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Ilya
REPIN

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Ilya Repin

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Introduction

Despite his rich imaginative endowment, a poignant sense of reality is the birthright of each and every Russian. Those restless wanderers who started from Galicia and the upper Dnieper River, who founded Kiev, Novgorod the Great, and Moscow, and settled in the fertile basin of the Volga, were not theorists. The intrepid traders who in turn pushed across the Urals and penetrated the silent forests and frozen marshes of Siberia were not impelled by abstract ideas, or by the pious frenzy of the Crusaders, for instance, but by simple reasons of racial and tribal pressure. From the outset, in brief, the Rus' has been brought face to face with the most severe conditions, external and internal. He has always been a subject and a sufferer. Now overrun by the ruthless hordes of the Great Khan, and sterilized by the ritual of Byzantine priests, the true Slavic spirit has had little scope for individual development.

When the Mongol yoke was, at length, broken by the Grand Prince Vladimir, the situation remained much as before. Oppression still existed, only it came from within, not from without. The people no longer paid tribute to the khan; they bowed to the tsar now, a creature almost as alien and as autocratic. Down to the present time, in fact, matters have continued with but slight alleviation. Though there were liberator tsars as well as demonic tyrants on the imperial throne, progress has remained dubious and intermittent. The beneficent humanity of Alexander II was succeeded by the drastic reactionary policy of von Plehve and Pobedonostsev. Each step forward seems to have been offset by a corresponding step backward. The Tatar spearman gave way to the Cossack with his knout. And the blue banner of Genghis Khan has been replaced by the red badge of revolution and a reversion to the most sinister forms of despotism.

Of all epochs in the spiritual evolution of Russia, the most inspiring from the standpoint of nationalism are the memorable years that followed the liberation of the serfs in 1861. It was at this period that the great, passionate publicist Chernyshevsky, turning from Teutonic abstraction to Russian actuality, pronounced the dictum that "Beauty is Life", and it was at this time also that came into being the aspiring organization known as *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Freedom). The atmosphere was charged with hope and anticipation. Radiant ideas of progress permeated all classes of society. On every side were signs of regeneration, of a vast political and social awakening. In the comparatively tardy development of contemporary cultural expression in Russia, the novel and the play preceded the graphic and plastic arts. For long periods the painter was crushed beneath archaic formalism and sterile academic precedent, just as in the broader relations of life, all healthy, spontaneous initiative was repressed by influences wholly artificial and foreign. While it is a matter of record that Gogol actually paved the way for such masters

Self-Portrait, 1878.
Oil on canvas, 69.5 x 49.6 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

On a Turf Bench, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 36 x 56 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.





W. J. Smith 1875



Summer Landscape in the Kursk Province, 1881.
Oil on cardboard, 14 x 20 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

of domestic genre as Sternberg, Fedotov, and Perov and that Turgenev was among the earliest to appreciate the elegiac beauty of native Russian landscape, it matters little which came first, and which after. The chief point is that from this period onward each strove to depict with increasing fidelity not only the actual physiognomy of the country itself, but that confused and questing human equation that lay just at hand waiting to be understood and interpreted.

With that passion for absolutism so typical of the Slavic mind, it is scant wonder that the emancipation of art should follow rapidly upon the liberation of the serfs. On November 9, 1863, under the magnetic leadership of Kramskoi, thirteen of the ablest students of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts rebelled against soulless formalism, left the institution, and formed themselves into an independent body. The little band of aspirants struggled



dubiously along for a time, but was later strong enough to establish the *Peredvizhnaya Vystavka* (Society of Travelling Exhibitions). And it is to this group, with its hatred of classic and mythological themes, and its frank love of national and local type and scene, that Russian painting owed its subsequent vitality. It was this clear-eyed, open-minded band of enthusiasts who first made it possible for the Slavic artist to “go among the people,” and to harken to the secret song of the steppe. Their passionate nationalism assuredly exceeded their artistic sensibility, yet one must never forget that they came into being during a vigorously realistic and utilitarian epoch, an epoch that witnessed the publication of Pisarev’s amazing *Razrulenie Estetiki* (Annihilation of Aesthetics) and similar diatribes against the formal canons of abstract beauty. *Le beau, c’est la vie* [Beauty is life], was in fact by some amended to read, *Le laid, c’est le beau* [That which is ugly, is beautiful].

Ukrainian Farmhouse, 1880.
Oil on canvas, 34.3 x 52.5 cm.
Museum of Russian Art, Kiev.



The Creative World Of Repin

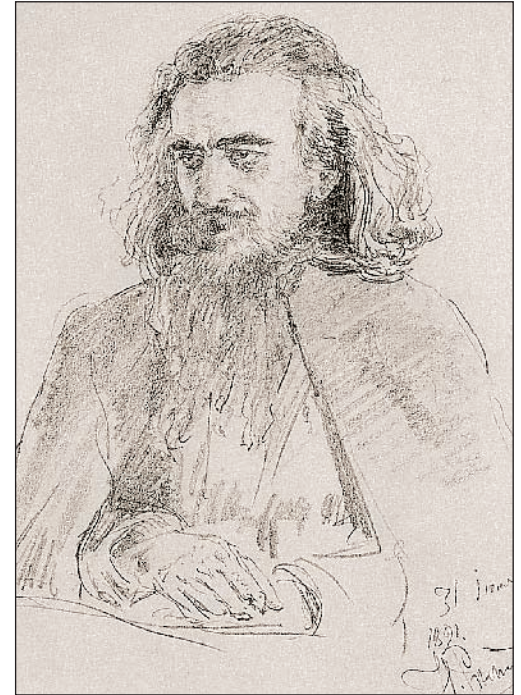
Ilya Repin enjoyed more fame and recognition during his lifetime than any other Russian artist born in the nineteenth century. Repin's position in the world of pictorial art was comparable to that of Leo Tolstoy in the world of letters. For twenty-five years, every new picture by Repin was awaited with bated breath, and the publication of his essays, especially those written at the turn of the century, always caused a stir in the cultural life of the country.

Acutely aware of the social problems of his day and in tune with the restless spirit of the times, Repin produced works that contained all the essential features of late-nineteenth-century Russian realism and it was in part thanks to him that Russian art came to play a significant role in European culture. Even early on in his career, the artist's pictures attracted the attention of critics at international exhibitions. They recognized in his work the beginnings of a creative search which was to enrich the general development of critical realism in European art. When Repin produced his first independent works, it became clear that a form of art was taking root in Russia which was imbued with civic feeling and akin to the work of such major realists as Courbet in France, Menzel in Germany, and Munkacsy in Hungary.

The creative world of Repin possessed a special spiritual integrity, which existed not despite of, but because of the diversity of the artist's creative goals and the breadth of his grasp of reality. This integrity was inseparably bound up with the general character of Russian artistic culture in the second half of the nineteenth century striving to realise its social and historical mission. As is the case with many great masters, Repin had certain favourite subjects, motifs and images, and a limited circle of people whose portraits he especially liked to paint. But the deep sense of purpose in his aesthetics went further than this, for he possessed first and foremost the great artistic gift to sense the spirit of the age and to see the way in which this spirit was reflected in the lives and characters of individuals. It does not particularly flatter the artist to say that the figures in his canvases and portraits belong to their time; the same could be said regarding the work of any of his contemporaries, even the mediocre ones. The figures in Repin's paintings and drawings are the historical reality, with all its hopes and suffering, its spiritual energy and its painful contradictions.

"As in life" is an expression often used to describe the distinctive quality of Repin's work. This expression does indeed reflect the essential principles of tone and style in his creative legacy, and yet, when allocated the role of general characteristic, it oversimplifies the nature of Repin's realism. This view fails to grasp the main thing – the artist's strong creative will, the directness of his conception, his tremendous technical mastery, in short, everything which causes real life to assume on his canvases the form of great art. In order to understand the great transformative power of Repin's artistic language one has to penetrate the creative world from which such

Preparation for the Examination, 1864.
Oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.



works as the *Portrait of Modest Mussorgsky* (p.148), *Unexpected Return* (p.168), *Religious Procession in Kursk Province* (pp.28-29), and the *Portrait of Polina Strepetova* emerged.

The search for truth and the search for an ideal led Repin along various paths, and was tempered by various aspects of the artist's own social and spiritual experiences and certain elements in the national cultural tradition. As was the case with most representatives of the Russian realist school of the second half of the nineteenth century, Repin most often selected dramatic conflicts rooted in reality for his works, drawn either from contemporary life or from the historical past. Much less often he used mythological images in his work, but when they do occur they are used with the same strong sense of purpose. Some of his pictures, based on Biblical subjects or Christian mythology, are justifiably counted among his greatest works. When dealing with the subjects of Repin's works, it is important to grasp the logic of their co-existence and interconnection, their relationship with a general set of conceptions regarding the meaning of human life. One should constantly remember that Repin's work is like an intricate multidimensional structure, rooted both in the creative individuality of the artist himself and in the complex artistic consciousness of his time.

Nadia Repina Painting Ceramics, 1891.
Charcoal on paper, 43.8 x 34.2 cm.
State Art Museum Abramtsevo,
Abramtsevo, Russia.

*Portrait of the Philosopher and Poet
Vladimir Soloviev*, 1891.
Pencil on paper, 34.3 x 23.6 cm.
Brodsky House Museum, St Petersburg.

Ilya Yefimovich Repin was born in 1844, in the small Ukrainian town of Chuguyev, the son of a private in the Uhlan Regiment stationed there. Later, at various times in the course of his long life, he would recollect with distaste the military settlements where he spent his early years, specifically their regimentation and iron discipline. These childhood memories undoubtedly played quite an important role in the formation of the artist's deep democratic convictions. In 1872, Repin wrote to his friend, the critic Vladimir Stasov, regarding the mission of the artistic intelligentsia in the social life of the country: "Now it is the peasant who is



judge and so it is necessary to represent his interests. (That is just the thing for me, since I am myself, as you know, a peasant, the son of a retired soldier who served twenty-seven hard years in Nicholas I's army.)"¹

Early one grey November morning, a young Cossack from the Government of Kharkov knocked at the portals of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in the city by the Neva. He was pale and shy of manner, with thick masses of brown hair clustering about brow and ears, and under his arm carried a portfolio of sketches. The lad had journeyed all the way from Chuguev, an isolated village amid the steppes of Little Russia, his entire capital consisting of forty rubles, and a consuming desire to become a painter. Born on July 24th in 1844, the son of a military father and a gentle, solicitous mother, Ilya Yefimovich Repin early displayed marked capacity for graphic and plastic expression. Whilst a mere child he used to draw pictures for his sister and her playmates, as well as cut figures out of cardboard and model

Portrait of Actress Eleonora Duse, 1891.
Charcoal on canvas, 103 x 139 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Raising of Jairus' Daughter, 1871.
Oil on canvas, 229 x 382 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.





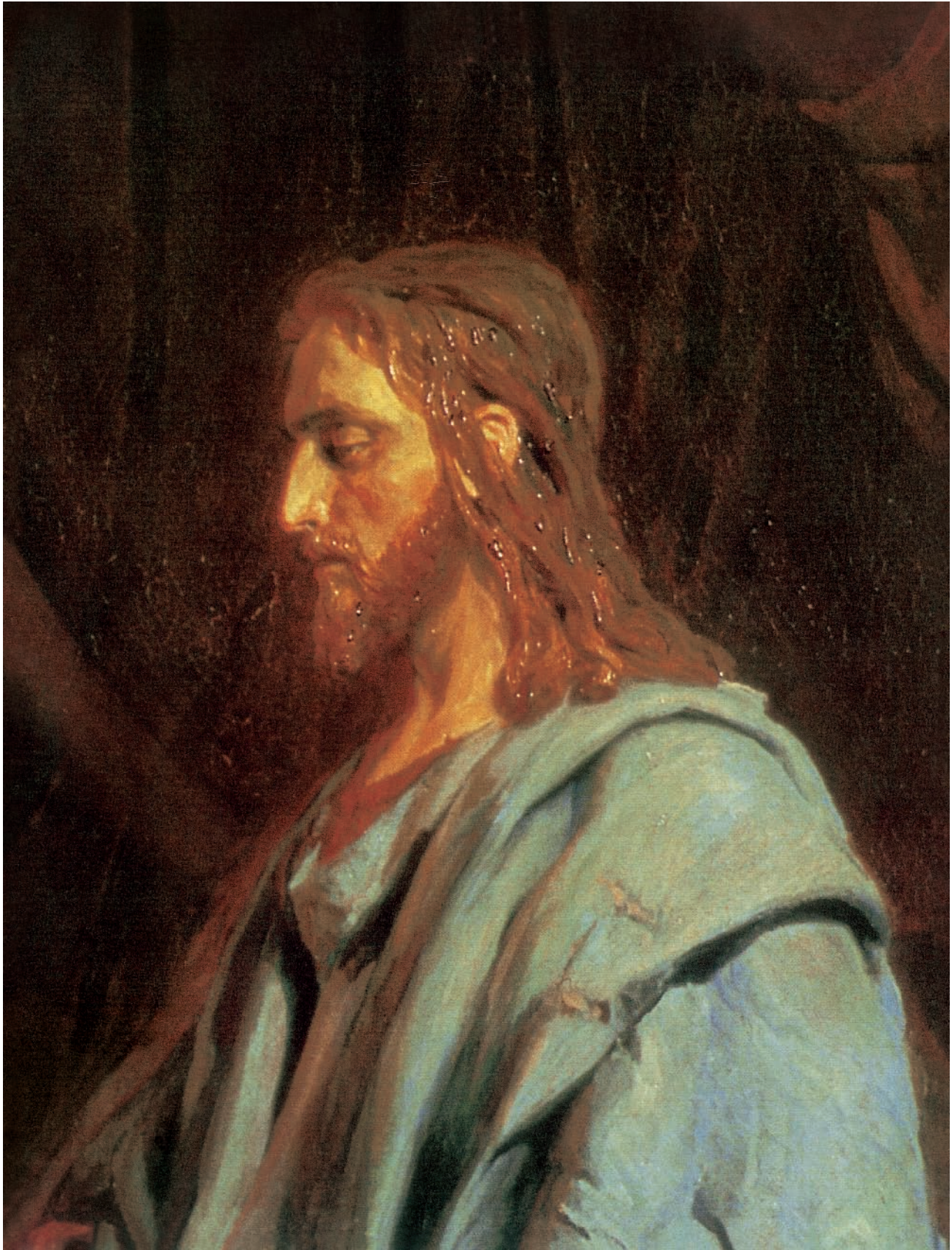
animals in wax. Though delicate, he was sent to the communal school, where his mother was a teacher, and later attended the nearby Military Topographical Institute, but on the closing of the latter, he was apprenticed at the age of thirteen to Anton Bunakov, a local painter of sacred images. So rapid was the boy's progress, that within three years he was able to support himself, receiving anywhere from two to five, and even as high as twenty rubles for a religious composition or the likeness of some worthy villager. Pious *muzhiks* and pompous rural dignitaries would come from a hundred *versts* or more to see his *ikoni* or secure his services as ecclesiastical decorator, the most famous of his efforts being a fervid and dramatic *St. Simeon*. It was while working in the church of Sirotin that Repin first heard of the eager, ambitious life of the capital, with its opportunities so far beyond the limitations of provincial endeavour. Certain of his colleagues told him not only of the Academy, but of Kramskoy, the leader of the new movement, who had lately paid a visit to Ostrogorsk, bringing with him the atmosphere of the city and the ferment of fresh social and artistic ideas.

His arrival in the capital coincided with one of the most significant events in Russian cultural life in the 1860s – a major demonstration by young artists who challenged their academic teachers and insisted that art had the right and duty to follow truth in life. This was the famous 1863 “Rebellion of the Fourteen” at the Academy of Arts, when fourteen final-year students took a stand against attempts to reduce the social aspects of creative work, and to regiment its development through outdated academic dictates. They only had one demand, but a highly significant one: to be allowed to choose the subject of their graduation work. When this demand was rejected by the administration of the Academy, the students resigned from the Academy en masse. And so the year 1863 became an important milestone in the history of Russian art, marking a new stage in the social self-awareness of artists and their understanding of their professional aims.

The works Repin produced during his years at the Academy of Arts suggest a certain dichotomy in his creative efforts. As a student, he followed the obligatory academic programme, with subjects far removed from ordinary hopes and fears, from “empirical” reality. However, as a young artist highly receptive to impressions of life, he had no intention of cutting himself off from that reality. He tried his hand, not without success, at unaffected “domestic” genre scenes (*Preparation for the Examination*, p.12), made lyrical portraits of people close to him (*Portrait of Vera Shevtsova*, 1869), and in his final years as a student worked long and hard on *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (pp.33-39), a picture of social import which brought the young Academy graduate European fame.

Yet all these early works, whether “set pieces” produced for the Academy or intimate portraits done for his own personal satisfaction, share certain common features, a common sphere of interests and technical experimentation. The picture on a Gospel theme, *The Raising of Jairus' Daughter* (pp.16-17), is highly significant in this regard. It was painted for an Academy competition and earned Repin a gold medal and the associated travelling scholarship. In creating this monumental canvas, Repin conformed both to academic demands and,

Raising of Jairus' Daughter (detail),
1871.
Oil on canvas, 229 x 382 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.





at the same time, transcended them. He perceived the “elevated style” cultivated by the Academy not as a kind of system of rules, but as an interesting tradition, bound up with the ability of art to attain a sublime, miraculous spiritual force. We can point here even more specifically to one of the prototypes Repin clearly had in mind when he created *The Raising of Jairus’s Daughter* – Alexander Ivanov’s celebrated painting *The Apparition of Christ to the People*. Repin had a truly deep respect for Ivanov and must, undoubtedly, have heard much about him from the man who was his first teacher in St Petersburg and who later became a close friend, Ivan Kramskoi. The austerity of the composition, the harmonious balance of colours and the restraint of movement and gesture all serve to underline the deep, solemn significance of the subject in this work of the young artist.

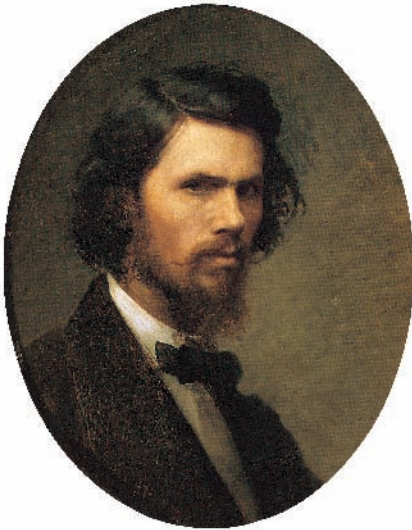
A characteristic feature of Repin’s talent – the persistent search for new approaches to technique and content that would give his work fullness and depth – can also be seen in those early works of a totally different kind, which were directly inspired by real life. *The Barge Haulers*, on which Repin worked for a long time, is a very clear example.

Unless you chance to be familiar with the Russian art of the day, it is difficult to grasp the distance which separates the *Barge Haulers on the Volga* from that which came before. At one stroke the clear-eyed Cossack placed himself at the head of the new movement. He went direct to nature and character, not to the arid formalism of academic tradition. The general effect of the canvas is compelling in its sheer veracity of observation and statement. The composition is effective, the various types are accurately individualised, and about these sun-scorched bargemen, who sullenly pull on the same sagging tow-line, radiates the genuine light of the outdoors, not the bitumen and brown sauce of the galleries. While it is impossible to overlook the fact that the *Barge Haulers on the Volga* is what the Teutons call a *Tendenzbild* – a picture with a purpose – it cannot be said that the didactic or humanitarian elements outdo the pictorial appeal. Imbued with a certain deep-rooted pity for the downtrodden, the painting stands upon its own merits as a resolute example of realism. The artist’s triumph was in fact complete and his fame as sudden and widespread as that of the young officer who, years before, had penned with searching verity *The Cossacks* and *Sevastopol Sketches*.

Barge Haulers on the Volga (1870-1873) was the first picture Repin completed after leaving the Academy of Arts. It was immediately acclaimed by contemporaries, including Fiodor Dostoyevsky and the critic Vladimir Stasov. This work is an early, but vivid expression of one of the most valuable qualities found in the creative work of the Russian intelligentsia – a feeling of personal responsibility for the hard lot of the common people and the historical destiny of the country. It was this position as both artist and concerned citizen which gave Repin’s work its distinctive character: it found expression in his monumental canvases, in his more modest studies and sketches, and even in his trial jottings.

Incidentally, bearing in mind this aspect of Repin, it is more appropriate to speak not of the single final version of the painting, but of the whole series of works in oil and in pencil.

Alexandr Ivanov,
The Apparition of Christ to the People, 1837-1857.
Oil on canvas, 540 x 750 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Ivan Kramskoi,
Self-Portrait, 1867.
 Oil on canvas, 52.7 x 44 cm.
 The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Ivan Kramskoi,
Christ in the Desert, 1872.
 Oil on canvas, 180 x 210 cm.
 The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Repin worked on this canvas for several years during which he travelled more than once to the Volga, studying the people who had come there from all corners of Russia to earn a hard living as barge haulers. The young artist would spend many hours closely observing them at their daily toil. But he was also attracted by secondary motifs which had a romantic overtone, such as the raft men's courageous battle with the elemental force of the river.

The sketches and studies for *Barge Haulers* reveal an interesting peculiarity which was to become characteristic of Repin's method of working on a painting. Sometimes his basic idea sprang from his first impression of something seen in real life (as was the case with *Barge Haulers*). On other occasions the basic theme was the outcome of reflections on Russia's history or the social and religious destiny of the individual. Between the "idea" and the "soil" – that is how one might describe the mental and spiritual sphere in which all Repin's most significant concepts arose. In either case, however, given the logic of the development of the subject, on the one hand, and the logic of the human characters, on the other, the two elements which determined the basic idea of his picture often compelled him to produce several versions of one painting, making changes in both content and technique. In *Barge Haulers*, which was completed at the juncture of two decades in Russian painting that differed greatly with regard to social and aesthetic ideas, this distinctive aspect of Repin's creative method is expressed with the assertive directness of youth.

The final version of the picture is far removed from the original concept. A simple feeling of sympathy for the barge haulers developed into a picture which anticipated essential features of Russian realism in the 1870s and '80s. The effect of hard physical labour seems to emphasise rather than obliterate the individuality of the barge haulers. The leader of the group, Kanin, has the dignity of an ancient philosopher sold into slavery, and his bearing illustrates the extent to which the artist respected the inner world of these men and reflects his belief that the spiritual strength of man cannot be broken even by heavy toil. It was no accident that Repin, after trying out many different versions of the same motif – the slow, staggering movement of a group of people – finally struck on an arrangement in which the barge haulers tramping the sandy bank appear to dominate the boundless expanse of the Volga. The artist achieved the effect through compositional means that are still rather overly direct, but his aim is clear, and it was that aim which placed Repin among those who were exploring new ways of portraying ordinary people.

In 1873, Repin made use of his travelling scholarship. He spent a few months travelling around Italy, but then lived and worked in France right up until his return in 1876. In Paris he visited the first exhibition of the Impressionists, and became immersed in the atmosphere of the heated debate over this new direction in European art. The young Repin studied the collections in the great museums in depth. He spent the summer months with other Russian artists in the small northern French seaside resort of Veules, trying to learn as many lessons as possible directly from nature.





Golgotha (The Crucifixion), 1869.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 99 cm.
Museum of Russian Art, Kiev.

Repin's work from this three-year period abroad includes landscape studies, several interesting portraits and two large multi-figure compositions, *A Paris Cafe* (1875) and *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom* (p.135). These and letters back to Russia reveal the range of the young painter's creative interests. He was not a particularly fervent supporter of the new French school, but on the other hand, he was far from joining in the rigorous criticism voiced by some of his Russian colleagues who tended to look on Impressionism as a dangerous departure from reality. Repin greatly valued the artistic and cultural heritage of France, carefully studying that tradition and trying to understand its role in contemporary art. *A Paris Cafe* is, in this sense, a sort of experiment, an attempt to put down on canvas his impressions of French life and French painting.

By the summer of 1876 Repin was home once more. He settled for a short period near St Petersburg and produced the beautiful, lyrical painting *On the Turf Seat*. This was in a sense a summary of his Paris experiences and the most impressionistic work Repin ever produced. The intimate motif (the artist's children, his wife and her relations out for a

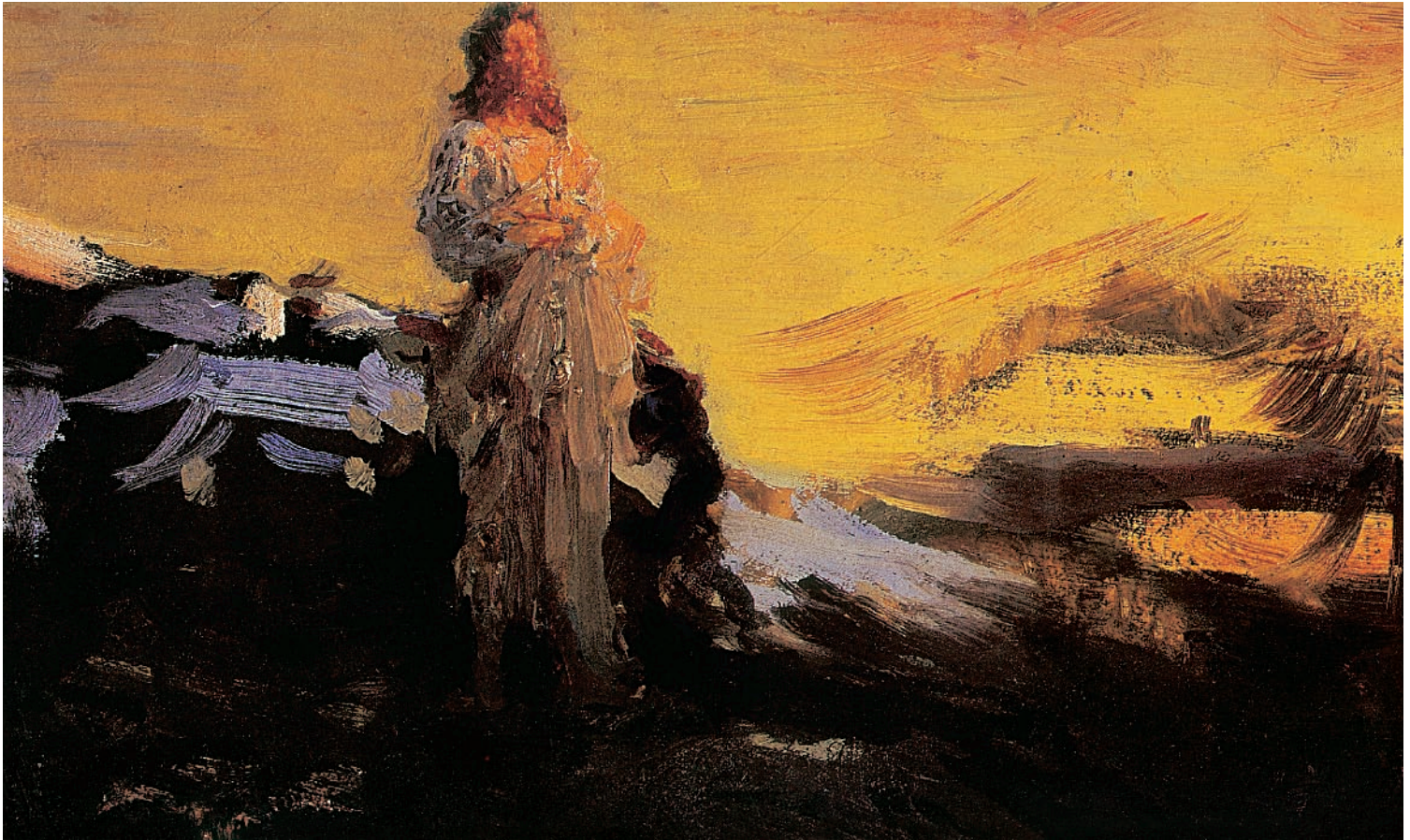


breath of fresh air) allowed Repin to convey the poetry of the summer landscape on a still, warm day.

In the autumn, the artist returned to his home town, Chuguyev, but after a year he moved to Moscow. He was a frequent guest at Abramtsevo, an estate near Moscow, where he was one of the most active members of the "Mamontov circle", named after its founder, the famous patron of the arts, Savva Mamontov. Many great Russian artists, including Victor Vasnetsov, Vasily Polenov, Valentin Serov and Mikhail Vrubel, were active in what was becoming one of the centres of Russian cultural life. The circle embraced a whole range of creative activities – painting, theatre, music, folk art – and was free of that slightly ascetic truth seeking characteristic of the young "rebels" of 1863 in St Petersburg. The environment of the Abramtsevo colony and acquaintance with the life of the local area further stimulated Repin's full-blooded response to reality. Here he found fresh fodder for his constant desire to strengthen the link between his own creative personality and the everyday existence of the people. The most significant and productive period in Repin's career began when he moved to St Petersburg

Job and His Friends, 1869.
Oil on canvas, 133 x 199 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.





in 1882. In the following decade, he produced most of his famous works. He became a member of the Itinerants' Society (the Society for Itinerant Art Exhibitions), a group of artists which brought together all the main currents in Russian realist art of the second half of the nineteenth century, and which played a considerable role in democratic culture in Russia. Itinerant exhibitions caused the visitors to think about themselves and the general lot of their country. By this time the picture of the world which art was presenting had lost its Romantic light-heartedness, its wilful egocentricity. The theme of destiny became the religious and philosophical-cum-moral orientation in the world depicted, the core which shaped the whole. This theme was capable of drawing on ideas of social determinism as well the great mysteries of existence in all its different forms, from the national and historic to the domestic and the personal.

On each occasion, the appearance of Repin's works at the annual exhibitions of the society became a social and artistic event. In his pictures, or at least in his most important ones, Repin tackled problems which were of concern to the progressive circles of Russia. The artist's constant desire was to understand the Russian mode of life and to interpret it in his own way; to show "the peculiarities of Russian tastes, images and notions, in fact, to do something which has never been done before."² Two aspects of Repin's talent should be singled out above all. They are, firstly, an innate feeling for the life of ordinary people, for their everyday concerns, their joys and sorrows, and, secondly, a persistent search for

St. Nicholas Saves Three Innocents from Death, 1888.

Oil on canvas, 215 x 196 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Get Thee Behind Me Satan! (sketch), 1890-1900.

Oil on cardboard, 21.7 x 40.5 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Religious Procession in Kursk Province, 1880-1883.

Oil on canvas, 175 x 280 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.







Pilgrim (study for Procession Amongst the Oak Trees), 1881.

Oil on canvas, 40.5 x 26 cm.

Savitsky Art Gallery, Penza.

The Hunchback, 1880.

Pencil and watercolour on paper,
61 x 52 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Diego Velázquez,

Portrait of Pope Innocent X, 1650.

Oil on canvas, 140 x 120 cm.

Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome.

The Archdeacon, 1877.

Oil on canvas, 124 x 96 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

"truth", for the meaning of human existence. Repin was capable of dashing off dozens of sketches for his own pleasure, deriving enjoyment from everyday scenes or the expressive possibilities of objects. But on the other hand, he would sometimes paint one figure several times before arriving at a solution which satisfied him. This was true of the face of the main figure in *Unexpected Return* (p.168), through whom Repin tried to convey the moral and philosophical content of the scene.

Though he would often, as did his colleagues Vasnetsov and Surikov, glance backward across the surging centuries for some picturesque setting, never after his apprentice days did he choose a subject that was not thoroughly Muscovite. Whatever else it may have been, the art of Repin was, and continued to be throughout his career, essentially nationalistic in aim and appeal. It is absorbing to follow from canvas to canvas the unfolding of Repin's pictorial power. His method is the reverse of impressionism. His principal works are not the result of a single, swift transcription of something vividly seen or spontaneously apprehended. They are the outcome of prolonged study and adjustment. As many as a hundred preliminary sketches were made for *The Cossacks' Reply*, of which, during an interval of some ten years, he painted three separate versions. The theme in fact haunted him in the same manner as the great romanticist Bocklin lived for so long under the spell of his *Island of the Dead*. Repin was never satisfied with the result of his efforts. He constantly strives to attain more effective grouping and arrangement, and more eloquent colouristic power. While based upon direct observation, the larger realistic and historical compositions appear to assume their final form in response to some inner pictorial necessity.

These qualities of Repin's realism were fully revealed in the works during the Chuguyev and Moscow periods of his career. With all the energy of a man returning to his native element, Repin seized on many different aspects of a world he had known since childhood. Some of the works of this time remained in sketch form (*In a Volost Administration Office*, p. 47), whereas others penetrated so deeply into the artist's creative consciousness that they reappeared over the following decades as independent works, enriched by the artist's spiritual and professional experience. Although the subject-matter of these works – peasant Russia – remained all-important, one could nonetheless distinguish new aspects on every occasion.

The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 furnished him with several themes, and in what is known as his nihilist cycle, comprising *Putting a Propagandist Under Arrest* (p.54), and *Unexpected Return*, he portrayed with penetrating truth and intensity that smouldering social volcano which has been responsible for so many decades of heroism and heartbreak. Among the works of this period are two that merit special consideration: *Vechornitsy*, or, as it is popularly called, *Ukrainian Peasant Gathering*, and the *Religious Procession in Kursk Province*, which was later supplemented by a somewhat similar *Procession*. Nowhere does Repin's Ukrainian origin betray itself more sympathetically than in his picturing of these simple-hearted merrymakers who gather at a humble *traktir* (Russian tea) to pass the night before their wedding dancing to the tune of violin, pipe, and balalaika. In *Procession*, with









its struggling, seething mass of humanity – its obese, gold-robed priests, benighted peasants, wretched beggars and cripples, cruel-mouthed officials, and inflated rural dignitaries, Repin seems to have offered us a pictorial synthesis of Russia. While a scene one might witness any day on the dust-laden highways of the southern districts, the picture possesses a deeper significance. In essence it is a condemnation, and, like the *Burlaki*, it is all the more severe because it is clothed in the irrefragable language of fact.

Repin's contemporaries remarked more than once on his special ability to capture everyday peasant life in his art. Kramskoi wrote to Stasov in December 1876: "Repin is capable of depicting the Russian peasant exactly as he is. I know many artists who have painted peasants, some of them very well, but none of them ever came close to what Repin does."³ Much later, in 1908, Leo Tolstoy remarked that Repin "depicts the life of the people much better than any other Russian artist."⁴ Such remarks are frequent in critical articles and commentaries of the time on the Itinerants' exhibitions.

Repin's reputation was founded on his *Barge Haulers*, the artist's thoughts on life in the Russian countryside after the reforms of the 1860s and on the lot of peasants who had to leave the land to take on seasonal work. However, this early canvas, in spite of the fact that it was based on preparatory work in open air, still shows a certain contradiction between the artist's desire to remain true to life and his rationalistic approach to the composition of the picture which consequently acquired a somewhat spectacular quality. In the Chuguyev and Moscow years, the peasant theme, at first a simple expression of the artist's social orientation, became an integral part of his realism.

In 1877, Repin conceived a multi-figure composition representing the scene of a religious procession. He was attracted to this subject primarily because of the opportunity it afforded to depict a multitude of people of diverse character and appearance. The content of this composition and the complicated process involved in its completion will be discussed in more detail below. As a preliminary study, Repin painted a portrait of Ivan Ulanov, the archdeacon of Chuguyev. The result was a work far superior to what was usually achieved in such studies. Repin's *Archdeacon* was soon shown at an Itinerants' Society exhibition where it was highly praised.

Repin's contemporaries were astonished by the amazingly plastic quality of the picture and the artist's ability to reproduce the vital force of human flesh. Repin himself saw in it "the echo of a pagan priest", the "pagan" element completely dominating the picture. *Archdeacon* (p.33) undoubtedly betrayed his knowledge of Western European art. One needs to think not of the French Impressionists – the aim of the painting is diametrically opposed to the tenets of French Impressionist art – but rather of the great masters of the seventeenth century, above all, Rembrandt and Velazquez. The artist's desire to portray a certain type of man remained linked to the essence of the model. The strength of the living energy conveyed places the portrait of Ivan Ulanov on the borderline between art and



Édouard Manet,

Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets, 1872.

Oil on canvas, 55.5 x 40.5 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Portrait of Vera Repina, the Artist's Wife, 1876.

Oil on canvas, 59 x 49 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.



Storm on the Volga, 1871-1891.
Oil on canvas, 55 x 102 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Vassili Grigorievitch Perov,
Troika (Apprentices Fetch Water), 1866.
Oil on canvas, 123.5 x 167.5 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Barge Haulers on the Volga,
1870-1873.
Oil on canvas, 131.5 x 281 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

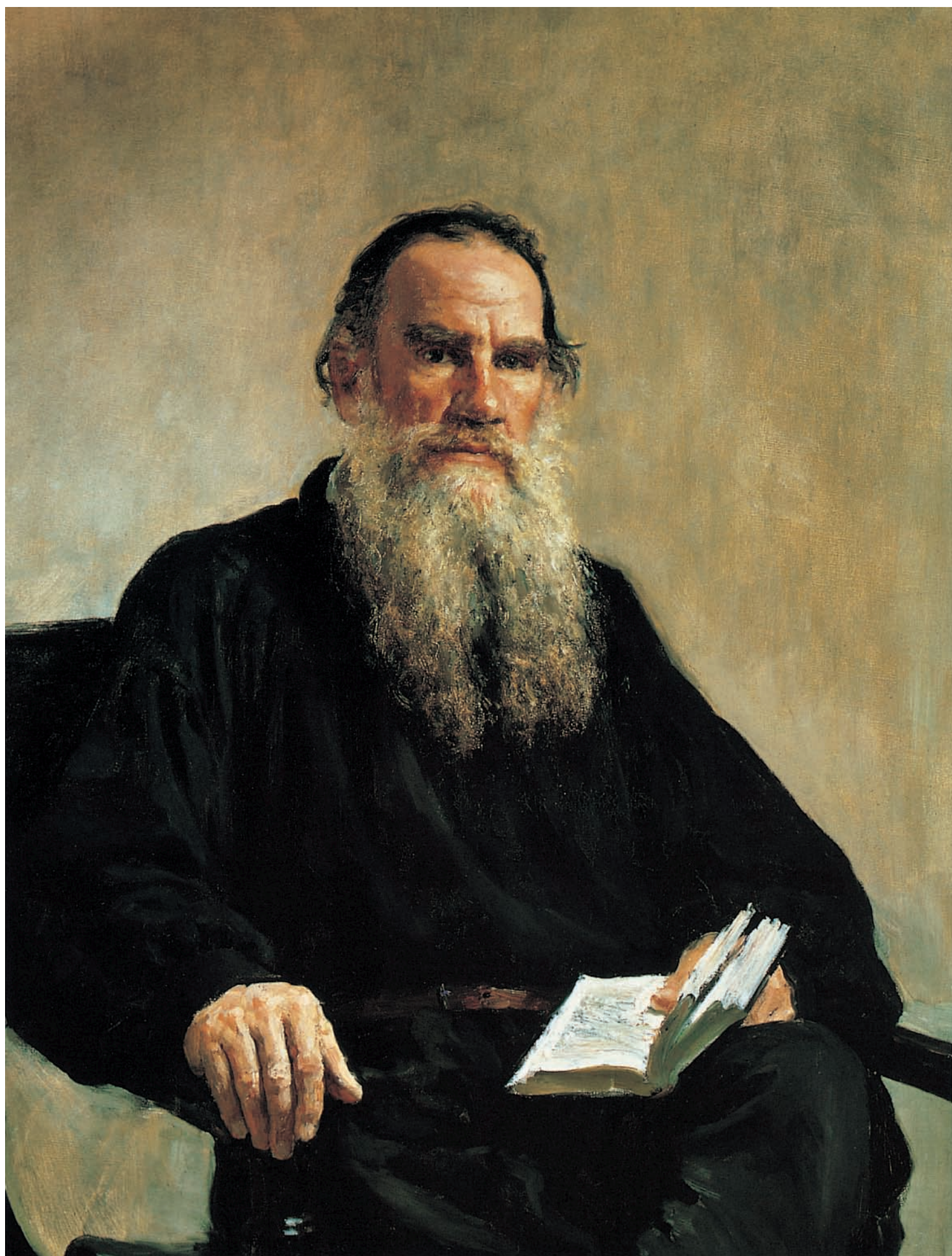
action itself. One has the impression that the irrational elemental nature depicted is barely constrained by the artist's wilful act of creation. While admiring Repin's skills, contemporaries noted the awesome, almost magical power of the image. The flourish with which this portrait was executed, intimates not only the boldness of the great artist, but also some sort of frenzied invocation, the anger of the animal-tamer. The artistic power of Repin's *Archdeacon* has something of the expressivity of a man-made idol. The work provoked the following comment from the composer Modest Mussorgsky, who perceived the elemental forces contained within the archdeacon's figure: "What fearsome sweeps of the brush, what an abundance of space!"⁵ This "pagan" motif probably never reoccurred with such consistent force in Repin's work. But it is present in many of his ideas, reflecting an important aspect of the artist's thoughts about Russia. In these thoughts two elements dominate, and both vie and interact with each other. One is a delight in the deep, primordial, "earthy" force of Russian reality; the other an awareness of the conflict between that force and the spiritual ideals of the age. In fact, Repin's treatment of the peasant theme best illustrates this.

Repin travelled many different artistic roads in his attempts to grasp life in the Russian countryside after Alexander II's reforms. He never lost touch with the people, with the social and moral outlook of the Russian peasant. In fact, this involvement was characteristic of the Itinerants as a body. Repin's conceptions of epic scenes and vast multi-figure compositions are always accompanied by a desire to incorporate different typical characters.







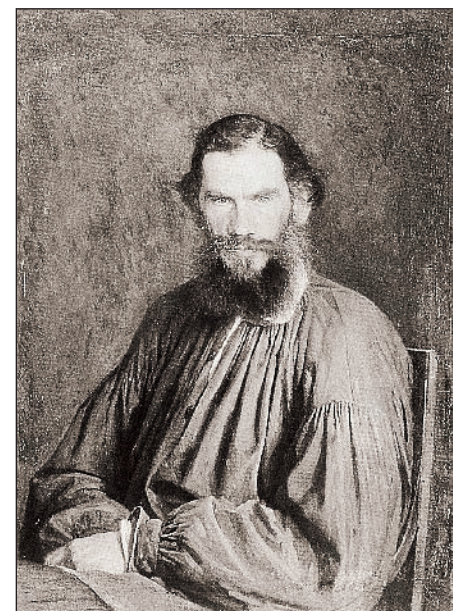


The artist was intensively seeking an image of his Russia – a Russia which lived in the expectation of divine benevolence. It was this innate feature of the popular consciousness which he tried to come to grips with. *The Revealed Icon*, *The Miraculously Created Icon* and *A Religious Procession* are the names Repin gives these different versions of his concept, each time linking – and this is very significant – the religious, ritual side of public life with historical and cultural symbolic meanings. The general narrative and compositional scheme at once took on a certain dramatic aspect: he wanted to show the different attitudes of the people towards the miracle-working icon at the head of the procession. This dominates the preliminary sketches for the canvas. Later on, however, the concept seems to have dictated the very process of its realisation, and forced the artist to change his original scheme. Thus two versions arose, differing both in form and in content.

Repin was to return many times to his first version, which has come to be known as *Religious Procession in an Oak Wood*, begun in 1877, changing individual elements and even whole groups of figures. Some scholars have rightly suggested that here he depicts the procession as if it were part of some outdated superstition. It was for this canvas that the artist needed the “pagan” image of the archdeacon. The procession itself is pageant, more reminiscent of rural mummers than of a serious ritual act.

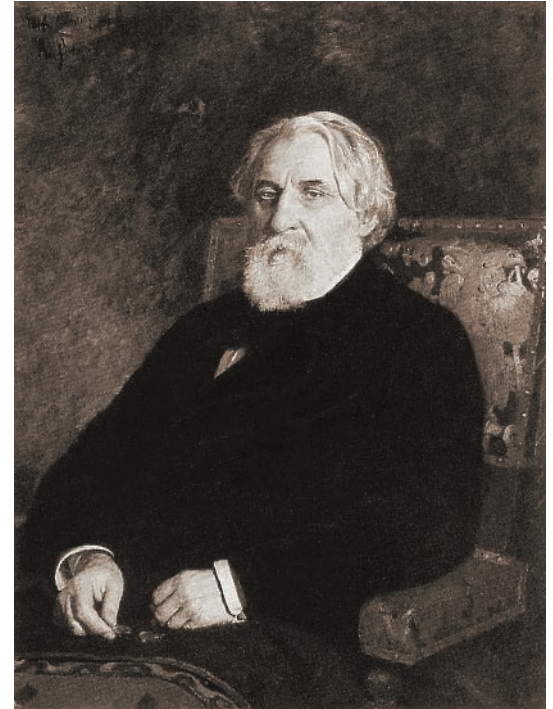
The second version of the picture, which Repin began later and completed in 1883, was destined to become the more popular of the two. It was called *Religious Procession in Kursk Province* (1880-1883). The story told in the work has been slightly altered: in a time of drought a crowd of people is moving across the parched earth. They are carrying a miracle-working icon to a nearby church or monastery, carrying it in such a way as to observe at least the outward forms of the ritual procession. It is not a homogeneous gathering – the viewer will immediately detect a great variety of social types and characters. Depicted here is not just a stream of people but the flow of life itself, a life bereft of joy, full of profound contradictions, social hostility and inequality, but a life which never stops moving for a moment. By placing rough peasant clothes and colourful holiday caftans next to a range of city attire, Repin precisely illustrates the differences in class and wealth between those participating in the procession. The behaviour of the people and their attitudes to what is happening around them, suggests equally vividly another “hierarchy” within the crowd: from the sanctimonious piety of the gentry to the impetuous absorption of the hunchback.

One aspect of the setting is very important, as has often been pointed out. In the first version the crowd is passing through leafy woodland; in the second it is moving along a dusty hillside covered with bare tree stumps. This image of wasteland was a significant sign of the times; when Repin returned home to Chuguyev after his trip abroad, he wrote in distress: “Houses and fences seem to have sunk into the earth as if in a deep sleep, roofs have sagged... Only the exploiters of the land, the kulaks, are not sleeping. They have cut down my beloved woods, so full of childhood memories.”⁶



Portrait of Leo Tolstoy, 1887.
Oil on canvas, 124 x 88 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Ivan Kramskoi,
Portrait of Leo Tolstoy, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 98 x 79.5 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



It would be an oversimplification, however, to interpret this aspect of the picture as merely a protest against the unscrupulous exploitation of nature. The pitiful sight of the stunted tree trunks in the background, the result of an act of destruction, stood for a much broader notion – the notion of human cruelty. This is developed in several other motifs within the composition.

This concept of Repin's is far removed from the pantheist symbolism of the Romantics who often depicted trees as an allegory, a direct embodiment of a person's life and destiny. The artist who painted *Religious Procession in Kursk Province* was first and foremost an acute and profound observer of life. His brilliant insight into the material world was rooted elsewhere, in the artistic vision of Russian realism during the second half of the nineteenth century. The realist artists sought to maintain the essential link between man and his social and natural environment, while always looking for an approach to the basic problems of everyday life.

These principles are evident in Repin's work and in his interesting correspondence. It is worth quoting again from the letters he wrote from Chuguyev in which he touches on the same subject:

This winter they cut down a large section of the Staroversky forest. I often went there to watch. The day before yesterday they felled the biggest oak... They had already sawn into the oak. It was a colossal tree with many branches – probably more than two-hundred years old. Two men could scarcely encircle the trunk with their arms.

The longest branches were on the west side, in the direction it was supposed to fall... They thrust a wedge into its eastward side, sawed a little more... the oak trembled and slowly began to topple... A terrible noise of whistling wind

Nikolai Nikolaevich Ge,
Tolstoy at Work, 1884.
Lithograph.
Private collection.

Portrait of the Author Ivan Turgenev,
1874.
Oil on canvas, 116.5 × 89 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

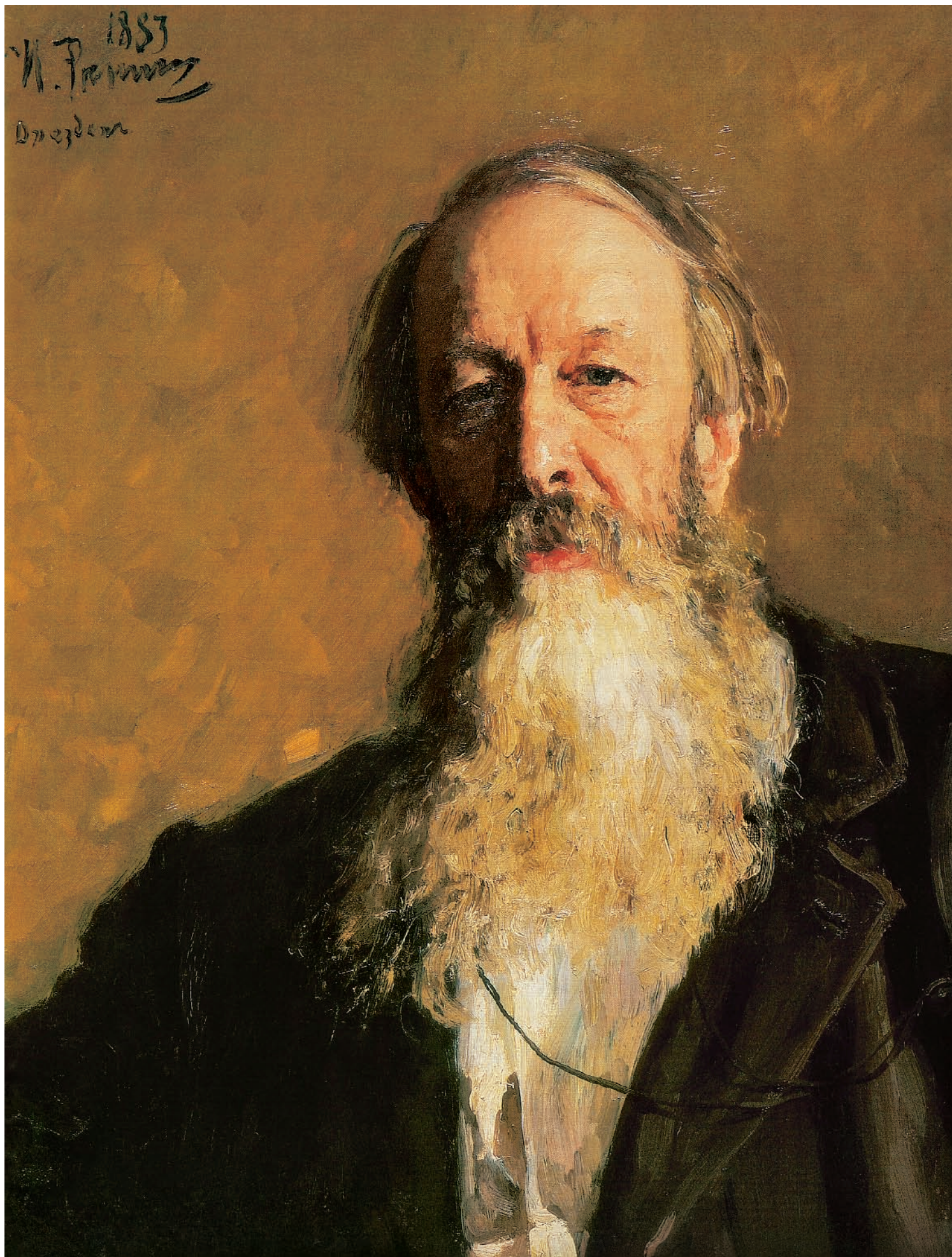
Vasily Perov,
Portrait of the Writer Fyodor
Dostoyevsky, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 99 × 80.5 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of Polixena Stasova, 1879.
Oil on canvas, 75 × 66 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of Vladimir Stasov, 1883.
Oil on canvas, 74 × 60 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.











accompanied the falling giant. Then there was a great thunderous thud; lumps of snow flew up in places, and in an instant all that splendid, curling mass lay flat...

I wondered whether the oak was rotten, since it had broken to pieces; I picked up an axe and tried it... the oak seemed as tough as iron; it was good, healthy, dark and old.⁷

It is interesting to note the similarity of Repin's image with the famous description of the death of a tree in Leo Tolstoy's story *Three Deaths*:

The sound of the axe at the bottom grew duller and duller. Sappy white chips flew onto the dewy grass and a slight creaking could be heard above the sound of the blows. The tree, shuddering from top to toe, bent over and quickly straightened up, shaking with fear on its roots. For an instant all was still, but then the tree bent again, another crack sound came from its trunk, and with its branches breaking and its boughs hanging down it fell crown-first onto the damp earth.⁸

It is not so important to establish whether or not Repin remembered Tolstoy's story when he wrote down his impressions. (Most likely he remembered it well.) It is far more important to note the link between the two, the features of an artistic perception of the world shared by these two great representatives of Russian culture.

Woman Leaning on Back of a Chair, 1875.

Oil on canvas, 40.3 x 26.5 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

In a Volost Administration Office, 1877.

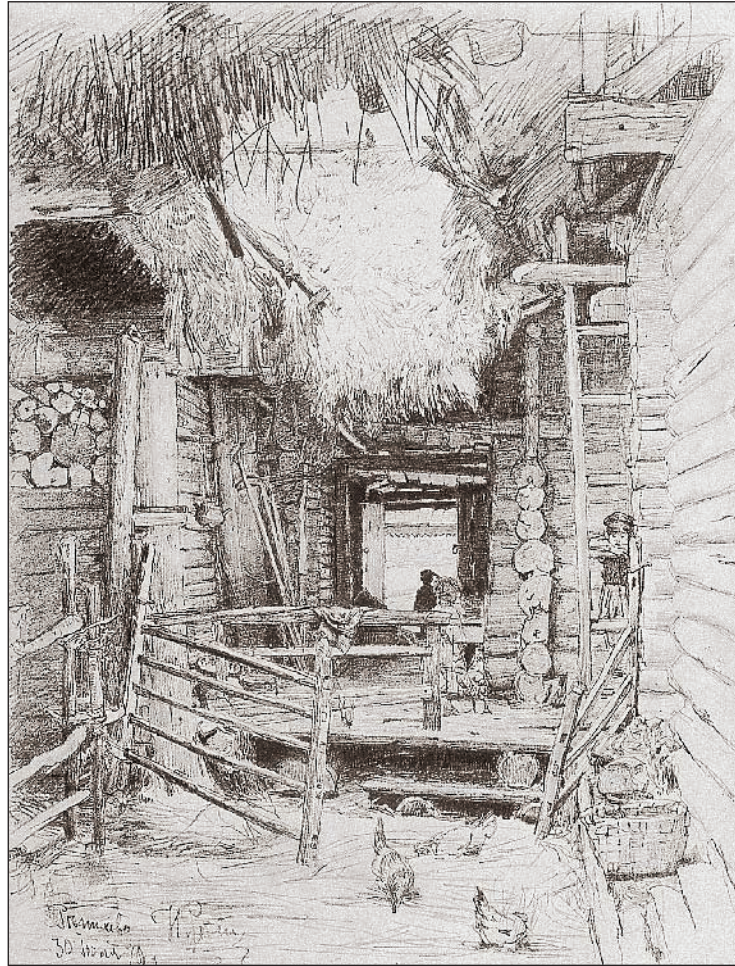
Oil on canvas, 47.5 x 80 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.



*Man and Woman at a Table, Two
Seated Women, Man Putting a Glove,*
1873.
Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 47.5 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.





Does this example mean that the similarity can be detected only with the aid of written commentaries by the artist, and not on the basis of the paintings themselves? Undoubtedly when the images are expressed in the same, literary sphere of creativity it makes identifying such parallels easier, but equally undoubtedly (and we shall return to this idea several times) Repin's visual idiom provides sufficient grounds for drawing such parallels.

The creative process behind *Religious Procession in Kursk Province* fully accorded with the artist's chief goal – to give a cohesive picture of peasant Russia. Repin began collecting material in Chuguyev, then worked intensively on studies in Moscow. Later he made a special trip to the Kursk area to observe a religious procession and the landscape on the spot. The lack of any distinctive features in the mutilated central Russian landscape of the final composition serves to strengthen the idea of the picture as a conglomerate endowed with a certain geographical "universality".

Of all the numerous studies for *Religious Procession*, the study or rather the whole series of paintings and drawings of *The Hunchback* (p.31) is of particular significance for the development of the overall conception. In the same way as the *Archdeacon* set the tone of *Religious Procession in an Oak Wood*, so the figure of the hunchback embodies the most fundamental aspects of *Religious Procession in Kursk Province*.

Small Courtyard in the Countryside,
1879.
Pencil on paper, 35.3 x 26.1 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Instead of “pagan” elements, in his main study of the hunchback Repin emphasizes other aspects of human consciousness. The manner of painting here is just as energetic, just as directed to reveal the “physical” truth of the image as in the case of the *Archdeacon*. Now, however, the plastic qualities of the study serve not only to “lay on” the material flesh of the image, but also endow it with a new dimension, stressing inner mobility and mutability.

In the painting the hunchback is perhaps the only character whose movement, nervous and impetuous, has a profound significance of its own. The whole crowd moves along slowly. The straggling disorderly procession with neither beginning nor end, nor even a general sense of purpose, has broken up into separate groups of people engrossed in their own concerns. And only in the figure of the hunchback, pushing his way urgently forward, does the motif of movement take on an entirely independent significance and acquire inner impulses. The half-stupor affecting the never ending flow of people contrasts sharply with the energy of this one troubled soul, representing the silent determination of the human will.

Repin’s “peasant” canvases of the 1870s and 1880s reveal the scope of his artistic interests, and the diversity of their creative outlets. While working on the conception of

Seeing off a Recruit, 1879.
Oil on canvas, 143 x 225 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.



his epic multi-figure composition *Religious Procession*, he also produced some small-scale pictures, including such noted works as *A Peasant with an Evil Eye* and *A Cautious One* (both 1877). Those paintings show character types shaped to a large degree by their social background and through them Repin makes a major contribution to an understanding of the nature of the common people. Repin sought to comprehend the deep-rooted, “eternal” problems of peasant life in Russia, but he was also capable of tackling its pressing everyday issues. Evidence of this can be found in some of Repin’s works, inspired by events connected with the Russian army’s Balkan campaign in the late 1870s.

In contrast to his well-known contemporary, Vasily Vereshchagin, who actually witnessed the Russo-Turkish War and produced a whole series of battle scenes, Repin saw the war as a succession of episodes from the hard daily life of the peasantry. One example is the genre piece *Seeing Off a Recruit* (p.51). Although this canvas differs noticeably from Repin’s other works in that it is a far more conventional composition, it still manages to convey genuine human emotion and an authentic sense of peasant life.

Vechornytsi, 1881.
Oil on canvas, 116 x 186 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Church with Steeple of the Village of Gruchevka, 1880.
Pencil on paper, 19 x 24.8 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Riverbed by Nikopol, 1880.
Pencil, shaded on paper, 18.8 x 24.7 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

A distinctive place in Repin’s artistic legacy is occupied by a group of works produced in the later part of the nineteenth century expressing his reflections on the liberation movement of his time and the fate of those involved in it. Starting with a few rough sketches, the artist went on to explore the theme in ever greater depth. Even the one theme of *Putting a Propagandist Under Arrest* gave Repin enough material for several drawings and paintings, each with its own specific meaning and intonation.





By comparing two pictures of the 1880s – *Unexpected Return* (p.168) and *Confession* (1879-1885) we can get some idea of the variety of social, moral and psychological problems which occupied Repin when he was working on the image of the “popular intercessor”. This comparison will also demonstrate the artist’s capacity to modify the pictorial and dramatic aims while remaining within the framework of late-nineteenth-century realism.

While possessing an ample measure of reconstructive imagination, and a notably sound and convincing historical sense, Repin is one of those instinctive realists who are at their best when face to face with the living model. Rarely does he wander from the realm of definite, specific observation. The stricken, tortured countenance of Ivan the Terrible’s dying son is virtually a portrait of poor, distraught Garshin in the final stages of insanity and impending suicide. The confused, haunted expression on the face of the exile in *Unexpected Return* was suggested to the painter by the appearance of Dostoyevsky when he first came home after his Siberian immolation. The work of Repin, like that of his fellow toilers in the field of letters as well as art, takes its point of departure from the facts of everyday existence. For them, life as it seethed about them in its perennial power and complexity, was all sufficient.

Putting a Propagandist Under Arrest,
1880-1889.
Oil on canvas, 34.8 x 54.6 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Unexpected Return depicts the homecoming of a political exile, a subject which combines direct social relevance with the portrayal of a psychological drama. The exile's mother, wife and children are numbed by their emotions, and wait for the first word that will end this moment of tension and make way for an expression of human joy. But as yet that first word is still unuttered and everyone looks for some response to their own feelings in the eyes of the others. *Confession*, one of Repin's finest works, depicts another possible outcome in the life of a revolutionary. Instead of the bright sunlit room which greets the returning exile in *Unexpected Return*, here we see a tiny, poorly-lit prison cell. Looking at the pose and expression of the prisoner, and still more knowing the literary source behind the painting (Nikolai Minsky's poem *The Last Confession*), it is easy to foresee that the confession of the character depicted will not be an act of reconciliation with the world, still less an expression of penitence. In the last moments of his life the condemned man adheres to the moral code he himself has chosen, the code which for him determines the true values of existence. But the final confession – whatever form it might take – is not only an assertion of some particular moral precepts, but also a man's acknowledgement of personal responsibility, a viewing of his individual destiny as something laid down by some higher force. The semi-darkness of the solitary cell absorbs the visible features of the social drama, but reveals the tragedy of a freedom-loving human soul. The content of the painting is considerably broader than an

The Annual Memorial Meeting Near the Wall of the Communards in the Cemetery of Père-Lachaise in Paris, 1883.

Oil on canvas, 36.8 x 59.8 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Road through Montmartre in Paris,
1875-1876.
Oil on canvas.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.





apologia of any form of prescriptive morality, broader than some proclamation of particular ideological principles.

When attempting to characterize the artistic and social problems which occupied Repin at the time, we should remember that this was the period when the authority of literature with the Russian public was at its greatest. This was the age of Leo Tolstoy, Fiodor Dostoyevsky, Nikolai Nekrasov, and many other important figures, and thus the relationship between literature and painting was one of the key factors shaping Russian realism at that time; its imagery, and its social, philosophical, and moral ideas.

It would be wrong to reduce this matter to merely looking for direct parallels between literature and art. It would be even further from the truth to say that representational art only interpreted the ideas and images found in literature – in other words, merely produced illustrations. This idea was rejected at the time by Vladimir Stasov, when he wrote:

The main distinguishing feature of Russian art is that it invents its own subject-matter independently of the works of Russian literature... What could be easier, it would seem, than to take a ready-made subject from the short stories, novels, poems, comedies, plays and poems of Russian writers. There are so many of them, and they have created so many splendid works. However, in contemporary Russian art you will not find pictures based on a subject from Griboyedov, Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Ostrovsky, Leo Tolstoy, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Nekrasov, or

Under Guard. On the Muddy Road,
1876.
Oil on canvas, 26.5 x 53 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



others. Every painting has its own subject. The exceptions are so rare as to be virtually, even entirely non-existent.¹⁰

Stasov's statement is, admittedly, too categorical: nineteenth-century Russian painting does echo works of literature, and examples can be easily found amongst Repin's works, too: *Poprishchin* (1882), a portrayal of the tragic figure from Gogol's story *The Diary of a Madman* and *Don Juan and Dona Anna* (p.171), inspired by Pushkin's *Stone Guest*. But in general Stasov is, of course, right; the heart of the matter lays elsewhere. The link between visual arts and literature was important primarily because it helped form the character of Russian artistic culture in the second half of the nineteenth century; literature, more than any other form of art, expressing the ideals of the time, and encouraging the development of public self-awareness, of social and moral values, and a new historical perspective.

The artistic vision shared by Repin and Leo Tolstoy has already been illustrated by the motif of the felling of a tree. This community of vision was born out the sensitivity to the fundamental problems of daily life, inherent in Russian classic realism. Repin's approach to the subject of revolution serves as an even more telling illustration of the coherence of Russian artistic culture, which determined the aims of different branches of the arts, their social and ethical explorations, and their attempts to pin down the "main idea" of the age.

The sense of drama engendered by Repin's canvases is not confined to the heightened intensity of the situations depicted. The conflicts in, for example, *Confession* or *Putting a*

Opening the Railroad. Khotkovo, 1882.
Oil on canvas, 35 x 59 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.





Propagandist Under Arrest go much deeper than that. The artist understood very well that material well-being and civic courage belonged to different pans of the scales, but as a genuine realist he could not be satisfied with merely stating that fact. The protagonists of Repin's best pictures, and particularly those based on revolutionary subjects, are examined in their relationship not only to their environment, but also to themselves, to their own spiritual world. In this sense, the artist made it his principal task to explore the ethical ideals of the age from a psychological point of view. This indeed was that most profound sphere of Repin's realism which linked his work with the creative interests of Russian writers. The exploration of ethical ideals through the example of real human destinies became one of the most characteristic features of Russian artistic culture in the late nineteenth century in its search for historical and social truth. Undoubtedly this process was influenced by the complex social and moral nature of the popular liberation movement whose participants provided the prototypes for many of Repin's characters. To give one example already mentioned: the concept of "Confession" was suggested by Minsky's poem *The Last Confession*, printed in the underground newspaper of the revolutionary group known as the People's Will. The poem was written to glorify the heroic determination of a young revolutionary who had been condemned to death. But Repin's significance as a realist artist lay precisely in the fact that he never contented himself to illustrating events, and never limited himself to imitating discoveries that had been made in other branches of art. The world of his imagery directly reflects the profound intellectual trends of the period, his artistic innovations and his faith in the unconditional value of man's spiritual ideals.

These convictions focused the artist's attention on the most important events in the country's life, on facts that concentrated within them the social and moral meaning of the age. But the same also gave rise to one more characteristic of Repin's art – the common ground

Girl with Flowers.
Daughter of the Artist, 1878.
 Oil on canvas, 61 x 49 cm.
 Brodsky House Museum,
 St Petersburg.

On a Bridge in Abramtsevo, 1879.
 Oil on canvas, 37.5 x 61 cm.
 The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts,
 St Petersburg.

*Portrait of Vera Repina,
the Artist's Daughter, 1886.*
Oil on canvas, 134.5 x 63.5 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

*Rest. Portrait of Vera Repina,
the Artist's Wife, 1882.*
Oil on canvas, 69 x 57 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of Vera Repina, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

The Black Woman, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 115 x 92 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.











Portrait of Nikolai Wentzel (study), 1879.

Oil on canvas, 29.3 x 20.3 cm.
The Pushkin Museum of Fine Art,
Moscow.

Portrait of the Artist Konstantin Pervukhin, 1885.

Pencil on paper, 18.8 x 11 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

On the Volga. Landscape with Boats, 1870.

Pencil on paper, 28.2 x 37.2 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

The Shiriayevo Gully on the Volga, 1870.

Pencil on paper, 28.2 x 37.2 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

between his imagery and motifs with mythological or Biblical subjects. Thus, for example, scholars have noted the semantic link between the main character entering the room in *Unexpected Return* and the image of Christ appearing to the people, a scene taken from the history of world art. (Alexander Ivanov's picture *The Apparition of Christ to the People* was probably fresh in Repin's memory.) In Repin's creative career there were also occasions when the artist, wishing to give expression to the tragic clashes of his time, turned directly to Christian subjects.

Such compositions usually arose out of the artist's desire to imbue his own idea with the power of a moral imperative. A concrete example is provided by *St. Nicholas Saves Three Innocents from Death* (1888; Repin completed two more versions of this picture shortly afterwards), a work overtly directed against capital punishment, extensively used in Russia in the 1880s. Had Repin never painted a single portrait, he would still have earned his place in the history of Russian art as an incomparable master in the portrayal of human characters. But, of course, he did produce dozens portraits, paintings, and drawings which constitute an important part of his legacy. Particularly his portraits, regularly displayed at art exhibitions, won him extraordinary popularity amongst his contemporaries. This popularity was of a completely different nature from that enjoyed by fashionable portrait painters. Whereas the fashionable journeyman-painter strove to captivate the viewer with a simulacrum of life, Repin stressed the real – material and spiritual – essence of life, the essence of a person.





In examining Repin's portraits, one can, with full justification, call the artist a "clairvoyant of the flesh" in the sense in which Dmitry Merezhkovsky used that expression for Leo Tolstoy; that is to say a clairvoyant of the flesh which is born of life and itself creates life, is blooming or already withering, but in any case strikes the eye as the vital force of nature. We are talking here, first and foremost, about the living body's capacity to radiate energy and express all the shifts of the human heart conveyed in programmatic manner. Repin fulfilled the role of portraitist in different ways. While depicting, say, Nikolay Pirogov or Polina Strepetova, he revealed the process of painting itself, displaying the artistic perception of nature. In the portraits of Mussorgsky or Andrei Delwig, by contrast, the image of the sitter seems to have been seized by the artist's inner vision and transferred directly onto the canvas without the aid of the brush.

When considering Repin's portraiture as a whole, one is struck by the great variety of sitters that he chose for his works. He did portraits of people from all walks of life – high officials, representatives of St Petersburg's high society, figures from Russian cultural life, close friends, and relations. It is interesting to note that quite often one can detect in the work of artists of that time a qualitative division between portraits that were commissioned and those for personal reasons. Such a division is not noticeable in those which Repin executed. This does not, of course, mean that Repin tackled each portrait with equal enthusiasm. It was, for example, no easy task for him to paint the picture *Slavic Composers* (p. 132) for which he had to accomplish the portraits of more than twenty great Russian, Polish, and Czech musicians: Mikhail Glinka, Alexander Dargomyzhsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Frederic Chopin, Stanislaw Moniuszko, Bedrich Smetana, and many more. In this very unusual commission, a memorial group portrait, Repin was to present on canvas both people still alive and others long dead. These conditions placed a certain limit on his creative possibilities. But even under these restrictions the young artist's outstanding talent is unmistakable. In Repin's finest works itinerant portraiture reached a height that placed it among the most significant achievements of art in late-nineteenth-century Europe. Following the precepts of Ivan Kramskoi, Repin in his portraits sought to stress, and succeeded in stressing, the social and moral value of man's intense inner life. Yet at the same time, it is a comparison with Kramskoi's works, in particular, which helps to reveal the distinctive characteristics of Repin's imagery.

If we try to characterize the portraits created by Kramskoi, it is fairly easy to point to the dominant theme – and not merely because his portraits as a rule depict members of the Russian intelligentsia of the 1860-1880s, "the shapers of thoughts". It is not difficult to detect another common aspect of his "gallery" – the type of portrait the artist preferred. The poses have a certain austere quality and the sitters look out at the viewer with a penetrating, at times almost hypnotic stare. Although all Kramskoi's portraits are very true to life and manage to capture the individual character of the sitters, they seem to reflect the personality of the painter himself, and his particular outlook on the world. It could be said that the psychological element in Kramskoi's portraits, which is their common element, expressed

Portrait of Princess Maria Tenisheva,
1896.
Oil on canvas, 197 × 120 cm.
Brodsky House Museum, St Petersburg.



Choosing a Bride, 1884-1887.
Oil on canvas, 65 x 101 cm.
State Art Gallery, Perm, Russia.



both the objectively-existing qualities of the people portrayed and the working of the artist's penetrating analytical mind. That is not to say, of course, that Kramskoi's portraits amount to nothing more than a series of works reflecting his own personality. Yet one thing remains clear: the great typological similarity between most of his portraits is due to the fact that each was a "portrait-idea" engendered by the artist.

In contrast, the subjects of Repin's portraits possess to a far greater degree an independent life of their own; at the very least, they are subordinated to some sort of "spirituality" existing outside of the actual human image. The artist painted usually in a free and easy manner, although sometimes with evident inner tension, but always trying to express the natural individuality of his sitters, their own bearing and way of presenting themselves to the surrounding world. This is just as true of his formal portraits as of his more intimate ones.

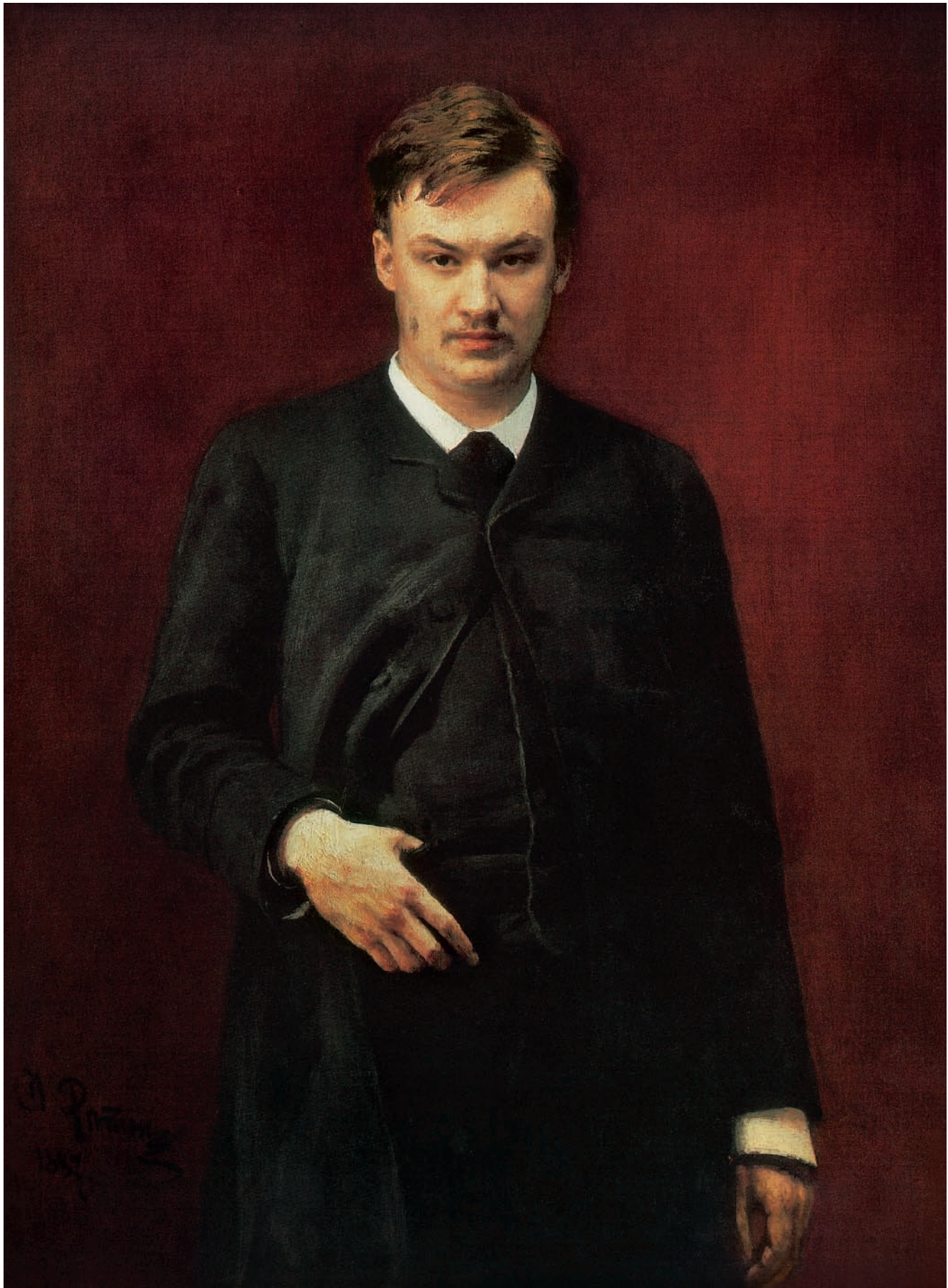
Repin was particularly fond of portrait painting. In the early period of his career, when he was still a very young man in Chuguyev, he used to paint the portraits of people around him, following the tradition of half-self-taught provincial portraitists. Later, when he became a versatile master, portrait painting still attracted him as a main means of creative self-expression. He continued to devote much time to portraiture in his later years, and judging by the works of that period, it seems the ageing artist found that portraiture remained an important means for satisfying his continuing need for direct communication with people and reality.

Throughout his career Repin produced numerous graphic portrait sketches alongside his major painted works in this sphere. There was constant interaction between the two forms of creativity. It is, therefore, necessary to say a little at this point about Repin the draughtsman. A considerable number of Repin's drawings have come down to us, both as separate sheets and in sketchbooks, which illustrate the immense amount of preliminary work that preceded most of his paintings. In these drawings we can trace the development of his compositions and the artist's attempts at capturing individual likenesses, gestures, and moods. The talent of this realist was always founded on a minute observation of life; like most of the great artists of his time, Repin would constantly record his impressions, make notes, study the structure of objects destined to feature in future canvases.

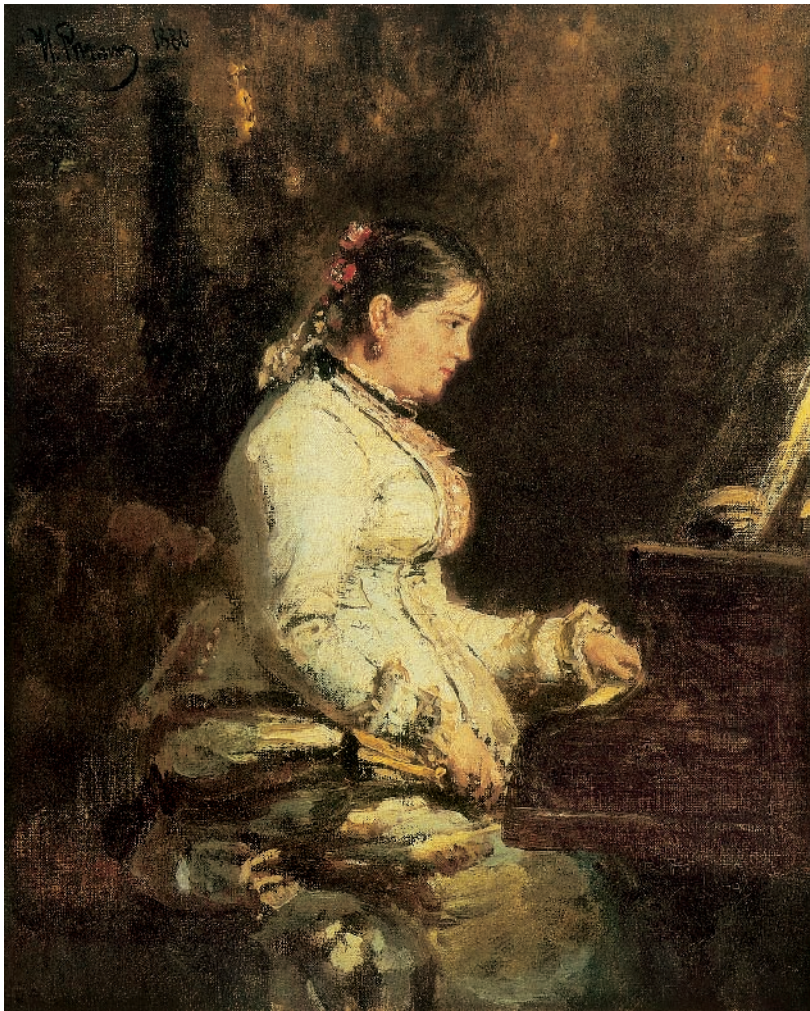
One could not call Repin a graphic artist in the sense that the term was applied to his younger colleagues, such as Valentin Serov, or the members of the World of Art group. His graphic idiom did not develop into an independent artistic system emphasising the special expressive role of the pencil stroke and the white sheet of paper. While Repin was a master of practically all techniques of graphic art – pen and pencil drawing, watercolours, and brush drawing in India ink – he rarely presented such work as a fully-fledged vision and objective interpretation of the world. Repin's drawing most often tends towards an essentially painterly means of imitating nature, and we can usually sense an attempt to make material form tangible and to endow it with elements of independent existence. In this respect his talent as a draughtsman was unequalled in Russian art of the late nineteenth century.

Portrait of the Composer Alexander Glazunov, 1887.
Oil on canvas, 125 x 89 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of the Pianist Maria Benois, 1887.
Oil on canvas, 125 x 88 cm.
Brodsky House Museum, St Petersburg.







It is perhaps his portraits (including the many studies not formally listed under this genre, but relevant and interesting because Repin tackled them as portrait paintings) that give us the best idea of Repin's achievements as a draughtsman. Although his drawings tend towards lyricism (it is no coincidence that the theme of female beauty occurs far more often in his graphic works than in his paintings), Repin also produced psychological works full of drama and inner tension. Such is his charcoal-on-canvas *Portrait of Eleonora Duse* (1891). The work vividly demonstrates Repin's ability to find a harmonious relationship between a natural portrait motif and a distinct monumental quality in the composition.

At all times the evolution of Repin's portrait work was closely bound up with his personal development as an artist. Many portraits gravitate towards one or other of the artist's great narrative paintings, and it is easy to divide them on that principle into thematic groups. His work on *Religious Procession* was accompanied by a whole series of portraits of peasant figures. Repin's canvases of the 1880s, which are devoted to the intelligentsia's involvement in the Russian liberation movement, also had a notable influence on the content of his portraits, increasing his interest in a certain group of his contemporaries. In more precise terms, we are talking here about the interaction between definite thematic concepts and the

At the Piano. Portrait of Sofia Tarnovskaia, 1880.

Oil on canvas, 46 x 36 cm.
Art Museum, Sumy, Ukraine.

At the Piano, 1905.

Charcoal, red and black chalk shaded on paper, 44.5 x 29 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

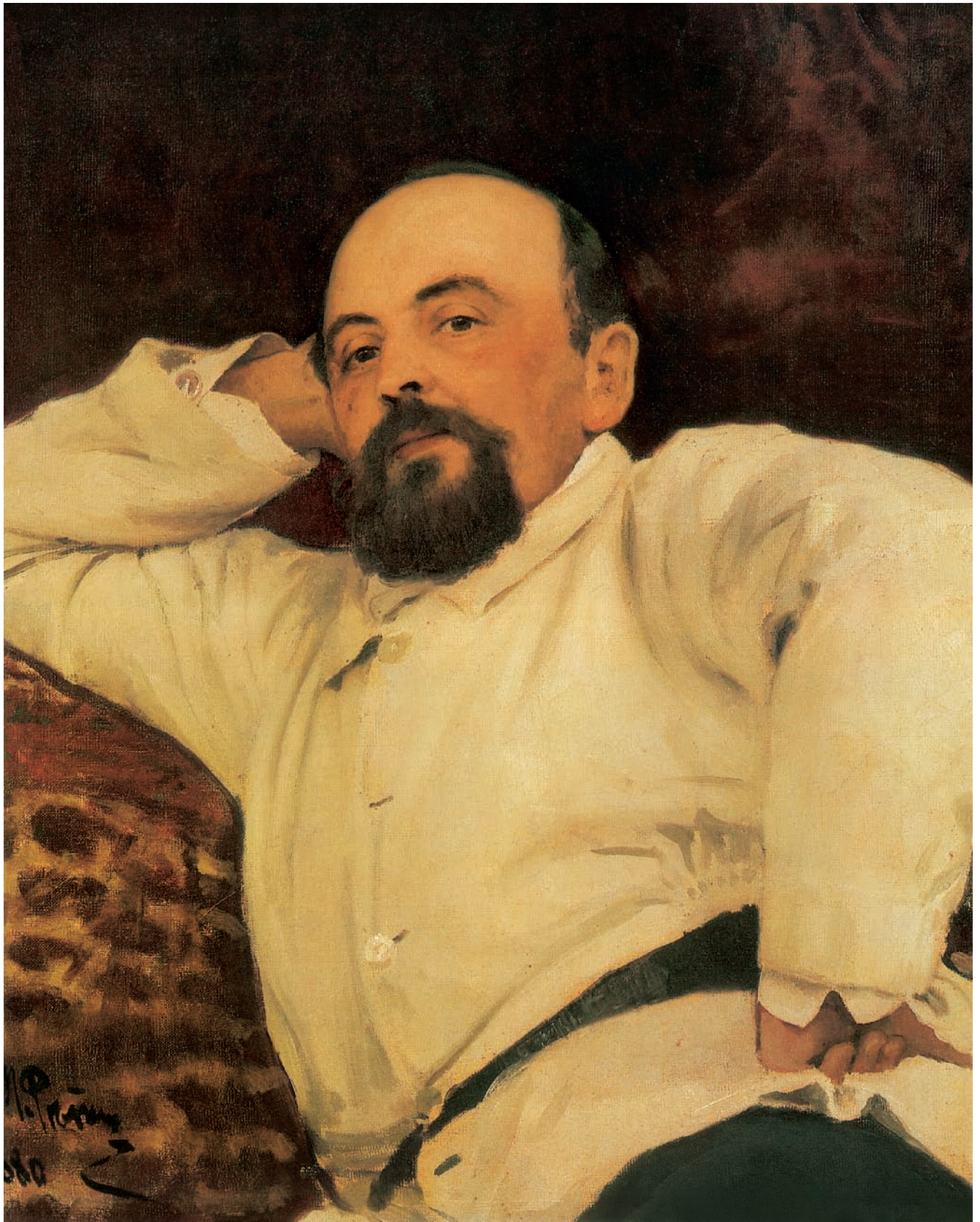
Portrait of the Composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (detail), 1893.

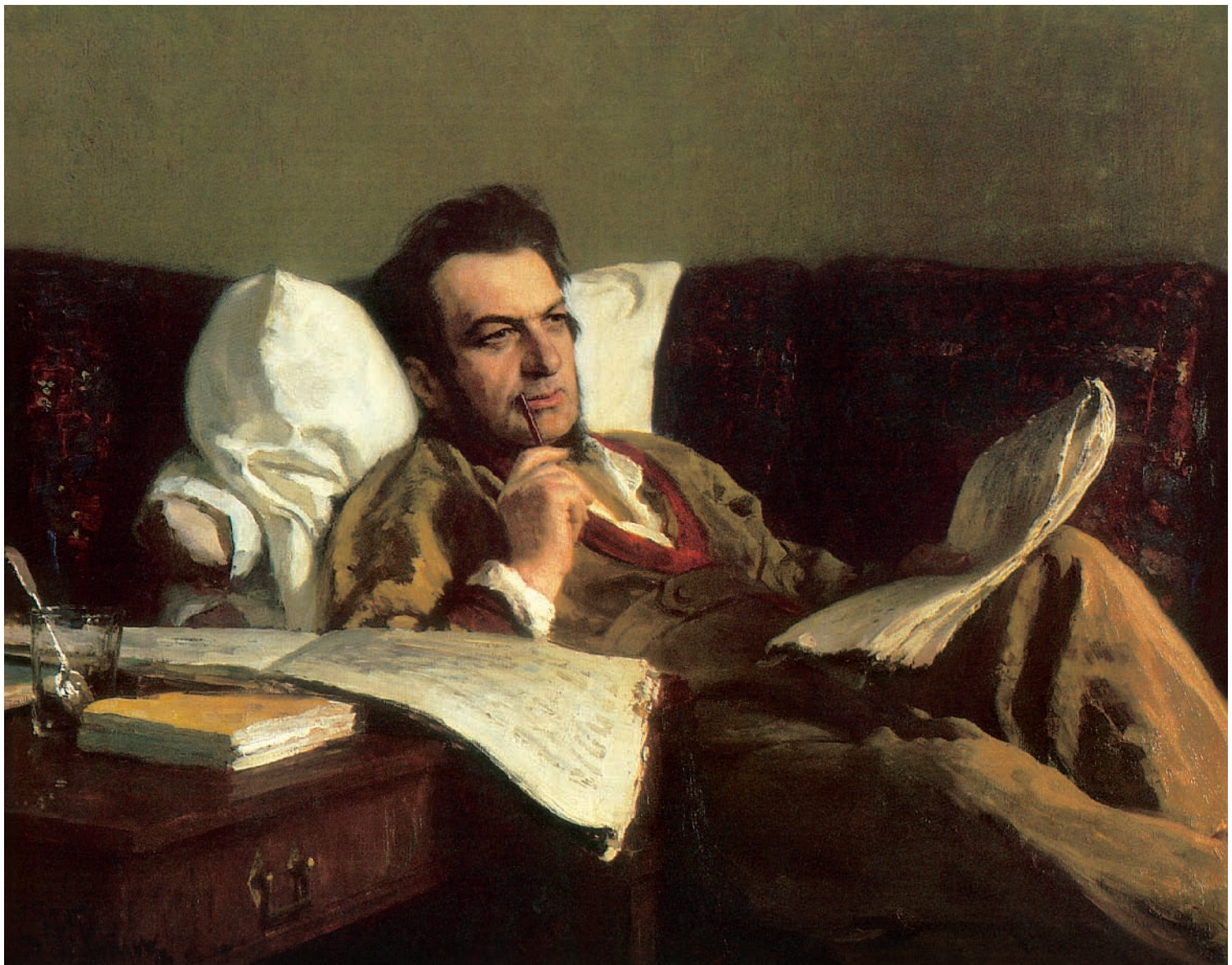
Oil on canvas, 125 x 89.5 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of Savva Mamontov, 1880.

Oil on canvas, 93 x 56.7 cm.
Bakhrushin State Theatre Museum, Moscow.







Portrait of the Composer Mikhail Glinka Working on the Opera "Ruslan and Lyudmila", 1887.
Oil on canvas, 98 x 117 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of the Composer Mitrofan Belyayev, 1886.
Oil on canvas, 125 x 89 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mahmoud IV, 1880-1891.
Oil on canvas, 203 x 358 cm.
The State Historical Museum of Russia, Moscow.

concrete human "material" which Repin dealt with. The 1880s was the time when most of Repin's key works of portraiture were produced. These are pictures which express through real faces the spiritual life of the period, its richness, its deep tragedy, and its hope.

His portraits of Alexei Pisemsky (1880), Modest Mussorgsky (p.148), Nikolai Pirogov (1881), Polina Strepetova (1882), Vladimir Stasov (p.14) and of Leo Tolstoy (p.40), created over a period of seven to eight years, have become images familiar to whole generations. Each of them is completely lifelike and conveys the transient, changeable nature of the sitter's mood. But this does not mean that they demonstrate an impressionistic capturing of a passing moment, but rather an intense embodiment of the physical and spiritual life of the sitter. The artist did not stop the moment because it was beautiful, but because it enabled him to penetrate into the heart of life, to more profoundly express its constant motion. It must, of course, be











considered mere coincidence that Repin painted Mussorgsky during the last days of his life. There is no symbolic meaning in the fact that the composer is portrayed in a sick man's dressing-gown. It is simply a presentation of the actual circumstances: the portrait was done in a hospital, and Repin, true to himself, believed it was important to reflect that fact. What really matters is something else; namely the very concept of the image, with its emphasis on the man's unyielding spiritual strength rather than his sick body. This portrait reveals one of the very characteristic qualities inherent in all of Repin's portrait work: his ability to combine an empathetic artistic vision penetrating into a person's soul with the sharp, rather detached eye of a painter. It was the inseparable union of these two approaches that gave rise to a special Repinesque eloquence of form. The figure of Mussorgsky stands out against the light

Portrait of Prince Ivan Tarkhanov, 1892.
Oil on canvas, 116 x 93 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of the Military Engineer Andrey Delvig, 1882.
Oil on canvas, 107.7 x 86 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Portrait of Vassili Tarnovski, 1880.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 31.5 cm.
Art Museum, Soumy, Ukraine.

Portrait of the Composer César Antonovitch Cui, 1890.
Oil on canvas, 125 x 98 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

What a Freedom!, 1903.
Oil on canvas, 179 x 284.5 cm.
The Russian Academy of Arts,
St Petersburg.

background of the canvas thanks to an exceptionally vigorous modelling of the head and face. The life-asserting force of the image reveals the dialectic of the transient and the unchanging suggested by this portrait, which was considered by contemporaries to be the closest likeness of the great musician ever achieved in his lifetime.

Even from the short list of Repin's portrait works just given, it is clear that the artist's attention was constantly drawn to the major figures in Russian cultural life. He was bound to many of them by years of friendship, particularly Vladimir Stasov whom he portrayed many times, the last being when the outstanding art critic was over eighty years old. Repin was also on close terms with Leo Tolstoy and a frequent guest at Yasnaya Poliana, the writer's estate. He produced a famous series of Tolstoy portraits. On other occasions his portraits were the result of one-off encounters or relationships of a purely professional nature between the artist and his sitter. Taken together these works constitute a whole gallery of portraits of writers, musicians, actors, and fellow artists as seen through Repin's eyes.

It is worth noting that this persistent interest in the artistic intelligentsia was characteristic of Russian fine art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This certainly reflects the role played by that section of society in Russia's spiritual life and social changes which followed the reforms of the 1860s. In this sense, Repin simply shared the creative preferences held by many of his colleagues. His portraits display, however, a particular approach to the theme, one that needs to be looked into more closely.

The difference between Repin's conception of the human being and Kramskoi's has already been mentioned. There is, however, a no less appreciable difference between Repin's portraits and the painted and graphic works produced in that field by the following generation of artists. A comparison of Repin's conception with the aims which Valentin Serov pursued in his portraiture is, probably, most revealing.

Serov produced many portraits of people from artistic circles, and he tended to emphasise his sitters' creative will, their artistry and inner freedom. In his best works this expressed itself in the proud self-awareness of man the creator, an attribute perceived by the artist as a gift of fate, as some sign of Romantic exclusivity. Some of Repin's later portraits of members of the artistic intelligentsia are not devoid of such emotional or psychological features, for instance his portrait of Leonid Andreyev (p.103). On the whole, though, the images in Repin's portraits are more closely related to the spontaneity of life. The spiritual and psychological mood of the sitter, irrespectively of the scale of his or her creative aspirations, seems more subject to the various influences of the social climate and lives of the time.

Researchers have already noted that in painting *Solitary Confinement (Depression)*, completed in the 1880s, which depicts a female revolutionary in a prison cell, Repin obviously proceeded from his life study of Polina Strepetova. The range of that famous Russian tragic actress's personality proved so broad in Repin's mind that it allowed him to











include her in material of a wholly different nature. From the portrait of the actress, he saw a direct line to the image of a woman involved in the revolutionary struggle.

At the peak of the artist's career such direct parallels between portraits and the thematic tendency of his painting could occur, but did not necessarily do so. They are of no special significance. It is more revealing to look at the meticulous way the artist studied his subject's essence and then presented his own interpretation of the creative powers of the human mind and character; his own understanding of how life shaped personality.

Leo Tolstoy proved an ideal subject for the expression of Repin's ideas. His very personality, both his physical and spiritual nature, spoke to Repin of a poetic world remarkably close to his own; consequently the artist found himself able to regard his sitter almost, as it were, through the sitter's own eyes. The living truth of the actual man was upheld and substantiated by another living truth: that revealed by Tolstoy in his truths. However, both could not be combined in a Romantic image of man-as-creator since both were deeply rooted in concrete reality and appeared in the material

Portrait of the Writer Alexander Vladimirovitch Jirkevitch, 1894.
Pencil on paper, 40.9 × 29.8 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Onegin's Duel with Lensky, 1899.
Watercolour, India ink, and Venetian Ceruse on paper, 29.3 × 39.3 cm.
Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, St Petersburg.



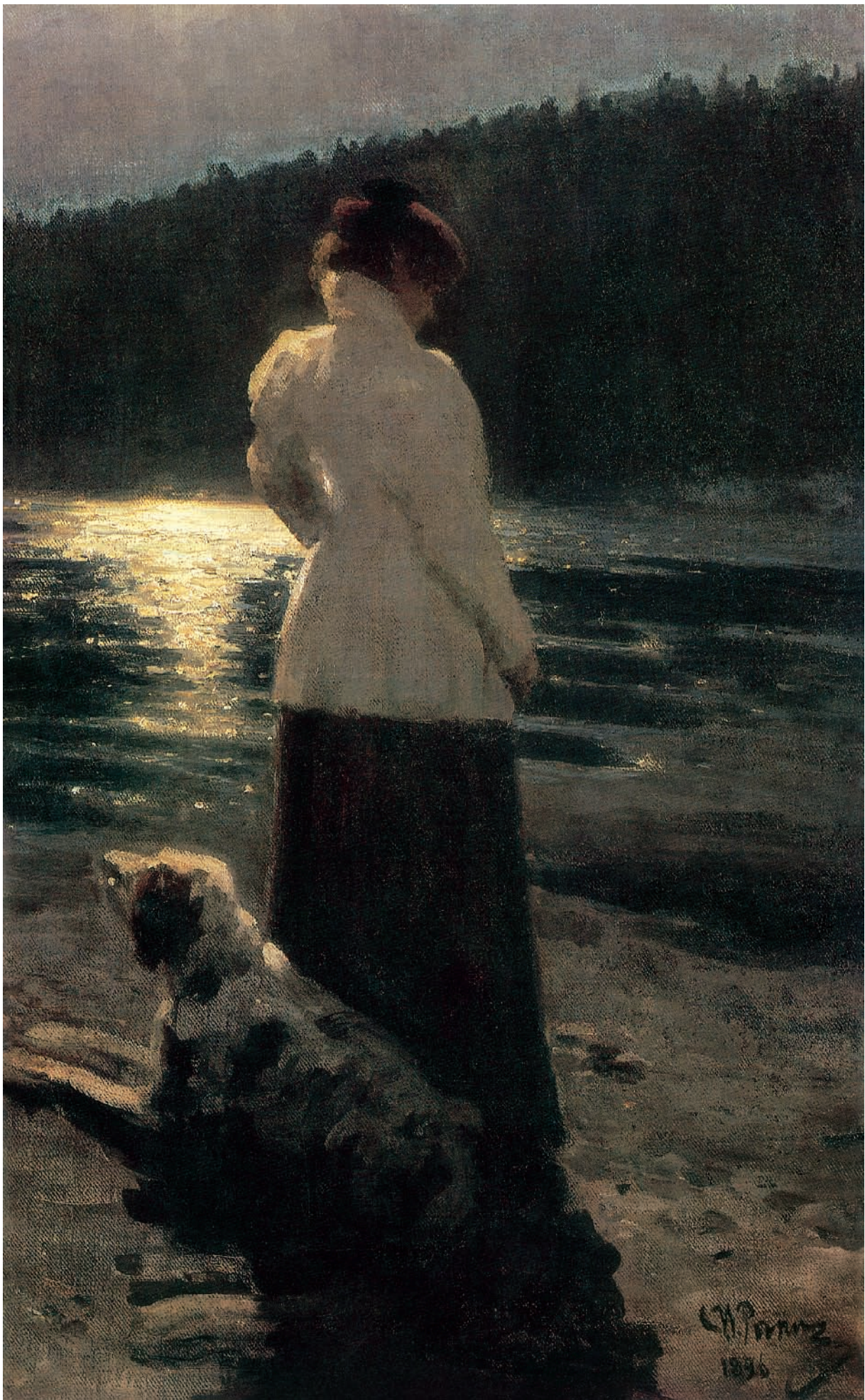
Portrait of Countess Louise de Mercy-Argenteau, 1890.
Oil on canvas, 86.5 x 108 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of Countess Natalia Golovina, 1896.
Oil on canvas, 90 x 59 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

substance of earthly life. Repin's series of portraits depicting the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* is characterized by the attempt to achieve a synthesis along different lines.

In the course of his thirty-year friendship with Tolstoy, Repin produced dozens of paintings and drawings and even a sculpture representing the writer. When choosing themes for his portrait studies, Repin obviously tried to show those sides of the "peasant-count's" life which were widely discussed all over Russia. Tolstoy the ploughman, Tolstoy mowing, Tolstoy at prayer in the forest – such scenes fascinated the artist and he returned to them several times. The overall image of the writer which can be gleaned from all these portraits fully corresponds to the notion of Leo Tolstoy as a living legend. Repin affirmed the vital significance of this legend, but at the same time stripped it of its romantic aura, removed its conventional cloak, and tried to gain direct access to the "spirit and flesh" of his model, to show him as he really was in day-to-day life. In the Tolstoy series of paintings, especially such works as *Leo Tolstoy Barefoot*, or *Leo Tolstoy in the Forest* (both 1891),





the artist actively exploited the emotional possibilities of colour. The scenes he depicts seem full of the invigorating force of nature and its inner energy. The hot summer air, the fresh green of the leaves, the cool, dense shade of the tree where the elderly writer is resting with a book in his hands, or a forest path with Tolstoy walking barefoot in a simple white blouse, his fingers tucked into his belt in a characteristic gesture; all this was seen and recorded by the artist deliberately seeking profoundness and intensity in naturalness and simplicity.

In one of his letters from the period of the Tolstoy series, Repin formulated his understanding of the great man, not concealing that his was the view of a “pagan”:

A venerable man, with bushy eyebrows; he focuses everything in himself and his kind eyes light up everything around him like the sun. No matter how much this giant humbles himself or what pitiful rags he covers his mighty body with, one can always tell he is Zeus, at the raising of whose eyebrows all Mount Olympus trembles.¹¹

Though this character description contains a certain polemical element (“pitiful rags” refers to the religious ideas of Tolstoy that Repin never accepted), it also gives us an idea of the artist’s own creative creed. The spiritual strength of Tolstoy, the particular power of his moral authority was perceived by the artist as embodied in the strong, physical flesh in the “mighty body” of the ancient Zeus. It was in this manner that the painter depicted the writer in the central work of the Tolstoy series, where he is represented sitting in an armchair with a book in his hands (1887).

Many other Russian artists of the time produced portraits of Tolstoy. The best known today are those of Ivan Kramskoi and Nikolai Gay. The former painted the writer in 1873, almost fifteen years before the above-mentioned portrait by Repin; the latter completed his portrait in 1884, only three years before Repin’s. In its painterly manner and even in the understanding of the image of Tolstoy, Repin’s portrait is in marked contrast to both. At first glance it appears that Repin is far less concerned than his colleagues to reveal his own stance. His portrait does not show that tension between subject and artist, that “complicated dialogue” of looks, which lends Kramskoi’s work its heightened psychological quality. Nor do we find in Repin’s work the desire to incorporate the creative passion of the writer which was the main aim of Gay’s portrait. The Tolstoy portrayed by Repin is altogether a simpler figure as regards the artistic image and the human being, but this is a special kind of simplicity, directly associated with the idea of great unspent vital energy. It was in this way that Repin, on an aesthetic level, made a profound connection between the image of Tolstoy and that of Russia itself. Thus the artist, making use of his realist concepts, expressed his attitude to the historical fate of the country and its people.

The thematic diversity of Repin’s portraiture is striking. There were few artists in Europe in the late nineteenth century who could as confidently and freely change their style and their compositional aims according to the character of their sitter, or the final purpose of the painting. Repin’s numerous female portraits, to take one example, provide interesting material for a deeper understanding of the artist. They range from the portrait study of Strepetova

Moonlit Night at Zdravnevo, 1896.
Oil on canvas, 143 x 90.4 cm.
Belarusian National Arts Museum,
Minsk.



Autumn Bouquet.
Portrait of Vera Repina, 1892.
 Oil on canvas, 111 x 65 cm.
 The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of Nadezhda Repina,
the Artist's Daughter, 1900.
 Oil on canvas, 94.3 x 67 cm.
 The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Ladies Walking with a Herd of Cows,
 1896.
 Oil on wood, 36 x 73.6 cm.
 Museum of Russian Art, Kiev.







already mentioned to those like *the Portrait of Baroness Varvara Ikskul von Hildenbandt* (p.167) or the *Portrait of Countess Natalia Golovina* (p.91) which were painted according to all the rules of European formal portraiture. In this group of portraits, alongside the touching pathos of the troubled human soul, one can encounter a completely different motif – that of a self-confident woman, and the sometimes rather showy display of outward beauty: face, figure, fine clothes.

These diametrical examples also reveal the variety of Repin's pictorial language, ranging from near monochrome to compositions constructed on the overt juxtaposition of bright, smart patches of colour, and from dynamic, flowing, almost pulsating outlines to static ones, clearly defined in their spatial relations. It is worth remembering that the formal female portrait was one of the most widespread types of portraiture in both Russia and Western Europe at the time.

Some genuine creative achievements were connected with this particular type of work, but more often than not it reflected the tendencies encouraged by the academy and the salon of the time. It was this type of portrait that revealed most clearly the idealizing and superficial attitude of certain artists towards the human being, towards reality and, in the final analysis, towards beauty itself. A kind of stereotype of the fashionable beauty was created, an image that formed part of the bourgeois myth of "the beautiful life". Repin's approach to his sitters could not have been more different. His artistic temperament, his intense perception of reality in all its varied forms was not compatible with the rules of formal portraiture, which tended only to feign a true representation of reality. One of the most attractive features of Repin's work is that it conveys Russian democratic aesthetics of the second half of the nineteenth century, and his ability to find beauty in simplicity: a feature apparent in many of his works, but probably most obvious in his more intimate portraits.

Although, as has already been remarked, if we refer not to who the figures portrayed were, but to Repin's attitude towards them, intimacy is a fairly widespread characteristic of Repin's portraits. The artist's creativity was often stimulated by his sitter's personality to such an extent that this intimacy became inseparable from the spiritual make-up of the image. In the eyes of some of Repin's models one can detect anxiety and melancholy in their gestures, shyness, and constraint; while others conduct themselves before the viewer with ill-concealed complacency. In all cases, however, the subjects are not just abstract symbols of the age but real people whose social status was sometimes determined by the intimate side of their spiritual make-up, their psychology. The portrait study the military engineer Andrei Delwig (1882) and the artist Mikhail Mikeshin (1888) are but a few examples of Repin's subtle penetration into the human character, despite the fact that they are markedly different works in many respects. But intimacy in the narrower sense of the word – as a lyrical mood, as an expression of a special spiritual closeness between the artist and his subject – was of course only inherent in the portraits of men and women whom Repin found to be kindred spirits, with whom he was closely acquainted or had a long-lasting friendship.

Maria Tenicheva before her Easel,
1897.
Oil on canvas, 57.5 x 49 cm.
Armenian National Gallery, Yerevan.







Portrait of the Countess Sofia Panina,
1909.

Oil on canvas, 107 x 79 cm.

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of the Artist Valentin Serov,
1901.

Charcoal on canvas, 116.5 x 63.3 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of Alexandra Botkina, 1901.

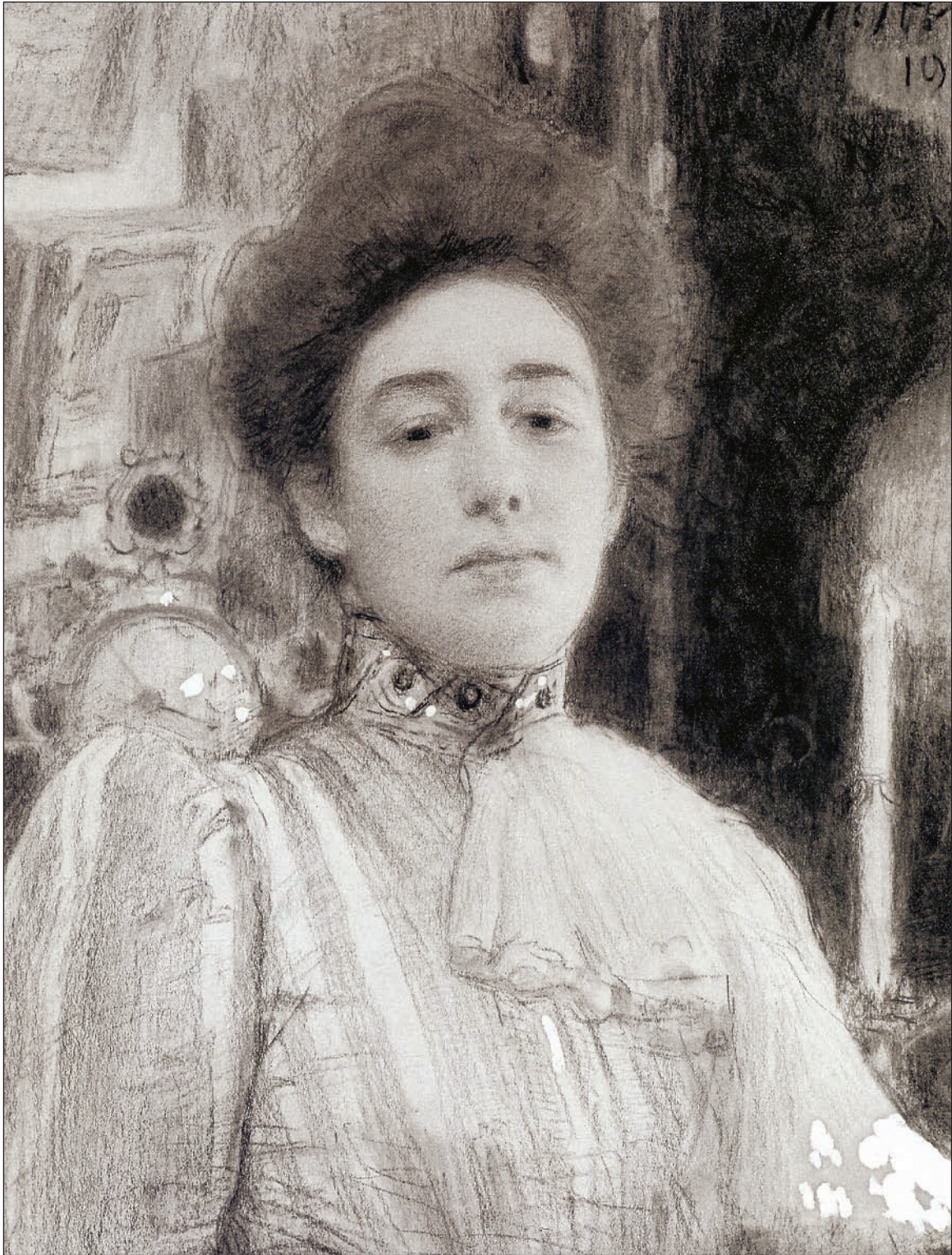
Pastel, charcoal and black and red
chalk on paper, 75.4 x 54.5 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of the Author Leonid Andreev,
1904.

Oil on canvas, 75 x 66.5 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.







Here we must return again, first and foremost, to Repin's graphic portraits, mostly done in pencil. Private by their very nature, this portraiture was intended by the artist to express himself in a confidential manner. Not by chance Repin's first significant achievements in this field are associated with his time at Abramtsevo. In these works one can easily detect the influence of the artist's environment; the warm, friendly and cultured atmosphere of the Mamontov circle.

In the double portraits of *Emilia Prakhova and Raphail Levitsky* (1879), *Zinaida Yakunchikova and Olimp Belopolsky* (1880), in *Little Ada and Liudmila Mamontova (Miloucha)* (p.118), and in other sketches of people close to him, the poetic harmony of the image is founded in the graphic form itself: the authenticity of the study from life is here combined with the delicate and sensitive contours of the faces, drawn in sharp pencil and softened by light shading. A series of interesting paintings, including portraits of the artist's daughters, Vera (p.144) and Nadezhda (p.143), painted perfectly naturally and vividly, express an important aspect of Repin's position as an artist and a man – his love of life.

At the Country House of the Academy, 1898.
Oil on canvas, 64 x 106 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of the Writer Nathalia Nordmann-Severova, 1905.
Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 68.5 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

On one occasion only in his career as a portrait painter did the artist change his usual approach to his subject; instead of people and characters full of life, he portrayed figures devoid of all real emotion and any direct sense of reality: in his monumental *Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council on May 7, 1901* (pp.122-123). Produced in fulfilment of an official commission, this picture was supposed to portray the senior dignitaries of the Russian Empire, those who controlled the country's destiny. This gigantic canvas presented



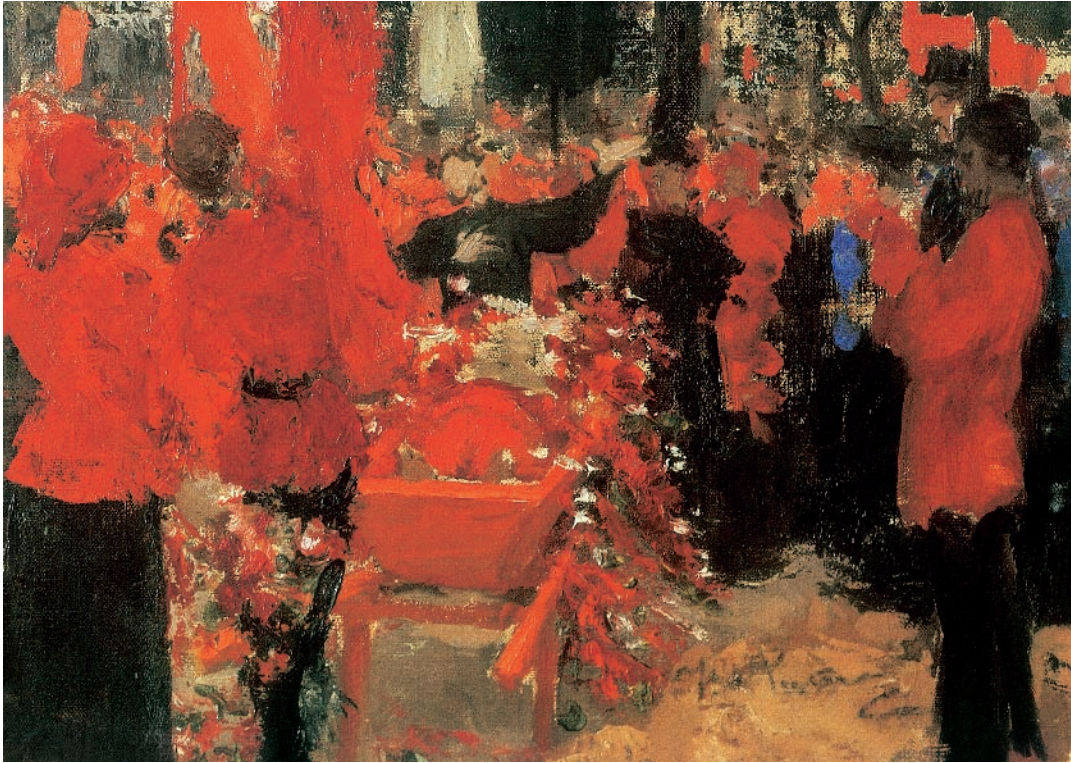


a challenge in more ways than one – from the points of view of genre, subject-matter, and composition. It had few precedents in nineteenth-century painting anywhere in Europe and required all of Repin's mastery for its successful completion (the artist worked in collaboration with his pupils, Boris Kustodiev and Ivan Kulikov).

Those who had commissioned the picture envisaged it as a glorification of the state machinery of tsarist Russia, but that was not how it turned out. "This is a great painting, this is Carthage before its destruction": such was the astute judgement of the noted philosopher and essayist Vasily Rozanov, one of Repin's contemporaries, crediting the artist with prophetic powers.

Repin's numerous portrait studies for this enormous canvas are well-known, and include depictions of Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1903), Alexei Ignatyev (p.121), Ivan Goremykin and Nikolai Gerard (p.120). They are noticeably different from the studies for most of Repin's other works: they are totally bound up with the problems of colour scheme and compositional arrangement of the larger picture, and are in this sense fragments of the painting-to-be, rather than preliminary studies. However, they do each have a significance of their own, thanks to the keen eye of the artist and his perfect technical mastery. All that was needed were a few precise strokes of Repin's sensitive brush, to give an unmistakable rendering of the faces and figures of his subjects, and to demonstrate that the lifeless social mask of those depicted had merged with their inner selves.

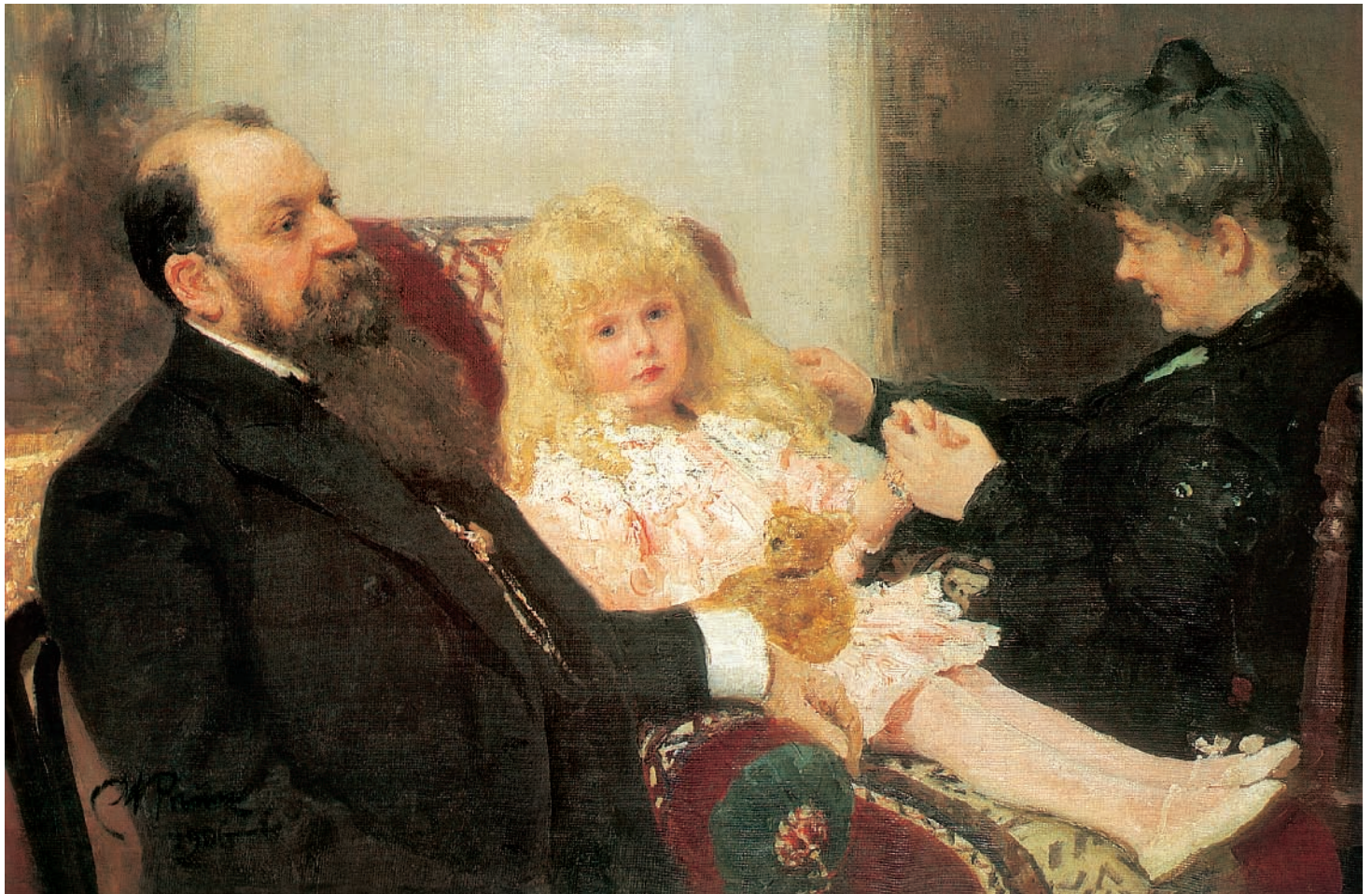
Demonstration on the Seventeenth of October 1905 (sketch), 1906.
Oil on canvas, 42 x 63 cm.
Museum of the Russian Revolution,
Moscow.



Repin was less attracted to history painting than to any other branch of representational art. However, any extensive assessment of his work would be impossible without mentioning *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581* (pp.110-111) or *The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossaks to Sultan Mahmoud IV* (1880-1891). Yet at the same time it must immediately be said that Repin was not a history painter in the sense that his gifted contemporary Vasily Surikov was. None of Repin's works can be compared with such canvases as *Morning of the Execution of the Streltsy* or *Boyarynia Morozova*, which capture the spirit of the period concerned, revealing its social and philosophical conflicts. Repin's history paintings, like his works on contemporary themes, show him to be above all a psychologist, attempting to present the human personality in all its complexity. In Surikov's best works the human character is also an essential element in the artistic concept, but the spiritual conflicts in which his heroes are trapped are subordinated to a "superpersonal" force which governs the historical destiny of a people. For Repin the psychology of his heroes was a sphere for independent artistic exploration.

His understanding of the creative task can already be seen in full measure in Repin's first work on a subject from Russian history, *Grand Dutchess Sophia at the Novodevichy Convent* (p.136). The artist interprets the historical episode as a personal drama. Exiled to the New Maiden Convent for her opposition to her half-brother Peter the Great, Grand Dutchess Sophia is represented as a powerful personality who was not reconciled to her defeat as she finds herself confined to the narrow space of the convent cell.

Red Funerals or Funeral of the Revolutionaries, 1905-1906.
Oil on canvas, 45 x 64 cm.
State Historical Museum of Russia,
Moscow.



A spiritual drama of a completely different nature is the subject of another historical painting by Repin, perhaps his most widely known: *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581* (1885) (pp.110-111). The artist started work on this painting when the execution of the members of the People's Will revolutionary group – those responsible for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 – was still fresh in his mind. "A trail of blood ran through that year," Repin later recalled. "Terrible scenes were in everybody's mind... It was natural to look for a way out of this painful and tragic situation in history. I began on an impulse and the picture progressed in fits and starts. My emotions were overburdened with the horrors of contemporary life..."¹²

Ivan the Terrible was not the only picture in Russian art of the second half of the nineteenth century where events from the past or even entire historical eras were conjured up in the artist's mind under the influence of the political and social problems of the present. Even the historical pictures closely connected to the academic tendency, often justifiably criticised at the time for their abstract content, reflected certain parallels with current events. The distinctive character of Repin's artistic approach lay in the fact that his images presented reality, as it were, in two temporal plains simultaneously: three hundred years ago, in an age of cruelty and bloodshed, and in present-day reality. That is why, when referring to *Ivan*

The Delarov Family, 1906.
Oil on canvas, 123 x 195 cm.
Fine Arts Museum, Archangel.



the Terrible, we cannot claim that historical allusions are the chief element of the picture. The work does not really require any interpretation; the force of its impact on contemporaries was not due to any historical associations but rather to the tragic poignancy of the scene represented. Psychological conflicts are brought here to a breaking point, and the wildly distorted face of Ivan the Terrible who has just murdered his son in a fit of rage, anticipates some of the particularly expressive images in Repin's later works.

In the picture *The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossaks to Sultan Mahmoud IV* (the most widely known of the several versions of this painting was completed in 1891), the artist approaches the historical subject from another emotional angle. In this instance his aim is to show the feeling of inner freedom in his heroes. It is the best known of all Repin's works abroad and typifies the artist's effective grouping, his robust, almost Flemish opulence of colour, and his characteristic gift for portraiture. The mocking bravado of each countenance tells the same story in a different way. You can literally hear the derisive laughter of these liberty-loving Zaporozhtzi as the regimental scribe pens their defiant answer while they gather about the rude, card-strewn table. Like Gogol before him, Repin has here rolled back a few hundred years. We are again in the days of Taras

Maxim Gorky Reading His Drama "The Children of the Sun", 1905. Charcoal and red chalk on paper, 28 x 49.5 cm. The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.







*Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on
November 16, 1581, 1885.*
Oil on canvas, 199.5 x 254 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

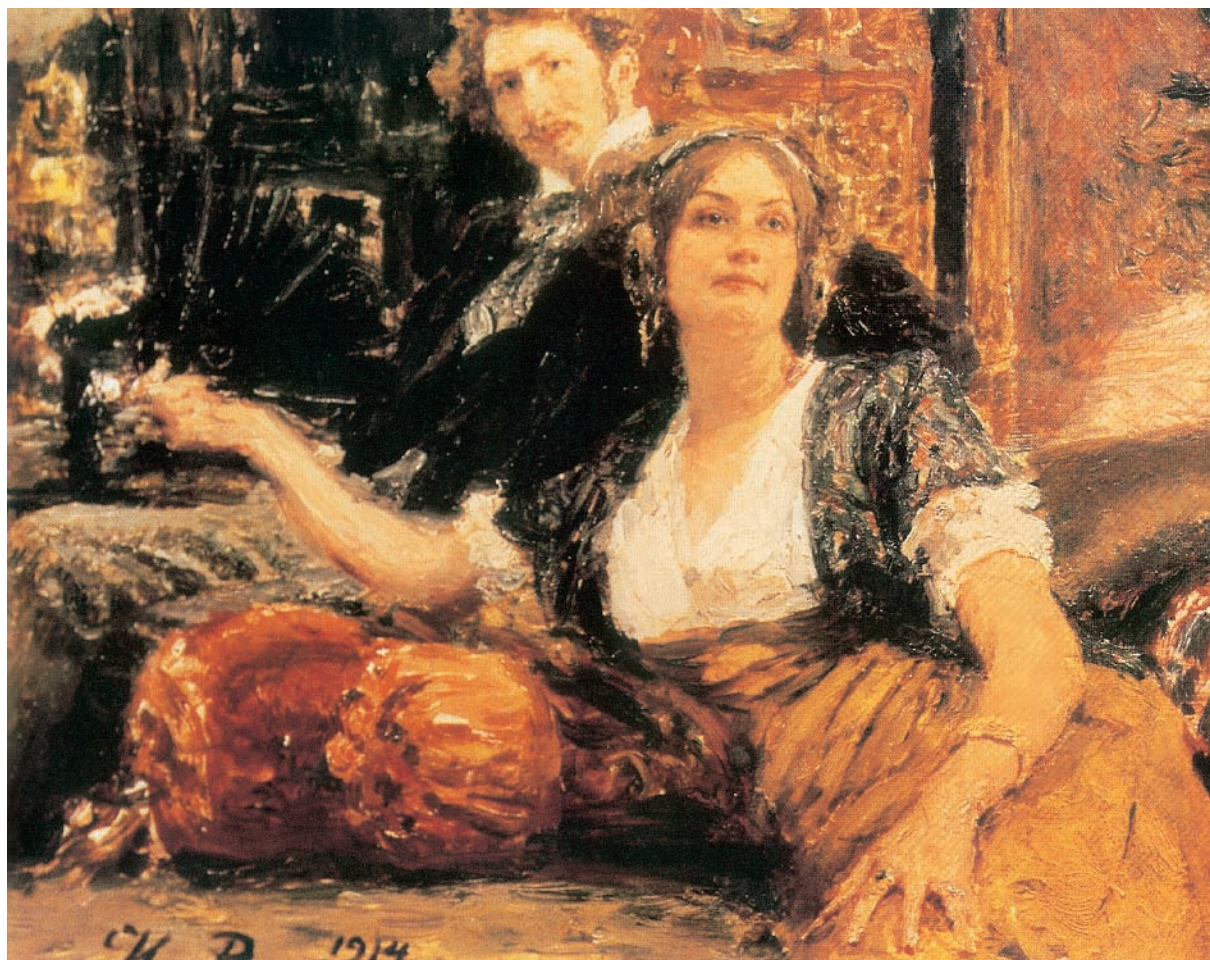
Bulba and his pirates of the vast steppe and stormy inland sea over which used to roam Kazak and Pole, Tatar and Turk.

Until now we have been examining the works Repin produced in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. That time might be called the classical period of the artist's career, and all, or almost all, of his best paintings date from that period. It was during these years that his paintings determined the leading stylistic and conceptual qualities of Russian realism, and Repin himself was regarded as an indisputable authority in both literary and artistic circles. But Repin's creative activity continued well into the twentieth century. The artist went on painting right up until his death in 1930, at the age of eighty-six. The new century marked an important change in his lifestyle, with his move to a small country estate, The "Penates", not far from the Gulf of Finland in the village of Kuokkala (now called Repino). There he spent the rest of his life, and although he did not deliberately isolate himself from the outside world – the life of a hermit was always alien to Repin's character – it is nonetheless true that he was more cut off from the current of life than ever before.

The early twentieth century, which marks the final phase of Repin's artistic activity, was replete with contrast. Beginning with the brilliant success of his imposing collective display in the picturesque Russian Pavilion at the *Esposizione Internazionale* of Rome in 1911, it closes in darkness and distress. The Roman exhibition comprised the most comprehensive assembly of his work ever seen outside of Russia. There were in all sixty-two numbers, consisting mainly of portraits, drawings, and watercolours. And it may be added that the production of the sturdy, fecund sexagenarian held its own beside the work of many a younger man, not forgetting his former pupils Serov and Maliavin, who on this occasion shared honours with their master. Although, during these stressful, progressive years, he could not fail to note that the complexion of art was rapidly changing, the austere painter of *The Cossacks' Reply* and its pendant, *The Black Sea Pirates*, refused to make any sort of compromise with what is called modernism. He remained resolutely himself.

The shimmering radiance of impressionism broke unregarded about him, and as for certain more recent manifestations of artistic activity, they are anathema to the truculent Cossack. So stoutly does he defend himself against what he deems the pernicious heresies of the later men that when, in 1913, his *Ivan the Terrible and his Son Ivan on 16 November 1581* was wantonly slashed by a young lunatic in the Tretyakov Gallery, he took occasion to avow that he considered the act to have been prompted by a hatred of the older art, a desire to destroy former canons of taste and set up new, and frankly revolutionary standards. Shocked beyond measure by the damage done his painting, he could scarcely believe that the deed was the work of a sporadic individual impulse, but took it as a symbol of the general artistic and social unrest of the day. "Who knows," he passionately exclaimed, "but that this affair may be the result of that monstrous conspiracy against the classic and academic monuments of art which is daily gathering momentum under the influence of endless debates and disputes regarding the newer tendencies. These people are actually

Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581 (detail), 1885.
Oil on canvas, 199.5 x 254 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Portrait of the Poet Sergei Gorodetski with His Wife, 1914.

Oil on canvas, 56.6 x 79 cm.
Museum of Russian Art, Kiev.

Portrait of the Actor Pavel Samoylov, 1915.

Oil on canvas, 115.5 x 79 cm.
Bakhrushin State Theatre Museum,
Moscow.

Portrait of the Writer Nathalia Nordmann-Severova, 1911.

Oil on canvas, 76 x 53 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of Vera Veriovkina, 1916.

Oil on canvas, 65 x 57 cm.
State Art Gallery, Perm, Russia.

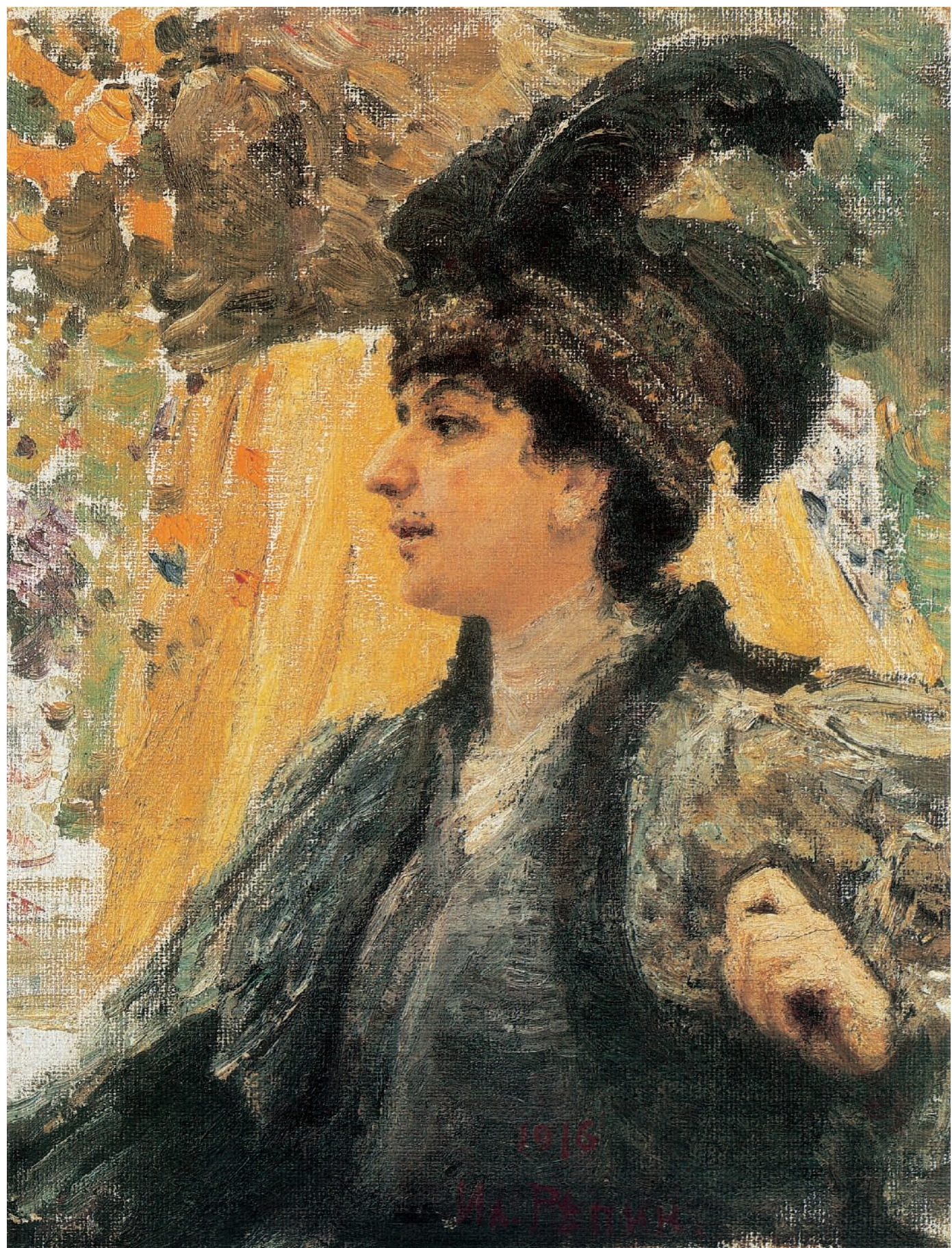
advocating the destruction of the cherished masterpieces of the past. They are seeking in all manner of ways to achieve their ends. They wish to break into the temple of art and hang there their own abominations, but I say they are creatures without reverence or religion, without a God, and without a shred of conscience in their souls!" The wanton act of poor frenzied Abram Abramovich Balashov had, however, no aesthetic import. Its prompting lay deeper than any artistic considerations, for in its own isolated, spasmodic fashion it foreshadowed events of a far wider significance. And it is these events, coming with fateful swiftness, that so overcast the last years of the painter's life.

Repin in The "Penates" – this is the concluding chapter of the artist's career, a chapter linked with the past as well as with the future. The developments that took place in Russian art at the beginning of the twentieth century meant that Repin's work had now to be seen in the context of new aesthetic ideas and artistic discoveries. This context left its imprint both on his works and on their reception by a new generation.

True to his democratic beliefs and to his social convictions, Repin keenly followed developments in Russian public life. He reacted sharply to the events of the first Russian









Little Ada, 1882.
Pencil on paper, 18.8 x 11.3 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Ludmila Mamontova (Miloucha),
1884.
Pencil on paper, 18.3 x 10.6 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.



Evdokha Jevdokha Gussarivna, 1880.
Black chalk and pencil on paper,
33 x 24 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Portrait of Maria Artsybatcheva, 1880.
Pencil on paper, 34.8 x 26 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.





revolution in 1905, taking part in many collective protests of the Russian intelligentsia against bloodshed and Tsarist repressions, and also tried to convey his impressions of these years in his paintings. It was at this time that he made the acquaintance of Maxim Gorky. Repin's sketch *Maxim Gorky Reading His Drama "The Children of the Sun"* (p.109) depicts the writer together with Vladimir Stasov, Alexander Kuprin, Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovsky and others, and can be looked upon as an important event in Russian graphic art at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as a historical and cultural record of the period. While quite rightly regarding himself as a conservator of the traditions of the nineteenth-century realists, Repin did not remain indifferent to those forms and methods of expressing reality which the new era and new modes of artistic thinking brought about. Looking at the picture *What a Freedom!* (1903), viewers saw, and not without justification, not so much a representation of two young people walking along the shore of the Gulf of Finland (as the content of the painting might prosaically suggest), but rather the artist's attempt to convey his premonition of coming events. The pre-revolutionary Russian art world was full of internal contradictions, and the artist was keenly aware of the question of the self-identity of the creative personality and his or her lot in life. Some of his pictures dating from this time seem to be a direct reflection of this heartfelt problem. These include Gogol's *Self-Immolation* (1909) and several canvases dedicated to Pushkin.

The story of Repin's career and achievement is the story of Russia during the period intervening between the Russo-Turkish war and the war with Japan. On his canvases gleams the history of his country with all its possibilities, all its eager, baffled effort and sullen,

Portrait of the Members of the State Council Ivan Goremykin and Nikolai Gerard (study for the Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council), 1903.
Oil on canvas, 63 x 45 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Portrait of Seminiov, Member of the State Council, Honorable Member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences (study for the Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council), 1901.
Oil on canvas, 97 x 62 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Deputy of the State Council Count Alexei Ignatiev (study for the Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council), 1902.
Oil on canvas, 89 x 62.5 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council on May 7, 1901, 1903.
Oil on canvas, 400 x 877 cm.
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg.







misdirected power. His series of portraits constitutes a pantheon of Russia's leading spirits. His naturalistic and historical compositions reflect with consummate graphic resource a troubled present and a sumptuous, barbaric past. It is to Russia and Russia alone, that he has consecrated the passionate fervour of his vision and the vigorous surety of his hand. And these gifts he dedicated not to the narrow province of aesthetics but to a broader, more beneficent appeal. At first, as in the *Burlaki*, his message seemed repellent in its unflinching verity, but gradually the stern accuser displayed more sympathy and forbearance. Though he seems to stand apart from his fellows, a solitary, taciturn figure, Ilya Repin belongs to that great succession of academic realists at whose head remained for so long the diminutive yet masterful Adolf von Menzel. Once the essential facts are at his command, Repin groups them with due regard for scenic effect. He composes as well as observes. His art is both portraiture and panorama.

Alexander III Receiving Rural Elders on the Grounds of Petrovsky Palace in Moscow (study), 1885.

Oil on canvas, 33 x 45 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Grounds of the Petrosky Palace (study for Alexander III Receiving Rural Elders on the Grounds of Petrovsky Palace in Moscow), 1885.

Oil on canvas, 13 x 22.5 cm.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

The rigorous realistic and nationalistic tradition represented alike by Repin in painting and by his contemporaries in music and letters is the specific legacy of their day and generation. Solidly grounded in the positivist philosophy of Bielinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Pisarev, contemptuous of aesthetics, and the effete passions of those who were called "the superfluous ones". This art does not address itself primarily to the imagination. It is in no sense a product of fancy; it is rather a convincing transcription of outward and visible fact. When Repin came to the capital in the early sixties of the last century the Byronic fervour of Pushkin and the eloquent heart-hunger of Lermontov had been brusquely swept aside by the so-called humanitarians and utilitarians. Freed from classic and mythological pretence, the artists of the day set about the task of evolving what they considered a characteristically national



pictorial expression, and this they did with all the resources of pen and brush, for they were polemicists as well as painters.

In its every accent the artistic legacy of Ilya Repin typifies the man's own particular age and epoch. It definitely incarnates the "signum temporis", the spirit of the time, in the same manner as does the fiction of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, and the music of Glinka, Mussorgsky, and Borodin. Like their brethren in letters and music, Repin and his colleagues of the Peredvizhniki fought a bitter and victorious battle in the cause of nationalism. And yet, however formidable their achievement undeniably was, it proved by no means the final phase of Russian pictorial activity. The realistic nationalism so dear to this heroic group has in due course been superseded by a decorative and idealistic nationalism, which is equally legitimate and equally logical. The elder men, long kept away from wholesome, objective reality, were content with the realm of fact.

Repin lived a long life, a life of complete devotion to his work. His great talent as a painter was recognized by all, but not all could fully appreciate the historical and social significance of his art. Vladimir Stasov was one of the first to acclaim Repin's genius, and it was Stasov's view of Repin, with one or two minor alterations, which was to influence a whole succession of articles and books about the artist. Stasov was right in his main thesis: Repin's creative work was social, in the sense attributed to that word by the democratic aesthetic theory of the nineteenth century. He strove not merely to express the spirit of his age, for such a desire is characteristic of all great artists both before and after Repin, but to reveal the social phenomena which engendered that spirit. All this ensured that Repin's work would come to occupy a leading position in the world's legacy of nineteenth-century realist painting.

Minin Calling Upon the People of Nizhny Novgorod, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 97 x 156 cm.
Ilya Repin's Memorial Home
"Penates", St Petersburg.

Ilya Repin in his atelier at the "Penates".
Photograph: Konstantin Glybowski,
1906.







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PORTRAIT OF VERA CHEVTSOVA (REPIN'S WIFE SINCE 1872)

1869

Oil on canvas, 83 x 67 cm

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

The biographical information about Repin that is available to us today does not provide any details about when and where he first met his wife Vera. What is known, however, is that this portrait was painted in a period of their relationship that is commonly called “engagement-period”, which generally serves as a mutual examination of the two people considering marriage; based on Friedrich Schiller’s (1759-1805) reminder from his poem *Song of the Bell*: “Therefore test, who wants to bind himself forever, Whether heart will find right heart. The elation is short, the remorse is long.” The engagement of Ilya Repin and Vera Chevtsova lasted unusually long – they married three years after the completion of this portrait – which was probably rather due to material and monetary reasons than a lack of mutual affection.

Vera Chevtsova is sitting dreamily on a bench that is covered by a green, patterned piece of cloth. Her body is inclined towards the viewer, looking at him (or her) directly. The colour combination of blue and red and the small white collar of her striped dress in front of a medium brown background dominate the canvas. Her braided hair is almost not visible in front of the blue jacket. The pale, almost yellow complexion of her face, which is accentuated by the red colour of her dress even more, is alarming and lets the viewer assume that she is illness-stricken. Her almost bloodless, extremely white hand that she is holding limply in her lap further adds to that impression.

After ten years of marriage, Repin divorced his wife. The reasons for this separation are no longer known; however, Repin and Vera Chevtsova seemingly maintained an amicable relationship after their divorce.





SLAVIC COMPOSERS

1872

Oil on canvas, 128 x 393 cm
Moscow Conservatory, Moscow

The same year that Repin started working on *Barge Haulers on the Volga* he painted this group portrait of famous composers of Slavic origin, which was appropriately given the alternative title *Imaginary Meeting of Slavic Composers*. This title goes back to the patron's demand for a painting in memory of more than twenty outstanding musicians from Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic who were both still alive and deceased. Apart from Russian composers – who fill the major part of the painting – Repin also painted the Polish composer Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin (right side, 1810-1849), Stanisław Moniuszko (1819-1872) and the Czech Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) who is sitting in the left-hand corner of the painting flipping through a score. Further "sitters" are (standing, from left to right): Eduard Nápravník (1839-1916), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Alexander Dargomyzhsky (1813-1869), Mily Balakirev (1836-1910), Vladimir Odoevsky (1804-1869), Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), Alexander Serov (1820-1871), as well as the brothers Anton (1829-1894) and Nikolai Rubinstein (1835-1881).

Although Repin was especially devoted to portraiture he did not necessarily show the same commitment for every single portrayal since some commissions restricted him in his creative individuality. As for this particular painting, it can be assumed to have been quite a challenge in regard to both the mere quantity of people portrayed and the fact that the artist had nothing but their depiction by other painters or photographs of them at his disposal.

SADKO IN THE UNDERWATER KINGDOM

1876

Oil on canvas, 323 x 230 cm

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Sadko is the name of a Russian folktale hero. Legend has it that he was a musician who was so talented that the Underwater King offered him a reward for playing in his kingdom – an offer Sadko could not possibly refuse. At the sound of the first notes the king started to dance, thus causing a storm on the surface of the sea which resulted in the sinking of many ships that were trapped between the high waves. As time passed by, Sadko began to get tired whereupon he was given worthwhile advice by a sage: Sadko should tear through the strings of his instrument in order to interrupt the dance without bringing forth the King's anger. Thereupon the Underwater King would stop dancing and offer him one of his daughters as a reward for his services. With regard to this reward the musician should refuse the first three hundred daughters, the following three hundred, as well as the three hundred after that in order to finally accept the very last of them.

Repin here depicts the moment of this very decision. The young women, that are half-human and half-aquatic, float past the front of the hero who refuses them one after another. They respond to his rejection with sadness or disappointment. Nevertheless, one can spot the betrothed, Tschernawuschka, immediately. She is wrapped in golden light and flashes Sadko a glance, confident of victory. In this work, Repin accomplishes a visually adept representation of the Underwater Kingdom. By means of a high horizon line and the worm's-eye perspective, he manages to give the viewer the impression of diving into the depths of the ocean.

The mythological character Sadko inspired both Rimsky-Korsakov to compose a symphonic work in 1867, which was followed soon after by an opera in 1896, and Aleksey Tolstoy to write a poem. By the end of the nineteenth century, Sadko, as a figure, was becoming more and more popular in Russia due to the fact that artists wanted to get rid of Western influence in order to recover the roots of Russian art. This return to the "source" also comprised the rediscovery of the rich potential of Slavic tales and fairy tales.





GRAND DUCHESS SOPHIA AT THE NOVODEVITCHY CONVENT

1879

Oil on canvas, 201.8 x 145.3 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

In 1689 the Grand Duchess Sophia Alekseyevna, regent of Russia since 1682, tried to have her half-brother, the future Peter the Great, killed in order to stay in power. But, dumped by the military units of Streltsy, her revolt failed and she was banished to the Novodewititschi Convent in Moscow. Another revolt of the Streltsy had to be bloodily oppressed in 1698. Sophia was suspected of being the cause for this revolt and of having instigated it from the convent. Thereupon, Peter the Great has all of her attendants tortured – one of which you can see in the background of the painting: one can make out the silhouette of a hanged man in front of the regent's window. Sophia is forced into the decision of entering convent life and is made to spend her last years there until she dies in 1704.

Repin illustrates the regent's behaviour during the events of 1698 here. He describes a historic event without embellishing the outer violence or romanticising the unrelenting attitude of the regent. The representation is uncompromising and realistic: Her unfriendly appearance reflects descriptions of her contemporaries. She seems to challenge the viewer in her determined and hot-tempered bearing, with her arms crossed and furrowed brow. Her pompous attire and jewellery emphasize her belonging to the royal family.

The painting's major source of light is the Grand Dutchess in her white attire who finds herself in a dark but comfortable room (frescoes on the walls and the fabric on the bench add to this impression). The room also seems to be her study considering the open book on the table, the writing equipment, and the candleholder. Near the door stands a young fearful maidservant who is probably affected by the tragic circumstances she has to witness – and also fearing the reaction of her mistress.

In this painting which deals with a historic subject, Repin displays his distinctive sense of detail and his masterly ability to render a person's character in a purely visual way. Not embellished at all and sticking to her reputation as a power-oriented woman, the Grand Dutchess Sophia Alekseyevna faces the viewer as if affronting Peter the Great himself.

PORTRAIT OF THE PAINTER ARKHIP IVANOVICH KUINJI

1877

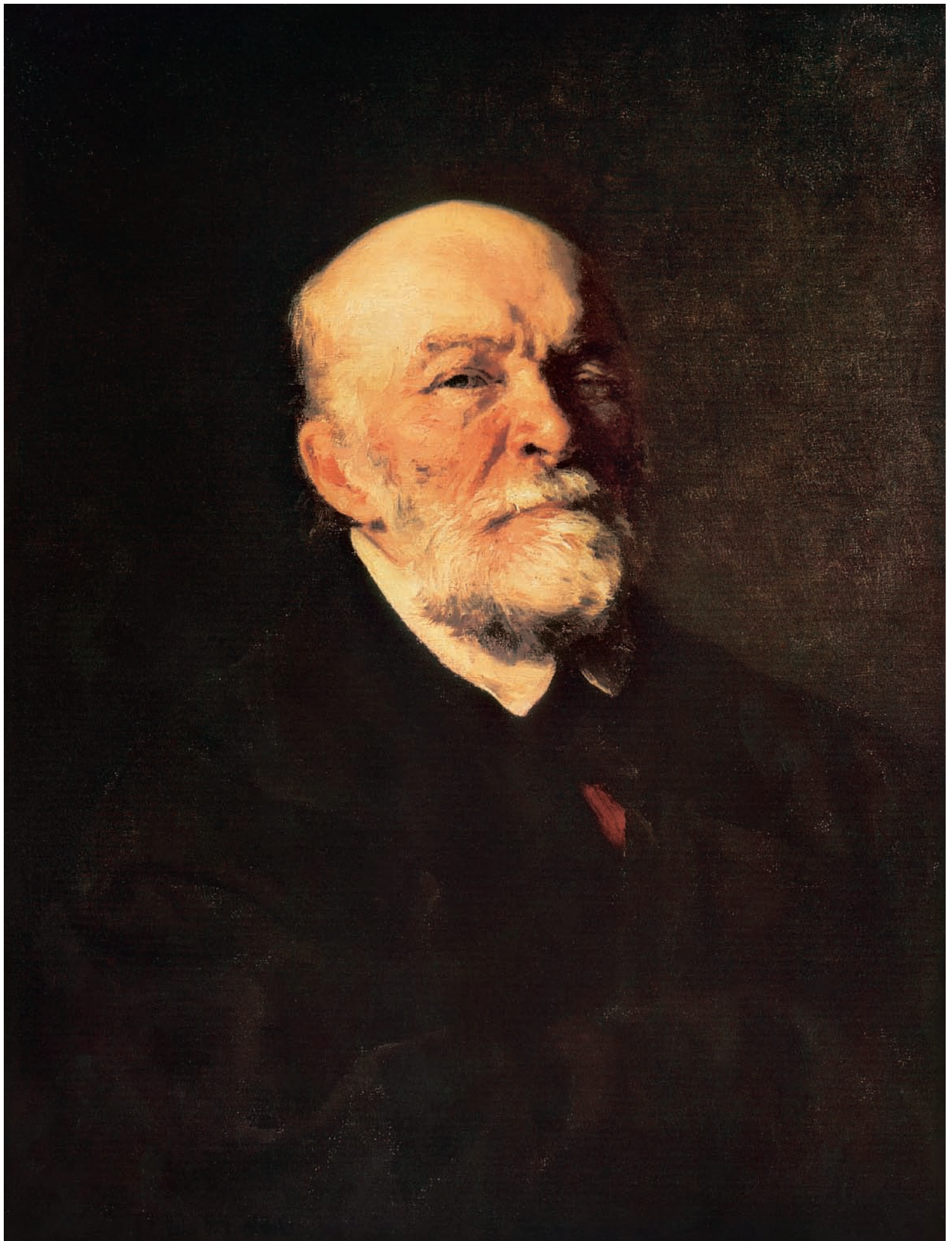
Oil on canvas, 147.1 × 104.8 cm
Russian State Museum, St Petersburg

This portrait shows thirty-year-old landscape painter Arkhip Ivanovich Kuindzhi (alternative spellings: Kuinji or Kouindji) from the port town of Mariupol on the Azov Sea. Kuindzhi, whose family emigrated from Greece to the Priazovye region, grew up in poor surroundings and was thus forced to learn painting techniques in a completely autodidactic manner. At the age of twenty-six he was able to enroll in the St Petersburg Academy of Arts and was later assigned a teaching position in the academy during the mid-1890s.

Kuindzhi, who was working mostly either in St Petersburg or in cities on the Crimean peninsula, garnered early success with his painting *The Snow*, which he exhibited during an international exhibition in London. It earned him a bronze medal from the exhibition jury. One year after his first success, he joined the *Peredvizhniki* (called “The Wanderers” in the rest of Europe), a group of Realist painters from the Russian Empire who organized their own exhibitions independently from the established art scene.

Among his most appreciated and successful landscape paintings are: *Deserted Village* (1874), *Dnepr in the Morning* (1881), *Surf and Clouds* (1882), *Elbrus*, (1890/1895), *Patches of Moonlight in a Forest*, *Winter* (1898/1908), and *Red Sunset on the Dnieper* (1905/1908) which is now kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.





PORTRAIT OF THE SURGEON NIKOLAY PIROGOV

1881

Oil on canvas, 64.5 x 53.4 cm
State Tretyakov Gallery, St Petersburg

Nikolay Ivanovich Pirogov (1810-1881), who studied at the universities of Moscow and Dorpat (Estonia), was an enormously successful practitioner of medicine. At the age of twenty-seven he was given a doctorate and teaching position for surgery and pathologic anatomy at the German University in Dorpat, the second most populous town in Estonia. Four years later he was additionally made a professor for surgery at the academy for military medicine in St Petersburg.

Furthermore, he published several books in Germany and Russia on the topic of field surgery, drawing on the profound experience he gathered in four wars, one of them the Prussian-French War from 1870-1871. These experiences also encompassed in-depth anatomical studies of frozen bodies which had been sawed in parts for medicinal purposes. His last book however, *Questions of Life: Diary of an Old Physician*, was published posthumously, four years after his death.

Pirogov's various achievements earned him the unofficial title of "father of field surgery". He was among the first physicians in Europe who started to use ether to anaesthetise patients before surgical interventions. The surgical method of amputating a foot while preserving the heel bone still carries the name "Pirogov amputation" to this day. In addition to receiving several scientific awards for his work, the city of Moscow made him an honorary citizen and dedicated a statue to him. Another statue in Dorpat pays homage to the immense impact that his work had in the Russian Empire.

Repin painted the portrait in the last year of the surgeon's life. Pirogov is sitting in front of a neutral, non-descript background, his arms crossed defensively in front of his chest. With tired eyes, which have seen the horrors of war, he seems to be closely examining the viewer. One could almost imagine a trace of hostility in his look, as if he were annoyed by the beholder's attention and wanted nothing more than his well-deserved rest.

PORTRAIT OF NADYA REPINA, THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER

1881

Oil on canvas, 66 x 54 cm

Radishchev Museum of Arts, Saratov, Russia

How arduous and boring the life of a model can be, as Nadya, Repin's four-year-old daughter, demonstrates in this painting. Repin painted the portrait in 1881, one year before he separated from his wife Vera. In the same year Repin had completed several other portraits of well-known and reputable Russian personalities. Several of those, for example, famous writer and poet Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Repin got to know in the parlour of Russia's most famous art critic of that time, Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906). That way, Stasov was able to introduce Repin to a social circle that would provide him with contacts of a rich clientele. Something the struggling artist, who so far could not achieve financial success, was in dire need of.

In 1876, after three years of journeys abroad which took him to France, Italy, and Austria, Repin decided to focus the subjects of his future paintings on Russian history and culture. The portraits that Repin created after 1881 can be regarded as commissioned paintings that he made for collector and patron of arts, Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov (1832-1898), who requested to have the paintings exhibited in his private gallery. A notable work of art from this period is the last portrait to be made of gravely-ill composer Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881).

Consequently, Repin was in a financially secure position in the 1880s, as Nadya's elegant dress in this painting suggests. She has gotten tired from sitting still for a long time. She is resting her head with the black curly hair on the pillow; her look seems to be focused dreamily on something outside of the canvas.





DRAGONFLY. PORTRAIT OF VERA REPINA, THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER

1884

Oil on canvas, 111 × 84.4 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

Repin, who was forty years old at the time he finished this painting, usually chose motifs from either the daily life or the turbulent history of the Russian people – it was only later that he decided to take up portrait painting. In this painting, he chose a very different subject: his twelve-year-old daughter Vera whom he lovingly called “Dragonfly”, probably for her lively and sprightly nature. It is not the only painting that Repin made of his daughter; roughly ten years later he painted Vera again in *Autumn Bouquet. Portrait of Vera Repina* (1892).

In this painting she is seen sitting still, seemingly bored by the proceedings, on what might be part of a wooden fence that is surrounding a meadow in the background. The meadow is only indicated by light brushstrokes and almost seems to be fusing with the washed-out blue colour of the sky. Vera is wearing a Sunday dress which is complimented by a small bonnet in similar colour and pattern, woollen stockings and what seems to be her best pair of black shoes. Her whole ensemble suggests that she did not come outside to simply play but is meant to act as a model for her father.

Ten years earlier, Repin celebrated a huge success with what was probably his most famous and well-known painting, *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (pp.38-39). After that he continued to paint many other paintings depicting the everyday life of the Russian people like *Refusal of the Confession* (1879-1885) or *Religious Procession in Kursk Province* (pp.28-29).

Similarly this portrait is also a snapshot of daily life, although it is far removed from the plight of the Russian peasant and rather shows a scene from the life of the Russian middle-class at the end of the nineteenth century.

PORTRAIT OF YURI REPIN, SON OF THE ARTIST

1882

Oil on canvas, 110 x 55 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

 One year after he painted the portrait of his reclining daughter, Repin painted a portrait of his only son. The three or four-year-old Yuri is sitting on a sofa that is covered by a red, rug-like blanket wildly patterned with Central Asian motifs. He is wearing a thick dark blue jacket adorned with golden buttons and blue appliqués, warm trousers and padded boots as if ready to go out on a stroll.

The light that is coming from the right part of the painting is bringing out the pale complexion of his slightly reddened face, which is also visible in his left hand that is clenching his right. Yuri is posed as if he is waiting for the signal to go out for the walk. He is no wild child, however; he does not look as if he is going to romp around before leaving the house, as is not unusual for children of his age when the prospect of fresh air and wondrous things to discover is about. Quite the opposite: He is looking unusually thoughtful and introverted. Seemingly, he is not a healthy child. Was he – unconsciously – already aware of his fate?

The thoughtful, foreshadowing pose that Repin recorded in this painting will be confirmed soon thereafter: Yuri dies in early childhood. The death of his only son and the separation from his first wife, Vera Chevtsova, are an understandably heavy burden for tragedy-ridden Repin.





PORTRAIT OF THE COMPOSER MODEST MUSSORGSKY

1881

Oil on canvas, 69 × 57 cm

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Repin painted this portrait of Modest Mussorgsky shortly before the famous Russian composer died at the age of 42. Despite being intended for a military career, Mussorgsky maintained his interest in music after his mother introduced him to playing the piano. In 1857 he joined the group “The Five”, consisting of composers of Russian national music who taught him notation. In spite of his definite talent, alleged reasons for his downfall, like loneliness, his family’s financial ruin, and the failure of his works, caused his flight into alcoholism.

The portrait that was painted within four sessions in the hospital, only one week before the composer died, presents Mussorgsky to us sitting on a chair in a dressing gown. The representation contains not the slightest embellishment: scrubby hair, tousled beard, dark circles around the eyes, and a face clearly marked by excessive alcohol consumption. But despite its unflattering way of representation, the cold colours of the portrait both captures the musician’s traits down to the smallest detail and most profoundly reflects his psyche in all its disillusionment and decadence.

This is without any doubt one of the most touching pictures ever painted of a composer. Repin’s interest in the social conditions of nineteenth-century Russia drove him to transcribe reality without the slightest compromise. Furthermore, Repin not only refused to be remunerated for this work in particular, but over and above also stuck up for the erection of a monument honouring the composer.

PORTRAIT OF PAVEL TRETYAKOV, FOUNDER OF THE TRETYAKOV GALLERY

1883

Oil on canvas, 98 x 76 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

In the series of portraits that Repin created in the 1880s, the portrait of his patron Pavel Tretyakov (1832-1898) is especially notable. Tretyakov was one Moscow's biggest entrepreneurs as well as an amateur art collector; a passion that he pursued together with his younger brother Sergei (1834-1892). He was the heir to the successful textile company opened by his father and – as co-founder of the Moscow commercial bank and the Moscow industrial trading company, as well as owner of several other ventures – also part of the close circle around art critic Vladimir Stasov where he was introduced to Repin.

The two young Tretyakov brothers started collecting art, which they stored in a Moscow townhouse, at the beginning of the 1850s when Pavel was just 20 years old. In the course of several years they were able to accumulate a considerable fortune which they partly invested into the acquisition of paintings. With their growing collection, the focus and idea behind their passion shifted from establishing a private collection to the creation of a comprehensive national collection.

Repin arranges his 50-year old patron to sit in front of several paintings in sumptuous golden frames which are cut off by the upper border of the canvas so that their subject is not clearly determinable. Tretyakov is crossing his arms in front of his body, seemingly tired and lost in thought. Besides his small head with the receding hairline, his delicate, almost frail, hand is the center of attention in this painting.





PORTRAIT OF THE ACTRESS PELAGEYA STREPETOVA

1882

Oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

Pelageya Strepetova (1850-1903), born in Nishni Nowgorod, a city featured heavily in the novels of Leo Tolstoy, which was also a prominent trade capital in the nineteenth century due to its location at the confluence of the Oka and Volga, was an exceptionally spirited actress and woman.

Strepetova, who learned to act autodidactically, a remarkable achievement, especially for that time, extensively studied the aesthetic ideas of the two philosophers Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) and Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836-1861) in her academic pursuits. From 1881 to 1890 she worked at Russia's oldest theatre, the Alexandrinsky Theatre (which was founded by Empress Elizabeth of Russia), in St Petersburg. Strepetova quickly garnered a reputation for being an excellent interpreter of the plays written by Alexander Ostrovsky (1823-1886) and Alexey Pisemsky (1820-1881; *Gorkaya Sudbina* – A Bitter Fate)

It was not recorded when she married her fellow actor I. Pissarev. As she became embroiled in an argument with the rather conservative direction of the theatre, she only performed outside of big cities later in her life. Repin shows her as an energetic, self-confident woman – which she surely was. Another painter, Nikolai Jaroschenko (1846-1898), painted her two years later quite differently: as a thoughtful woman in her thirties.

PORTRAIT OF DMITRI MENDELEEV

1885

Oil on canvas, 57.5 × 46 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

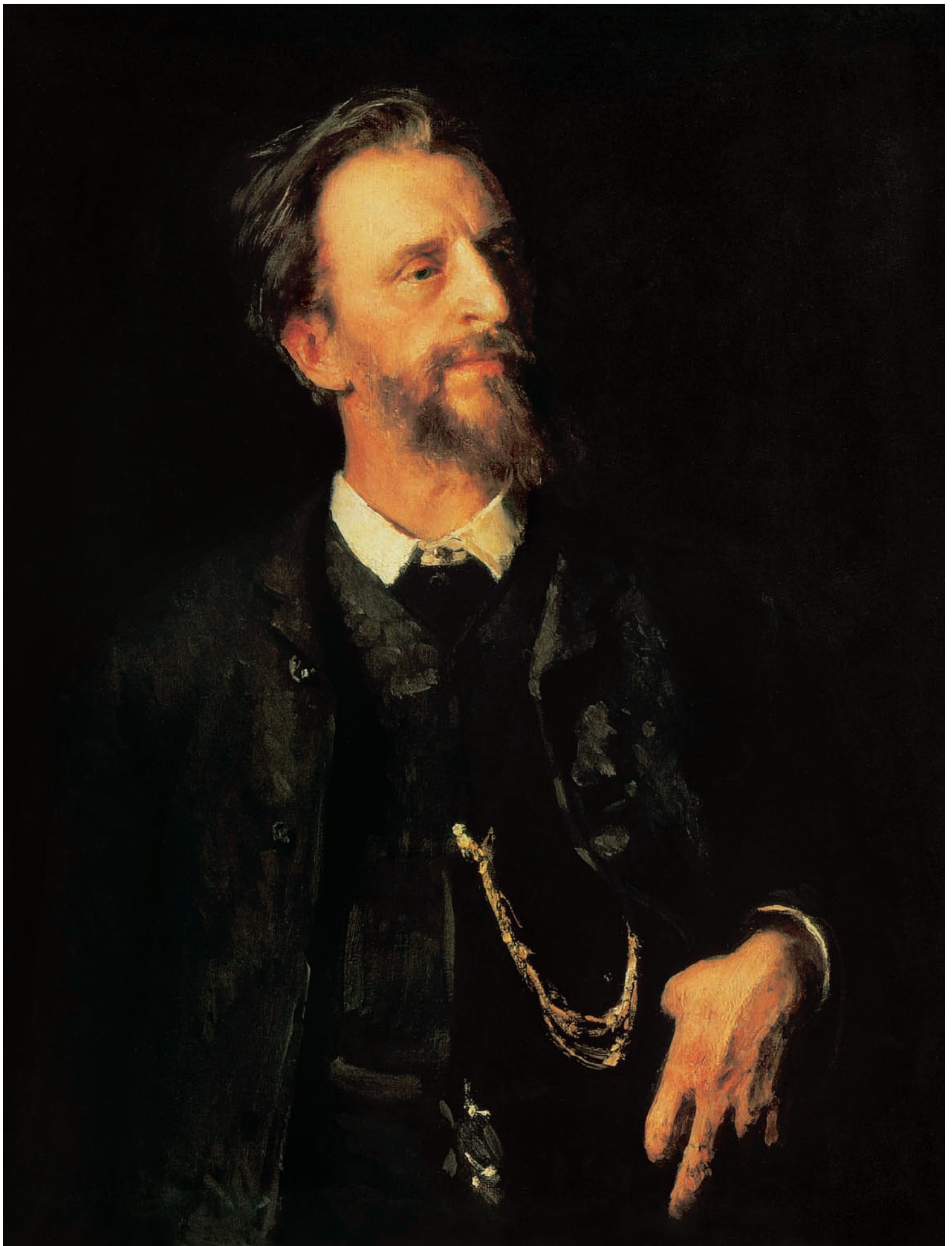
 One year after the portrait of his daughter, *Dragonfly*, Repin painted this portrait of the most famous Russian chemist of his time, Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev (alternative spellings: Mendeleyev or Mendeleef) (1834-1907). Mendeleev, who had already dedicated himself to the study of the natural sciences by the age of sixteen, studied first at the University of St Petersburg and later at the University of Heidelberg.

Throughout his life, Mendeleev was successful in various scientific disciplines and worked in different fields. Later in his life he was made the director of the Bureau for Weights and Measures, a position which he used to introduce the metric system in the Russian Empire. Furthermore, he developed a working theory examining the origin and formation of mineral oil and extensively studied, in a related matter, the usage of naphtha in the industry.

His whole attention, however, was dedicated to the study of physical chemistry. In this field he developed a system to categorize chemical elements, the famous periodic system of elements. This discovery enabled him even to predict the existence and the characteristics of elements that had not yet been discovered. Mendeleev published the theory in 1869 in a scientific article which he entitled *Über die Beziehungen der Eigenschaften zu den Atomgewichten der Elemente* (About the Relation of the Characteristics of Chemical Elements to Their Atomic Mass) and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Chemistry seven years later, however, he did not receive it. The 101st element in the periodic system was named in his honour: Mendelevium.

Since Mendeleev was a member of various academic institutions, the University of Edinburgh among them, Repin painted him in the doctorate robes of that university.





PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST GRIGORIY MYASOYEDOV

1886

Oil on canvas, 89 x 69 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

Grigoriy Grigoryevich Myasoyedov (1834-1911) was born as the son of a small gentry family who lived in an area 20 km south of Moscow in a fertile rural region that was known for supplying the capital's population with flour and wheat. The family was wealthy enough to send Myasoyedov to the Academy of Arts in St Petersburg where he spent ten years studying. After a customary journey into Europe, during which he also spent time in France and Germany, he followed a similar course as Repin and dedicated his art to the depiction of the hard life of the rural population.

Among his best-known paintings, which consistently can be classified as 'Realism', are *The Mowers* (1887), *On the Boulevard* (1886/1887) and especially, the 1872 painting *The Zemstvo Having Lunch*. The *Zemstvo* were members of a localised political body with a limited right of self-government whose responsibility was the management of rural districts. Going by the original title of Myasoyedov's painting, one might expect to see a group of political dignitaries engaged in a formal dinner. The canvas, however, shows something entirely different: in the midst of strutting chickens, five men are sitting or standing in front of a house façade, eating their homemade lunch. It is simply an extraordinarily well-made, genre-typical painting.

Repin's portrait of Myasoyedov shows a wealthy, well-dressed gentleman whose posture implies a deep confidence in his skill and an awareness of his social standing. He is inclining his head in a portrait-typical side-face manner; the thumb of his left hand is nonchalantly in the pocket of his vest; a weighty golden chain is indicating the presence of a pocket watch.

LEO TOLSTOY AS A PLOUGHMAN ON A FIELD

1887

Oil on cardboard, 27.8 x 40.3 cm
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

ount Lyev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910) was born on the family country estate Yasnaya Poliana 200 km south of Moscow. Among his most famous works are the novels *War and Peace*, which was translated to film multiple times, and *Anna Karenina*, a story depicting the life of the upper echelon of Russian society in the nineteenth century.

The estate Yasnaya Poliana was part of the family heritage since the eighteenth century. Tolstoy inherited the manor, the huge plot of land and five villages with several hundred serfs when he was barely 18 years old. Two years before that he had started studying oriental languages and jurisprudence. By the time he inherited the estate he had already spent the majority of his allowance on his *bon vivant* lifestyle.

When he returned home, he made his first attempts at writing by describing the life of his serfs, which resulted in the novel *Youth*. As a young officer in the army he participated for two years and traveled through several West-European countries. With the knowledge he gathered throughout his travels he began to build village schools. Furthermore, he wrote textbooks which were in use for fifty years and gave the children basic knowledge in the traditional school subjects.

An image like this, an intellectual doing hard labour, might be dismissed as a PR-stunt to improve public perception today, seems realistic when painted by Repin: The noble author of world fame, who did a lot of philanthropic work and was a vehement advocate of separation of state and church, seems believable and authentic behind his ploughshare.





PORTRAIT OF ANTON RUBINSTEIN

1887

Oil on canvas, 110 x 85 cm
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Repin sets his friend, pianist and composer, Anton Rubinstein, in front of a neutral brown-orange background. He turns the page of the score in one single movement while swinging a baton with his right arm. The portrait puts the focus on the upper body and the face of the subject and therewith leaves out some elements that continue outside of the frame, such as a part of the composer's long baton, his right elbow, as well as the music stand that holds the score in front of him.

As a prodigy, Rubinstein early learnt to play the piano from his mother and he had his first concert at the age of thirteen. Beside twenty operas, the most famous of which is called *The Demon*, the productive artist composed six symphonies, seven concerti and many works of chamber music. Too conservative to join the group "The Five" (Mily Balakirev, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, and César Cui) but, at the same time, too innovative to be taken for a traditionalist, Rubinstein had some difficulty in finding his place in the music world of his time. This might be the reason why his works were only rarely performed – and why they are still not played very often today.

This painting, which portrays Rubinstein as a man focused on his passion, was realised years after *Slavic Composers* (p.132) and in accordance to drafts for that painting, whose depiction of the gathered musicians – among them Anton Rubinstein and his brother Nikolai – is rather traditional. Repin already painted a portrait of the Russian composer in 1881 wherein he put romantic emphasis on the musician's dense hair and drooping but bright eyes.

A NUN

1887

Oil on canvas, 124 x 90 cm
Museum of Russian Art, Kiev

Two years after the disappointing tour through Western Europe, which earned him a scholarship at the Academy of Arts in St Petersburg through his highly lauded final project, Repin turned towards motives and subjects of Russian life.

In the Russian Orthodox Church it was customary for women to cover their heads. The justification for this rule was derived from the first letter of Apostle Paul to the Corinthians which mentions that "[...] every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is the same as having her head shaved. [...]" and "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man."

This makes the identification of the woman in the painting not an easy task. She could be a nun just as well a regular church-going woman on her way to mass. With this portrait, Repin created a dark painting depicting a woman fully covered in a black cloak and a black head cloth with only her strict face left uncovered. Her silhouette is barely distinguishable against the background which is broken only in one place by a lighter shade of colour. The woman is looking at the viewer from the corners of her eyes – waiting, insecure, and cautious.





PORTRAIT OF SOPHIA DRAGOMIROVA

1889

Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 78.5 cm
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Sophia Mikhailovna Dragomirova (1871-1953), aged seventeen in this painting, was the daughter of the successful and decorated Russian general, military scientist and writer Mikhail Ivanovich Dragomirov (1830-1905), whom Repin painted in the same year. There is hardly any information about her life. The only known facts are the existence of two older brothers who, like their father, also achieved a high military rank and that Sophia took on the name Lukomskaya after her marriage. Several years after Repin's portrait, Valentin Serov also made a portrait painting of her. After that Sophia's historical footprints vanish.

In the center of both portraits are her thoughtful, sad-looking hazelnut eyes. In Repin's painting she tiredly supports her head with her arm, seemingly exhausted from long hours of reading, as one can gather by her books, which are barely visible at the edge of the painting. She is leaning her elbow on a small table that is covered with a flowered tablecloth. Her colourful attire, a dress that could be a national costume, bright necklaces with religious symbols and a headdress adorned with blue flowers, is a sharp contrast to her rather melancholic and sorrowful expression. Serov's painting is vastly different: it shows Sophia as a socialite in her twenties, wearing a dark brown dress and sitting in front of an undefined brown-shaded background.

A similarity that both paintings share, however, is Sophia's apparently sad expression. Elaborating from that, we can assume that Sophia Dragomirova was not a person that found much happiness in her life.

PORTRAIT OF BARONESS VARVARA IKSKUL VON HILDENBANDT

1889

Oil on canvas, 196.5 × 71.7 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

Varvara Ivanovna Ikskul von Hildenbandt (1850-1928) led an eventful and turbulent life. She was the daughter of a high-ranking Russian artillery officer and a Serbian noblewoman. Aged 16, she was married to State councilor Nikolai Glinka, with whom she had three children. She divorced him ten years later in order to marry Privy Actual Councilor Karl Petrovich Ikskul von Hildenbandt.

In her thirties she dedicated herself to various causes and activities: She published short stories in French magazines, established a printing house in order to provide the poor lower class with affordable literature, used her political influence on the Empress Dowager to help leftist organizations, fought for the establishment of medical training courses for women and served herself as military nurse in the Russo-Japanese War. During the revolution she was chased out of her Moscow townhouse by the Bolshevik revolutionaries whom she had supported in earlier times. She lived in relative solitude for the following years before she decided to flee the country. At 71 years of age, she hired a guide and escaped over the frozen Gulf of Finland into Western Europe where she re-united with her son, Grigory Glinka, and lived out the rest of her days with him and his family in France.

Repin shows the baroness, known for her eccentric nature, in a posture that could remind the viewer of a Roman "Domina": proud, inapproachable, with a hint of arrogance in her expression. Her waist has been tied according to nineteenth-century custom of the "wasp waist". She is dressed according to Russian high fashion during that time: a red blouse, a colour-fitted extravagant cocktail hat and a red bow that covers her neck. Her face, characterized by her dark-circled eyes, is covered by a thin veil. Only the light jewelry on her left hand and arm slightly defuse the strict atmosphere of this impressive portrait of a self-confident woman.





UNEXPECTED RETURN

1884-1888

Oil on canvas, 160.5 x 167.5 cm

The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow

In this painting, Repin records a scene that surely did not occur every day: set in a middle-class living room in the Russian Empire, a convict returns from exile. In Russia, being sentenced to “exile” usually meant working in a Siberian penal labour camp; the sentence was rarely less than ten years.

Two characters are central to this painting: The first one is the surprised, maybe even alarmed older woman. Her identity is not quite clear, she might either be the mother or the wife of the returning man. Her posture expresses shocked incredulity; she seems to have frozen in mid-motion when getting out of the armchair. The ribbons of her cap are untied, which suggests that she clearly did not expect any visitors on this day. The other person is the man entering the living room through a door that is held by an expectant looking maid. He is wearing a wide, brown coat and a loosely tied scarf; the heavy boots on his feet are dirty and suggest a long and arduous journey. His hanging shoulders speak of exhaustion, the look he is casting towards the older woman is expectant, slightly insecure.

The two children at the table, who may just have been working on their homework, show different reactions to the newcomer. The boy is joyfully surprised, while fear and uncertainty characterise the expression of his younger sister, who may be too young to remember her father; an assumption that would certainly explain her reaction.

The woman in the background, who may be the oldest sister or even the wife of the returning exile, ceases playing the piano and reacts with a similarly shocked surprise as her mother.

STONE GUEST. DON JUAN AND DONNA ANNA

1885-1896

Oil on canvas, 202 x 123 cm

Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow

If we take a closer look at the depicted characters, Repin seems to have been clearly influenced by Mozart's opera (*Don Giovanni*) in his interpretation of a scene from Don Juan. The first act of the opera namely opens with a scene of Don Juan trying to seduce Donna Anna. This seduction scene is set in the garden of the young lady's house. Don Juan has snuck into in the disguise of a Franciscan monk while Leporello kept watch. His endeavours fail and the virtuous Donna Anna calls for help. Repin chose precisely this moment in which Donna Anna turns away from her ravisher.

The painting follows a logic of "trinity". This primarily shows in the painting's three layers of space: Don Juan and Donna Anna are positioned in the foreground in front of the barrier; the middle layer contains Leporello and the statue of the Commander, while the background is taken up by a landscape. The same structure is recognisable vertically: the kneeling seducer, then Donna Anna and Leporello on the same level, and at last the statue of the Commander that exceeds the picture frame. The respective levels are symbolic and correspond to their relative human merit: Don Juan belongs to Hell, Donna Anna and Leporello are weak but faithful individuals (one to her husband, the other to his master), and divine justice will be carried out by the Commander at the end of the opera.

The theatrical aspect of this painting is emphasised by both the exaggerated movements of its characters – Donna Anna averting her eyes and Don Juan kneeling ecstatically – by reducing the action to the three main characters and by the scenographic aspect of the background landscape that is not set on the same level as the characters. All this can be complemented by the work's lack of depth and the flowers that are spread on the floor and simply elude a garden decoration. It is a coherent possibility that Repin let himself be inspired by a performance of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* while working on his own composition.





PORTRAIT OF K. POBEDONOSTSEV (STUDY FOR THE CEREMONIAL MEETING OF THE STATE COUNCIL)

1903

Oil on canvas, 69 x 53 cm

The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev (1827-1907) came from a family of intellectuals. His father, who taught literature at the University of Moscow, enrolled him in the St Petersburg School of Jurisprudence when he was barely fourteen years old. After six years of studying, Pobedonostsev left the school, which was famous for training and preparing future statesmen, and took on the job of teaching jurisprudence to several grand princes in 1860. Among his pupils were the son of Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881), Grand Prince Nicholas, whom he accompanied on a journey through Russia, and Alexander III (1845-1894) who later also became Tsar of the Russian empire.

As a believer in the superiority and self-sufficiency of Russian culture and highest member of the Russian Holy Synod (the highest authority in the Russian-Orthodox Church) he used his political position under the Tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II (who was murdered during the Bolshevik Revolution along with his family) to advance reactionary conservative policies towards other nationalities and denominations within the Russian Empire. His influence earned him the reputation of being the "grey eminence" of Russian Imperial politics. In 1872 he also assumed a position within the State Council in addition to the other public offices he held at that time.

Commissioned by the government, Repin and a few other pupils painted the ceremonial meeting, which was meant to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the State Council, the highest judicial authority in the Empire. This portrait is a preliminary study for the larger painting showing the whole of the State Council.

PORTRAIT OF THE NEUROLOGIST VLADIMIR BEKHTEREV

c. 1913

Oil on canvas, 107 x 78 cm

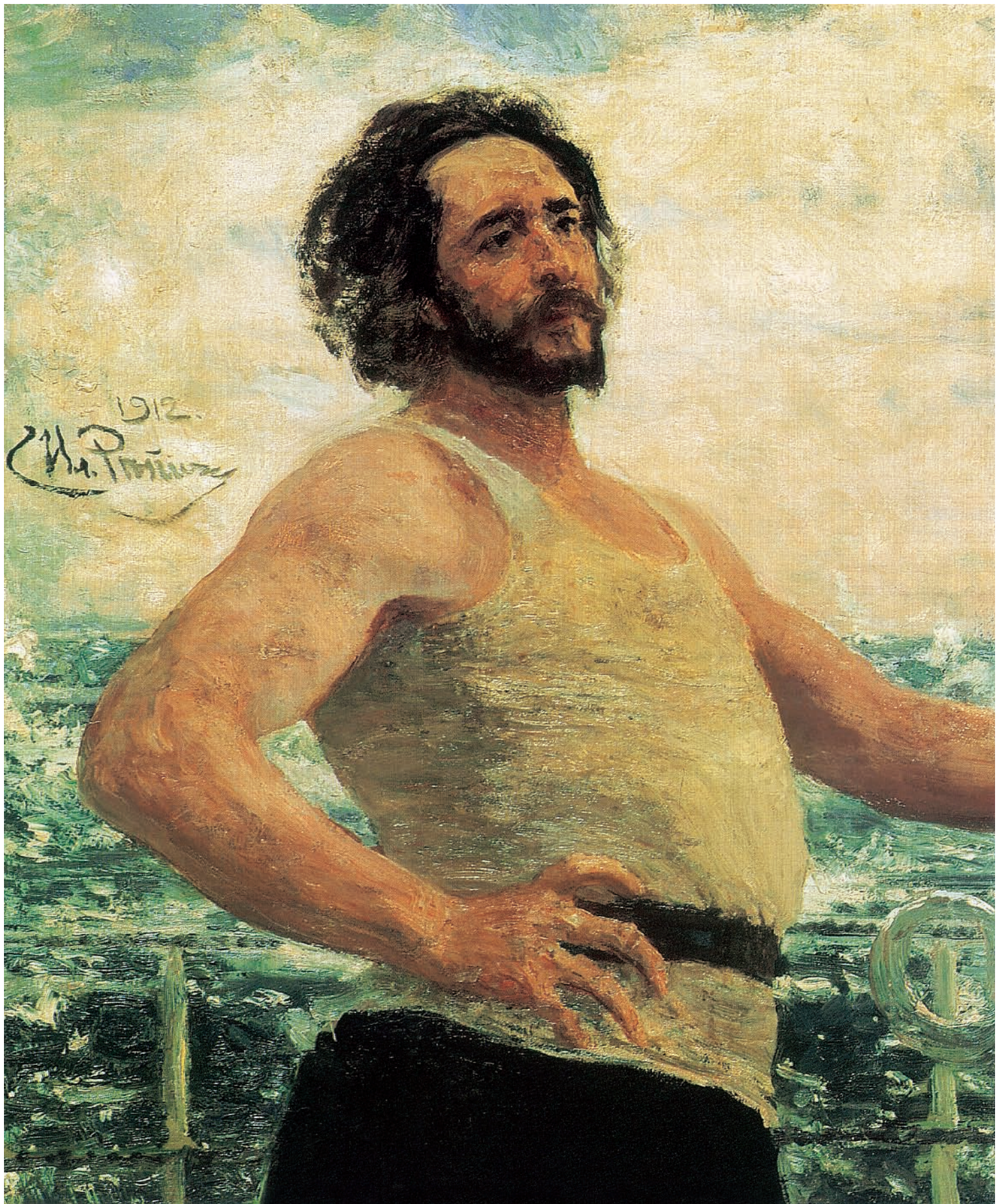
The Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev (1857-1927) was born in Sorali in the Viatka Territory in Russia as son of a police officer. His academic career started at the University of St Petersburg where he studied medicine. After completing his studies he began working in a psychiatric hospital and pursuing a state doctorate in the disciplines of psychiatry and neurology. Later he also worked in Paris and Leipzig. At the age of thirty he received a doctorate in Kazan and founded the first laboratory for experimental psychology which he, however, left a few years later to start a private neurological institute and to publish a scholarly magazine in the same field.

He collected his findings in the field of neurology in his book *The Conduction Paths in the Brain and Spinal Cord*. Further studies of brain anatomy resulted in the discovery of the neuron cluster *superior vestibular nucleus*, which is still called the *Bekhterev's nucleus* today. His name, however, is probably most famous in connection to an arthritic disease of the spinal joints, *Bekhterev's disease*. Apart from his neurological work he also extensively observed and tested the human reaction to environmental stimuli and thus created a new field of study: reflexology.

Bekhterev seemingly liked being portrayed in uniform, either in a relaxed pose – like in this painting – or in impressive, almost Napoleonic pose with his right hand tucked inside of his uniform jacket, as seen in a 1912 photograph. Bekhterev died unexpectedly in 1927. According to rumour, Joseph Stalin ordered his death after Bekhterev had diagnosed the dictator with a “grave paranoia”.





PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER LEONID ANDREYEV ON A PLEASURE BOAT

1912

Oil on canvas, 124 x 95 cm

Gallery of Art, Tver, Russia

Leonid Nikolaievich Andreyev (1872-1919) was born into the family of a simple government worker. Initially no one expected him to have a great career as a writer. His life's work, however, rightfully places him among the greats of the classical Russian authors, despite his lack of fame outside of Russia. He began his career by working as a lawyer in Moscow but changed his profession and became a journalist; a job that also gave him the opportunity to work as a court reporter.

It is possible that he got his first ideas for novels like *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, *Abyss*, or *In the Fog* while working as court reporter. His first published short story was called *Bargamot and Garaska* and showed definitive influences from authors like Dostoyevsky and Dickens; a fact that Andreyev confessed good-naturedly since he previously had studied their works extensively. Just three years later he published a collection of realistic short stories which were greatly lauded by Maxim Gorky (1868-1936). Andreyev also wrote a short play named *To the Stars* in 1905. The first theatrical rendition was forbidden by Russian censorship however with the explanation that it contains and idealises revolutionist ideas and their propagators. A short while later, however, the play premiered in Vienna and was positively lauded by the Moscow press, who wrote, "This performance is one of the strongest that the theatre has ever seen and will remain in the memories of those who attended for a long time."

Repin portrays Andreyev not as a pale, skeletal thinker who is overly focused on mental and rational activities but as a strong man with his hair fluttering in the wind who might quite enjoy the pleasures of life.

SELF-PORTRAIT

1894

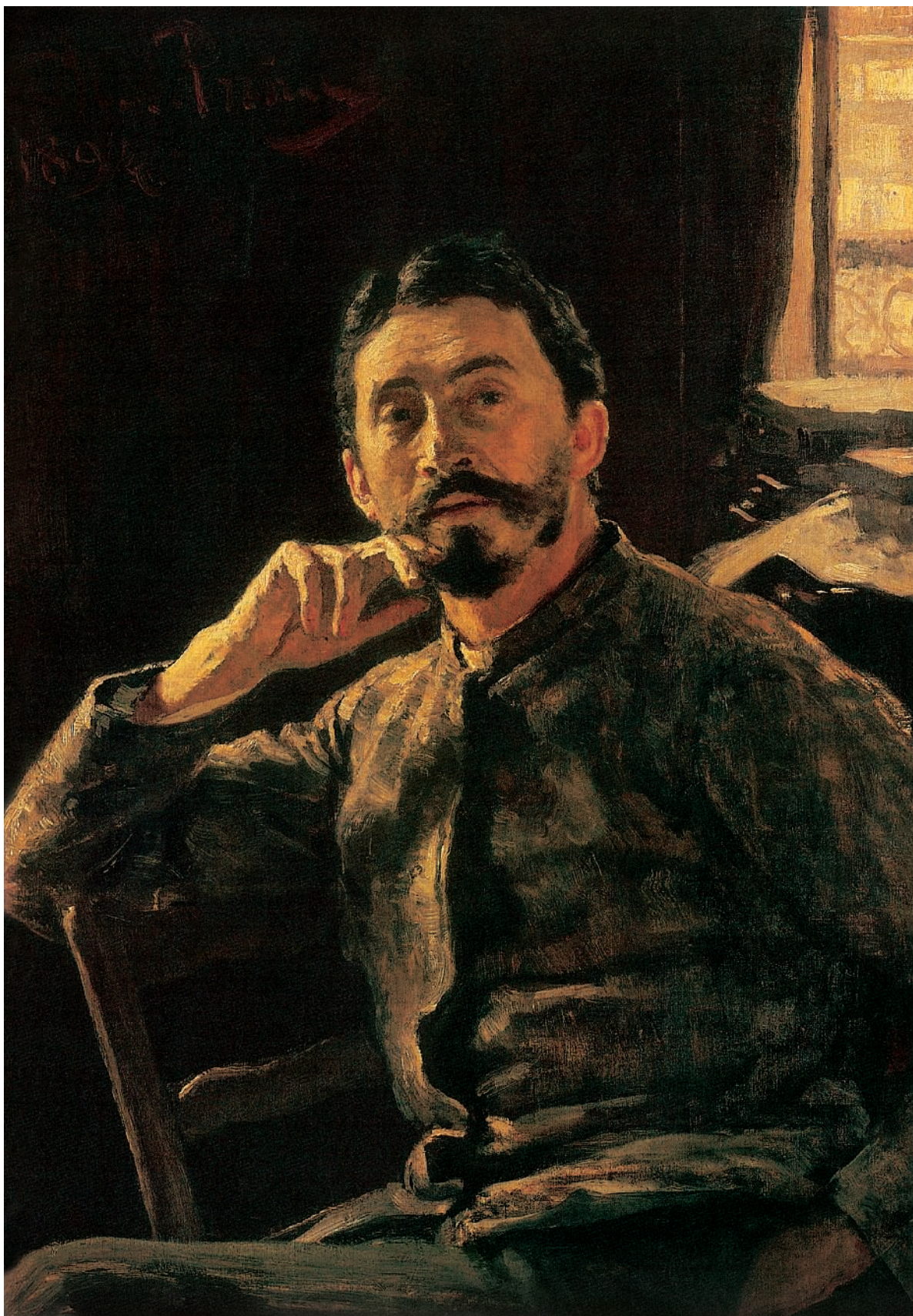
Oil on canvas, 90 x 63 cm

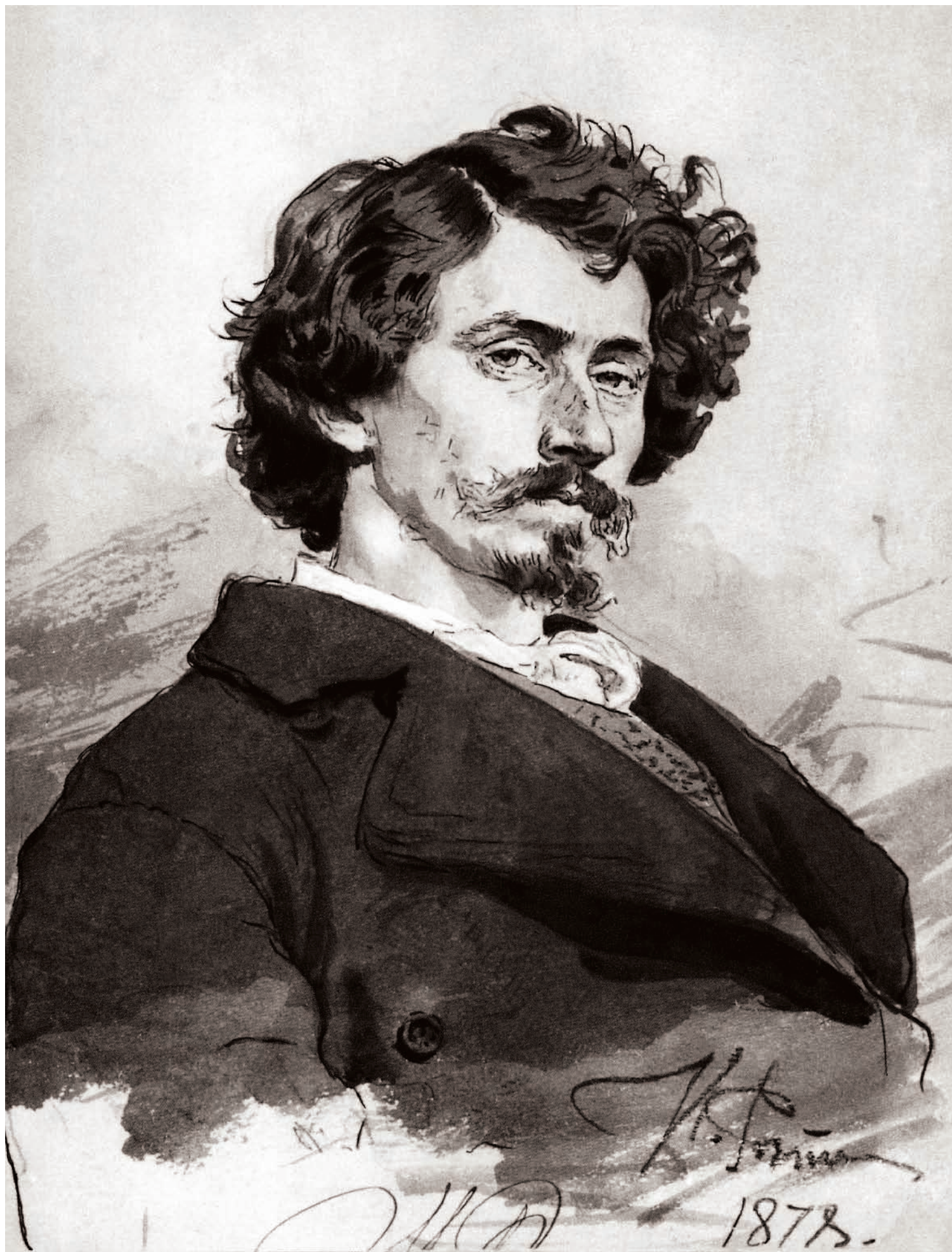
Yasnaya Poliana, Moscow

Among the artists Repin particularly appreciated, Rembrandt seems to be the one to have influenced him the most, which becomes clearly apparent in paintings such as this self-portrait. As a master of the self-portrait, Rembrandt portrayed himself at least eighty times. He had a command of twilight and used the latter to put special emphasis on his face in a painting while accentuating its subtlest features and eliminating the narrative details. This particular *Self-Portrait* proves that Repin had an equal command of this very technique.

If you take a closer look at the painting, Repin's procedure of self-depiction will become traceable. The light comes from the window behind him and, positioned at a right angle to the canvas, another source of light illuminates the right side of his face. His left arm is hanging down loosely and seems to be excluded from the composition. He is seated on a chair and turns his body towards the viewer in order to provide a better profile view. Even though the painter consciously depicts himself in a casual position – since he probably finds himself in an everyday environment – this very position also suggests the existence of a mirror opposite the artist while the canvas is assumedly positioned opposite the chair. Consequently, Repin must have regularly turned around to alternately dedicate himself to the mirror and the canvas. He might have painted the whole work with his left hand: this would explain the unusual position of his arm that regularly reached out to the canvas and was merely depicted at the side of his body. The artist learnt how to use his left hand when he dislocated his right wrist while working on the majestic composition of *Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council on May 7, 1901* (p.122-123). The existence of the mirror is further affirmed by the reflection of the light coming from the window that shades the face and the clothes of the painter.

The everyday environment and Repin's simple attire indicate that he finds himself in his atelier "Penates" in Kuokkaala in Finland.





Biography

1844

24 July (5 August): Born in the town of Chuguyev, Kharkov Province. His parents are Yefim Vasilyevich Repin, a private in the Uhlan Regiment, and Tatyana Stepanovna, neé Bocharova. Named in honour of the Old Testament Prophet Elijah (Ilya in Russian).

1854

Enters the Military Topography School.

1856

Becomes a pupil of a local icon-painter, Ivan Bunakov.

1859-1863

Fulfils commissions for icons and wall-paintings in church commissions for the Society for the Encouragement of Artists.

1864

Granted permission to attend lectures at the Academy of Arts, without having the formal status of a student. Meets Ivan Kramskoi.

Paints *Reading for Examinations*.

1869

Is awarded a small gold medal for his painting *Job and His Friends*.

Meets Vladimir Stasov.

Paints *Portrait of Vera Shevtsova*.

1870

Makes a trip to the Volga River. Paints sketches of Volga landscapes and studies of barge-haulers.

1871

Is awarded a large gold medal for his painting *The Raising of Jairus' Daughter*.

1872

Marries Vera Shevtsova. His first daughter, Vera, is born.

Works on the painting *Barge Haulers on the Volga* commissioned by Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich (completed in 1873).

Self-portrait, 1878.

India ink on paper, 17.8 x 13.3 cm.
The Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.

Meets the art collector Pavel Tretyakov.

Tretyakov acquires Repin's first works. Paints *Slavic Composers*.

1873

Departure to Italy and France with his family.

1874

Birth of another daughter, Nadezhda.

1874-1875

Summer: Works in the open air at Veules in Normandy.

Contributes to the Salon in Paris and to the exhibitions of the Itinerants' Society in St Petersburg.

Paints *A Paris Cafe*.

1876

Return to St Petersburg. Goes to Chuguyev with his family.

Receives the title of academician for his painting *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom*.

Paints *On a Turf Seat*.

1877

Birth of his son, Yuri.

Travels to Nizhni Novgorod, Moscow and St Petersburg. Moves to Moscow.

Produces *Archdeacon*, portraits of peasants, sketches for *Religious Procession in Kursk Province*, portraits of fellow-artists Arkhip Kuinji and Ivan Shishkin, and of the historian Ivan Zabelin.

1878

Regularly meets Leo Tolstoy and the painter Vasily Surikov. Paints his first sketch for *The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossaks to Sultan Mahmoud IV*.

1879

Spends the summer at Abramtsevo near Moscow. Paints portraits of the Mamontovs and Grand Dutchess Sophia.

1880

Birth of a third daughter, Tatyana.

Travels to Zaporozhye in the Ukraine to collect material for the painting *The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossaks to Sultan Mahmoud IV*.

Paints portrait of Nikolai Gay, Polina Strepetova, and *Rest*.



1883

Travels around Western Europe with Vladimir Stasov. The painting *Religious Procession in Kursk Province* is shown at the 11th Itinerants' Society Exhibition.

Paints portrait of Pavel Tretyakov.

1884

Unexpected Return is shown at the 12th Itinerants' Society Exhibition.

Paints *A Lively Girl*.

1885

Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581 is shown at the 12th Itinerants' Society Exhibition.

1886

Travels to the Crimea with Arkhip Kuinji.

Produces drawings and sketches on Biblical subjects.

1887

Visits Austria, Italy and Germany. Retires from the board of the Itinerants' Society.

Paints two portraits of Leo Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana and makes sketches for the painting *Leo Tolstoy Ploughing*.

Ilya Repin shopping for fish in Helsinki, c. 1900.

Photograph: Nathalia Nordmann.



Paints Mikhail *Glinka at Work on His Opera "Ruslan and Liudmila," Alexander Pushkin on the Shore of the Black Sea* (in collaboration with Ivan Aivazovsky), a portrait of the pianist Maria Benois, and a self-portrait.

1888

Travels to the southern provinces of Russia and the Caucasus. Produces sketches and studies of descendants of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

Paints portraits of artist Mikhail Mikeshein and the poet Konstantin Fofanov.

1889

The City of Chuhuiv (Chuguyev).
Shops on Nikitskaya Street, c. 1860.
Photograph.

Travels to Paris to see the World Exhibition and then, together with Vladimir Stasov, visits London, Zurich, and Munich.



Draws Nikolai Leskov, paints the *Portrait of Baroness Varvara Ikskul von Hildenbandt* and *Yelizaveta Zvantseva at the Easel*.

1890

Travels along the Volga and then goes to the Crimea and Odessa.

Appointed to a government commission working on a new statute for the Academy of Arts.

1891

Visits Yasnaya Poliana and Abramtsevo.

Resigns from the Itinerants' Society in protest against the adoption of a new statute which restricts the rights of young artists. An exhibition of works by Repin and Shishkin is held in the Academy of Arts, including *The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossaks to Sultan Mahmoud IV* and *Religious Procession in an Oak Wood*.

Academy of Arts, St Petersburg,
end of the 19th century.
Photograph.



Ilya Repin and his children, c. 1880.
From left to right: Nadia, Tatiana,
Yuri and Vera.
Photograph.

1892

Visits Leo Tolstoy who is working in the famine-affected provinces. One-man show in the History Museum in Moscow.

Paints portraits of his daughters, Yevgeny Pavlov and Ivan Tarkhanov, and also *The Byelorussian*, *portrait of the peasant S. Shavrov*.

1893

Visits academic art schools in Warsaw, Krakow, Munich, Vienna, and Paris to study their teaching methods.

Spends the winter in Italy.

Publishes his essays "Letters on Art".

1894

Visits France. Begins giving a class at the Higher Art School attached to the Academy of Arts. Paints a self-portrait, *A Neapolitan Woman* and *The Wedding of Nicholas II and Grand Duchess Alexandra Fiodorovna*.

1895

Paints portraits of Emperor Nicholas II, Alexander Verzhbilovich, Baroness Lydia Steingel, and Princess Maria Tenisheva.

1896

Goes to Nizhni Novgorod to visit the All-Russian Exhibition. Repin's paintings are shown in St Petersburg, at the Exhibition of Works of Creative Art.

Produces sketches of the coronation ceremonies, *Portrait of Countess Natalia Golovina*, *The Duel* and *Don Juan and Dona Anna*.

1897

Rejoins the Itinerants' Society. Leo Tolstoy visits his studio. Appointed rector of the Higher Artistic School for a year.

Illustrates Nikolai Kutepov's book *Royal Hunting in Russia*.

1898

Visits the Holy Land. Paints the icon *Carrying the Cross for the Russian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem*. Attends Pavel Tretyakov's funeral.

1899

Travels along the Volga and to the Caucasus.



Joins the editorial board of *World of Art*, but soon breaks with the magazine. Buys an estate, The "Penates", at Kuokkala (now Repino), near St Petersburg.

1900

Takes his common-law wife Natalia Nordman to the World Exhibition in Paris, where he is on the painting jury.

Visits Munich, the Tyrol, and Prague.

Paints a portrait of Vladimir Stasov, *Natalia Nordman in a Tyrolese Hat* and *In the Sunlight: Portrait of Nadezhda Repina*.

1901

Awarded the Legion of Honour.

Paints a watercolour portrait of Leo Tolstoy in Yasnaya Poliana. *Get Thee Behind Me, Satan!* is shown at the 29th Itinerants' Society Exhibition.

Group of painters from the Society of Travelling Exhibitions, 1880.
Photograph: André Denier



1902-1903

Works on the painting *Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council* (produces over forty portrait studies and the portraits of Sergei Witte and Viacheslav Pleve). Paints *What a Freedom!*

1904

Makes a speech at an evening dedicated to the memory of the artist Vasily Vereshchagin. Paints portraits of Leonid Andreyev and A. Zinovyev, *The Death of the Cossack Squadron Commander Zinovyev*.

1905

Travels to Italy with Natalia Nordman.

Produces sketches depicting government troops opening fire on a peaceful demonstration on 9 December 1905.

Sketches portraits of Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Stasov and paints two portraits of Natalia Nordman.

1907

Resigns from the Academy of Arts. Paints a double portrait of Leo Tolstoy and his wife.

Visits Chuguyev and the Crimea.

Writes his reminiscences of Vladimir Stasov.

Ilya Repin with a group of writers in his studio at the "Penates", 1909. Photograph.



1908

Publicly denounces the death penalty in Russia.

Illustrates Leonid Andreyev's story *The Seven Who Were Hanged*. *The Cossacks from the Black Sea Coast* is shown at the Itinerants' Society Exhibition.

1909

Paints *Gogol Burning the Manuscript of the Second Part of «Dead Souls»*.

1910

Paints portraits of Piotr Stolypin, Komei Chukovsky, and Lydia Yavorskaya.

1911

Travels with Natalia Nordman to the World Exhibition in Italy, where his painting *17 October 1905* and his portraits are displayed in a separate room.

Writes his reminiscences of Leo Tolstoy. Makes a speech on artistic education.

Paints *Alexander Pushkin at the Lyceum Speech-Day, 8 January 1815*.

1912

Produces paintings devoted to the centenary of Napoleon's invasion of Russia.

Members of the Society of Travelling Exhibitions (Peredvizhniki). Photograph.



1913

Makes several visits to Moscow to restore *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581* in the Tretyakov Gallery.

Paints *The Duel* and *Portrait of Vladimir Bekhterev*.

1914

Goes to Switzerland for the funeral of Natalia Nordman after her death in Locarno.

Goes on to Italy before returning to The "Penates".

Paints *The Cossack Kriuchkov* and *King Albert of the Belgians during a Battle*.

1915

Paints a self-portrait with a suspended palette.

1916

Works on a book of reminiscences, *Far and Near*, assisted by Kornei Chukovsky.

1917

Welcomes the February Revolution.

Ilya Repin and Feodor Chaliapin
amongst painters and writers at the
"Penates", 1914.

Photograph: Karl Bulla.

Paints a portrait of Alexander Kerensky, *The Slaves of Imperialism* (a new version of the painting *The Barge Haulers on the Volga*).

1918

Finds himself abroad after the frontier between Russia and Finland is closed.

1919

Presents his collection of works by Russian artists and his own works to the Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki.

1920

Celebrations in honour of Repin by artistic circles in Finland. Works on the painting of famous Finns.

Paints a portrait of the artist Axel Gallen-Kallela and a self-portrait (in a fur hat).

1921-1922

Paints *Doubting Thomas*, *The Ascent of Elijah the Prophet*, *Christ and Mary Magdalene (The Morning of the Resurrection)*.

1923

One-man show in Prague.

1924

Celebrations at Kuokkala to mark Repin's 80th birthday. A Repin exhibition is held in Moscow.

1925

A jubilee exhibition of Repin's work is held in the Russian Museum in Leningrad. His *Calvary* is shown in Oslo.

1926

Turns down an offer to move to Leningrad. Presents three sketches devoted to the Revolution of 1905 and the portrait of Alexander Kerensky to the Museum of the Revolution of 1905.

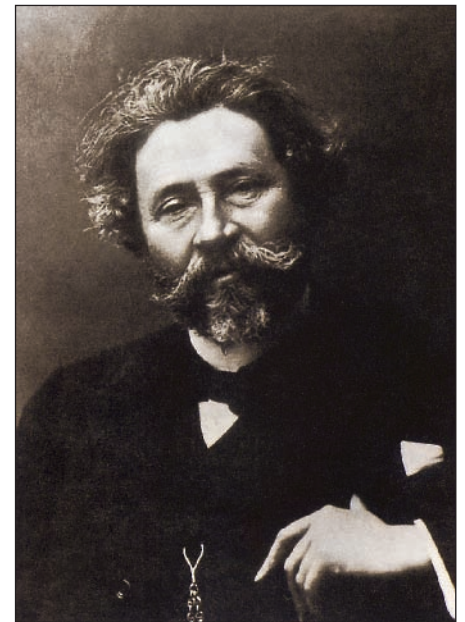
1928-29

Continues work on the painting *The Hopak Dance (The Zaporozhye Cossacks Dancing)*, begun in 1926.

1930

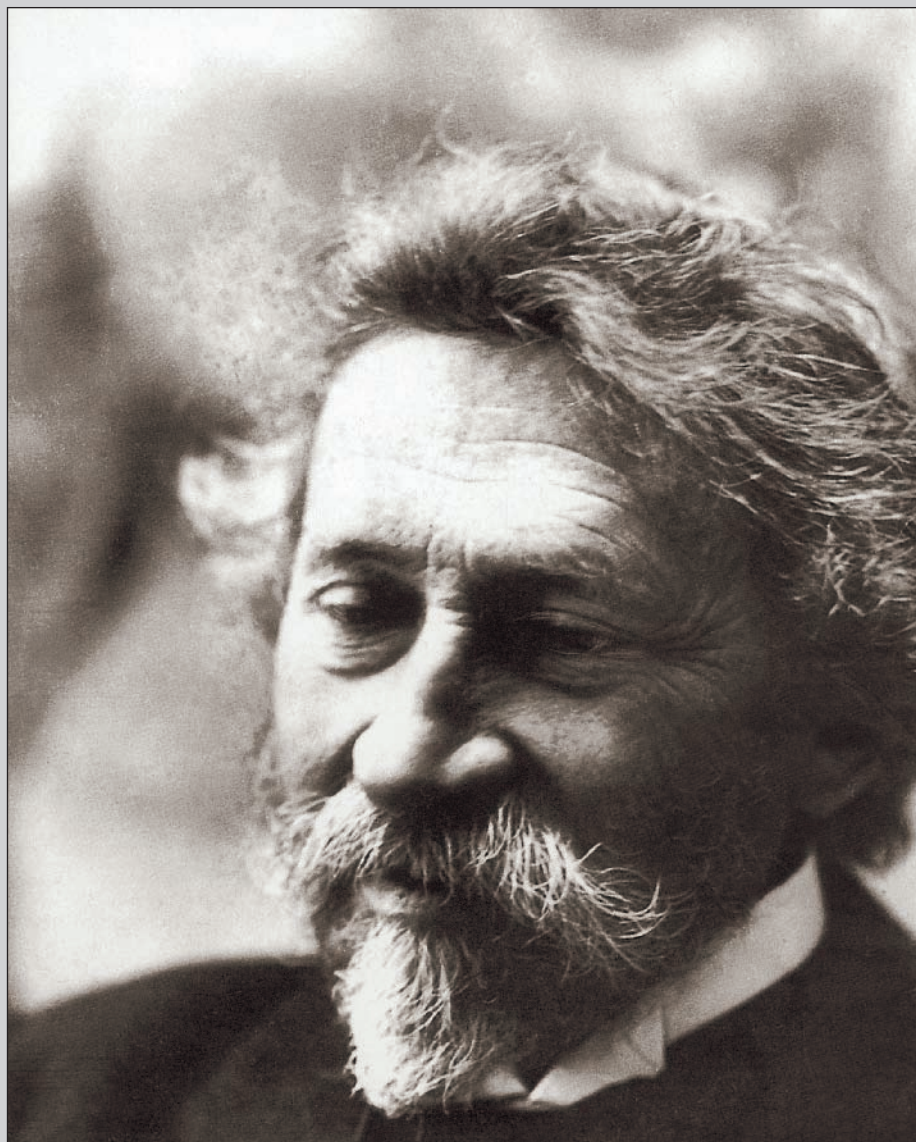
29 September: Ilya Repin dies.

He is buried on the grounds of The "Penates".



Ilya Repin. Photograph.

Ilya Repin, 1914.
Photograph: Karl Bulla.



Notes

- ¹ *Ilya Repin and Vladimir Stasov. Correspondence*, vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1948, p. 37 (in Russian).
- ² *Ilya Repin and Vladimir Stasov. Correspondence*, vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1948, p. 92 (in Russian).
- ³ *Ivan Kramskoy's Letters*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1937, p. 74 (in Russian).
- ⁴ "From Makovsky's Memories of Yasnaya Poliana," *Problems of Literature*, No 8, 1978, p. 188 (in Russian).
- ⁵ *Modest Mussorgsky's Letters and Documents*, Moscow, 1932, p. 372 (in Russian).
- ⁶ *Ilya Repin and Vladimir Stasov. Correspondence*, vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1948, p. 137 (in Russian).
- ⁷ *Ilya Repin and Vladimir Stasov. Correspondence*, vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1948, p. 137 (in Russian).
- ⁸ *Nine Stories by Leo Tolstoy*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude (Tolstoy Centenary Edition), London, 1933, p. 307.
- ⁹ This was the title used for the painting by the artist himself and his friends. In the 1930s it was given a different title with the opposite meaning: *Spurning Confession*.
- ¹⁰ Stasov, *Selected Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1950, p. 454 (in Russian).
- ¹¹ *Ilya Repin and Leo Tolstoy: Correspondence with Tolstoy and His Family*, vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1949, p. 32 (in Russian).
- ¹² "A Talk with Ilya Repin," *Russkoye Slovo*, 17 January 1913 (in Russian).

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Ilya Repin was a leading Russian painter and sculptor who is most famous for his involvement with the Russian Itinerant movement. These avant-garde artists rebelled against the formalism and tradition of the official Academy of Fine Arts and championed the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Repin's most powerful works expressed great psychological depth (*Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581*) and exposed tensions within the social order (*Barge Haulers on the Volga*) of his time.

This book invites you to discover the wonderful artworks of this progressive realist painter, whose work would eventually come to define and influence social artistic movements of the future.