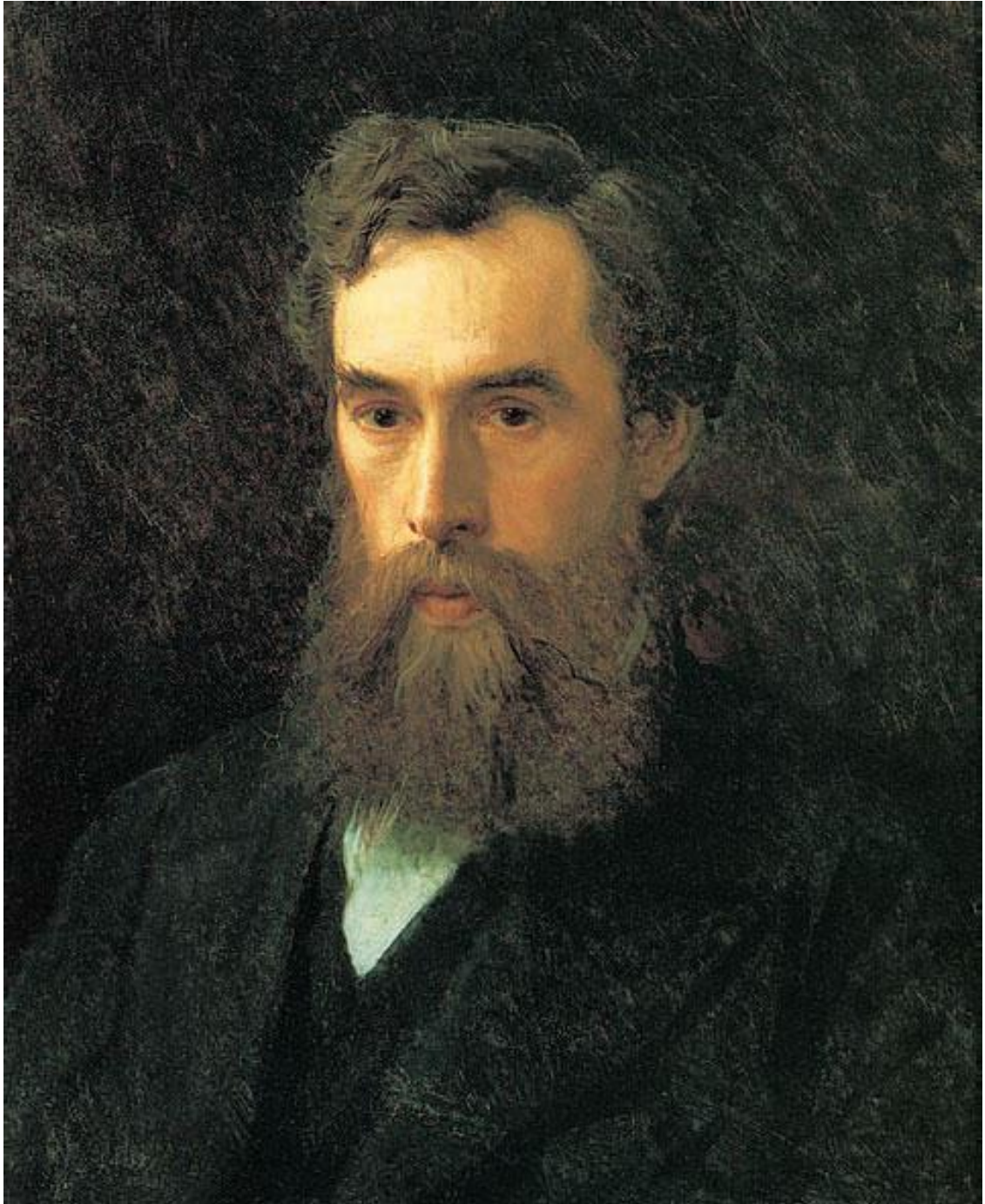


5. Anonymous, *Portrait of Jacob Turgenev*, before 1696. Oil on canvas, 105 × 97.5 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Parsunas

Up to the middle of the sixteenth century, in addition to Christ, the Virgin Mary and saints or angels, icon painters generally restricted their imagery to figures from the Old and New Testaments. Then, in 1551, Ivan the Terrible convened a Stoglav (ecclesiastical council) to settle a variety of issues, including the question of whether the depiction of living people in icons was sacrilegious. The council's somewhat cryptic ruling was interpreted as sanctioning the inclusion of tsars and historical or legendary figures alongside those culled from the Bible. As a result, icon painting gradually widened its ambit, both in terms of style and content until, during the schism that split the Russian Orthodox Church in the mid-seventeenth century, Nikon (the reforming patriarch) and Avvakum (the leader of the conservative Old Believers) vied with one another in their attempts to restore iconic purity. Nikon smashed, burned or poked out the eyes of icons that departed from the Byzantine tradition, especially those that included secular figures while Avvakum railed against innovations and foreign influences in language of a violence scarcely less than Nikon's.

But the ruling of Ivan's Stoglav had unwittingly paved the way for the spread of non-religious art. To escape the attentions of Nikon and Avvakum and their henchmen, painters turned to portraiture and other varieties of artistic endeavour. One result was a vogue for *parsunas* (from the Latin *persona*), pictures of living people similar in style to icons, but of a non-religious nature. These were usually painted on wooden panels, rather than on canvas. At first they were extremely stylized, and the emphasis was not so much on capturing character as on conveying the sitter's place in society. But before long the *parsuna* gave way to a more realistic type of portraiture. For example, the portrait of Peter the Great's jester Jacob Turgenev, painted by an unknown artist some time before 1696, has a psychological depth and an irony absent from most *parsunas*. The quizzical shrewdness of the jester's expression and the way his powerful figure fills the canvas may have been meant to suggest that wisdom is not exclusive to princes, nor folly to fools.



6. Ivan Kramskoï, *Portrait of Pavel Tretyakov*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 59 × 49 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The Academy

The Academy of Sciences was established in Saint Petersburg by a decree of the governing senate on 28 January (8 February) 1724, following an order of Emperor Peter the Great. Peter the Great's decision to build a capital that would be "a window on Europe" had considerable significance for Russian painting. First, he lured architects, craftsmen and artists to Russia from various parts of Europe, both to design and decorate the buildings of Saint Petersburg and to train their Russian contemporaries in the skills needed to realise his plans for modernizing the whole country. With similar aims in mind, he paid for Russian artists to study abroad and planned to establish an art department in the newly created Academy of Sciences.

After Peter's death, these plans reached fruition with the founding in 1757 of the Imperial Academy of the Arts, which opened in earnest six years later. For more than a hundred years the Academy exerted a powerful influence on Russian art. It was supplemented by a preparatory school, where budding artists were sent when they were between six and ten years old. It was rigidly hierarchical, with titles ranging from "artist without rank" to academician, professor and councillor. Students who had the stamina to do so toiled at their studies for fifteen years. And, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was dominated by unquestioning acceptance of classical ideas. Russian artists frequently found the Academy's regulations and attitudes frustrating, but it did have the merit of making a comprehensive and rigorous artistic education available to those who showed signs of talent.

Cross-currents in art

Initially the staff of the Academy included a preponderance of foreign – mainly French and Italian – teachers. As a result, Russian painting during the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries owed a great deal to the fashions prevalent in other parts of Europe, which tended to reach Russia with some delay. Given the distance from Saint Petersburg and Moscow to the Western European capitals, this lag is hardly surprising. But Russian painters did have considerable opportunities to familiarize themselves with Russian and non-Russian art, both thanks to the circulation of reproductions (often in the form of engravings and lithographs) and to the art-buying habits of the ruling class. As well as funding the Academy (including travel scholarships for graduates), Catherine the Great bought masterpieces of French, Italian and Dutch art for the Hermitage. During the French Revolution, her agents – and Russian visitors to Paris in general – were able to pick up some handy bargains, as the contents of chateaux were looted and sold off.



7. Jean-Marc Nattier, *Portrait of Peter the Great*, 1717. Oil on canvas, 142.5 × 110 cm, Hermitage, St. Petersburg.



8. Victor Vasnetov, *Ivan the Tsarevich Riding the Grey Wolf*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 249 × 187 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The Itinerants

However, although the Academy boasted a diverse and fairly liberal collection of foreign masterpieces, not all of the students were content. In 1863 – the year that the first Salon des Refusés was held in Paris – fourteen high-profile art students (thirteen painters and one sculptor) resigned from the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg in protest against its conservative attitudes and restrictive regulations. Their next move was to set up an artists' cooperative, although it soon became apparent that a more broadly based and better organized association was needed, eventually leading to the formation of the Society for Itinerant Art Exhibitions.

The Society was incorporated in November 1870, and the first of its forty-three exhibitions was held in November 1871 (the last one took place in 1923). The four artists who spearheaded the Society's founding were Ivan Kramskoï, portrait, historical and genre painter, who taught at the Society for the Encouragement of Artists school of drawing in Saint Petersburg before being given the rank of academician in 1869; Vassily Perov, portrait, historical and genre painter who taught painting at the School of Painting and Architecture in Moscow from 1871 to 1883; Grigory Miasoyedov, portrait, historical and genre painter who lived in Germany, Italy, Spain and France after completing his studies at the Academy in Saint Petersburg and was one of the board members of the Society for Itinerant Art Exhibitions, and finally, Nikolai Gay, religious and historical painter, portraitist and landscape artist, sculptor and engraver who also wrote articles on art. First a student at the university of physics and mathematics in Saint Petersburg, he entered the Academy of Arts as a teacher as of 1863.

One of their primary concerns, reflected in the name of the Society, was that art should reach out to a wider audience. To further that aim – perhaps inspired by the *narodniki* (the Populists then travelling around Russia preaching social and political reform) – they undertook to organize “circulating” exhibitions, which would move from one town to another.

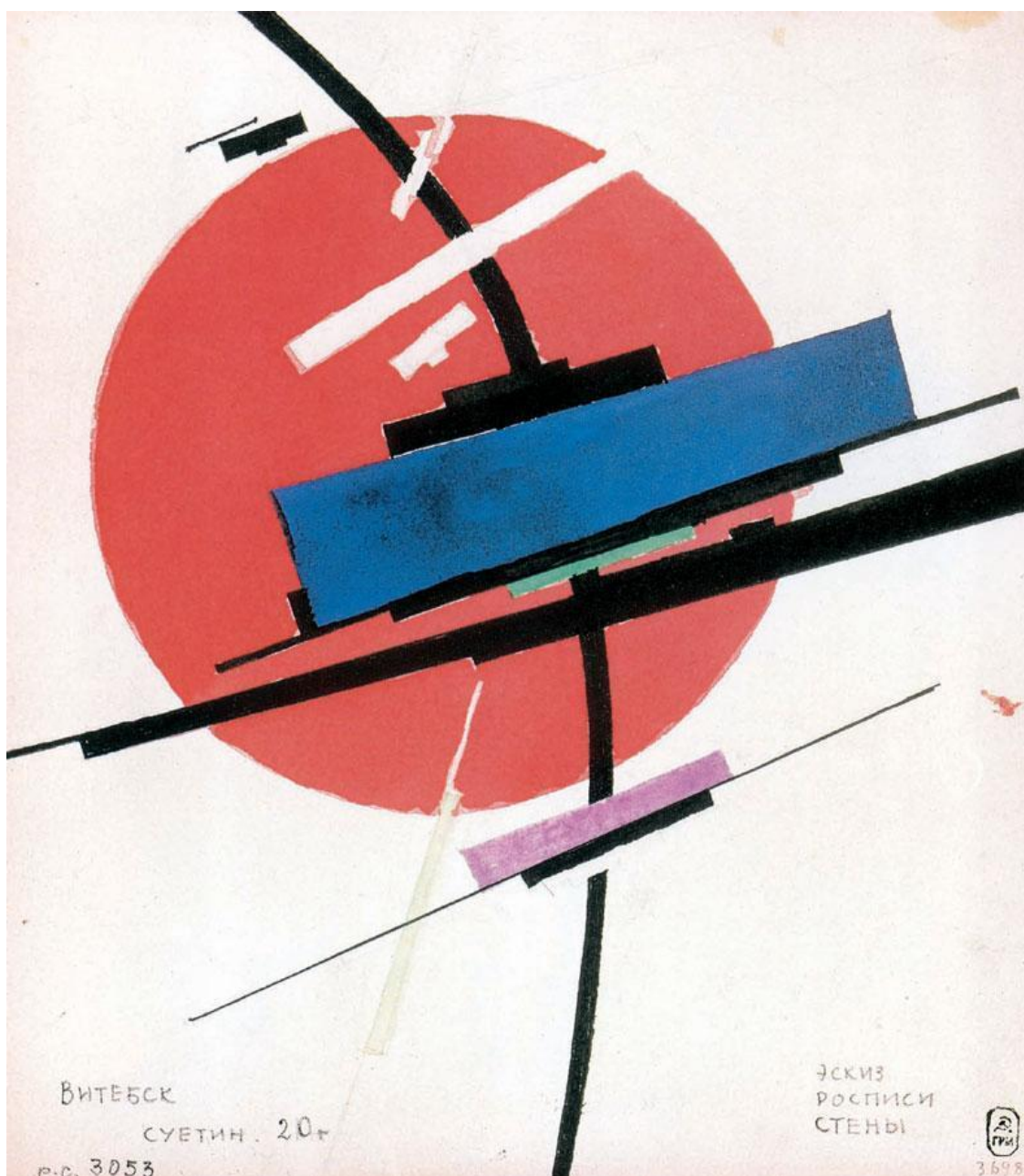
And like the Impressionists in France (who also held their first exhibition in 1874), the *peredvizhniki* – variously translated as Itinerants, Travellers and Wanderers – embraced a broad spectrum of artists, with differing styles and a great variety of artistic preoccupations. But, initially at least, the Society was a more tightly knit organization, and ideologically its aims were more coherent. Living at the time when the writings of Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy were awakening social consciences, most of the Itinerants were actively concerned with the conditions in which the ordinary people of Russia lived, and strove to stimulate awareness of the appalling injustices and inequalities that existed in contemporary society. The artistic movement that focused on these concerns came to be known as Critical Realism.

The emergence of Russian Avant-garde

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, modern Russian painters wished to confer upon art a vaster social resonance. To this end, they had to reconcile the profound attachment of Russians to tradition and the desire for renewal. The latter found expression in a wide variety of movements. Russian avant-garde offers multiple facets, drawing inspiration from foreign sources as well as those of its home country, making Russian art the spearhead of the worldwide artistic process at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A hundred years or so later, Sergeï Shchukin and the brothers Mikhaïl and Ivan Morozov purchased numerous Impressionist paintings and brought them back to Russia. In 1892 the merchant and industrialist Pavel Tretyakov gave his huge collection of paintings (including more than a thousand by Russian artists) to the city of Moscow. Six years later, the Russian Museum opened in the Mikhailovsky Palace in Saint Petersburg. Today it houses more than 300,000 items, including some 14,000 paintings.

Exhibitions, such as that of Tretyakov in the Russian Museum, also played an important role in the development of Russian art. At the end of the nineteenth century, the artistic status of icons had been in eclipse for approximately two hundred years, even though they were cherished as objects of religious veneration. During that time, many of them had been damaged, inappropriately repainted or obscured by grime. In 1904, Rublev's *Old Testament Trinity* was restored to its full glory, and in 1913 a splendid exhibition of restored and cleaned icons was held in Moscow to mark the millennium of the Romanov dynasty. As a result, the rediscovered colours and stylistic idiosyncrasies of icon painting were explored and exploited by a number of painters in the first decade or two of the twentieth century. Similarly, when Diaghilev mounted a huge exhibition of eighteenth-century portrait painting at the Tauride Palace in Saint Petersburg in 1905, it resulted in a noticeable revival of interest in portraiture and in Russia's artistic heritage as a whole. International exhibitions (like the ones organized by the *Golden Fleece* magazine in 1908 and 1909), together with foreign travel and visits by foreign artists to Russia, allowed Russian painters to become acquainted with movements such as Impressionism, Symbolism, Futurism and Cubism. What is particularly fascinating is to see how artists as diverse as Grabar, Vrubel, Chagall, Larionov and Goncharova adapted these influences and used them to create their own art – often incorporating Russian elements in the process.



9. Nikolai Souetine, *Esquisse de peinture murale. Vitebsk*. 1920. Chinese Ink on paper. 20.3 × 18.2 cm.

Religious Painting



10. Nikolai Gay, "*Quid est Veritas?*", 1890. Oil on canvas, 233 × 171 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

From the Eighteenth Century to the 1860s

In 1843 Briullov and a number of other artists, including Bruni, Markov, Basin, Chebouev and Timofei were commissioned to decorate the interior of St. Isaac's Cathedral in Saint Petersburg.

A Russian artist of French origin (his family had fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685) Briullov raised Russian painting to the European level. He introduced Romantic warmth along with inspiration from pompous classicism and reproduced living, spiritual and physical human beauty. From his home in Italy, where he lived until 1853, Briullov painted diverse subjects and explored various genres. Although antique and biblical subjects soon became less important, the largest murals of the St. Isaac Cathedral were entrusted to him: the cupola, the four Evangelists, the twelve Apostles and also the four large compositions from the New Testament. His depiction of the Virgin in Majesty, surrounded by saints and angels, fills the interior of the impressive central dome (a ceiling of over 800 square metres rimmed by gold stucco and white marble). Today, we still have sketches of these compositions as well as preliminary drawings based on models. The paintings of the Evangelists and the Apostles are reminiscent of his *Siege of Pskov*. The damp, cold and stone dust in the newly built cathedral undermined his health, and in 1847 he was compelled, reluctantly, to abandon the murals, which he had hoped would be the crowning glory of his artistic career.

Two other painters who produced major historical and religious works were Anton Losenko (1737–73) and Alexander Ivanov, whose father – Andrei Ivanov (see above) – was a professor of historical painting at the Academy. Losenko was born in a small town in the Ukraine and orphaned when young. After a course of singing lessons, he was sent to Saint Petersburg because of his remarkable voice. There, at the age of sixteen, he was entrusted to the care of Argunov (by that time one of the leading portraitists), then studied at the Academy, where he eventually became professor of history painting. Losenko's artistic education was completed in Paris and Rome, and several of his religious works – such as *The Miraculous Catch* and *Abraham's Sacrifice* – show the influence of Italian Renaissance painting. Curiously, his *Cain* (1768) and *Abel* (1769) were intended as exercises in life painting and were only given their Biblical names several decades after his death.

A contemporary of Briullov, Alexander Ivanov was indisputably the most influential religious painter of his day. After making his mark with pictures such as *Apollo*, *Hyacinth and Zephyr* and *The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene* (1836), he embarked on *The Appearance of Christ to the People*, a huge canvas that was to occupy much of his energy for the next twenty years, from 1837 to the year before he died. Nevertheless, despite all those years of effort, Ivanov was never happy with the painting and never regarded it as finished. Indeed, it has an undeniably laboured quality, and many of his preparatory studies – landscapes, nature studies, nudes and portraits, including a head of John the Baptist that is masterpiece in its own right – have a vitality that is absent from the painting itself.

During the last decade of his life Ivanov produced more than 250 *Biblical Sketches*, many of them remarkable for their limpid colours and spiritual intensity. His great ambition was to convert these watercolour studies into murals for a temple that would encompass every aspect of human spirituality. This project, which drew on mythology, as well as Christian ideas, loomed so large in his imagination that he made endless excuses to avoid working on the interior of St. Isaac's Cathedral, in order to concentrate on the ideal temple taking shape in his mind.



11. Nikolai Gay, *Calvary* (Unfinished), 1893. Oil on canvas, 22.4 × 191.8 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



12. Ivan Kramskoï, *Christ in the Desert*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 180 × 120 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

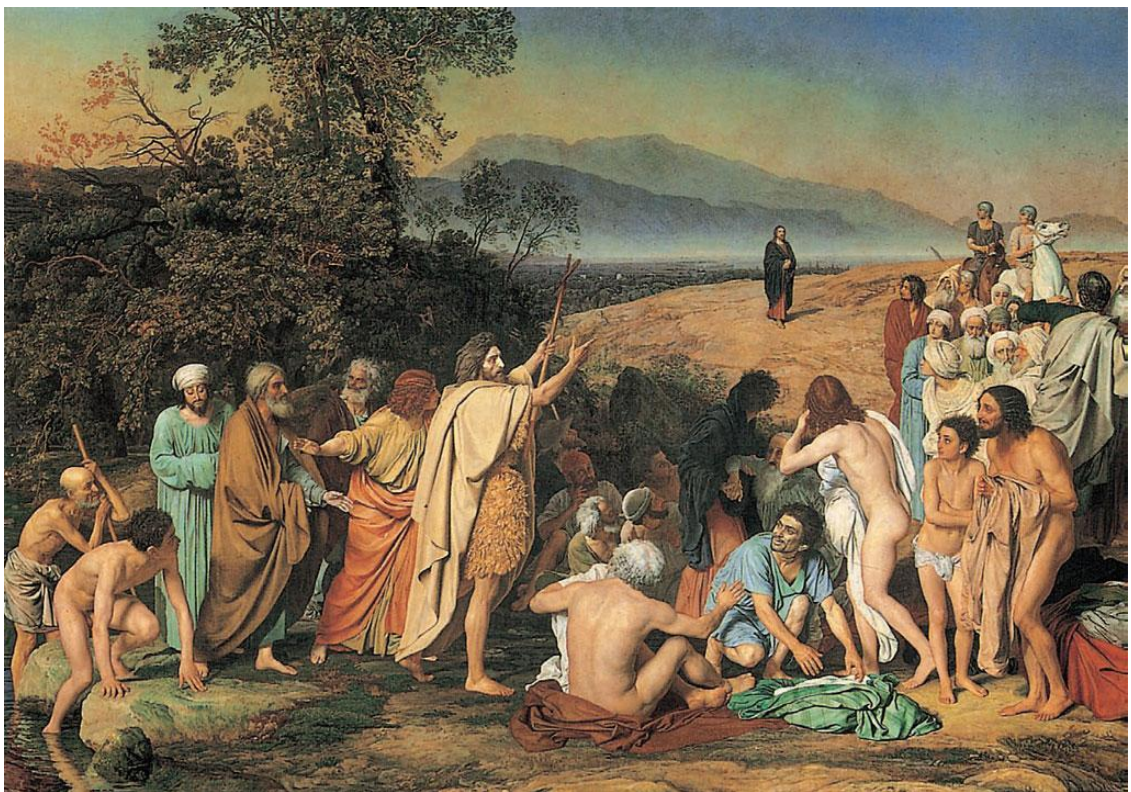
From the 1860s to the 1890s

The religious painting of the Itinerants was marked by an imaginative and psychological intensity that had not been seen since the days of Alexander Ivanov earlier in the nineteenth century.

During 1863, the year when the fourteen artists rebelled against the conservatism of the Academy, Nikolai Gay's powerful painting *The Last Supper* was exhibited in Saint Petersburg and roused passionate controversy. Dostoyevsky was among those who were disturbed by its realism and theatricality – the ghostly appearance of Judas, the disquieting shadows that fill the painting and, finally, the apprehension of the Apostles watching Judas leave, all contribute to the unusual atmosphere. The stakes were high, as many artists before him, including greats such as Leonardo da Vinci and Tintoretto, had tried their hand at portraying this biblical episode. But in his painting, the feelings of the characters, particularly exacerbated, deeply touched viewers. Gay set aside classical canons and yet achieved such an immense success (Emperor Alexander II himself bought the painting) that the Academy bestowed on him the title of professor. Later, he stated that it was by working on this painting that “he had at last grasped the modern meaning of the Holy Scriptures...” which was not a legend, but a real, living, eternal drama. Gay's later pictures, which he described as an attempt to create a “Gospel in paint”, were no less shocking. In several of them Christ is shown in a very human state of torment, looking more like a political prisoner than the son of God – a notion so shocking that “*Quid est veritas?*” (“What is Truth?”) had to be withdrawn when exhibited in 1860 because it was regarded as blasphemous. Nikolai Gay, contrary to Kramskoi or Polenov, did not intend to idealize the representation of Christ but wanted rather for the viewer to share in his suffering. This is apparent in *The Calvary* or in *The Crucifixion*. Christ resuscitated looks very human and he said, regarding this: “I will shake their brains by showing the suffering of Christ. I will force them to suffer without commiserating! After visiting the exposition, they will forget for a long time their small, banal concerns.” Through techniques and pictorial means such as contrast between light and dark, or the quickness of his brushstrokes, Gay managed to provide, with virtuosity expressive works that are very realistic.



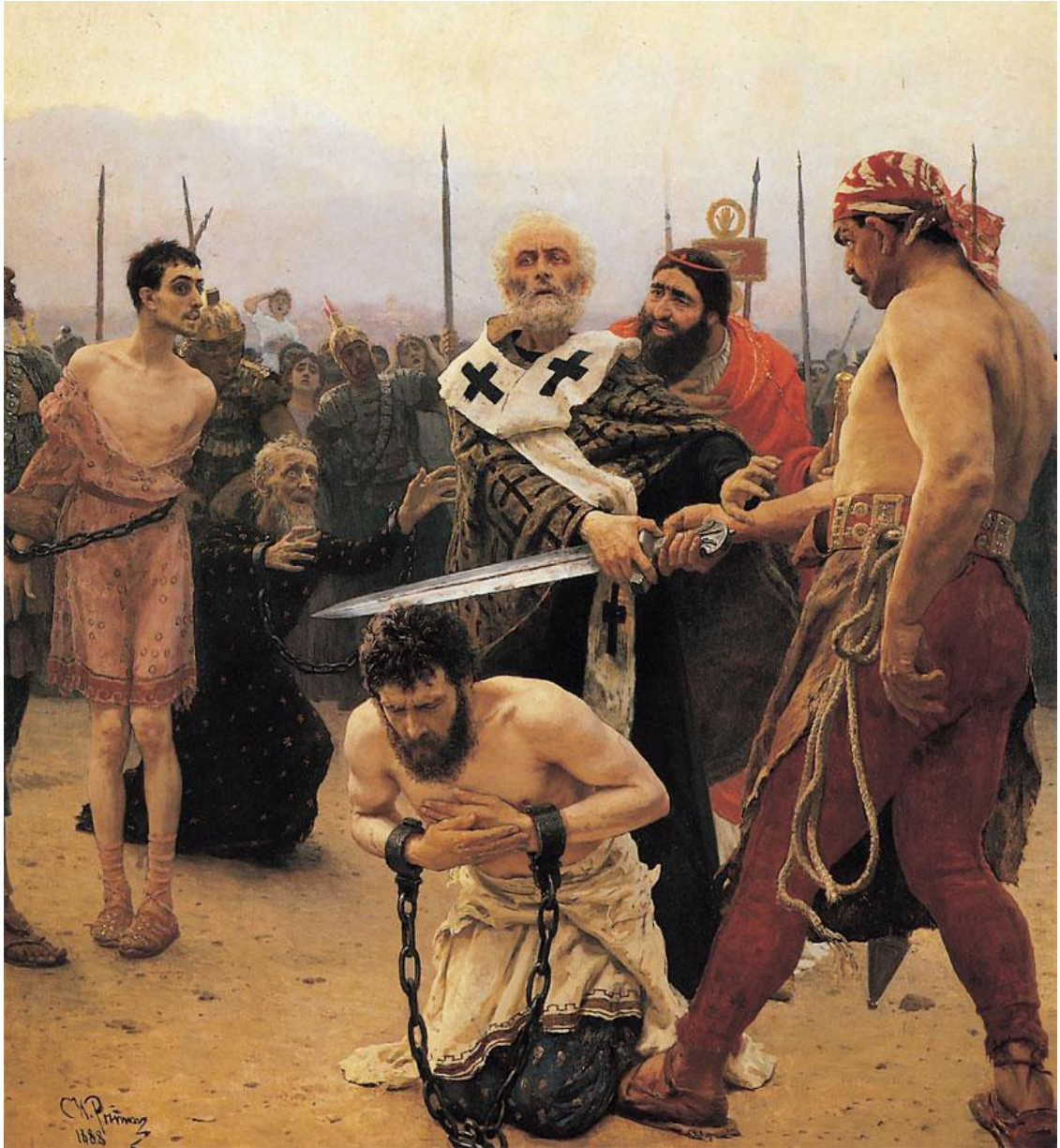
13. Nikolai Gay, *The Last Supper*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 283 × 382 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



14. Alexander Ivanov, *The Appearance of Christ to the People*, 1837–1857. Oil on canvas, 540 × 750 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



15. Ivan Kramskoï, *Laughter* (“*Hail, the King of the Jews!*”), 1877–1882. Oil on canvas, 375 × 501 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



16. Ilya Repin, *St. Nicholas of Myra Delivers The Three Innocent Men*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 215 × 196 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Nikolaï Gay was born into a noble family of French origin: his grandfather emigrated from France at the end of the eighteenth century during the French Revolution. The painter's parents died when he was still a child. He was raised by his nurse, who taught him, as he later explained, compassion for the poor. All his life, he remained sensitive to the misery of others. He entered the Academy of the Arts in Saint Petersburg in 1850, after having studied physics and mathematics for some time at university. At the Academy, he took classes with Pierre Basin, a painter who specialized in portraits and historical subjects. But, according to Gay himself, he was far more influenced by Karl Briullov. This influence is obvious in works of Nikolaï Gay's such as *Leila and Khadji-Abrek* (1852), *The Judgement of King Salomon* (1854) and *Achilles Mourning Patrocles* (1855).

All of these paintings, while very Romantic, correspond to the demands for classicism by the Academy. For his *The Witch of Endor calling the Prophet Samuel's spirit*, he received not only the gold medal but also became an academician in 1857. He then travelled for six years. During this

period, he discovered Germany, Switzerland and France and, in 1860, he finally settled in Italy. His interest in historical painting and portraits grew. In 1863 he returned to Saint Petersburg with his painting *The Last Supper* (1863). The following year Nikolaï Gay left the Academy where he was teaching to return to Italy, where he spent several years. He painted a portrait of his favourite Russian author, Alexander Herzen, in 1867. Upon his return to Saint Petersburg in 1870, he became one of the founders and directors of the Society for Itinerant Art Exhibitions. Then he turned his attention to the history of Russia. The painting *Peter the Great Interrogates his son Alexai in Peterhof* (1871), once again provoked widespread interest. Anew, the painting told the story of a historical father-son conflict. His other historical subjects had no success, either with critics or the general public. The painter took this failure very badly and lost confidence in his talent. In 1876 he bought a domain and went to live there. He stopped painting and devoted himself entirely to breeding and farming. Early in the 1880s he came back to art thanks to Tolstoy, whom he met. The two became close friends. From this time on, he devoted himself to biblical subjects and to portraits. Among the most famous portraits are those of the writer Saltydov Shchedrin, the poet N. Nekrasov and of Leon Tolstoy and members of the Tolstoy family. *Sanhedrin's Judgement: He is guilty!* (1892) was refused at the annual exhibition of the Academy of the Arts; *The Calvary* or *Golgotha*, (1893) remained unfinished, as for *The Crucifixion* (1894), it was banished by Alexander III. The artist died suddenly in 1894.



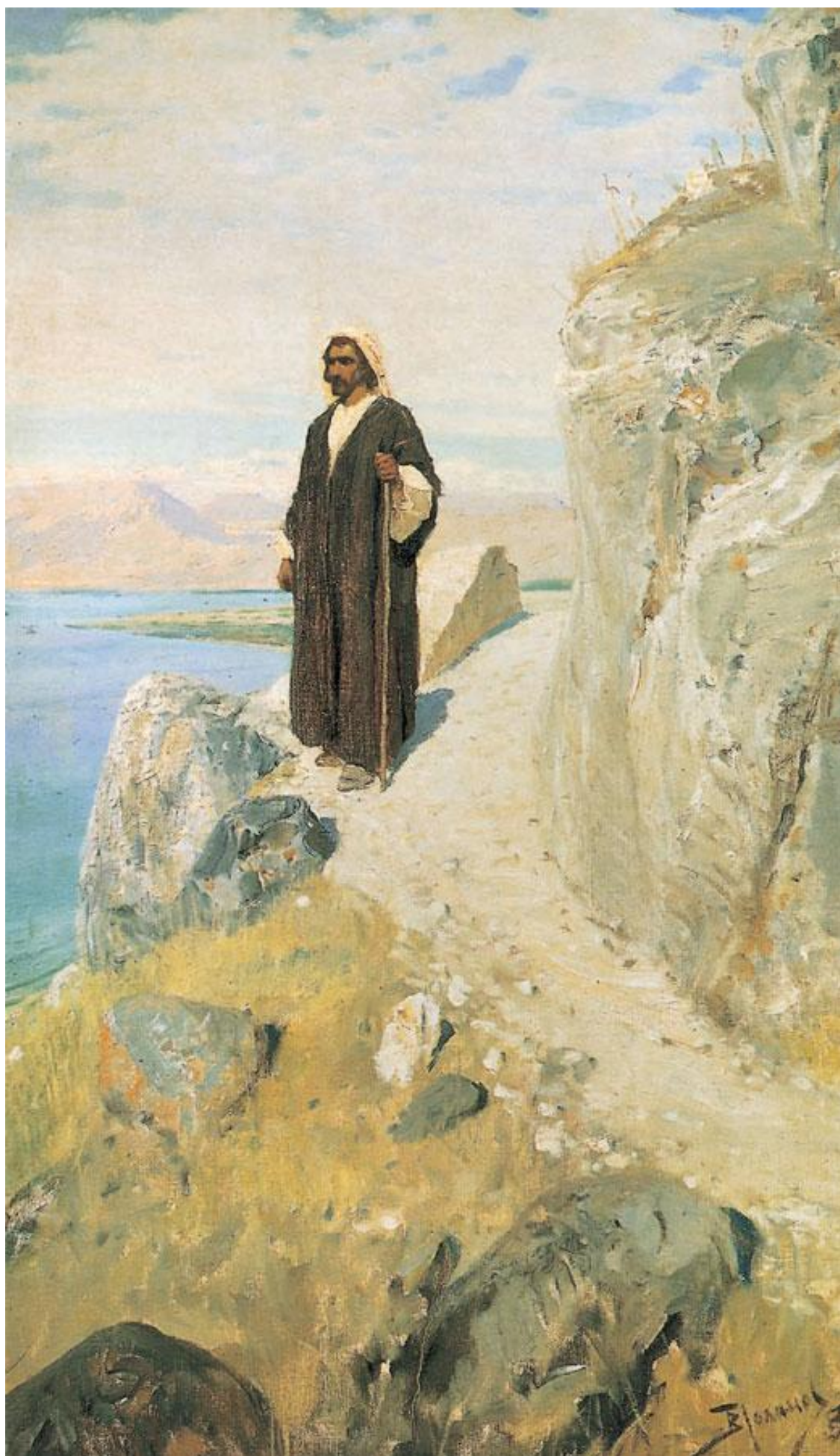
17. Ilya Repin, *The Raising of Jairu's Daughter*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 213 × 382 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Kramskoï's *Christ in the Desert* also caused a sensation when exhibited, in 1872. It shows Christ in a state of agonized indecision and dejection, hands clasped together out of tension, not in prayer. Kramskoï felt both impelled and daunted by the urge to paint Christ in a way that had never been attempted before, and said that he painted the picture with his own "blood and tears". Repeatedly, the painter expressed his doubts as to what he was attempting to represent. "Is it Christ? No, it isn't Christ, or, to be more precise, I don't know who it is. It is more the expression of my own thoughts. (...) driven by the circumstances of life, I perceived of existence as something tragic. I very clearly saw that in the life of each man, created with variable success on the model of God, sooner or later a moment comes when he must choose which path to take: turn to the right or the left,

betray God for a rouble or resist Evil.” This lends depth to the painting, which hereby represents the quest and the duty of every man rather than remaining a simple religious picture. As for the painting *Laughter* (“*Hail, King of The Jews!*”), he worked on it for five years before leaving it unfinished. “As long as we chatter lightly about Good and Honesty, we will remain on good terms with everyone. Try to put your ideas into practice and you will hear laughter spring up all around you,” he said. As the previous painting does, this piece goes further than simple picturing.

Both Repin and Vassily Polenov produced paintings of Jesus raising the daughter of Jairus. Although both admirably express Jesus’ charisma, Repin’s work is certainly richer in emotion. This is the painting that was given the gold medal of the Academy of the Arts in 1870. In it, the influence of Ivanov’s *The Appearance of Christ to the People* is gripping: sobriety in the relationships of colour, restraint and modesty in movements, this religious episode is solemn and profound.

Repin was born in a province of Kharkv (the Ukraine) in 1844. As of 12 years old, he joined Ivan Bounakov’s studio to learn the icon painter’s craft. Religious representations always remained of great importance for him. Later, he studied at the Academy of the Arts in Saint Petersburg from 1864 to 1873 under Kramskoï. The Tretyakov Gallery began to purchase his works in 1872. With his wife and children, he left for visits to Vienna, Rome and to study in Paris for two years, where he was strongly influenced by outdoor painting without, however, becoming an Impressionist, a style that he judged too distant from reality. Taken with French pictorial culture, he worked to understand its role in the evolution of contemporary art. From 1874 to 1875, he exhibited at the Paris Salon and participated in the Society for Itinerant Art Exhibitions in Saint Petersburg. A year later, he was named academician. Seen as one of the masters of realist painting, he devoted himself to portraying the lives of his contemporaries: the most renowned Russian writers, artists, intellectuals; peasants at work; the faithful in procession; revolutionaries on the barricades. There are also a number of portraits of his friends: Tolstoy, Gay...



18. Vassily Polenov, *Returning to Galilee in the Power of the Spirit*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 131 × 75.5 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



19. Vassily Polenov, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 325 × 622 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Two traits of Repin's talent deserve special attention. He understood the pains of the people perfectly, the needs and the joys of ordinary lives. Kramskoï said on this subject, "Repin has a gift for showing the peasant as he is. I know many painters who show the *moujik*, and they do it well, but none can do so with as much talent as Repin." In 1886, he made a good number of sketches on biblical subjects. He left to travel for a year and withdrew, in 1887, from the Society for Itinerant Exhibitions. In 1888 he worked particularly on *St. Nicholas Saves three Innocents from Death* to express his opposition to the death penalty. He went to Paris for the World Fair. In 1891, he was elected to the Governmental Commission for the Elaboration of New Statutes of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. A year later, he left the Society for Itinerant Exhibitions because he did not agree with the new statutes which limited the rights of young artists admitted to the Society. He became a member once again in 1897, the year in which he was named rector for a year of the *Ecole Supérieur des Arts*. Four years later he received the Order of the Legion of Honor. That same year, he painted several portraits of Tolstoy, whose spiritual authority he revered. He went as far as to immortalise Tolstoy as a ploughman. He was honoured in Helsinki in 1920, when he had been living in Finland for some time already. He worked on *St. Thomas' Doubt*, *The Prophet Elijah carried to Heaven*, *Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalena* and, a year later, in 1923, a personal exhibition was consecrated to him in Prague. Next it would be Moscow and, in 1925, in the Russian Museum in Leningrad. The same year, he exhibited *Golgotha* in Oslo. He died in 1930 and was buried in the park of the "Penates". Repin attained immense stature in Russia and outside of its national frontiers.

Polenov's enormous *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* is so packed with worldly detail that it seems more like a secular painting than a religious work. During the later part of his life, Polenov produced a series of paintings inspired by Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863), a book that had a huge impact on artists and writers both in Russia and elsewhere. Indeed, David Frédéric Strauss and Ernest Renan who both wrote books entitled *The Life of Jesus*, brought to

light the positive side of Christ's life. This positivism had immense success throughout Russia, an even greater success than in the Occident, thanks especially to these two books. Renan's book in particular emphasized another point that influenced many Russian artists, including Tolstoy, Nikolai Gay, Kramskoi and, of course, Polenov. According to Renan, Jesus deserved to be called on by God, not because he possessed within himself something divine, but rather because he taught men to elevate themselves toward an ideal. Polenov was among those who were impacted by Renan. He therefore attempted to portray Christ as he was in reality. Thanks to trips he made to Syria, Egypt and Palestine, he was able to reproduce with an impressive number of historical details *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. But his work cannot be limited to simple ethnographic, historic or geographical details. It raises the question of humanity. Christ is of the "best of men" and portraying him in this way was the objective of the painter and the historian. This work was displayed in the fifteenth itinerant exhibition.

Among the Itinerants, the evangelical theme played a very important role. Many paintings testify to Christian morals: giving of oneself, love of others, Christ's suffering for his people... All of these scenes encourage the viewer to rise toward the ideal that he has set for himself. In addition, the theme of salvation particularly attracted Russian artists who, here again, found a way to better man and the human condition. It was more the idea of morals that had a value in and of themselves. Occidental art, to date, had never managed to raise itself to such a level of pathos.



20. Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, *The Mother of God of Tenderness Towards Evil Hearts*, 1914–1915. Oil on canvas, 100 × 110 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Portraiture



21. Ivan Argounov, *Portrait of an unknown Girl in Russian Dress*, 1784. Oil on canvas, 67 × 53.6 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



22. Ivan Nikitin, *Portrait of a Leader*, 1720. Oil on canvas, 76 × 60 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

From the Eighteenth Century to the 1860s

In Russia, the eighteenth century was the century of the portrait. Other than icon painting, the patronage of the tsars, wealthy nobles or merchants was virtually the only source of income available to Russian painters. Perfecting their skills as portraitists was therefore high on the agenda of the five painters sent to study abroad, in 1716, by Peter the Great.

One of the five was Ivan Nikitin. The son of a priest, he began his artistic career by studying drawing and arithmetic at an artillery college. Noticed by the tsar, he was dispatched to Italy, together with his brother Roman, an able though more conventional painter. In the portrait of Peter the Great that Ivan painted in 1721, the emperor is shown without attributes of power and with a degree of intimacy rarely encountered in royal portraits. Four years later, he painted an emotionally charged portrait of the tsar on his deathbed. Ivan's last years were overshadowed by tragedy. After the death of Peter the Great, he opposed the regime of Anna Ivanovna and in 1736 was deported to Siberia, together with his brother. By the time they were pardoned, Ivan was critically ill, and he died on the way back from Siberia.

Another of the artists sponsored by Peter the Great was Andreï Matveyev, who was sent to study in Holland. Obligated to paint battle scenes, ceilings and panels for the palaces of the tsars, he lacked freedom to fully develop the talent for portraiture evident in works such as *The Allegory of Painting* (1725) and the portrait that he painted of himself and his wife in 1729. Matveyev was a fine colourist, and his works are full of pleasing nuances. They also hint at his desire to break new ground, to bring a more psychological approach to portraiture.

The 1730s saw appreciable changes in Russian society. Intent on strengthening their position vis-a-vis the State, the aristocracy strove to show their standing by displaying the superiority and sophistication of their tastes and lifestyle, especially through the embellishment of the interiors of their homes. Portraits offered a means of self-aggrandisement and of conveying status. By the 1760s they were in evidence everywhere – not only at the court in Saint Petersburg, but in remote parts of Russia too.

Some of the most accomplished portraits from the mid-eighteenth century were produced by Ivan Vishnyakov (1699–1761). Continuing Matveyev's tendency towards lyricism, they possess the decorative qualities typical of the Rococo style then prevalent in Russia, without the frivolity generally associated with it. Instead, their static poses and facial expressions have an air of seriousness, focusing attention on the subject's face. Vishnyakov was at his most sensitive when portraying children; their elaborate clothes and frozen poses underline the innocence and vulnerability of these diminutive lords and ladies. Despite the formality of his portraits, relatively few of them were commissioned by the Imperial court.



23. Fyodor Rokotov, *Portrait of Alexei Bobrinsky in Childhood*, c. 1763. Oil on canvas, 59.5 × 47 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



24. Alexei Antropov, *Portrait of Maria Rurnyantseva*, 1764. Oil on canvas, 62.5 × 48 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



25. Dmitri Levitsky, *Portrait of Maria Diakova*, 1778. Oil on canvas, 72 × 57 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



26. Vladimir Borovikovsky, *Portrait of Maria Lopoukhina*, 1797. Oil on canvas, 72 × 53.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



27. Vassily Tropinin, *Lacemaker*, 1823. Oil on canvas, 74.7 × 59.3 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

This adoration of portraiture continued during the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, when Russia enjoyed a blossoming of the arts and sciences and an expansion of education – thanks largely to the influence of Mikhaïl Lomonosov (1711–65), a man of immense learning and wide cultural interests who became a professor of chemistry at the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg in 1745. Russian sculpture in particular benefited from these stimuli – and so did portraiture, which developed in two ways. Although there was a greater demand for elaborate formal portraits, there was also an increased realism in the way people were portrayed.

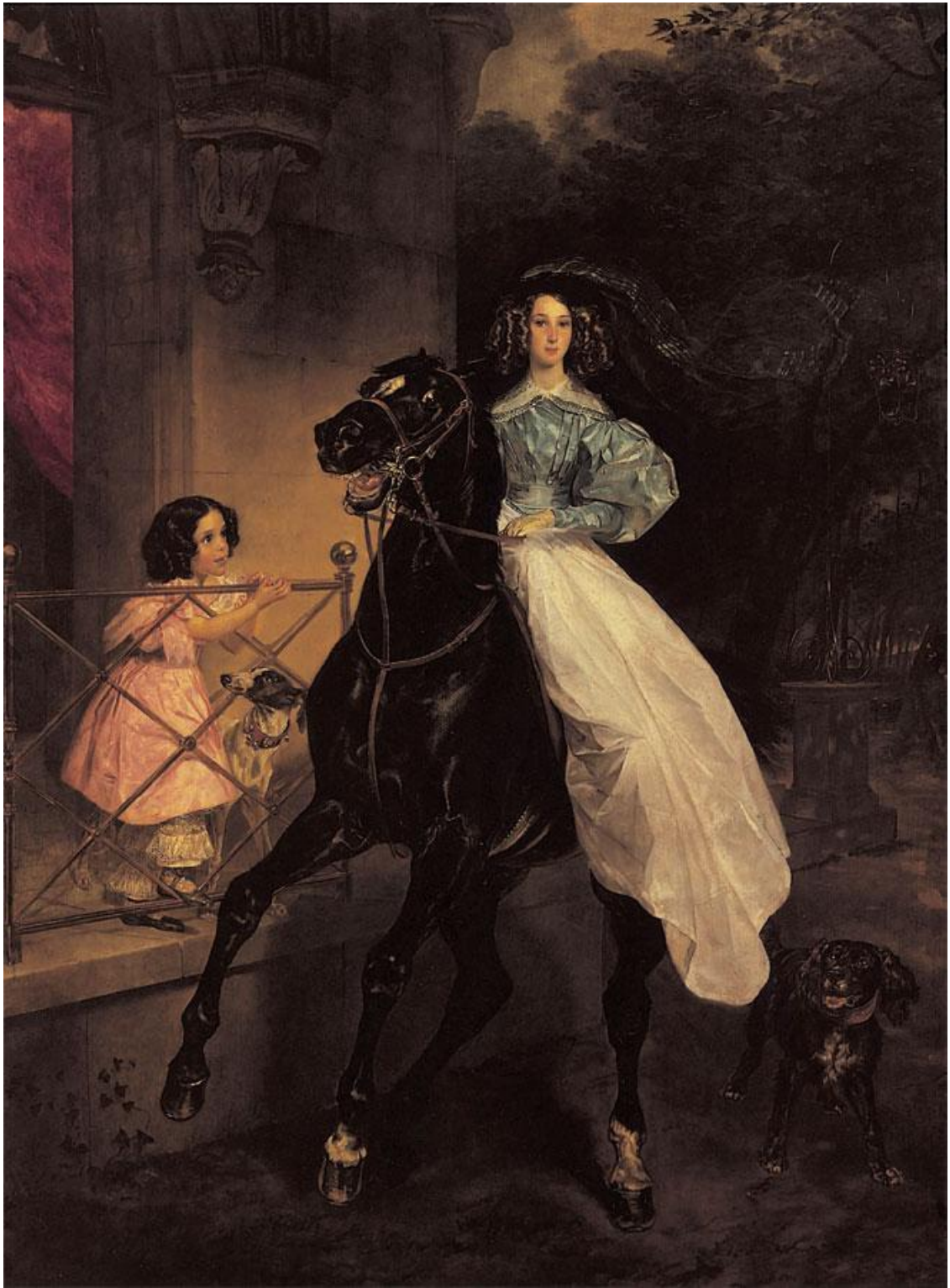
This development in portraiture was clearly demonstrated in the work of Alexeï Antropov who first studied with Matveyev and then worked for nearly twenty years under the direction of Vishnyakov, concentrating primarily on learning to paint formal portraits. Flags, columns and other decorative accessories tended to be featured in these portraits, along with luxuriant robes and drapery, all painted in lively colours. In deference to convention, they were normally full-length. Despite the inhibiting nature of official portraiture, Antropov managed to achieve a remarkable degree of veracity. The portraits, both formal and informal, that he painted during the 1750s and 1760s show him at his best.

Antropov's contemporary Ivan Argunov painted numerous portraits of artists and their families. By the middle of the eighteenth century he was already considered a leading portrait painter, and he received a great variety of commissions – probably greater than any other Russian artist of his time. His portraits range from the Empress and members of the court to the serfs and ancestors of his wealthy patron, Count Sheremetyev. While Antropov's style – with its rather static quality and detached feeling – is sometimes reminiscent of the *parsunas*, Argunov's work is generally more immediate and less austere.

In addition to Argunov, among the portrait painters of the second half of the eighteenth century, three stand out for the brilliance of their work: Rokotov, Levitsky and Borovikovsky. Their styles, however, are very different. Surprisingly, although highly regarded by his contemporaries, Fyodor Rokotov was completely forgotten during the period following his death and was only rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century. Initially he worked as a court painter in Saint Petersburg, where he produced portraits remarkable for their individuality and vivacity, among them his *Portrait of the young Alexeï Bobrinsky*. In 1767 Rokotov moved to Moscow, where he became the portraitist most sought after by Muscovite society. Once he was freed from the constraints of court painting, his portraits – especially those intended for the interiors of private houses – became more intimate. Particularly in his later works, he increasingly made use of *sfumazo* (almost imperceptible colour transitions), and a silvery tonal range to reproduce the delicate sheen of his sitters' satins, silks and velvets.



28. Vassily Tropinin, *Portrait of the Writer Varvara Lizogub*, 1847. Oil on canvas, 82.5 × 68 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



29. Karl Briullov, *Rider, Portrait of Giovannina and Amazillia Paccini*, 1832. Oil on canvas, 291.5 × 206 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



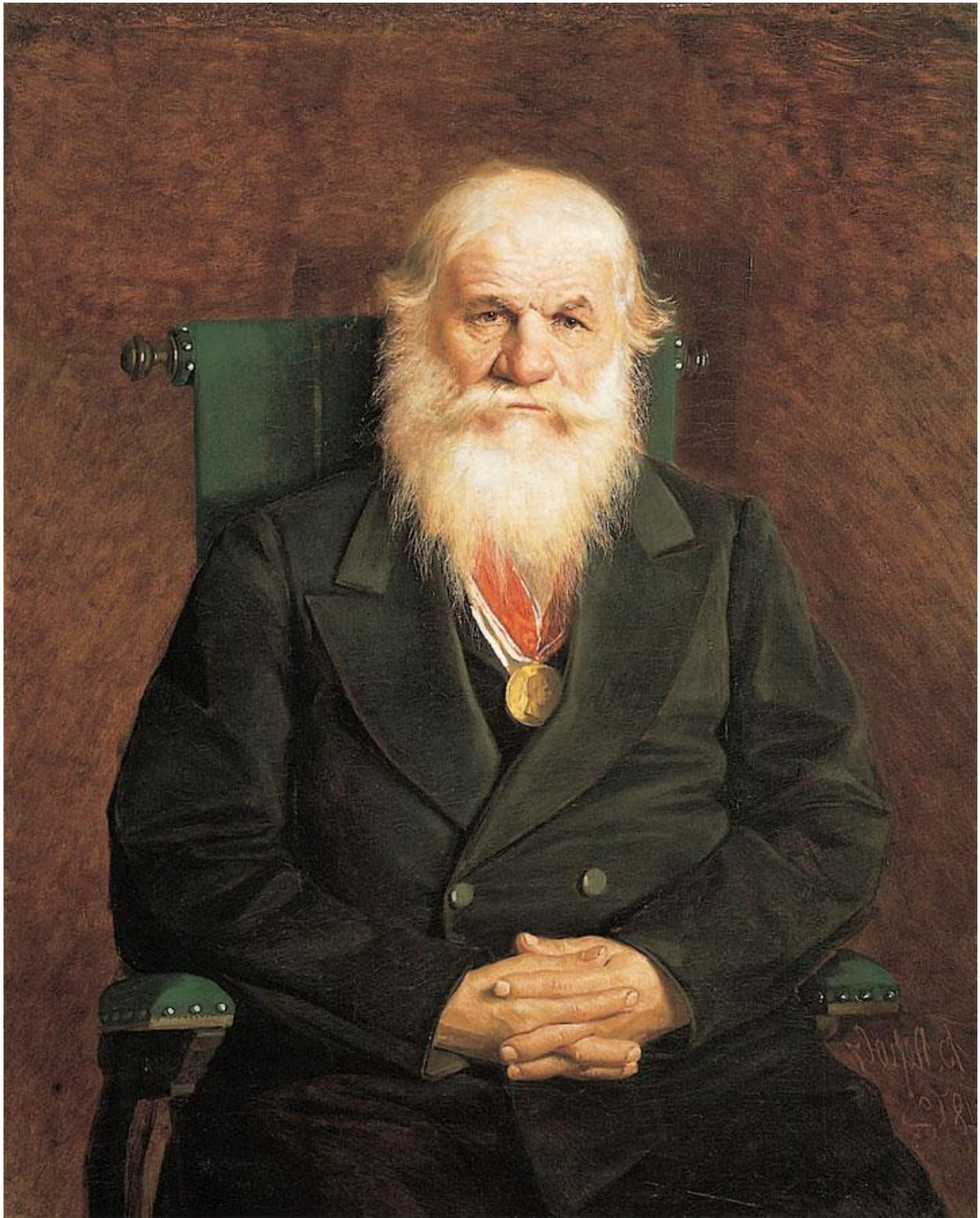
30. Alexei Venetsianov, *Reaper*, before 1827. Oil on canvas, 82.5 × 68 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



31. Karl Briullov, *Portrait of the Artist with Baroness Yekaterina Meller-Zakomelskaya and her Daughter in a Boat*, 1833–35. Oil on canvas, 151.5 × 190.3 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



32. Karl Briullov, *Italian Midday*, 1827. Oil on canvas, 64 × 55 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



33. Vassily Perov, *Portrait of the Merchant Ivan Kamynin*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 104 × 84.3 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



34. Vassily Perov, *Portrait of the Writer Alexander Ostrovsky*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 103.5 × 80.7 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Dmitri Levitsky differed from Rokotov in that he possessed a marvellous ability to interpret and express personality. Every detail is painted with care, yet a feeling of spontaneity is never absent from his work. The son of a priest who was a gifted engraver, Levitsky was born in the Ukraine. After studying with Antropov, he spent a few years producing icons for churches in Moscow, then taught portrait painting at the Academy from 1771 to 1788. Levitsky excelled at female portraiture, as can be seen from his paintings of the aristocratic Ursula Mnischev and Maria Diakova, the wife of architect, painter and poet Nikolai Lvov. Between 1773 and 1776, at the request of Catherine

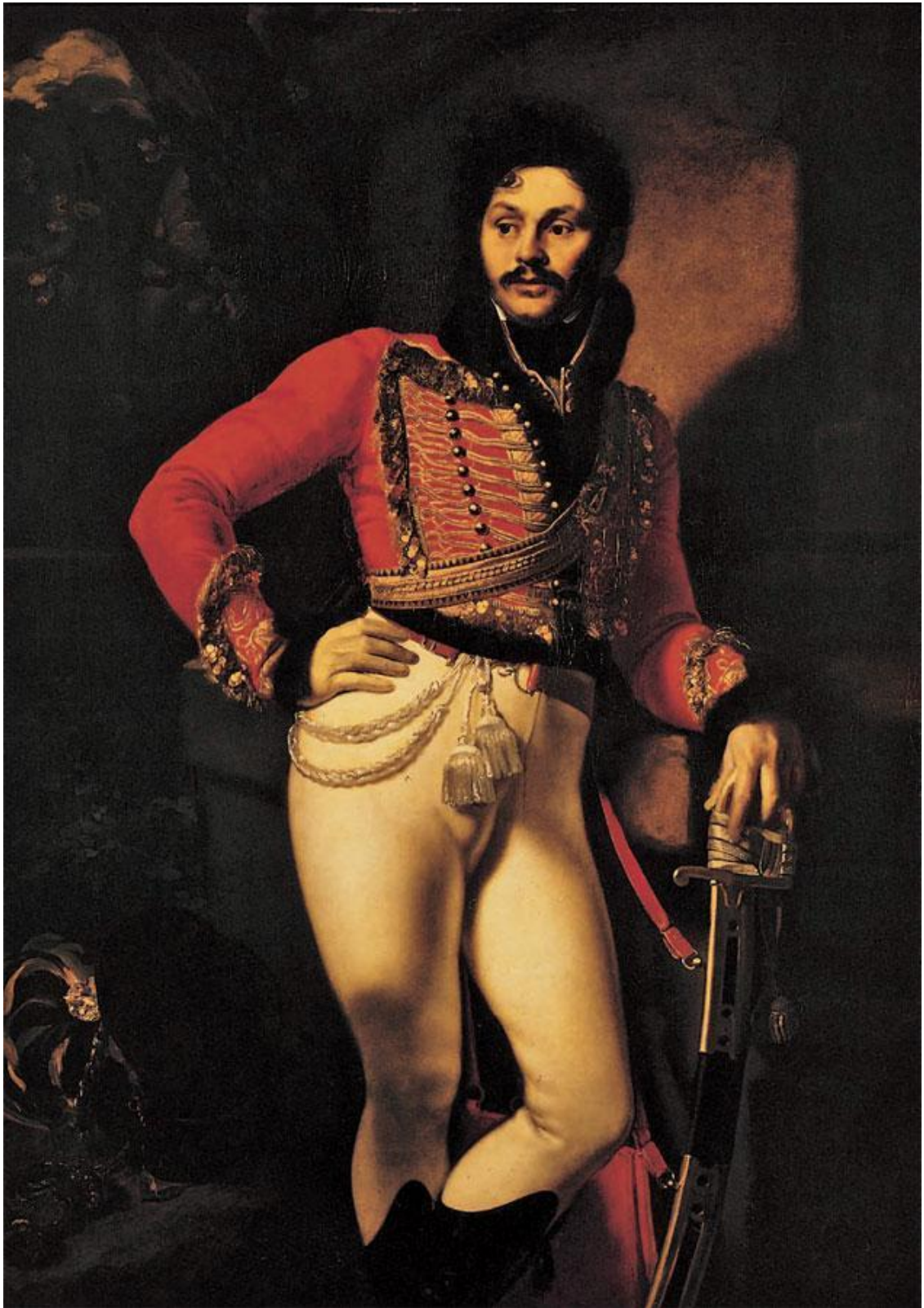
the Great, he painted a series of portraits of her favourite pupils at Smolny Institute (the school she founded for the education of young noblewomen), showing them engaged in such activities as amateur dramatics, playing the harp or dancing the minuet. Thanks to his portraits of foreign visitors to Saint Petersburg – among them Diderot – Levitsky acquired a reputation outside Russia (his style was even compared with that of Boucher and Watteau). In 1788 illness forced him to retire from the Academy, where he had been the principal teacher of portraiture. During the last thirty years of his life he hardly painted at all.

A member of an old Cossack family, Vladimir Borovikovsky (1757–1825) was the son of an icon painter. He lived in Mirgorod until 1788, where he painted icons and portraits in the Ukrainian tradition. In 1790, after Catherine the Great expressed her delight at the allegorical decorations which he had been commissioned to paint in honour of her triumphal tour of the Crimea, Borovikovsky moved to Saint Petersburg, where he studied with Levitsky and the Austrian portrait painter Johann-Baptist Lampi. That same year he painted a portrait of Catherine the Great, looking more grandmotherly than regal, walking her favourite dog in the park at Tsarskoe Selo. Borovikovsky's portraits of women – often attired in Grecian gowns and backed by a sylvan setting – have been likened to those by Gainsborough and Angelica Kauffmann. In many of them, the sitter is portrayed with the fingers of one hand delicately curled round an apple. As late as the 1790s, Borovikovsky's work was tinged with sentimentalism. Then at the beginning of the nineteenth century he adopted a more classical style, producing works like the *Portrait of Prince Alexander Kurakin* that he completed in 1802.

This classical style adopted by Borovikovsky at the start of the nineteenth century led to Romanticism which was beginning to influence Russian portraiture. Painters began to express themselves more freely, and self-portraits became increasingly common. With its accent on individuality, Romanticism was a perfect match for the self-portrait – which was, after all, a vehicle for psychological probing and spiritual revelation. It also led to important changes of form. In order to focus attention on the face, the sitter's clothes were given less prominence. For the same reason, a neutral background tended to be used.



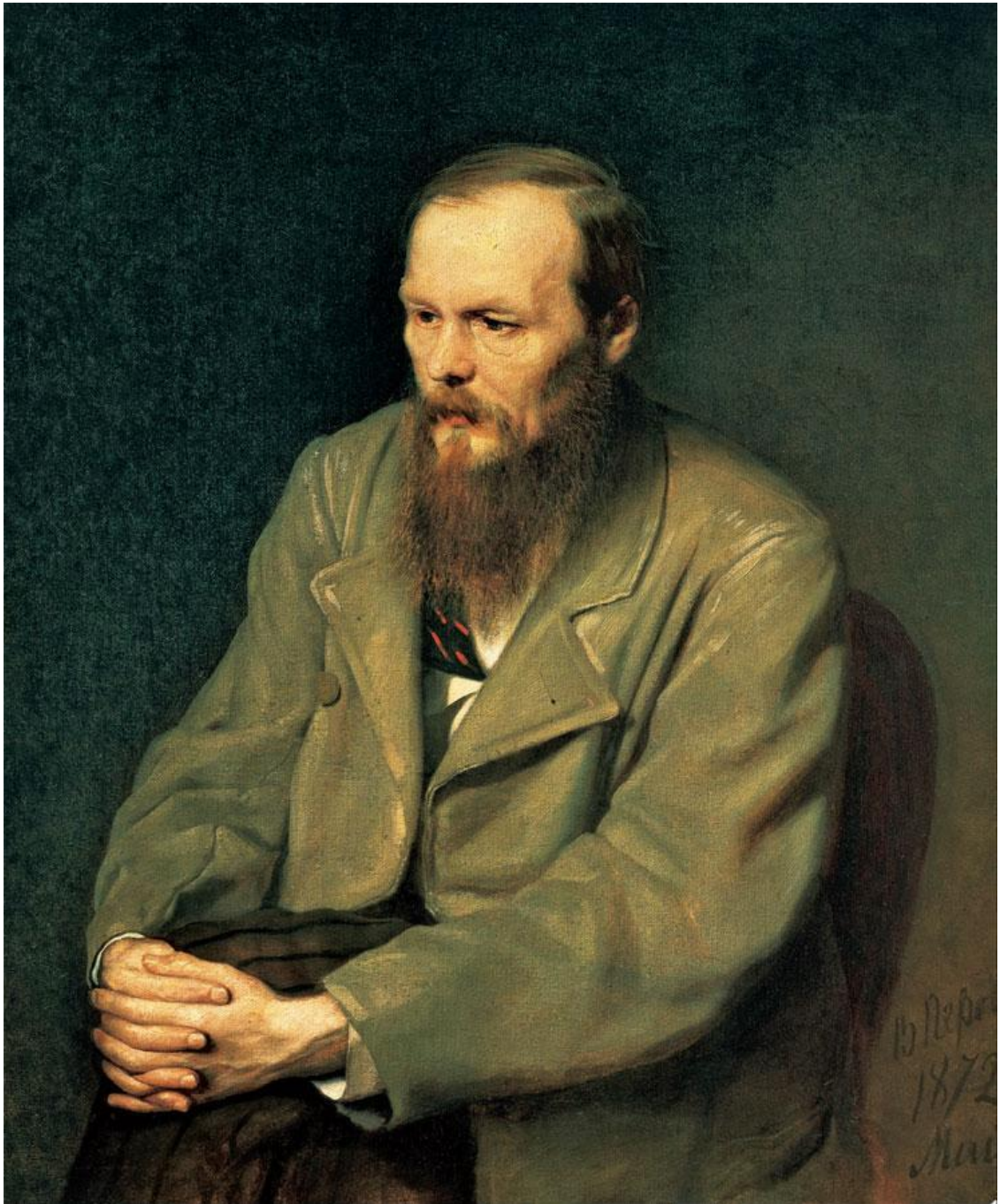
35. Vladimir Borovikovsky, *Portrait of Prince Alexander Kourakine*, 1801–1802. Oil on canvas, 259 × 175 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



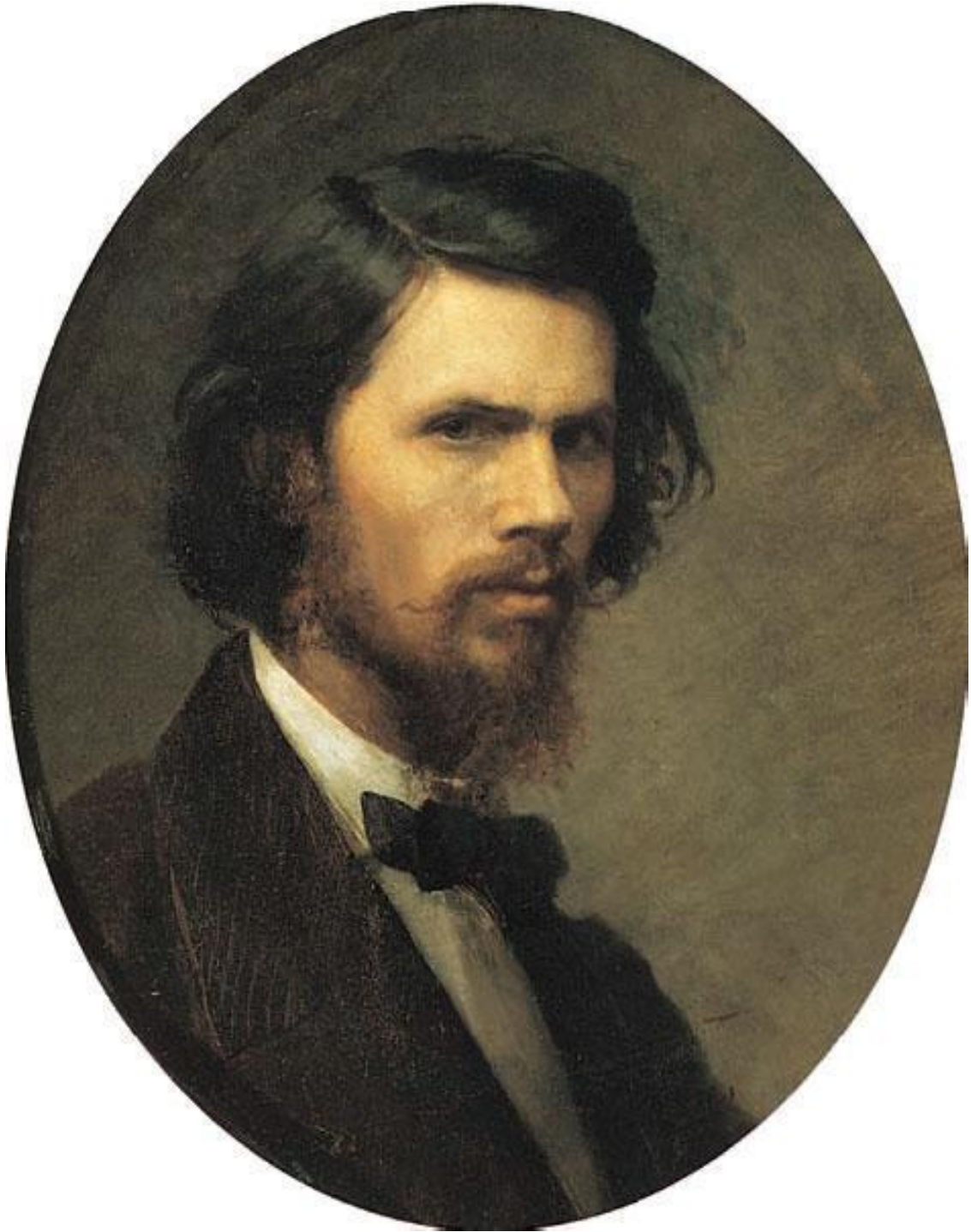
36. Orest Kiprensky, *Portrait of Life Guard Colonel Yevgraf Davydov*, 1809. Oil on canvas, 162 × 116 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



37. Orest Kiprensky, *Portrait of Alexander Pushkin*, 1827. Oil on canvas, 63 × 54 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



38. Vassily Perov, *Portrait of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 99 × 80.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



39. Ivan Kramskoi, *Self-portrait*, 1867. Oil on canvas, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Romantic portraiture found its fullest expression in the art of Orest Kiprensky, who painted several self-portraits, including a very painterly one, with brushes stuck behind his ear. Kiprensky's own life bore the hallmarks of Romanticism. The illegitimate son of an aristocratic army officer, he studied painting at the Academy (where he was enrolled at the age of six) and rapidly became a successful portrait painter. Then in 1805, he was awarded a travelling scholarship, and as soon as the Napoleonic Wars ended he departed for Rome. There he led a fairly bohemian life, and found himself the subject of scandal when an Italian model and a manservant died as a result of a fire at his house. In 1828, after four years back home in Russia, he returned to Italy, married the model's

daughter (whom he had entrusted to a convent school) and spent the next eight years roaming Italy with her, until his death from tuberculosis in 1836.

At the Academy, Kiprensky had learned to paint so flawlessly that his brush strokes are practically invisible and his pictures have an ivory-smooth finish. They also display an exceptional ability to convey character and to achieve subtle effects of colour and light. In them it is possible to see something of the spirit of the great Russian poets and novelists of the nineteenth century. Among his best-known works are the portrait of Pushkin that he painted in 1827 and the one of Colonel Yevgraf Davydov, an aristocratically nonchalant cavalry officer (and poet), who seems to have stepped straight out of the pages of *War and Peace*. When in Paris in 1822, Kiprensky was invited to exhibit at the Salon. He also had the distinction of being asked to provide the Uffizi Gallery with a self-portrait for their permanent collection.

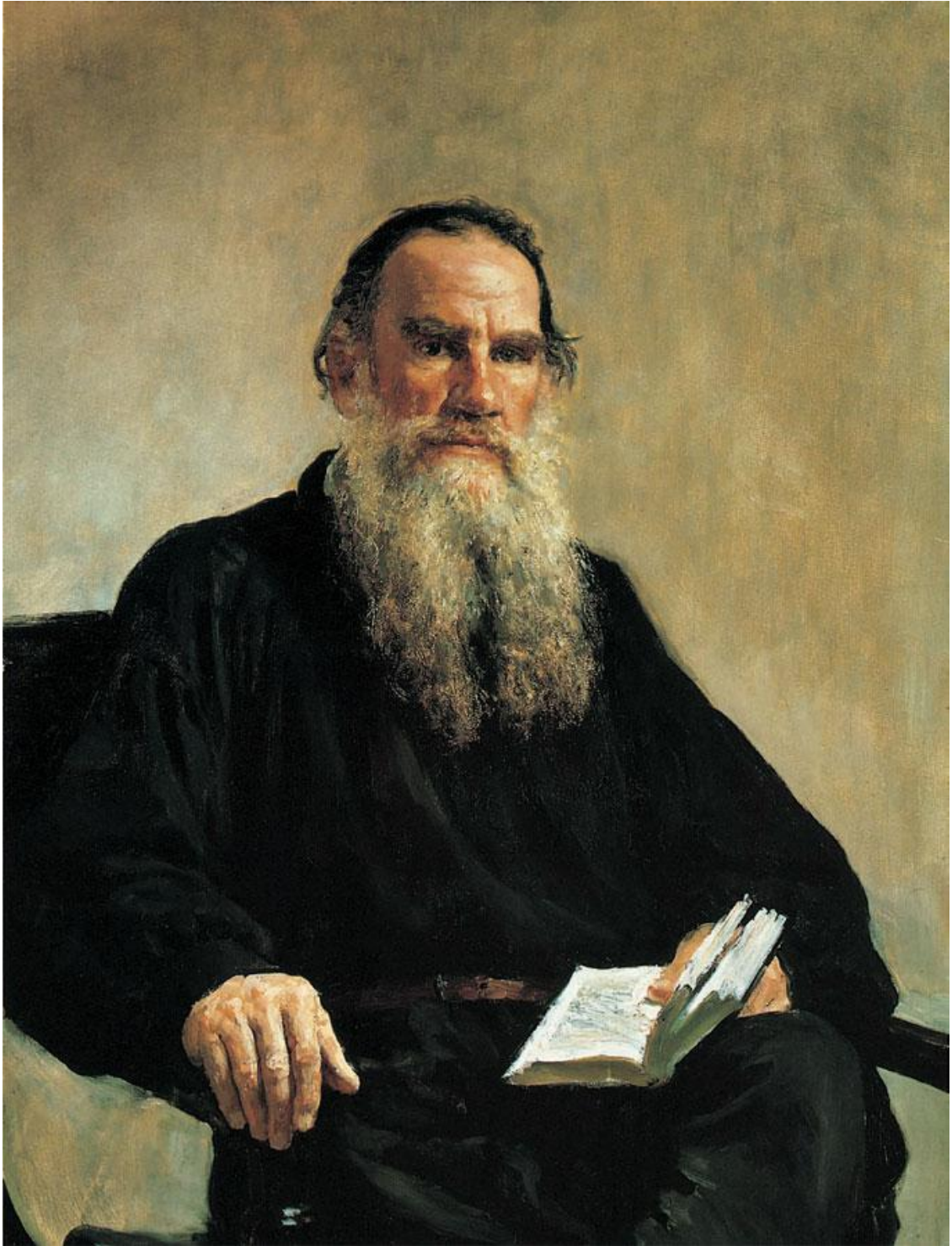
The career of Vassily Tropinin was very different from Kiprensky's. Born a serf, he was given to Count Morkov as part of his wife's dowry and spent the first part of his life on the Count's estate in the Ukraine. When Morkov discovered that Tropinin possessed artistic ability, he used him to make copies of famous works of art and also to paint portraits of his family. In 1799 Morkov sent Tropinin to Saint Petersburg to train as a pastry-cook. Tropinin seized the opportunity to attend classes at the Academy, at first secretly and then with Morkov's approval. But in 1804, Morkov recalled him to the Ukraine to continue working on his estate, both as a servant and as an artist. Eventually, in 1823 – when he was nearly forty-eight – Morkov granted Tropinin his freedom.

The following year Tropinin received the title of academician and moved to Moscow, where he painted portraits of celebrities (including Pushkin and Karamzin) and numerous foreign visitors. In the 1820s he began painting "genre portraits" depicting women at work, with titles such as *Lacemaker*, *Spinner and Embroidress*, which are remarkable for their realism and directness. Masterpieces from the later part of his life include his refreshingly unaffected portrait of the writer Varvara Lizogub, and one of his most memorable works is the very natural portrait of his own son painted in 1818.

Like Tropinin, Alexei Venetsianov was in his true element when painting ordinary people. The quiet realism of his work represented an important step in the development of Russian painting and had a clearly discernible influence for several decades. Until the age of thirty-nine, Venetsianov worked as a draughtsman and land surveyor in the civil service. After taking up residence in Saint Petersburg in 1802, he studied with Borovikovsky and ran a newspaper advertisement offering his services as a portrait painter. In 1811 he received a distinction from the Academy for his self-portrait, which rivals Chardin's for its frankness, and it was for a portrait of Golovachevsky (one of the professors) that he was nominated as an academician. Nevertheless, in March 1823 he decided to devote his energies primarily to genre painting, and wrote "Venetsianov hereby relinquishes his portrait painting" on the back of a portrait he had just completed.



40. Karl Briullov, *Self-Portrait*, 1848. Oil on board, 64 × 54 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



41. Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Leo Tolstoy*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 124 × 88 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



42. Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Modest Moussorgski*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 69 × 57 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



43. Ilya Repin, *Autumn Bouquet: Portrait of Vera Repina, the Artist's Daughter*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 111 × 65 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

With, Venetsianov, however, the distinction between portraiture and genre painting is often blurred, as can be seen from his *Girl with a Birch-Bark Jar* and *Reaper*, both painted after 1823. And, he clearly did not take his “relinquishment” of portraiture very seriously, since he afterwards painted affectionate portraits of his wife, daughter and young serfs and peasants – including a series in which he portrayed various peasant girls with face and hair framed by a shawl. In 1834 he painted a portrait of Gogol, whose progressive ideas he greatly admired.

Venetsianov's declared aim was “to depict nothing in any way different from how it appears in nature... without recourse to the style of any other artist, that is, not to paint à la Rembrandt, à la Rubens and so forth, but simply, so to speak, à la Nature”. In 1819 he resigned from the civil service and went to live at Safonkovo, the country estate to the east of Moscow that he had bought a few years earlier. At Safonkovo, he started teaching some of his neighbours and their serfs to paint. In the end, more than seventy pupils had absorbed his approach to art, including several who became popular teachers and transmitted his ideas to the next generation.

Among Venetsianov's contemporaries, the most popular Russian portrait painter was undoubtedly Karl Briullov, whose fashionable clients in Rome and Saint Petersburg were very different from the shepherds and dairymaids that sat for Venetsianov in Safonkovo. Briullov was taught to paint by his father, a Huguenot woodcarver, before going to the preparatory school of the Academy at the age of ten. Then in 1822 he was awarded a grant which enabled him to travel to Italy, where he stayed until 1835. Briullov's portraits from the 1820s are unmistakably Romantic in spirit, and some of his outdoor portraits from that period, such as his watercolour of Cyril and Maria Naryshkin, have an Italian setting. In 1827 he painted one of his most delightful and best known works, a picture of a girl gathering grapes (intended as part of a series of genre portraits), to which he gave the title *Italian Midday*.

Towards the end of the 1820s and during the 1830s he produced increasingly large and elaborate compositions, such as *The Portrait of the Artist with Baroness Yekaterina Meller-Zakomelskaya and her Daughter in a Boat*.

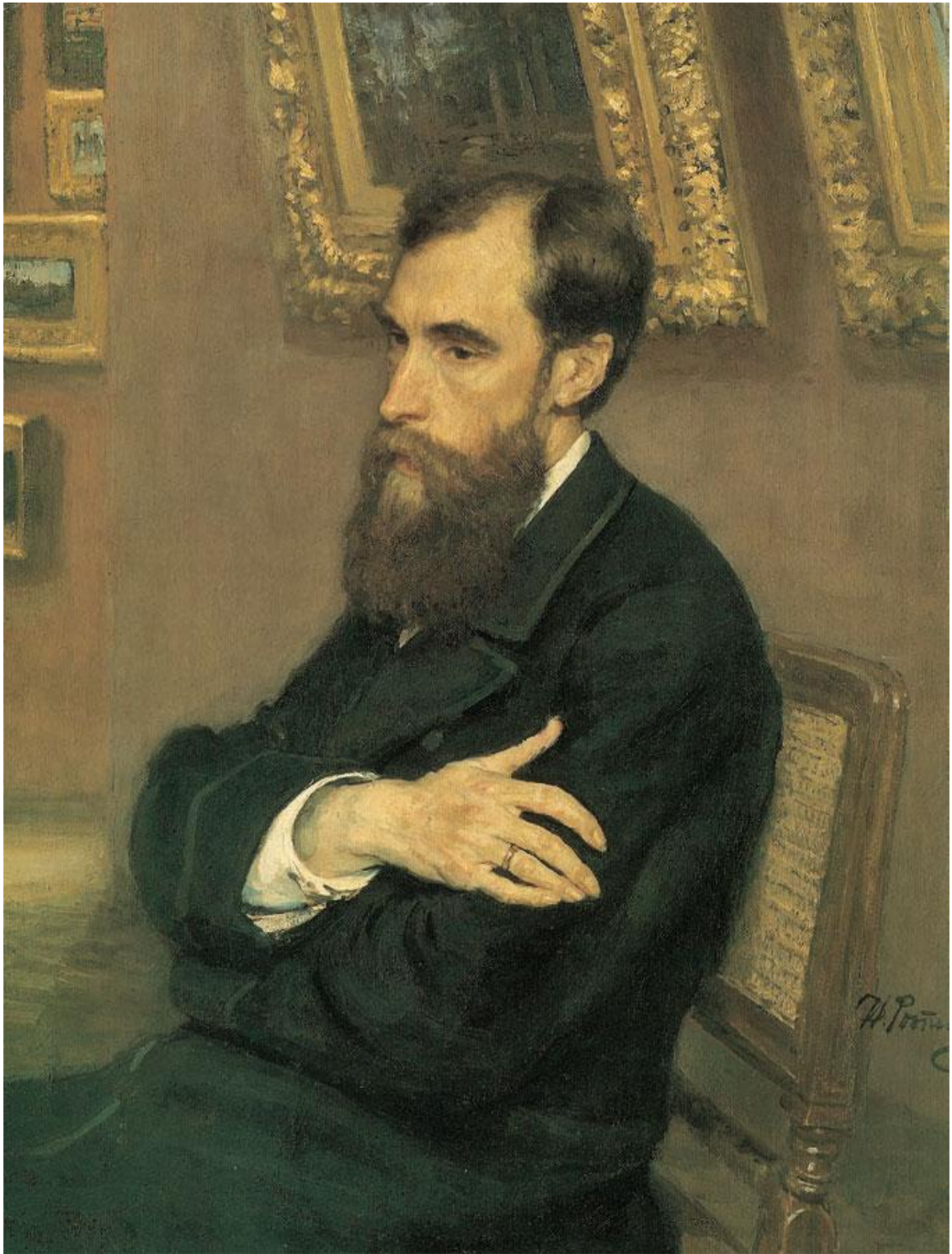
As Briullov's art developed, his style evolved beyond Romanticism. His portraits began to exhibit more psychological preoccupations, often giving the impression of being unaffected and placing a greater emphasis on the sitter's personality. The ultimate development of his style can be seen in the remarkable self-portrait that he painted in 1848.



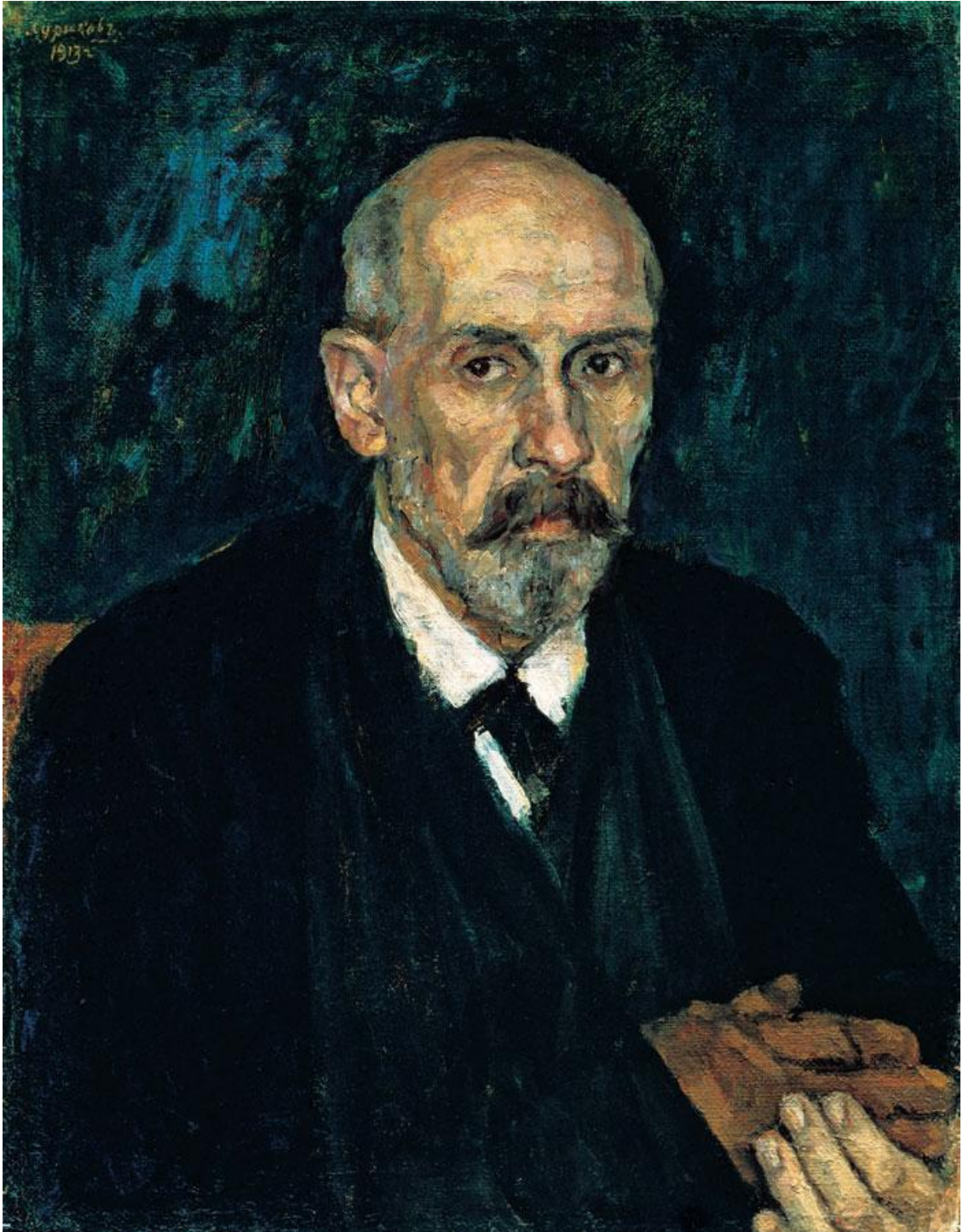
44. Ivan Kramskoï, *The inconsolable Grief*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 228 × 141 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



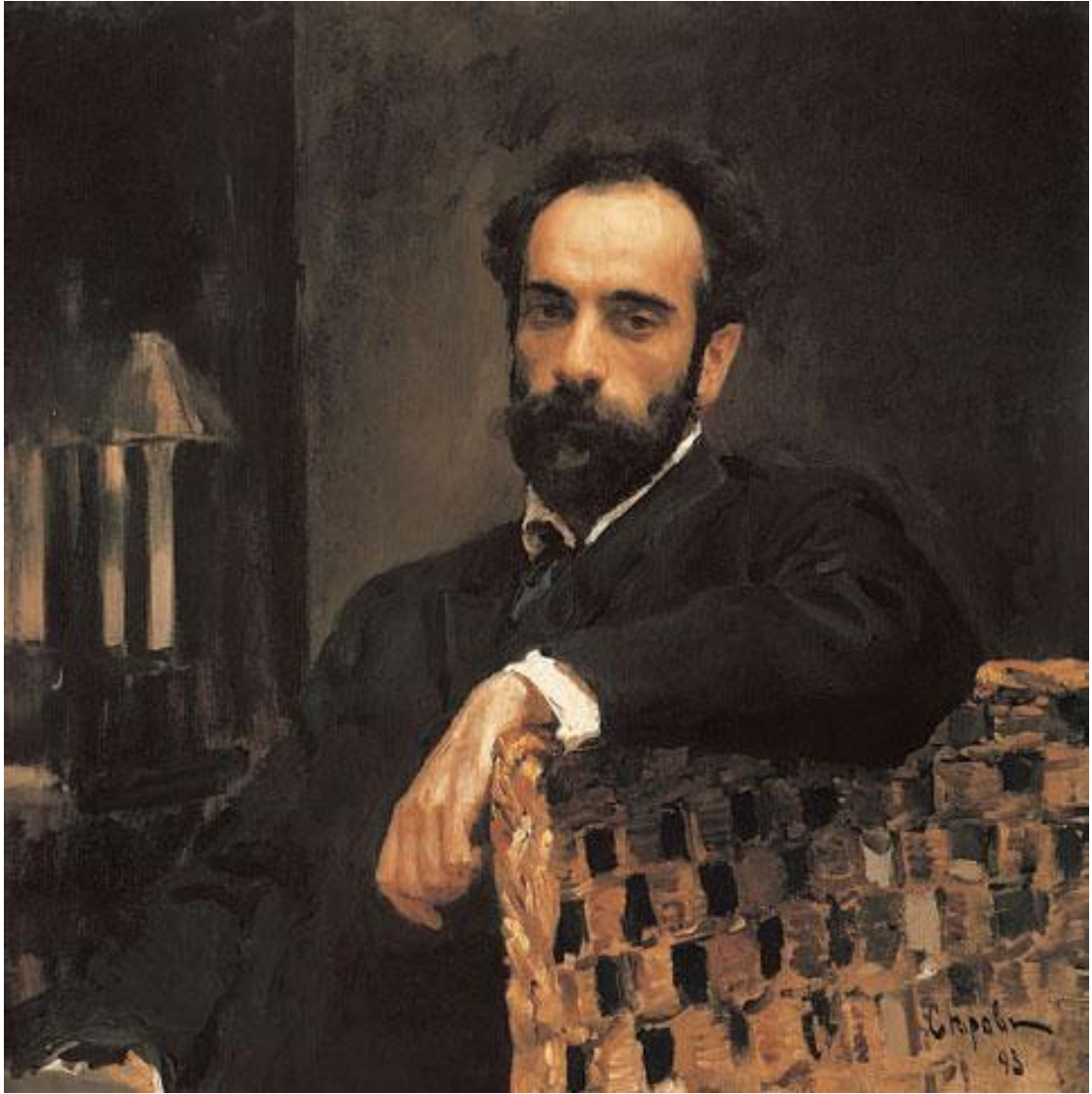
45. Ilya Repin, *Archidiacre*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 124 × 96 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



46. Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Pavel Tretyakov*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 98 × 75.8 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



47. Vassily Surikov, *Man with an Injured Arm*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 68.5 × 53.9 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



48. Valentin Serov, *Portrait of the Artist Isaac Levitan*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 82 × 86 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

From the 1860s to the 1890s

The most prominent role in setting up the artists' cooperative was played by Ivan Kramskoi, who had also been a leading member of the "Revolt of the Fourteen". Although initially drawn to historical and genre painting, he found his fullest expression as a portrait painter. Among the gallery of celebrities who appear in his paintings are fellow-Itinerant Ivan Shishkin – pictured against a backdrop of trees surveying the landscape before setting up his easel – and the singer Elizaveta Lavrovskaya (1879) on the stage of a concert hall, receiving an ovation. His portrait of the forty-four-year-old *Leo Tolstoy*, who sat for him while writing *Anna Karenina*, focuses on the thoughtful intensity of the novelist's gaze. Kramskoi's portrait of Nikolai Nekrasov, painted during the poet's harrowing final illness, shows the poet courageously attempting to finish his *Last Songs*. Even more heart-rending is his painting entitled *Inconsolable Grief* (1884), depicting a grieving woman standing beside a wreath of flowers, painted when his own wife was mourning the death of their son.

Vassily Perov, a warm-hearted man whose views commanded respect among his fellow Itinerants, almost invariably shows his models sitting in a quiet and dignified pose. With great subtlety, he conveys the haunted sensitivity of Dostoyevsky, the mental energy of the dramatist Alexander Ostrovsky, and the shrewdness of the merchant Ivan Kamynin – whose family refused to allow this portrait to be exhibited at the World Fair in Paris in 1878 because it did not present a sufficiently congenial image of him. Many of Perov's liveliest genre paintings, such as *Hunters at Rest*, *A Meal in a Monastery* and *The Angler*, rely on character observation for their lively satire or humour.

Ilya Repin (1844–1901) has a style of portraiture that remains very much his own, despite being influenced by both Manet and Velazquez. Among his most enchanting portraits are the ones of his daughters Vera and Nadezhda and the idyllic group portrait *On a Turf Bench* (1876), all painted *en plein air*.

Repin was a close friend of Leo Tolstoy. He made numerous paintings and sketches of the novelist, and it is interesting to compare the portrait reproduced here with the one painted by Kramskoi in 1872. An interval of fifteen years separates the two paintings, during which Tolstoy had become increasingly ascetic. No less revealing is Repin's *Portrait of Mussorgsky* painted in hospital (hence the dressing-gown) shortly before the composer's early death, hastened by alcoholism. One of Repin's most memorable portraits is *The Archdeacon* (1877), which splendidly conveys the patriarchal robustness of this "lion among the clergy" who, he felt, embodied "the echo of a pagan priest".

The most demanding official commission undertaken by Repin was a painting of the formal session of the State Council held on 7 May 1901. In order to complete this gigantic group portrait, he prepared dozens of studies so he could accurately capture the character of each of the 100 councillors, and he enlisted the help of two of his pupils, Boris Kustodiev and Ivan Kulikov. The painting was commissioned to celebrate the Council's centenary – but, whether intentionally or not, Repin succeeded in conveying its aura of implacable conservatism. One critic remarked that he had painted a vision of "Carthage on the eve of destruction".

Many of the other Itinerants were gifted portrait painters, among them Yuri Leman, Alexei Kharlamov, Nikolai Yaroshenko (1846–98) – dubbed "the conscience of the *peredvizhniki*", who succeeded Kramskoi as leader of the Itinerants – and Nikolai Gay, who painted a marvellously expressive self-portrait during the two years preceding his death. The portraiture of two of the most brilliant of the Itinerants, Serov and Surikov, will be discussed in the third part of this book.



49. Alexander Golovin, *Portrait of Stage Director Vsevolod Meyerhold*, 1917. Tempera on panel, 80 × 67 cm, Theatre Museum, St. Petersburg.



50. Boris Kustodiev, *Portrait of Fyodor Chaliapin*, 1921. Oil on canvas, 215 × 172 cm, Theatre Museum, St. Petersburg.



51. Alexander Golovin, *Portrait of Dmitry Smirnov as Griex in Jules Massenet's "Manon"*, 1909. Tempera on canvas, 210 × 116 cm, Bakhrushin Theatre Museum, Moscow.



52. Alexander Golovin, *Portrait of Fyodor Chaliapin as Boris Godunov*, 1912. Tempera and gouache on cardboard, 221.5 × 139.5 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



53. Valentin Serov, *Portrait of Savva Mamontov*, 1897. Oil on canvas, 187 × 142.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

From the 1890s to the Post-Revolutionary Period

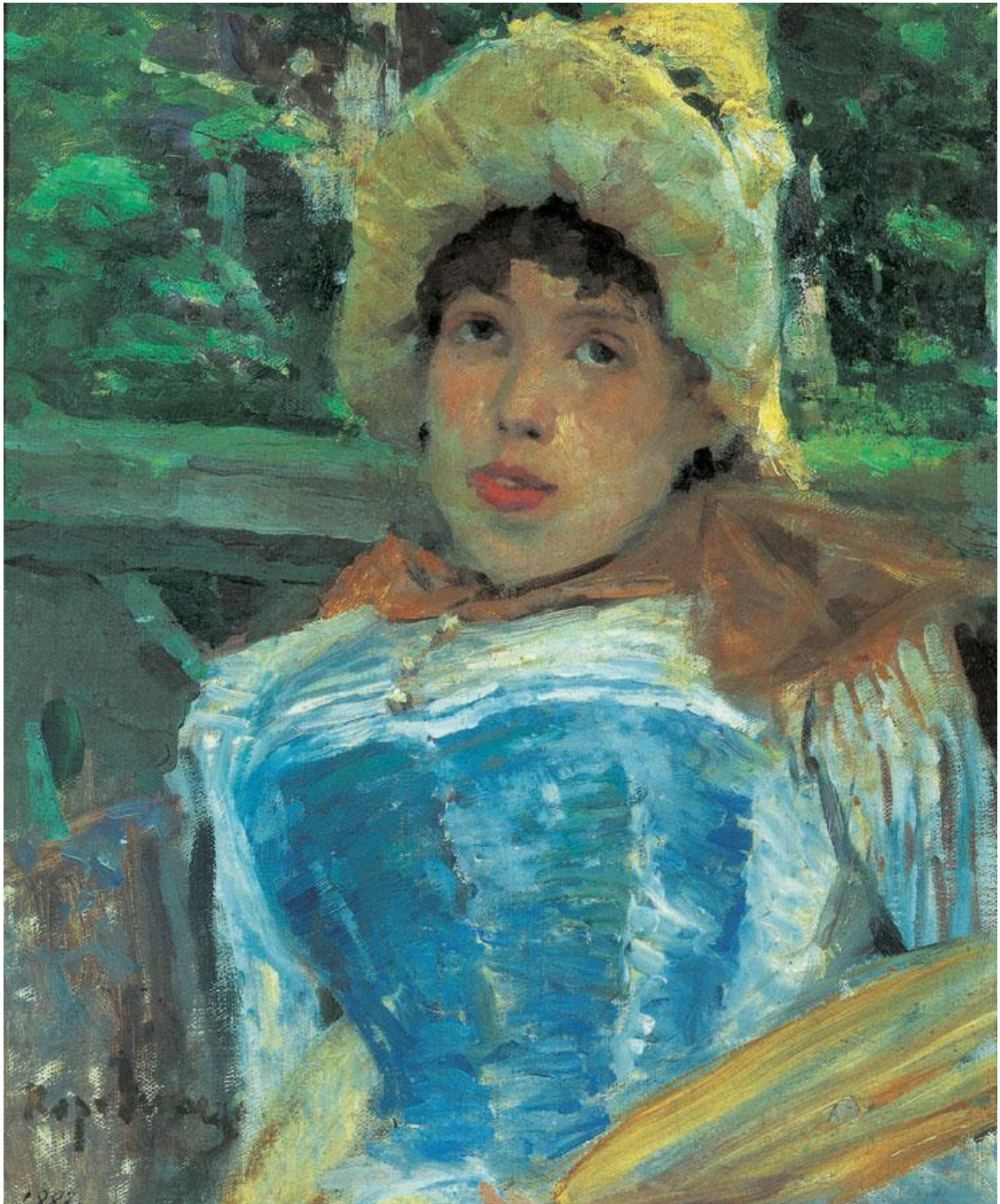
Although the World of Art movement attracted many of the best artists, it did not have a monopoly on talent and had little appeal to the older Itinerants, many of whom were still producing interesting and innovative paintings. Surikov, for example, continued to paint until the year before his death, and during the 1880s and 1890s produced a magnificent series of “costume portraits”, often graced with a descriptive title, such as *A Siberian Beauty* or *A Cossack Girl*, in addition to the model’s name. In doing so, he aimed to portray “a special beauty, ancient, Russian”. According to Alexander Benois, Surikov was “the first... to discover the peculiar beauty of old Russian colouring”, and these costume portraits are remarkable for their rich, warm tones. But Surikov also painted portraits that were more “modern” in style and more concerned with the personality of the sitter, such as *Unknown Girl Against a Yellow Background* and *Man with an Injured Arm*.

Among the “young *peredvizhniki*” who joined the World of Art group, the most brilliant portraitist was Valentin Serov. Like many of his contemporaries, he delighted in painting out of doors, and some of his most appealing portraits – such as *Girl with Peaches*, *Girl in Sunlight* and *In Summer* – owe their naturalness to their setting or to the interplay of sunlight and shadows. Indeed, Serov regarded them as “studies” rather than portraits, giving them descriptive titles that omitted the sitter’s name. The subject of *Girl with Peaches* – painted when Serov was only twenty-two – was in fact Mamontov’s daughter Vera. The model for *In Summer* was Serov’s wife.

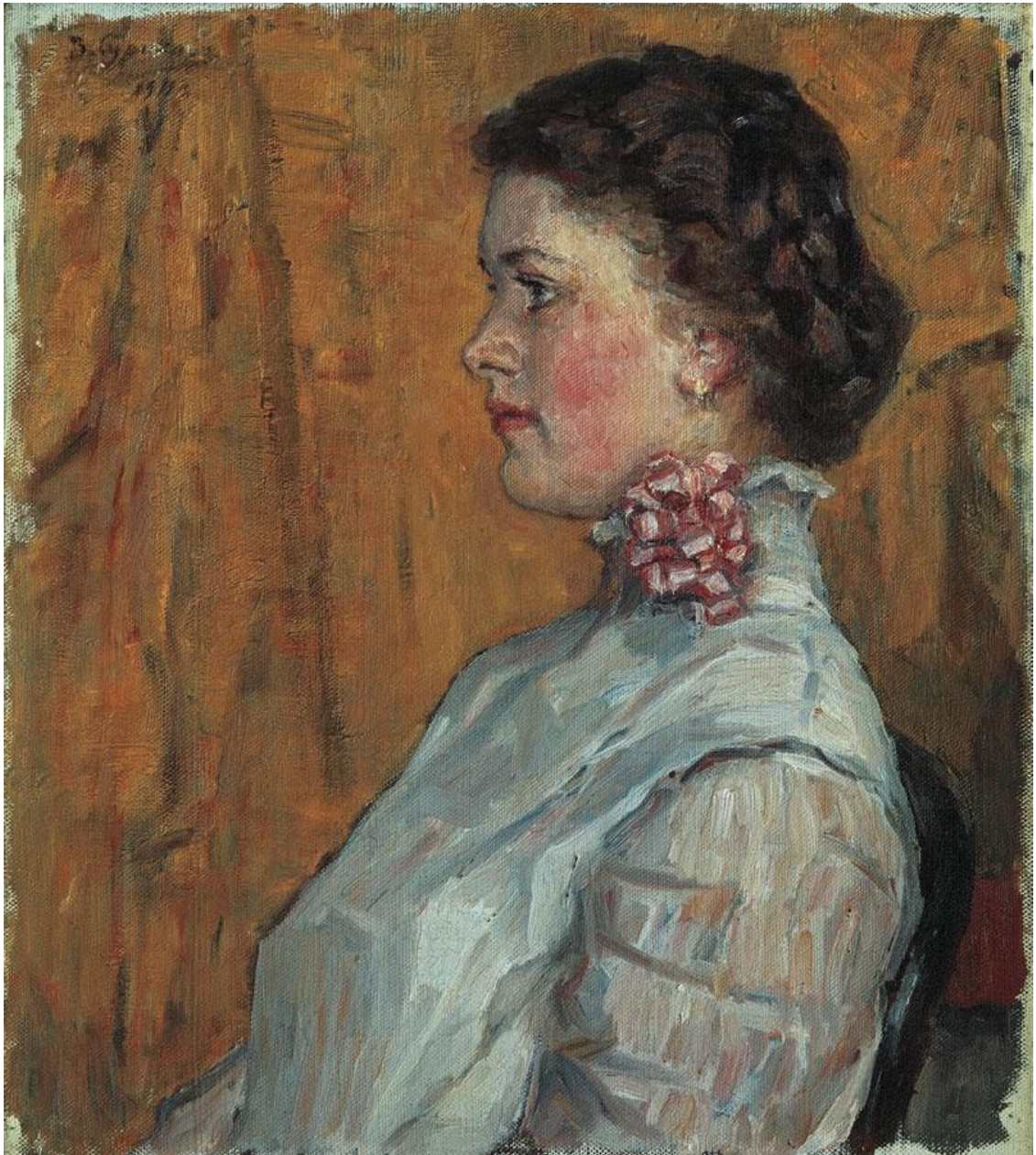
When only six years old, Serov began to display signs of artistic talent. Repin acted as his teacher and mentor, giving him lessons in his studio in Paris, at the age of nine, then letting Serov work with him in Moscow, almost like an apprentice. Eventually Repin sent him to study with Pavel Chistiakov – the teacher of many of the World of Art painters, including Nesterov and Vrubel, who was to become a close friend. Because Serov’s career spanned such a long period, his style and subject matter vary considerably – ranging from voluptuous society portraits (the later ones notable for their grand style and sumptuous dresses) to sensitive studies of children, like the one he painted of Mika Morozov in 1901. His portraits of Isaac Levitan and the actress Maria Yermolova demonstrate his genius for capturing his sitter’s personality. Utterly different from any of these is the famous nude study of the dancer Ida Rubinstein, in tempera and charcoal on canvas, which he painted towards the end of his life.



54. *Portrait of Sergei Diaghilev*, 1904. Oil on canvas, 57 × 83 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



55. Konstantin Korovin, *Chorus Girl*, 1883. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



56. Vassily Surikov, *Unknown Girl against a Yellow Background*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 51 × 44 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



57. Valentin Serov, *Portrait of Mika Morozov*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 62.3 × 70.6 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Although Serov's early style has much in common with the French Impressionists, he did not become acquainted with their work until after he had painted pictures such as *Girl with Peaches*. In contrast, Konstantin Korovin was deeply influenced by the French Impressionists almost from the outset of his career, as can be seen from his *Chorus Girl*, which is regarded as one of the first Impressionist works by a Russian painter.

Together with Korovin, Alexander Golovin designed the crafts section of the Russian Pavilion at the 1900 Paris World Fair. He then went on to design stage sets and costumes for a number of theatres, including the Imperial Theatres in Saint Petersburg (where he became the principal decorator), the Bolshoi, the Moscow Arts Theatre and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Two of his most powerful paintings arose from his interest in the performing arts, namely his *Portrait of the theatrical director Vsevolod Meyerhold* and the one of the bass singer *Fyodor Chaliapin in the role of Boris Godunov*, which he painted in 1912.

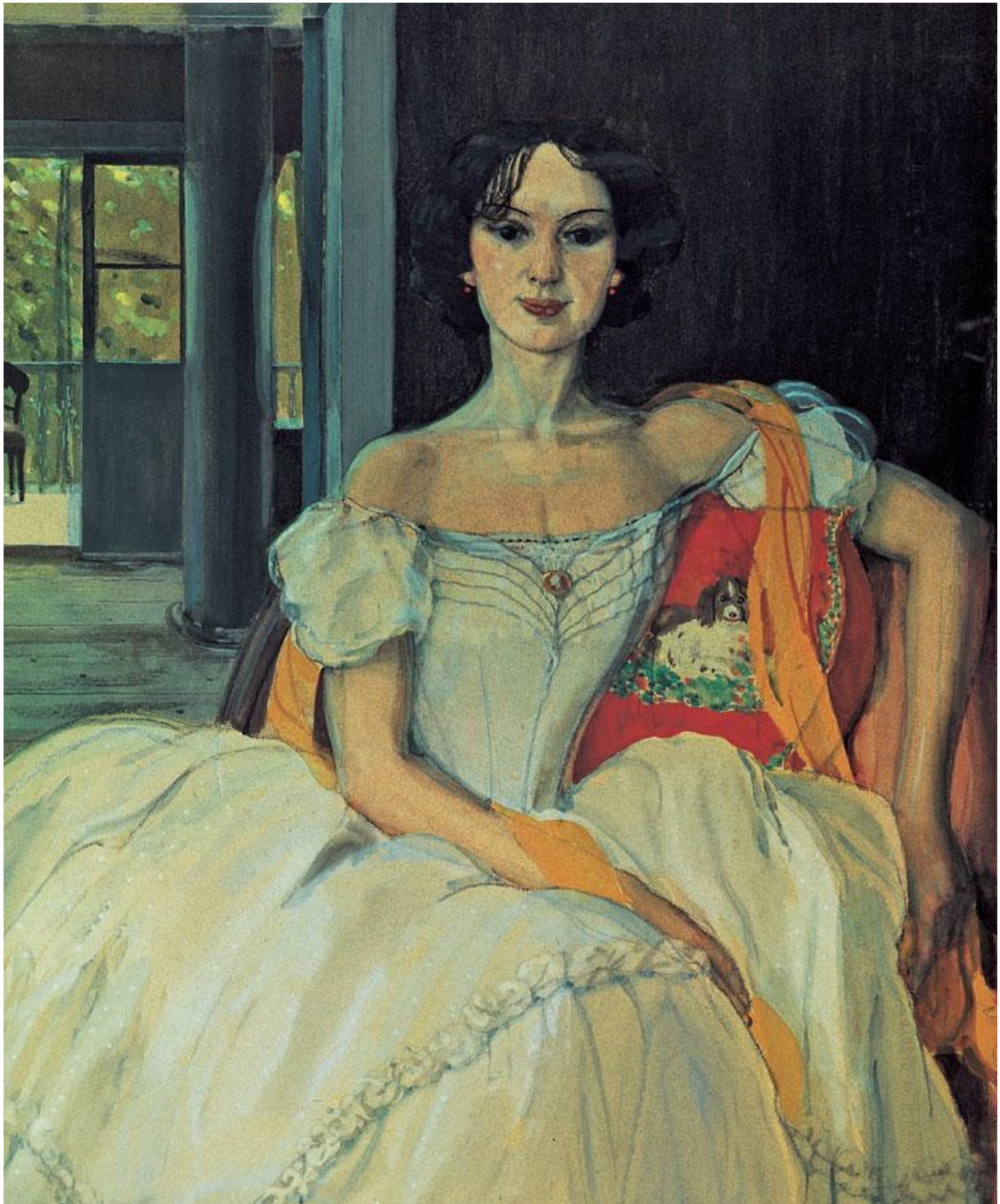
Chaliapin was the subject of a number of other portraits, including one (when young) by Serov and one by Boris Kustodiev, who depicted him standing like a fur-coated colossus on a snow-covered hillock, while in the background there is a fairground scene busy with tiny brightly coloured figures. Many of Kustodiev's portraits and genre paintings are richly decorative – for example, his splendid *Merchant's Wife Drinking Tea* – while the elegance and accuracy of his portrayal of the human figure reflect his early training as a sculptor.



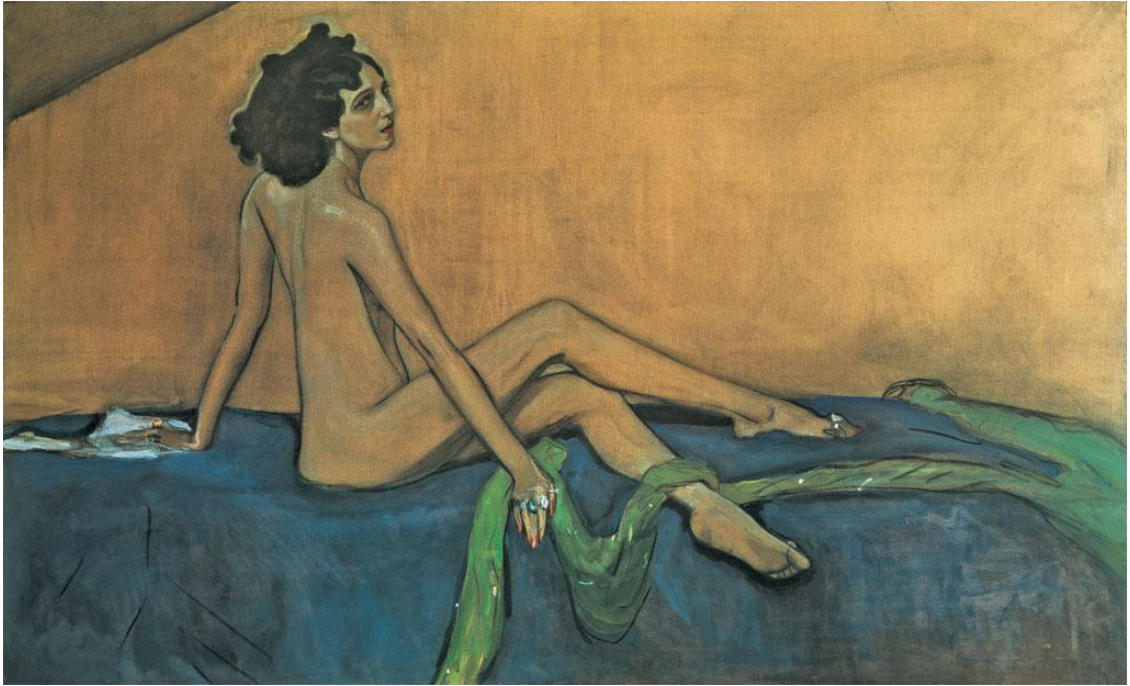
58. Valentin Serov, *Girl with Peaches (Portrait of Vera Mamontova)*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 91 × 85 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



59. Konstantin Somov, *Lady in Blue (Portrait of Elizaveta Martynova)*, 1897–1900. Oil on canvas, 103 × 103 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



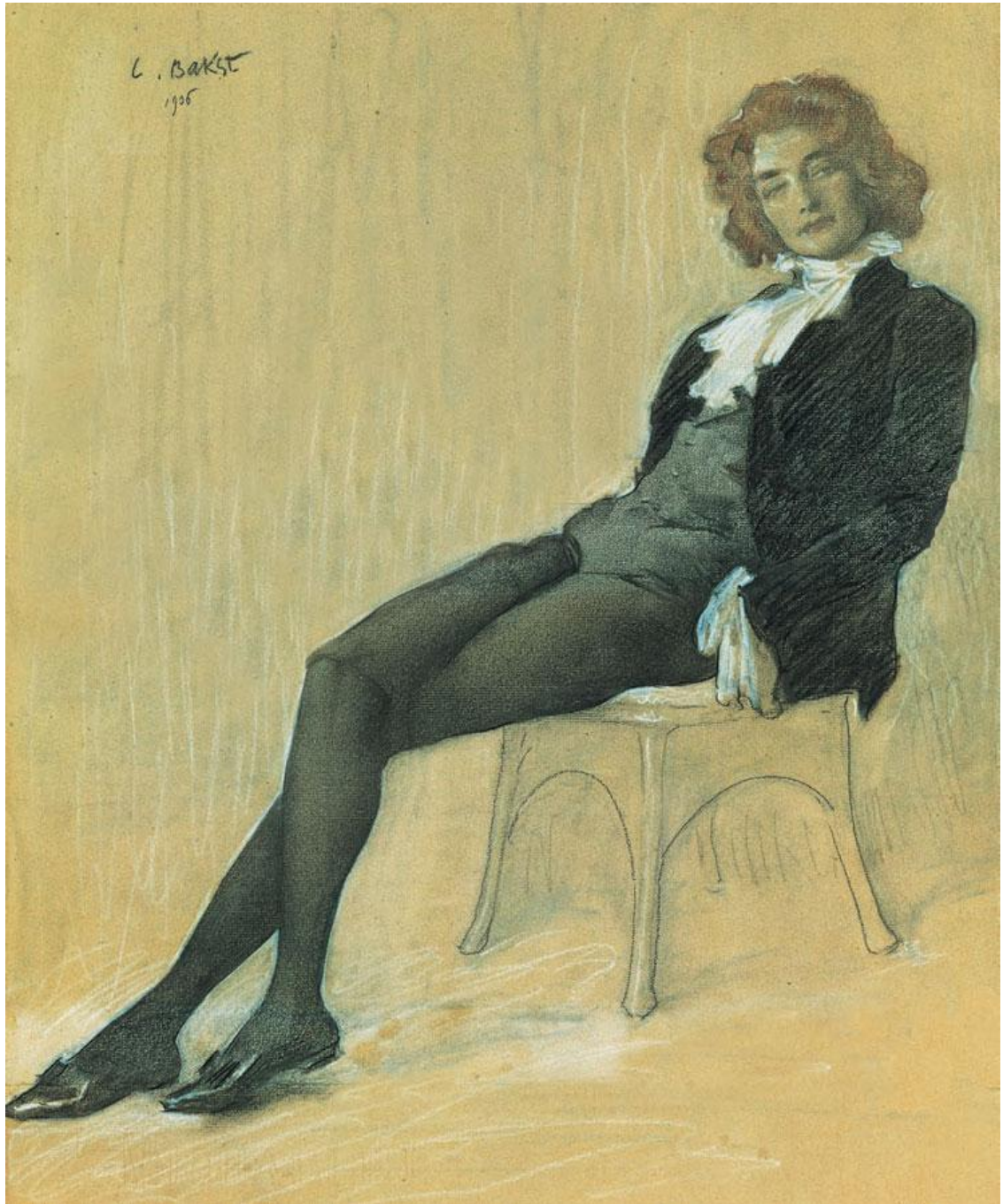
60. Konstantin Somov, *L'Echo du temps passé (Echo of the Past)*, 1903. Watercolor, gouache and graphite on paper mounted on cardboard, 61 × 64 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



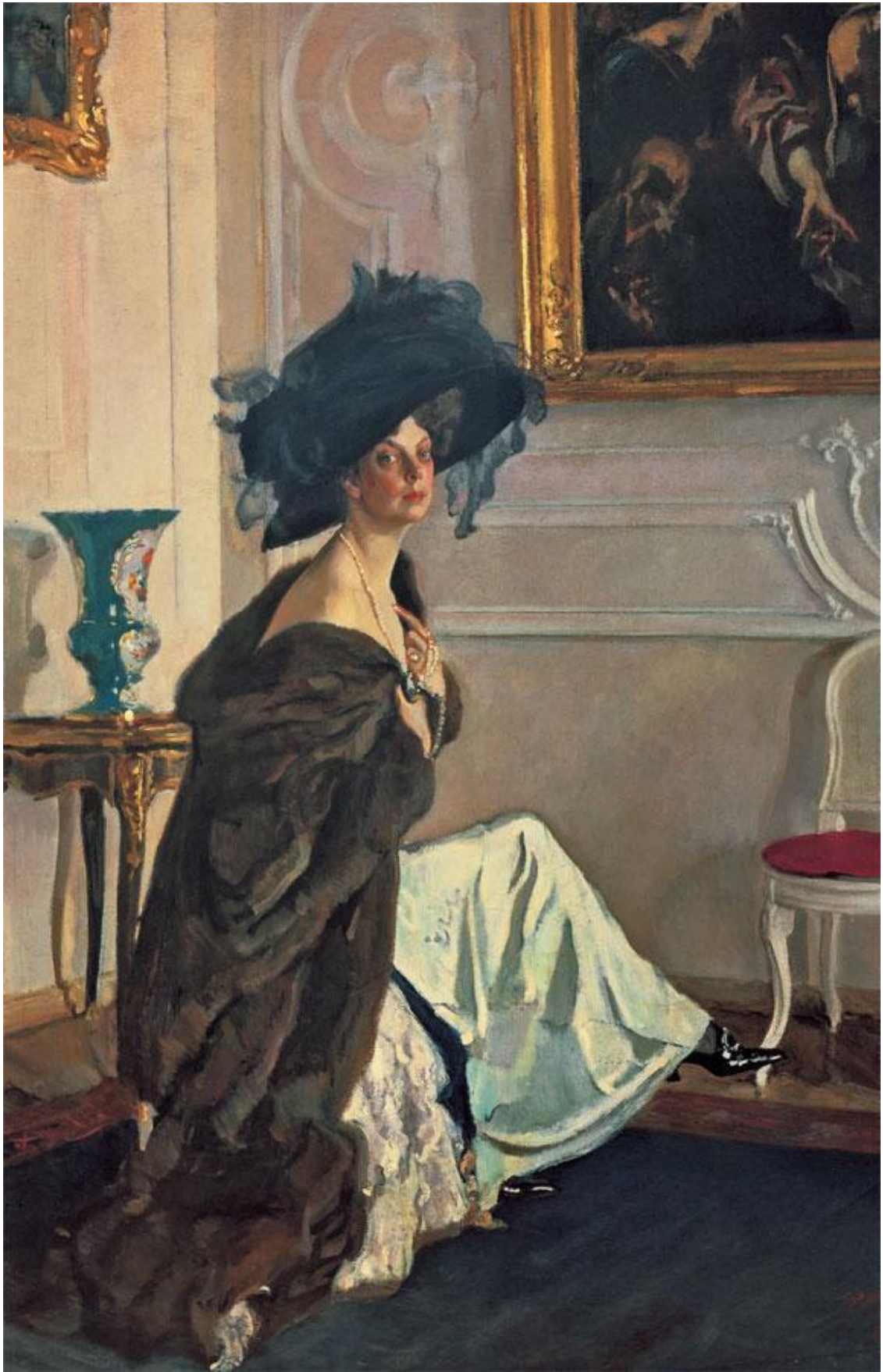
61. Valentin Serov, *Portrait of Ida Rubinstein*, 1910. Tempera and charcoal on paper, 147 × 233 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



62. Leon Bakst, *The Supper*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 150 × 100 cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



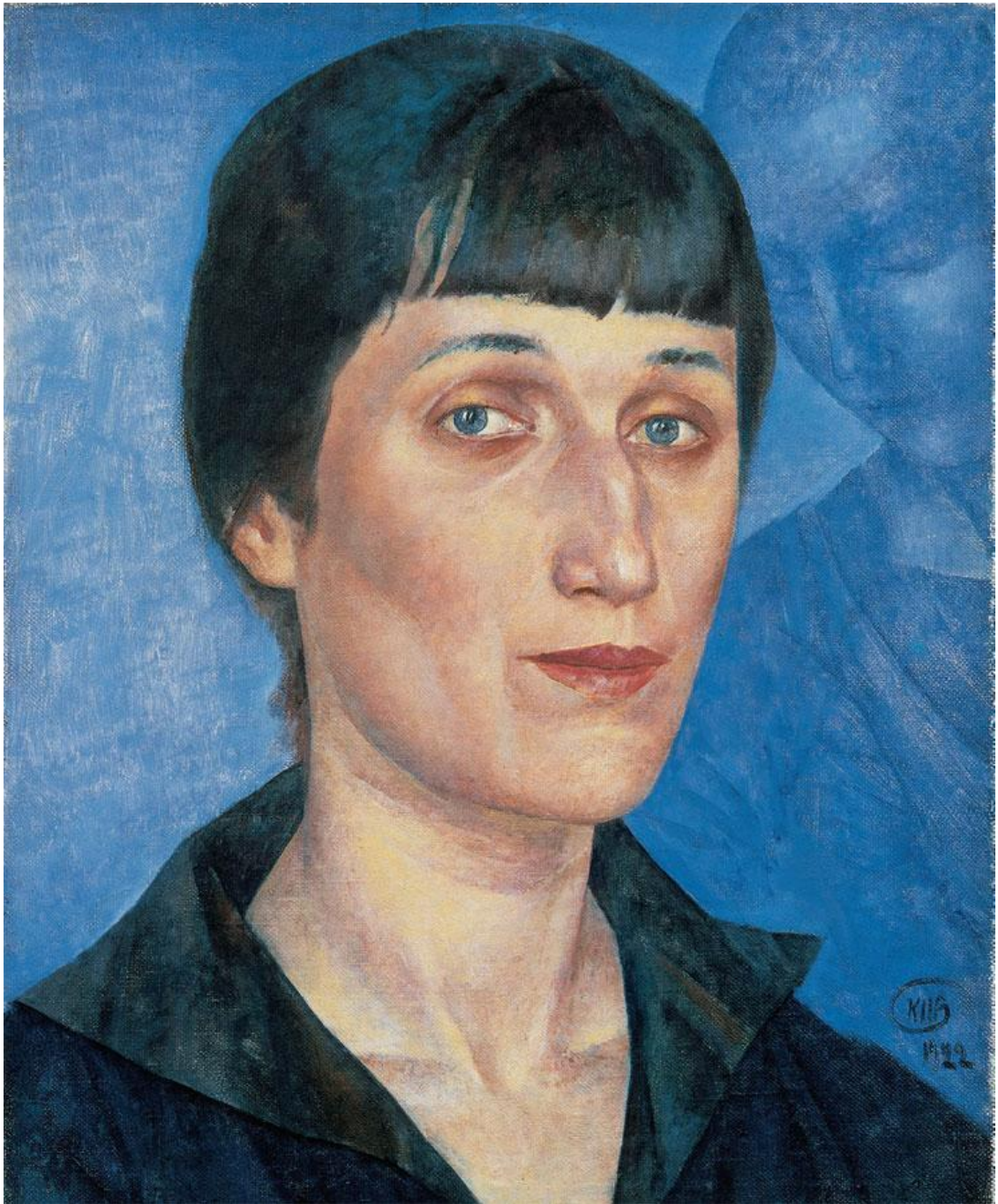
63. Leon Bakst, *Portrait of Zinaida Hippus*, 1906. Pencil and red and white chalk on paper mounted on cardboard, 54 × 44 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



64. Valentin Serov, *Portrait of the Princess Olga Orlova*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 327.5 × 160 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



65. Mikhaïl Vrubel, *Young Girl against a Persian Carpet*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 104 × 68 cm, Museum of Russian Art, Kiev.



66. Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, *Portrait of Anna Akhmatova*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 54.5 × 43.5 cm.

This accuracy was also evident in *Lady in Blue*, on which Konstantin Somov worked from 1897 to 1900. He achieves its effects by an unexpected synthesis of realism and stylization. The delicate beauty of the model – the artist Elizaveta Martynova, who died soon after this portrait was painted – appears all the more lifelike because of the artificial pose and scenery, and the old-fashioned dress that Somov asked her to wear. In contrast, the sketch of the poet *Zinaida Hippus* by Leon Bakst – who produced spectacular costume designs – is uncontrived and naturalistic. Philip Maliavin painted portraits of several of the World of Art painters, such as Somov and Grabar, that convey their character and characteristics with great insight and sensitivity.

From the first decade of the twentieth century onwards, “expressive” use of colour became more prevalent in Russian portraiture and figure painting – as, for example, in Ilya Mashkov’s

Artist's Model. It is also exhibited in Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's *Portrait of the poet Anna Akhmatova*, and furthermore in Martiros Saryan's portraits of his family and *Victoria Alabian*.

Further examples of this “expressive” use of colour are demonstrated by artists such as Saryan, Surikov, Vrubel, Petrov-Vodkin, Robert Falk and Mikhaïl Nesterov who all painted remarkable self-portraits. Among the canvases that Nesterov created in the 1930s was his double portrait of the painters Pavel and Alexeï Korin, which, unlike most of his works from the post-Revolutionary period, echoes his earlier Symbolist style. In terms of style, Vrubel's portraits, like Nesterov's, vary enormously. They range from the sober and conventional – for example, the portrait of Konstantin Artsybushev that he painted in 1897 – to highly decorative works such as *Girl Against a Persian Carpet*, which is both a sensitive portrait of a child and an inspired exploration of pattern and colour.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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