Courting the West: Nicholas I, Cultural Diplomacy and the State Hermitage Museum in 1852

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Abstract

The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg as a royal collection and cultural treasury reveals the aesthetic preferences of a nation that has always stood on the cultural and geographical periphery of Europe. Initially an imperial collection under Peter I, patrons of the Hermitage focused attention on collecting canonical European paintings and also emulating Western models of display. In this way, the Russian aristocracy superimposed itself on Europe's culture through the construction of a collection to rival its great European contemporaries.

The development of a standardized practice of display has widely been studied in relation to Western museums but similar attention has not been extended to the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. I argue that Nicholas was able to use objects of art and strategies of display to assert a greater role in the European state system of the mid-nineteenth century. While the supposed transparency conveyed by the collection's public opening was meant to make Russia seem less threatening to Western powers, in reality the yolk of autocracy was as tight as ever.

Résumé

Le musée de l'Hermitage, à Saint-Pétersbourg, qui possède une collection à la fois royale et culturelle, révèle les préférences esthétiques d'une nation qui s'est toujours tenue en périphérie de l'Europe, tant sur les plans culturel que géographique. D'abord impériale sous Pierre I^{er} , la collection de l'Ermitage, par ses mécènes, s'est ensuite intéressée aux oeuvres canoniques européennes, puis à reproduction de modes de présentation utilisés en Europe de l'Ouest. L'aristocratie russe s'est ainsi superposée à la culture européenne, par la construction d'une collection pouvant rivaliser avec toute autre grande collection d'Europe.

Le développement d'un mode de présentation standardizé en relation avec les musées de l'Europe occidentale a bien souvent été étudié; dans la présente thèse, je fais valoir que Nicolas a réussi, au milieu du 19^{e} siècle, à utiliser œuvres d'art et stratégies de présentation pour obtenir pour la Russie un rôle plus important dans le système des États européens. Alors que la transparence apparente véhiculée par l'accès de la collection au public rendait la Russie moins menaçante auprès des forces d'Europe de l'Ouest, en réalité, la fibre autocratique était plus vivante que jamais.

Plate List

Introduction

St. Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum has stood as an institution dedicated to education, conservation and the appreciation of fine art since 1852. Its history, however, goes back three hundred years to the founding of the capital city by Peter the Great in 1703. His will to create a capital on par with those of Europe proved obsessive, and his hatred for the traditions of Muscovy led him to pursue the creation of a Europeanized court. This task was met with a great deal of resistance for decades, though Peter's successors at last were able to view their court culture as the equal of their Western contemporaries. The Hermitage Museum was witness to the struggle for Russia to define itself as European by divorcing its religious and cultural ties to Asia and Byzantium. Theatricality played a large role in this enterprise as the aristocracy was forced to adopt unfamiliar behaviours, dress and languages. Europeans accused the Russian aristocracy of merely mimicking their costume and mannerisms. By the time Nicholas I came to the throne in 1825 the Romanov dynasty had so wholly embraced the facets of European culture that a vast percentage of his wealth was wrapped up in the royal collection and the creation of architectural monuments. In surveying the works in his possession he surmised that if they were given a purpose built structure in the new fashion of European public collecting Russia's cultural bridge to the West could be bolstered. The Russian employment of strategies in collecting and display that were then becoming standardized could demonstrate that the Tsar's political motivations in this enterprise were on par with those of his Western contemporaries. As a cultural ambassador, the New Hermitage would upon its completion become a vehicle through which Nicholas I could strengthen his diplomatic ties to the West and his personal influence on the continent.

It was Alexander Sokurov's motion picture *Russian Ark* that first proposed the idea of the Hermitage as a cultural treasury that strove to preserve Russia's artistic ties to the continent. Sokurov's ambitious project of making a film in one continuous camera shot drifting throughout the museum to capture three hundred years of Romanov history clearly articulates the difficulties behind imitating the West while holding fast to the autocracy of the ancien régime. The film has raised new public interest in the Hermitage in Europe and North America and has encouraged scholars of the English language to reevaluate the European strategies of display and political motivations behind the nineteenth-century museum. In the documentary *In One Breath: The Making of Russian Ark* Sokurov speaks of how the film's two central characters embody an interaction between Russia and Europe. Following the complicated history of these relations it is "...a very interesting and very ugly encounter."[1] Here we have the embodiment of contact between two world views, two systems of belief: the Russian, (played by Sokurov himself) and the Marquis Astolphe de Custine, a French diplomat who traveled to Russia in 1839 and wrote a scornful memoir of life in Nicholas I's empire.

Russian Ark presents the Hermitage as a protagonist in the history of nineteenth-century art and diplomacy, something which I would also like to convey. As an ark of cultural treasures the museum acts as the guardian of the nation's identity and its historical connections to Europe. It is able to keep these riches afloat on the banks of the Neva River and in active association with the traditions and cultural institutions of the West. Sokurov goes so far as to say the museum "...justifies the existence of this city"[2]

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[1]Alexander Sokurov in In One Breath: The Making of Russian Ark (St. Petersburg: Hermitage Bridge Studio, 2002), DVD.
[2] Alexander Sokurov in In One Breath: The Making of Russian Ark.

through which he refers to the fact that St. Petersburg was created to satisfy Peter's dream of what Europe was and the potential of its technologies to push Russia into the future.

High culture in nineteenth-century Russia has reemerged as a subject of general interest in part thanks to the work of Orlando Figes. While largely a scholar of the 1917 Revolution, Figes' *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* has proven insightful when examining Russia's emergence on the European stage of art and diplomacy. Figes agrees with Sokurov's conception of Peter's capital when he writes that "the projection of Russia into Europe had always been the *raison d'être* of St. Petersburg."[3] *Natasha's Dance* is based on the principle that the main goal of Peter's Westernization was "...to present Europe as something close to Russia, a civilization of which it was a part."[4] This remained at the top of Russia's diplomatic agenda in 1825 when Nicholas came to the throne. The byproduct of this drive for inclusion, I would suggest, is the theatricality that was remarked upon by contemporary writers and modern scholars alike. The stage for this performance of European-ness became the aristocratic palaces of St. Petersburg and Moscow's environs.[5] All of the manners exhibited by the Russian noble in his home were learned from childhood, all its furnishings borrowed from a once alien culture: "for these European Russians, then, 'Europe' was not just a place. It was a region of the mind which they inhabited though their education, their language, their religion and their general attitudes."[6] In addition to discussing the diplomatic ambitions of Nicholas in the creation of the New Hermitage I will also demonstrate how the European palace was surpassed by the European museum in the nineteenth century. Like the palace it was

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[3] Orlando Figes, Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia (New York: Picador, 2002), 61.
[4] Figes, 63.
[5] Figes, 42.
[6] Figes, 55.

"...an oasis of European culture in the desert of the Russian peasant soil..."[7] The fervor for public collecting in the West allowed Nicholas to adopt strategies of display that would make his royal collection seem organically European.

Literature on the history of the State Hermitage Museum in the English language has been largely undervalued. Few volumes dedicated to the royal patronage of the arts in the Winter Palace and indeed even fewer on the New Hermitage have been written. Beyond general surveys of the Hermitage collection and its benefactors, the most informative of which is Geraldine Norman's *The Hermitage: The Biography of a Great Museum*, scholarship in English has been uninterested in exploring the political motivations behind Nicholas I's creation of the New Hermitage Museum for the pleasure of aristocrats in Russia and from abroad. Research detailing the historical arrangement of the collection and Leo von Klenze's design for the project is extremely limited. I have therefore explored these topics through synthesizing original nineteenth-century watercolours of the New Hermitage interiors and façade by Hau, Ukhtomsky and Premazzi with the official history of these galleries as presented by the State Hermitage Museum's website.[8] This site proves fascinating and highly informative in regard to the first-hand commentaries of nineteenth-century curators it has preserved and the way in which it glorifies the collection and achievements of the Tsars and museum administrators.

In addition, while examining the ideological underpinnings of the museum in respect to nationalism, politics and education I have been dependant on Andrew McClellan's *Inventing the Louvre*. This study of the development of the Louvre

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[7] Figes, 24.
[8] "The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia," 2006, <www.hermitagemuseum.org> (7 November 2004).

highlights cultural incompatibilities and is illustrative of the fact that art and ideology shared a very different relationship in Russia than in France. McClellan's work also shows how France provided an artistic and cultural model in terms of collecting and display. The Louvre demonstrated how political ambitions could be furthered by the museum as an institution of national hegemony. In France this was particularly visible in the relation of the Royal Academy of Arts to the nineteenth-century museum when living artists could still expect to see their works inducted into the collection. Nicholas I was quick to embrace these concepts. He understood that he was already in possession of the wealth and extensive collection of European treasures necessary for the Hermitage's inclusion in the nineteenth-century order of museums. This institution would be both a celebration of his ancestors' Europeanization and a vehicle for dictating proper taste and nationalism by educating his court.

If we attempt to evaluate the success of these measures there is perhaps no source as important as Astolphe de Custine's travel journals. His first hand observations on the state of Russian life, government and character have continually been referred to since they were first published in London in 1854. Often scornful in his writing, the Russian theatricality as perceived on a wider scale in Europe was acutely offensive in the Marquis' mind:

> I do not reproach the Russians for being what they are, what I blame in them is, their pretending to be what we are... I see them incessantly occupied with the desire of mimicking other nations, and this they do after the true manner of monkeys, caricaturing what they copy.[9]

His remarks on this performance of European style were also shadowed by his observation that Russian aristocrats and commoners alike preserved an Asiatic

[9] Astolphe de Custine, Russia (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1854), 79-80.

susceptibility in their hearts. It affected their moral judgment, their political attitudes and their spirituality. This double-consciousness, as identified by Figes, proved an insurmountable barrier throughout the nineteenth century and is to a large extent still existent in contemporary politics. Though the creation of a state museum did increase the number of foreign dignitaries traveling to Russia's capital, there were many negative features of the empire's governance that could not be masked.

De Custine's writing showed a great deal of admiration for the powerful and striking Tsar but his French inclination to liberalism made it difficult for the Marquis to accept Nicholas' harsh autocracy. He saw in Russia the capability "...to represent the principle of order, but influenced by the character of its rulers, it seeks to propagate tyranny under pretext of remedying anarchy; as though arbitrary power could remedy any evil!"[10] In the minds of European statesmen Russia continued to lag behind the West despite the importation of technologies and a superficial pretense of constitutionalism in the nineteenth century. Equally, in the field of visual arts Russians had merely imported the aesthetic they admired without any of the underlying ideological apparatus. In the nineteenth century, then, the arts were still in their infancy in relation to the European centers of painting and architecture and therefore made little progress toward innovation according to de Custine. He is the first to declare that "Russian art will never be a hardy plant."[11]

The monuments to European art and architecture created during the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I, however, are appreciated today as contributions to the lexicon of Western aesthetics. The Russian Empire and Neoclassical styles were created

[10] De Custine, 23.
[11] De Custine, 57.

through the collaboration of European and Russian architects. Nicholas selected the Prussian architect Leo von Klenze to design the museum which he hoped would bring him greater influence on the European stage of statecraft. Completed under the supervision and recommendations of Russian architects, the New Hermitage is therefore yet another site of cultural and social interaction between Russia and the West. As Alexander Sokurov poignantly reminds us, it is a cultural ark adrift in the waters that stand between Europe and Asia. The final lines of his film recall the permanence of art, and equally of Nicholas' effort to carve a place for Russia in European politics:

"We are destined to sail forever. To live forever."[12]

[12] Alexander Sokurov, Russian Ark (St. Petersburg: Hermitage Bridge Studio, 2002), DVD.

Chapter I

Courting the West: Peter I, Catherine II and Nicholas I

Peter I

The development of the Russian imperial collection at St. Petersburg, like its counterparts in Western Europe, is indebted to several dedicated patrons. A study of Nicholas' intentions for the New Hermitage must begin with a history of this remarkable collection and the city that houses it. The endeavor found its beginnings in the foundation of Peter's dream-like city and the displacement of the Russian capital from Moscow to the far north. While it was Peter I who is credited with starting the collection and opening a *kunstkammer* (sometimes considered the first public museum), the collection can be traced back to Ivan IV, who ruled over Muscovy from 1547 to 1584. It was Peter, however, who began to develop the idea of an Hermitage after his visit to Versailles in 1717.[1] In the context of his newly Westernized court and the connotations placed upon the term *hermitage* in France, Peter viewed an Hermitage as a space where he could find amusement without the rigidity of courtly events, and where he could invite Western emissaries to discuss his artistic and military interests. The evolution of the Hermitage is a history of successive monarchs who drew on the legacy of their ancestors and used the city and its collection to tighten connections between Russia and the West. That Nicholas built a museum to house the collection was not a historical inevitability, nor is it entirely surprising given his keen understanding of how culture and politics intersected in the West. Nicholas' decision to create a formal museum structure to display the collection to his court and foreign emissaries cannot be understood without an

[1] Geraldine Norman, The Hermitage: The Biography of a Great Museum. (New York: Fromm, 1998), 4.

exploration of the motivations of his predecessors who first created a valuable European collection on its Eastern frontier.

The imposing figure of Peter I, or "Peter the Great" is remembered as both a Russian hero and a destructive force to its Muscovite heritage. His relocation of the capital to the far north on the Neva River signaled an ideological shift from his Muscovite ancestors, who from the fourteenth to the late seventeenth century ruled an empire centered on Moscow. Among the changes was the secularization of his state to bring his empire closer to the West. Like his ancestor Ivan IV he used cruelty and terror to bolster his dream of a Westernized court. Peter's dream of the West was implanted in this formerly Swedish territory without any of its ideological underpinnings. It was therefore met with a great deal of resistance and hesitancy. Members of the boyar (or noble) class resented his decree to build homes in Russia's new capital and to remain in residence for a good part of the year as a captive court to Peter's whim. Like Nicholas after him, Peter saw this cultural import as an instrument of statecraft and was willing to sacrifice his Muscovite heritage to tighten the links between Russia and Europe.

His love of European culture was fostered by his first tour of the continent in 1696. The significance of this journey cannot be overstated. It was during this time that he became enthralled with European manners and dress, education and technological advancements. As a lifelong enthusiast of naval pursuits he was particularly impressed by Dutch shipbuilding and spent the greater part of his trip determining how to establish such a strong industry in his own country. Under the guise of a baggage handler in an entourage of 250 members of court, the Tsar spent two years visiting the grand cities he had learned about from his tutors. He reveled in Europe's superior technologies in art,

politics and warfare.[2] Traveling in this way Peter learned about these advances in a direct manner, even living for several weeks in a rural Dutch community and learning carpentry.[3] His greatest desire was to learn from the West to carve a place for Russia in European diplomatic affairs. Increased trade with the West was particularly desirable but could not be realized without reconciling cultural incompatibilities. Peter would forge a distinct position for Russia in Europe's state system through the founding of an elegant capital city in the European manner.

Upon his return construction began under the supervision of both foreign and local architects. It was soon revealed how much Peter was affected by the aesthetics of Venice, Amsterdam and Stockholm. Indeed it became immediately clear that St. Petersburg was intended to rival these cities in beauty and grandeur. St Petersburg became his "window to the West" and his most enduring legacy, remaining the see of the Romanov monarchy until the October Revolution of 1917. St. Petersburg was his dream of the West: an illusion mirroring the arts and civilization of his powerful contemporaries.

Typical of his disdain for court ceremony, Peter's first residence on the banks of the Neva was little more than a log cabin, pared down but elegantly furnished with objects purchased in Europe. Nearby, the Peter and Paul Fortress was the first official structure to be completed in the new capital. Upon its completion the building proclaimed Peter's victory over the Swedes in the Battle of Poltava, 1709.

His campaign of Westernization did not stop at the architecture of the capital. The Tsar also revolutionized the boyar class by forcing them to adopt Western clothing

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[2] Norman, 7.
[3] Norman, 7.

and mannerisms, language and education. He desired a court centered on the new capital where he could ensure these Western imports were being engaged. In one of his least popular decrees Peter forced all boyars to shave their beards in the popular Western fashion or pay a heavy tax. This beard tax was another insult to the Orthodox faith which linked such facial hair to spiritual dedication. As former Director of the Hermitage Boris Piotrovsky has written, "[b]ehind the façade of cultural liberalism and patronage prevalent at the Russian court lay a play of financial investment aimed ultimately at reforming culture and customs—especially customs."[4] Prior to Peter's ascension, in fact, the aristocracy was hardly visually discernable from the peasantry. The forced adoption of Western dress and domestic architecture pulled these men hundreds of years forward in just a few decades. Through his Table of Ranks in 1722 he effectively dissolved the boyar class altogether, creating for the first time a meritocracy in Russia. From this point forward the only path to prestige in the empire would be through military service.

Progress also became evident in the visual arts. Peter is credited with single-handedly bringing the arts forward more than three hundred years in what historians remember as the "Petrine Revolution" in art.[5] Visual art in Russia had always been created for purposes of worship rather than beauty and had little to do with the appreciation of the artist's skill. As another vessel of his campaign of Westernization Peter commissioned works of art for aesthetic pleasure and dictated that this art would be of the highest value. Artists were sent overseas for training and many never returned, preferring the increasingly liberal environment of Western courts.

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[4] Boris Piotrovsky, The Hermitage: Its History and Collection (Toronto: Granada, 1982), 9.
[5] James Cracraft, The Petrine Revolution in Russian Imagery (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4-5.

It was essential to Peter's political aspirations that he be surrounded by the vestments of power in the Western fashion. While on his European tour he sat for a portrait with Godfrey Kneller, a German artist and famed portraitist in England who worked for Louis XIV and Charles II. Kneller's portrait of Peter showed him as an enlightened ruler, determined for victory over political adversaries and posed gracefully in the seventeenth-century stance associated with Louis XIV. The pressure in the eighteenth century to assume a European aesthetic produced a group of remarkable portrait painters in Russia. Following Kneller's example, the most important artists to come out of this century would be portraitists who characterized their sitters as Western in their imitation of the ornate and pretentious courts of Europe. Patronage of the visual arts in St. Petersburg formed an imperative part of the new identity of the aristocracy.

It was on his trip to Europe and during the early years of the city's construction that Peter acquired the objects that would form the basis of the royal collection. For the most part they were scenes recreating naval battles that would also prove popular amongst his successors. He also developed an interest in princely collecting, however, and was fascinated with the wonders presented in the Dutch Republic's Kunstkammers. Dutch portraiture was specifically admired by the Tsar on this occasion.[6] Determined to begin his own Peter purchased the entirety of Dr. Frederick Ruysch's collection of curiosities in 1717. Before Peter art in Russia did not extend beyond the elaborate golden icons that had been created for the Orthodox Church for more than five hundred years. In bringing Western canonical works into Russia he forcefully pulled Russian art from the twelfth century into the eighteenth. He was able to accomplish this within only a few decades by imposing a cultural revolution from above. As a result it has been said that

[6] Cracraft, 20.

the Russian aristocracy at this time suffered from a type of double consciousness: "his mind was a state divided into two. On one level he was conscious of acting out his life according to prescribed European conventions; yet on another plane, his life was swayed by Russian customs and sensibilities."[7] Spiritual dedication would remain an important part of courtly life until the mid-eighteenth century when observance was preserved only for high holidays.[8]

Until Peter the Great implemented his European program the noble families of Russia were still servile to the crown. The aristocracy owed a great deal of its wealth to the head of state.[9] At the end of the seventeenth century when the European nobility resided in chateaus and palazzos of exquisite grandeur their Russian counterparts still inhabited small, sparsely furnished wooden structures. Though they kept serfs in the home for domestic service the deep-seated roots of Russian feudalism fostered an understanding that all labour was dedicated to the glorification of the Tsar. Forced to abandon this familiar lifestyle for the courts of Europe, the Russian noble seemed to lead a double life. As a consequence great instability was evident among them throughout Peter's reforms of the eighteenth century. Early in the eighteenth century the Christian Orthodoxy adopted by Russia's medieval Muscovite rulers still permeated all levels of society. It proved during this point in history to be a major source of alienation from the West. This ancestral cultural legacy could not be erased in the course of several generations and meant that every Russian noble was a European on the international

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[7] Figes, 44.
[8] Figes, 57.
[9] This has been likened to the feudal age in Western Europe but is by no means agreed upon. Slavophiles argue that there was no such period, while Westernizers prefer to see the existence of feudalism in Russia to prove a common experience of the Middle Ages, which in Russia lasted for centuries longer than in Western Europe.

stage and a Slav at home. As Orlando Figes has written: "the moral lesson was simple: through their slavish imitation of Western principles, the aristocrats had lost all sense of their own nationality. Striving to make themselves at home with foreigners, they had become foreigners at home."[10] Having lost their capital city along with their historical conception of national identity, Russians began to construct one anew in the European style.

Peter's will and obsession with immersion in Western culture meant that those boyars resistant to change had little chance of retaining a Muscovite lifestyle in St. Petersburg where they were required to be in residence for part of each year.[11] Typically, boyars lived in the country to manage their properties and serfs. They were deeply religious and looked up to the tsars as the supreme leaders of the Orthodox faith. Peter took these duties less seriously than his ancestors. His focus in stead turned to the importation of Western imagery that would replace traditional Russian iconography.[12] Noble Russian families were obliged to exchange their minimalist wooden living spaces for ornate formal reception rooms. Their furnishings and rigid restrictions on etiquette proved wholly uncomfortable for this first generation of European Russians. Peter's reign set a precedent of courting the West which increased thereafter and remains evident today. Indeed, his legacy garnered a cult-like following amongst the inhabitants of St. Petersburg and his successors. The commemoration of Peter continued and grew in the reign of each successive tsar and tsarina. Catherine II is a particularly important figure in this enterprise. We shall see how Catherine II and Nicholas I built upon Peter's legacy which culminated in the creation of a major museum.

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[10] Figes, 53.
[11] Figes, 53.
[12] Cracraft, 71.

Catherine II

Many additions were made to St. Petersburg under the reign of Peter's illegitimate daughter, the Tsarina Elizabeth Petrovna (r. 1741-1762). Having seen the new capital rise from the swampy soil in Peter's new dream of Russia, Elizabeth showed a great admiration for her father's accomplishments and shared her father's passion for all things Western. She wished to push forth with his effort to Europeanize the city and its inhabitants. In her reign this is most evident in architectural commissions. It was under her command that the Italian architect Giacomo Quarenghi came into the regular employ of the royal family. He was commissioned by Elizabeth to begin construction of what would become Catherine's Summer Palace at Tsarskoe Selo and to rework parts of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, including the addition of the Hermitage Theatre from 1783 to 1787.[13] As an integral part of the State Hermitage Museum, the Winter Palace may be Elizabeth's most enduring accomplishment. The largest portion of the museum complex, it is illustrative of the transition from Russian Baroque to a style with more Palladian leanings.

Elizabeth erected the palace buildings on the site where Peter's had once stood during the early days of St. Petersburg. Catherine made them her own with the help of Quarenghi and the Scottish architect Charles Cameron. Significantly, it was during her reign that the term *hermitage* truly entered the Russian vocabulary. It became commonly used to describe the auxiliary building which she had connected to the palace. She used the building to entertain a select circle of guests without the rigid etiquette of a ceremonial court meal. Here Catherine could engage the brightest minds at court in her favourite discourses without the impediment of ceremony and gestures of servitude.

[13] Norman, 17.

Dumb waiters rather than stewards were used to serve meals, thus freeing guests from the more rigid conduct of formal palace events.[14] It also became a repository for her painting collection which was rapidly expanding with such purchases as the Walpole and Crozat collections.[15] She was so enthusiastic about a space for free thought that she had a code of behaviour posted at its entrance:

Rules to be Observed on Entering

Article I

On entering, the title and rank must be put off, as well as the hat and sword.

Article II

Pretensions founded on the prerogatives of birth, pride, or other sentiments of a like nature, must also be left at the door.

Article III

Be merry; nevertheless, *break nothing and spill nothing.*

Article IV

Sit, stand, walk, do whatever you please, without caring for any one.

Article V

Speak with moderation, and not too often, in order to avoid being troublesome to others.

Article VI

Argue without anger and without warmth.

Article VII

Banish sighs and yawns, that you may not communicate *ennui*, or be a nuisance to any one.

Article VIII

Innocent games, proposed by any member of the society, must be accepted by the others.

Article IX

Eat slowly and with appetite: drink with moderation, that each may walk steadily as he goes out.

Article X

Leave all quarrels at the door; what *enters at one ear must go out at the other* before passing the threshold of the Hermitage. If any member violate the above rules, for each fault witnessed by two persons, he must drink *a glass of fresh water* (*ladies not excepted*)... He who fails in the tenth article must never more re-enter the Hermitage.[16]

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[14] Norman, 5.

[15] "Catherine the Great, Art for Empire: Masterpieces from the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg," formed by the State Hermitage Museum with the cooperation of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Musée de Beaux Arts de Montréal places great significance on the emergence of Catherine's Hermitage.

[16] De Custine, 233-234.

Cerebral facets of the Enlightenment thereby entered the Russian court which was otherwise controlled with unwavering absolutism.

Catherine's intellectual pursuits are best remembered for their connection to the *philosophes* Diderot and Voltaire. Her mind was from a young age occupied with understanding a new language and faith (having been raised in Prussia) and after mastering these she was eager to expand her knowledge of French culture. While it was initially the political innovations of the West that attracted her attention it was soon literature and the arts which consumed her mind and treasury. She corresponded with both Diderot and Voltaire throughout her reign and for many years Diderot acted as her agent in Paris, recommending and negotiating the sale of numerous works for the Hermitage. Voltaire also shared a connection to the museum as Catherine purchased a model of his home at Ferney. After his death she had all the volumes in his library shipped to St. Petersburg. Catherine's Gallomania was such that she began to emulate French models of collecting and display in the late eighteenth century. Catering her royal collection to French taste she brought the hermitage closer to the Louvre model.

At the end of the eighteenth century Catherine gathered a staff of museum experts to appraise and organize the collection. Its first curator, L. Pfandzelt began to catalogue the museum's possessions. His successor Franz Labensky in 1797 began the process of giving the collection a discernible order while at the same time keeping an eye on acquisitions.[17] The entirety of Catherine's library has been a focus of scholarly attention. Piotrovsky stated that "by the end of the eighteenth century, the Hermitage had become a true museum of the Enlightenment, in which all schools of art were impartially represented... The Hermitage was, in short, the first museum born of the art market as

[17] Boris Piotrovsky, 119.

we know it today, which gave it an air of absolute modernity."[18] This reputation would be consolidated during the reign of Nicholas I who commissioned Leo von Klenze, one of the most celebrated museum builders of the nineteenth century, to design galleries based on the newest architectural developments in public collecting.

One of the strengths of the new Russian enthusiasm for collecting on a grand scale was that the Tsarina used the imperial coffers to outbid other European monarchs for individual pieces and even entire collections. According to Geraldine Norman and other scholars the museum's collection can be said to have truly gained steam with Catherine's 1764 purchase of 225 valuable canvases from the Johann Gotzkowski's Berlin gallery. In total Catherine acquired at least 4,000 European masterworks throughout her reign. While she showed a preference for paintings there is no department of the museum which was not enriched with her purchases.[19]

It is ironic that the Tsarina employed such purchasing agents and intellectual sparring partners as Diderot. These men imported the first Western ideas about liberty that would threaten Catherine's successors and leave the intelligentsia hungry for social and political upheaval. While the Hermitage was emerging then as a "true museum of the enlightenment" according to Piotrovsky it was already guarding itself against the ideological apparatus which seemed so threatening to the Romanov's authority. In the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I the emergence of these politically subversive ideas would be the source of great anxiety and paranoia. This posed an especially grave challenge for Nicholas I who faced the heavy task of assuming the throne after the sudden and surprising death of his elder brother Alexander I. This event sparked an

[18] Boris Piotrovsky, 9.
[19] Norman, 21.

influx of revolutionary sentiment that led to calls for a constitution. In the confusion over Alexander's death the political climate of the empire was such that his proposed successor, Constantine, refused the throne in favour of their youngest brother Nicholas.

Nicholas I

Nicholas' political and artistic interest in European affairs was as firmly entrenched as that of his ancestors Peter I and Catherine II. He continued their tireless campaign of Westernization in an effort to legitimize his absolute hold over the nation.[20] This had the added advantage of inspiring nationalism by paying tribute to the great thinkers who first revolutionized the Russian way of life and promoted its status as an international power. Nicholas in turn was known as the "Iron Tsar" for his political determination. He is remembered as thoroughly humorless and unpleasant. Distrustful of diversity throughout his reign, especially any freedom of speech or thought, Nicholas' reputation as a steadfast autocrat caused alarm. The most powerful nations of Europe were hesitant to allow his power to grow unchecked within the Western state system. His absolute nature posed a threat to diplomats who, after redesigning political relations after the fall of Napoleon, had real fears that Nicholas would attempt to disrupt the balance achieved by the Concert of Europe.[21] The preoccupation amongst member nations was that Nicholas would become the Napoleon of a new age.[22] His intense fear of intellectualism and enlightenment led to the encouragement of spying which increased dramatically at both the levels of government and amongst the people throughout the late

[20] Nicholas I ruled as the Tsar of all Russia from 1825 to 1855.
[21] Martin Malia, Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 139-140.
[22] Malia, 89.

nineteenth century.[23] Utilizing this social discipline in a premeditated way, Nicholas tried to suppress intellectual heresies such as revolutionary nationalist sentiment.[24] He was said to be more afraid of men with ideas than of men with swords. Ultimately, his fixation with regulating the populace through policing infiltrated the structure of his museum as well.

His upbringing as a staunch militarist and monarchist fostered a fierce personality. Numerous historical figures set down their impressions of the Tsar, none more engrossing than that of Queen Victoria I who described her meeting with him in London to her uncle Leopold of Belgium in 1844:

> He is stern and severe—with fixed principles of duty which nothing on earth will make him change; very clever I do not think him, and his mind is an uncivilized one; his education has been neglected; politics and military concerns are the only things he takes great interest in; the arts and all softer occupations he is insensible to, but he is sincere, I am certain, sincere even in his most despotic acts, from a sense that that is the only way to govern.[25]

In the same letter she commented that Nicholas was handsome and elegant, dignified and graceful, and that his manners were studied and of a most polite nature. This austere façade made it easy for Europeans to underestimate the Tsar's cultural interests. We will soon see that Nicholas took a close interest in his royal collection and its organization in the New Hermitage.

Not only is Nicholas' absolutism evident in his immense distrust of advisors, nobility and foreigners but also in his policy of "official nationalization"[26] which strove to centralize government and "Russify" the realm. Russification encouraged the people

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[23] Norman, 68-69.
[24] Malia, 98.
[25] Queen Victoria I in Norman, 69.
[26] Originally translated from "narodnost," the term is most closely aligned with the English "nationality."

to reevaluate their ties to the ancient traditions of Kievan Rus[27] and Muscovy and also aimed to unify and assimilate conquered nations east of the Urals. Amongst these was Poland, a source of great contention at the Congress of Vienna, where Russia was essentially made guardian to the fragile nation. Nicholas' policy of assimilation and nationalization sparked more intellectual dissent and resistance as the Russian empire had always been an amalgam of numerous Eastern, Western and Slavic influences. In addition, Russification pushed strict obedience of the Orthodox faith—yet another cultural barrier for Russian diplomats who frequently tried to underplay their longstanding ties to Byzantium.[28] With the Westernization of the Russian elite the Orthodox faith had over time become less influential over the daily life of court. Re-introducing it as a source of moral and spiritual guidance would enforce obedience to the Tsar, as the church still operated on the principle of divine right. Martin Malia notes with irony that it was exactly when Nicholas promoted Western culture in his state that Russia was pushed irrevocably farther from the European continent.[29] In the long run Nicholas' reign has been looked down upon as his policies damaged Russia's social economy and political system. He was not willing or able to use his resources to make positive changes within his turbulent empire. This was manifest most prominently when he led his nation to a humiliating defeat in the Crimean War of 1854-56.

Despite his extreme ideological conflicts with the West, Nicholas had an immense desire to compete with, and thereby be accepted fully into the realm of these established powers. Like Peter the Great he had a deep interest in technology. Through monitoring

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[27] The Principalities of Kievan Rus flowered from 880 to the mid twelfth century in the north and east of what is today Russia. Late in the twelfth century it was eclipsed by the principalities of Novgorod and eventually became part of Muscovy.
[28] Malia, 102-103.
[29] Malia, 139-140.

progress in the West he likewise realized the benefits to be garnered if he were successful in competing with continental powers. It was clear to him that his collective wealth could increase dramatically if Russia were a vital participant in the European economy. After Napoleon's defeat Nicholas found himself with the largest army of all Western powers.[30] He chose to demonstrate his imperial supremacy through campaigns east of the Urals—plans which were expected to bring him the recognition of those Western nations also continually expanding their empires.[31] His designs on the nearly defenseless nations of Eastern Europe were not the only way of highlighting common interests with the West. In seeking the acceptance of European diplomats Nicholas soon recognized that the fervor for public collecting in the nineteenth century could be employed to create a cultural bridge to the continent.

In view of his political aspirations it is clear that upon the opening of the New Hermitage his intended audience resided both at his own court and abroad. His policy of nationalization was bolstered by his possession of Russian masterpieces. His desire to join the cultural legacy of Europe was supported by Western canonical works that had been accumulated by his ancestors for centuries.[32] In creating an institution where these works were shown with the work of Russian artists trained in Europe or taught by European artists, Nicholas created a dynamic space to suggest close cultural ties to the West.

Nicholas was increasingly concerned that dangerous ideologies were being imported from Europe after the Napoleonic aggression of 1812. Indeed, it became particularly important to him upon his accession to the throne to continue the work begun

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[30] Malia, 97.
[31] William Simpson and Martin Jones, Europe 1783-1914 (New York: Routledge, 2000), 117-118.
[32] Piotrovsky, 186.

by his brother Alexander I to memorialize Russia's victory over France.[33] This began as soon as he and his wife Alexandra Fedorovna moved into the Winter Palace and initially took shape in the Hall of 1812, which though badly damaged in the fire of 1837, was fully restored in Nicholas' renovations and inaugurated in 1826.[34] Napoleon's defeat left a decisive gap in the fabric of Europe that Nicholas hoped to fill.[35] As the supposed liberators of Europe it was even believed that it was time for Russia to assume its rightful place amongst the remaining member nations.

The lesson that he wanted to communicate to the members of the Russian court in the commemoration of the Generals of 1812, I suggest, is that Russia could not move forward in the nineteenth century without increasing its participation in the European economy and state system. Moreover, with Russia's military tipping the balance of power it seemed that the time was at hand for Nicholas to assert his dominance over the affairs of European statecraft. His dissatisfaction with the new liberal intellectualism in the West meant that as a powerful nation Russia needed to maintain its political autonomy through a reconsideration of its historical traditions. The message sent abroad was slightly altered, however. The museum's collection of European masterpieces suggested that Russia had been a member of the visual culture of the continent for centuries. Furthermore, with the rise of dynamic Russian artists (particularly portraitists) in the eighteenth century it was becoming apparent that Russian artists were in technical harmony and the skilled equals of their Western contemporaries.[36]

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[33] Norman, 70.
[34] Norman, 70.
[35] Malia, 87.
[36] Cracraft, 311.

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century the imperial collection of the Romanovs had a well established history and reputation in Western Europe. Its connection to the Enlightenment and its ordering as undertaken by Franz Labensky gave it a distinctly modern air within the relatively primitive practices of eighteenth-century museology. The monarchs who created the museum left their influence in the early establishment of a standardized practice of collecting and display. The royal family had established themselves as competitive collectors of Western canonical works who participated in the most important auctions on the continent. The aristocracy (particularly during and after the reign of Catherine the Great) emulated the enthusiasm for collecting. The Russians thus created for themselves a particular niche in the European art market. Nicholas I was not only an avid contributor to the imperial collection but also to the legacy of his ancestors. In the "cult" of personality, the figures of Peter I and Catherine II remained bright in the collective memory of Russians thanks to public commissions and acquisitions in their honour. Nicholas saw in the collection a unique opportunity for Russia to expand in commercial and military arenas in Europe as well.

Chapter II

Structure and Order: The New Hermitage Realized

Russia's Induction to the Arts on the European Stage

By the time Nicholas was established on the throne the royal collection had been enlivened by several monarchs' passion for Western European canonical paintings, tapestries, sculptures and more. As the Winter Palace's interiors overflowed with treasures from both home and abroad the facets of collecting and display in public museums of the West had become standardized. The transition of painting galleries from the crowded tradition of the princely collection to the carefully spaced walls of the public museum allowed important works to become the focus of a room.[1] New lighting strategies were being put into practice in Europe such as the skylight over painting galleries and the side lit sculpture gallery.[2] With increasing numbers of artists and scholars traveling overseas to study and work these established practices could not be overlooked if Russia were to continue as a participant in the visual culture of the continent. The time had arrived, under Nicholas' drive to define Russia to the West, for the collection to shift from royal residence to a purpose-built structure with public access. In essence, Nicholas effectively asserted his taste (or the taste established by his ancestry) by dictating to the nation "this is how we are to view art."

The transplantation of the Western museum model to the centre of St. Petersburg's political and cultural life would certainly not disrupt Nicholas' determination to maintain the autocratic regime of his ancestors. In other words, despite

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[1] Andrew McClellan, Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris (Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 1994), 3.
[2] Julia Noordegraaf, Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century (Rotterdam: NAI, 2004), 38.

this cultural import the strings of democracy (in the West tightly laced to the museum) were severed. After the climate of fear and political upheaval of 1848 (which largely signaled the arrival of republicanism and the constitutional monarchy on the continent) Nicholas and former member nations of the Holy Alliance were forced to pursue new avenues to preserve the autocratic rule of their nations. In Russia, the surveillance of foreigners and courtiers would prove an enduring strategy for uncovering political heresy and in guarding against the import of dangerous ideologies from abroad: "No stranger can set foot in this country without immediately feeling that he is weighed and judged," observed Astolphe de Custine.[3]

In 1837 the Winter Palace became engulfed in flames and burned for two days. Servants and court administrators worked throughout this time to save as many works of art and furnishings as possible, piling all the objects in Palace Square. Scarcely any of the interior decoration of the palace survived this purge. The aftermath of this event was a massive restoration project headed by Vasily Stasov which was completed in a remarkable fifteen months.[4] In de Custine's travel journal this accomplishment is remarked on continually though his narrative of court life:

> ...in one year this palace has risen from its ashes: and it is the largest, I believe, which exists; equaling the Louvre and the Tuileries put together. In order to complete the structure at the time appointed by the Emperor, unheard-of efforts were necessary. The interior works were continued during the great frosts; 6000 workmen were continually employed; of these a considerable number died daily, but the victims were instantly replaced by other champions brought forward to perish, in their turn, in this inglorious breach. And the sole end of all these sacrifices was to gratify the caprice of one man![5]

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[3] De Custine, 82.
[4] The Hermitage: A Russian Odyssey: Tyrants and Heroes, the Nineteenth Century Czars, 2 Rod McLeish (Alexandria: PBS, Public Media Inc. 1994), videocassette.
[5] De Custine, 50.

The creation of the museum is somewhat less heroic than that of the city, however in de Custine's account the restoration of the palace takes on legendary status. The swift pace of this restorative work combined with a visit to the court of Ludwig I[6] in Munich made Nicholas think the time appropriate for adding a new purpose-built structure to the palatial complex to house the imperial collection.[7] Space around the Winter Palace being limited, it would be especially important that the ground plan of the new building utilize the most current approaches to display in order to maximize gallery space.

Leo von Klenze and the Design for the New Hermitage

In this enterprise the Prussian model would prove especially influential because of its autocratic nature and its familial ties to the Russian throne (Nicholas' wife Alexandra was the sister of Prussian Emperor Wilhelm IV). The presence of architectural savants and the perception that Germany had finally surpassed France as the height of fashion also aided in the process of selecting Leo von Klenze to design the New Hermitage. The Revolutionary events of 1789 and subsequent Reign of Terror paralyzed Russian interests in the French Enlightenment. Further, engaging in war with Louis Napoleon confused relations between Nicholas' court and France while officers resident in the provinces took this as a confirmation of France's corruptive effects on Muscovite culture.[8] Aside from its familial connections to Russia, Prussia's court and visual culture had great potential as a model in the late nineteenth century.

On an 1838 trip to visit his wife's family in Prussia, Nicholas and Alexandra stopped in Bavaria to tour several of its museums. Nicholas was particularly impressed

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[6] Ludwig I of Bavaria was a prodigious builder and was particularly fond of museums. During this visit Nicholas was so impressed by Leo von Klenze's work on the Glyptothek and the Alte Pinakothek that he invited the architect to St. Petersburg.
[7] Norman, 72.
[8] Simpson and Jones, 115.

on this occasion by the Glyptothek and Pinakothek, where he was guided around the collection by Leo von Klenze. The architect no doubt took pleasure in personally explaining the strategies of construction and display to the visiting monarch. Von Klenze's prestigious patrons included Jerome Bonaparte of Westphalia and Maximilian I and Ludwig I of Bavaria, all suggesting his prominence in the nineteenth-century phenomenon of public museum building.

We know from the construction of the Glyptothek and Alte Pinakothek that von Klenze was an architect who desired full immersion in a project, seeing it through to the very smallest of details.[9] In the Glyptothek he was especially concerned with linking the parts of the collection of ancient sculpture into a homogenous whole through careful orchestration of the museum's atmosphere (fig. 1 and 2).[10] Placement of the sculptures beneath the vaulted ceilings suggested a monumentality, an almost sacred space of observation. The rooms were not overcrowded and now reflected lessons about taste rather than the classification of the ancient world. The nineteenth-century museum was no longer an institution for the microcosmic understanding of the universe but for the canon of Western artistic masters.

It was important that the immense collection of the Tsar not seem fragmented, and von Klenze focused his energy on creating a fluid experience for the visitor through lighting and the path one traveled to view the space. All technical requirements for the placement and protection of the works of art were carefully blended with the ornamental features of the rooms. The layout of the galleries in Munich allows the works to stand out from their palatial surroundings in order to tell a consistent narrative. These

[9] Norman, 72.
[10] Noordegraaf, 44-47.

considerations were equally important to Nicholas and the museum's first curators in his conception of the New Hermitage. Von Klenze was asked in 1838 to submit a design that would exhibit the best of European and Russian architecture.

This task, however, would prove arduous at times. Von Klenze initially sought the demolition of Catherine II's Large Hermitage and the Raphael Loggias[11] to provide space for the addition. The request was refused by the court ministry. Von Klenze's building was thus not to have a façade facing the Neva river like the Winter Palace. Also, the appointment of the Russian architect Vasily Stasov to the head of the building commission, also advised by Alexander Briullov and Nikolai Yefimov, posed many problems when it came to design specifications. The Russian architects pointed out, for example, that the often destructive northern climate had to be taken into account.[12] The selection of indigenous materials that could withstand the harsh weather thus became of greater importance in the design scheme than von Klenze had anticipated.

The resultant structure was anything but a typical St. Petersburg building. Von Klenze managed to combine the visual features of antiquity, the innovations of the Renaissance and German Baroque in a single composition that proved to be in stark contrast to the St. Petersburg skyline as earlier conceived by Peter the Great.[13] The architect's visits to the city were numerous, however always brief, meaning that he did not have a good grasp of the overall architectural program of St. Petersburg. The new galleries, while grand and elaborately ornamented, nonetheless make a striking

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[11] The Raphael Loggias were completed from 1783-92 by Giacomo Quarenghi for Catherine II. Painted with delicate copies of Raphael's work in the Vatican, the vast scale of the hall is imposing. The loggias connected the Hermitage Theatre with the Large Hermitage but are today also an intricate part of the New Hermitage thanks to revisions in von Klenze's layout.

[12] "A Walk Through the Imperial Hermitage: Construction of the Public Museum," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_2.html> (28 January 2006).

[13] "The New Hermitage: The Building and the Rooms," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).

comparison to the restorative work of Stasov on Rastrelli's Baroque palace and to Giacomo Quarenghi's numerous commissions for Catherine II.[14] Prior to the completion of this building structures commissioned by the royal family seemed to rise effortlessly from the ground, as with the reconstruction of the Winter Palace. The labour of thousands of serfs produced an organic architecture which remained true to the original vision of St. Petersburg. These towering accomplishments of might at once fascinated and repelled the Marquis de Custine during his tour of the city:

> At the present day you will hear, both in Paris and in Petersburg, numbers of Russians dwelling with rapture on the prodigious effects of the word of the Emperor; and, while magnifying these results, not one troubles himself with dwelling upon means. 'The word of the Emperor can create,' they say. Yes, it can animate stones by destroying human beings.[15]

Ultimately, because its surroundings had been so neglected, Stasov and Yefimov made further adjustments to von Klenze's plan before ground was broken. Not only was the main entrance moved to its present place on Millionara Street but also many of the embellishments on this façade were the results of their fine-tuning.[16]

The exterior façade of the New Hermitage contains many features that set it apart from the Glyptothek and Pinakothek. Though still a temple to Western art, it does not rely as much as the Glyptothek on such a literal and faithful interpretation of Greek and Roman architecture. Nor does it emphasize a low and sprawling façade as in the Pinakothek, though both are truthful renderings of Leo von Klenze's passion for Neoclassicism. The New Hermitage was influenced greatly by von Klenze's taste for

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[14] "The New Hermitage: The Building and the Rooms," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).
[15] De Custine, 53.
[16] "A Walk Through the Imperial Hermitage: Construction of the Public Museum," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_2.html> (28 January 2006).

Roman palaces: austere and highly decorative.[17] Each surface of the façade was decorated with a sculptural program of twenty-eight reliefs depicting noted European painters, architects, sculptors and engravers spanning hundreds of years of art production and numerous foreign countries. The positioning of these reliefs corresponded to the kinds of work that were contained on the interior side of the wall.

The feature that has elicited most comment is undoubtedly the Atlas Portico which guards the main entrance to the museum (fig. 3). The ten figures of Atlas were carved by one hundred and fifty men from blocks of Finnish Serdobol granite under the supervision of the Russian sculptor Alexander Terebenev. Large-scale sculptures guarding entrances had previously been employed by the architect Charles Cameron for Nicholas' father Paul I's summer palace Pavlovsk at Tsarskoe Selo. They make for a conspicuous visual comparison as the protectorate to these two buildings which contain vast art treasures (fig. 4). Von Klenze himself remarked on the figures of the Atlas Portico, which are roughly three times larger than life size: "The beauty and noble character of these sculptures, accurateness and delicacy of work, glittering polish are beyond comparison..."[18] The figures simultaneously bear the weight of the portico and the façade's sculpturual program and stand as imposing cultural guardians of the collection.

Preparation and Opening of the Museum

Before the structure could be completed, order had to be brought to the collection which had been layered throughout the four older buildings of the palace. Many items would also be brought back to St. Petersburg from several Romanov palaces at Tsarskoe

[17] Pierre Descargues, The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1961), 62.
[18] "The New Hermitage: The Building and the Rooms," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).

Selo. The naming of the first curators proved a large step toward determining which works would grace the halls and galleries of the New Hermitage (the majority to this day). The museum's public opening and organization was especially indebted to two members of court who proved faithful and clever in the past. Florian Gilles had been in the employ of the imperial family as the French tutor to Alexander II.[19] He eventually became the court librarian. His administrative and academic work left an enduring effect on the museum, particularly the French publications *The Antiquities of Cimmerian Bosporus Kept in the Imperial Hermitage Museum* (1854) and *The Imperial Hermitage Museum: A description of various collections with a historical introduction about the Hermitage of Empress Catherine II and the formation of the New Hermitage museum* (1861).

The nomination of Feodor Bruni to the position of first curator of the picture gallery was somewhat more unexpected as he was not a specialist. He had, however, spent time in Italy studying the great masters of painting.[20] His legacy is also preserved in publications that guided the growth and maintenance of the museum as well as a trip to the Netherlands during which he secured the acquisition of several paintings from William II.

In 1851 an important step was taken toward ordering the somewhat confused collection. Compiled by Feodor Bruni, *Instruction on the maintenance of the Museum* asserted that the Hermitage would continue to function as a cabinet of the state and would be managed by the Ministry of the Imperial Court as it was still the private property of

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[19] "First Guidebooks to the Museum," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_7.html> (28 January 2006).
[20] "A walk through the Imperial Hermitage: Directors and Curators of the Imperial Hermitage," n.d. <www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_8.html> (28 January 2006).

the royal family. This document ignored no aspect of the new museum, detailing proper conduct for staff and visitors and outlining procedures for gaining admittance to the collection. Additionally, it mandated the first important division of the collection into two departments: one which oversaw the library, manuscripts, prints, engravings, coins, medals, carved stones, painted stones and antiquities, and a second which cared for the collection of paintings, drawings, sculptures and crown jewels.[21] This must be taken as another example of Nicholas' museum operating on the French model. In France a similar division was undertaken much earlier to create the Bibliothèque Royale and the cabinet de médailles.

Inventory taken in 1849 also under Bruni included 4,500 paintings. These were divided into items worthy of exhibiting in the new galleries, decorative objects that were to remain in the Winter Palace, those to be put in reserve, and those which held considerably less value on the art market.[22] In the end, 815 items were used in the museum, 804 were put into reserve and 1,561 were considered of little or no interest.

The arrangement of these exhibits was carefully laid out, including the separation of the painting galleries into national schools, as had become standard in the galleries of the Hermitage's main Western competitors: "The paintings and portraits are arranged in the Hermitage galleries according to schools, artists and time of creation... so that they could have the most favourable surroundings."[23] Bruni experienced some difficulty in having his way with the arrangement, for the Emperor expressed his wish to be a decisive member of the commission who worked on the placement of works each afternoon as the

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[21] "The New Hermitage: The First Public Art Museum," n.d. <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_1.html> (7 November 2004).
[22] Descargues, 61.
[23] "The New Hermitage: The First Public Art Museum," n.d. <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_1.html> (7 November 2004).

structure neared completion. Often misinformed in the standardized practices of museum presentation, Nicholas nonetheless had his way. The Hermitage has uncovered this anecdote of these difficulties: "Had he decided that this or that picture belonged to a certain school, it was hard to reassure him of anything else. –This is Flemish school! – Your majesty, I believe… --No, Bruni, don't argue, please. It is Flemish school!"[24] Nicholas was accustomed to being the authority on any topic, and obsessed with military order. He thus had much to say throughout this lengthy process.

Another important distinction in this process was separating works that would be kept by the court but not displayed, and those which should be sold. Indeed, there are still several works today which are mourned by the Hermitage staff. Nicholas' personal taste of course had a great impact on the direction of the collection in these years. He was very fond of battle scenes, of which Catherine II had commissioned several of the finest. He also shared her general interest in contemporary German painting, even sitting for Franz Kruger. This led him to several works by Caspar David Friedrich. As aforementioned it seemed that to Nicholas the French, as the height of elite culture, had been eclipsed for a time by the Prussians. Though he admired Horace Vernet (receiving him twice at court), Nicholas had little interest in the prominent French painters of the day—Ingres, Corot, Delacroix and Courbet.[25] In addition, he felt that the Romanov's Dutch and Flemish holdings far outweighed the collection and sought greater Spanish representation. The collection's strength in Dutch art was widely acknowledged and prized overseas as one visitor noted: "all the world knows that there are here some choice pieces, especially of the Dutch school… The Hall of the Rembrandts is doubtless

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[24] "The New Hermitage: The First Public Art Museum," n.d. <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_1.html> (7 November, 2004).
[25] Descargues, 58.

admirable..."[26] In 1850 the purchase of five Titians from a collection in Venice along with Veronese and Vecchio enriched the Italian galleries, which are arguably the most spectacular spaces with the delicate molding ornamentation and grand skylights.[27] Under Bruni's guidance *Holy Women at the Sepulchre* by Annibale Carracci and a valuable late sixteenth-century copy of *The Last Supper* also entered the Hermitage. Despite efforts to display only the most significant of works, the Marquis de Custine still complained about overcrowded displays: "The fault of the collection is, the great number of inferior pictures that must be forgotten in order to enjoy the master-pieces."[28] He was also unconvinced by Nicholas' effort to naturalize these works in the Russian environment: "The collection is undoubtedly fine; but it appears lost in a city where there are so few that can enjoy it."[29]

As aforementioned, Nicholas' role in the opening of the collection would prove a mixed blessing. While he gave permission for the purchase of several important works he also meddled in such small details as designing the guards' uniforms. His indifference to several major works in his possession saw their loss from the Hermitage. Before the museum opening the Hermitage owned fifty-four works attributed to Rembrandt—the largest number in the world. This was reduced to just twenty-five. The museum staff watched silently as Nicholas sold off works for a fraction of their value, demonstrating that as monarch his repressive hand touched all parts of creative and political life in Russia.[30]

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[26] De Custine, 232.
[27] Descargues, 58.
[28] De Custine, 232.
[29] De Custine, 232.
[30] The Hermitage: A Russian Odyssey

With the concept of the building's façade and the division of the collection settled it is the interiors of the museum which illustrate both Nicholas' vision of this Western temple to art and von Klenze's talent in realizing it. Over 800 drawings were produced to ensure that every detail and aspect of the ornamentation would be in harmony with the Winter Palace as well as show off the works to their best advantage. The Hall of Twenty Columns, for example, is a towering and beautiful room that shares strategies with von Klenze's Bavarian museum commissions. Its tall and highly polished columns of green Serdobol granite emphasize the height of the ceiling, and the capitals of the outer row of columns are painted with designs from antique ceramics (fig. 5). The emphasis placed on the loftiness of the gallery and the care taken to ornament the room make it more a temple to art than a room for displaying Greek and Etruscan painted vases. In the hyper-decoration of the room the aesthetics of the ancient world were exalted and nowhere was there any hint of Russian stylistic additions. Being an expert in the art of antiquity, von Klenze sought a decorative scheme with an air of authenticity, and to this end commissioned Pyotr Shamshin to paint scenes on the walls further illustrating popular themes from ancient vases.[31]

Equal concern was given to the Gallery of the History of Ancient Painting, as its walls were expected to demonstrate the evolution of painting in Greece and Rome (fig. 6). To remain truthful to this process the encaustic technique of using wax paints on copper was employed by Georg Hiltensperger, an artist from Munich, in creating grotesque ornaments from ancient art objects. Less true to the ancients were the ceiling decorations created by the Italian Chosroe Duzi, which were in fact von Klenze's

[31] "The New Hermitage: The Building and the Rooms" <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).

imagined imitations of interior paintings from antique structures. These illustrations show his impressions of Greek artists: Zeuxis, Parrasius and Apelles.[32]

The painting galleries of the upper floor set a strikingly different tone from the sculpture galleries. The "Tent Rooms" as they are often called were given massive peaked ceilings also painstakingly painted with delicate renderings of fantasy and often include the names of famous European artists of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries (fig. 7). This feature is also present in the Grand Gallerie of the Louvre. Paintings of the Dutch and Flemish collection were hung here on screens which paginated the immense room. They maximized the gallery space and emphasized the immensity of the room's dimensions. This unique approach to increasing the hanging potential of a gallery slowed down the visitor's pace when examining the works and also separated them from other visitors present in the same room. It would be possible while weaving between screens to imagine oneself alone in the infinite Tent Room. Katherine Blanche Guthrie left a favourable impression of the picture galleries of the New Hermitage when she published her travel journal of Russia and the Crimea in 1874. She wrote that they were in fact some of "...the finest in Europe... We felt quite grateful to Russia for having an English collection."[33] She noted the collection to be particularly rich in the works of Velasquez, Murillo, Van Dyck, Rembrandt and Reynolds. She also acknowledged, however, an awkwardness in the arrangement of the canvases, which as noted earlier, has a great deal to do with Nicholas' insistence that they be situated so: "the collection is large, but not

[32] "The New Hermitage: The Building and the Rooms," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).
[33] Katherine Blanche Guthrie, Through Russia: From St. Petersburg to Astrakhan and the Crimea (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1874), 35.

arranged advantageously, part being hung upon screens."[34] While she remained unsure of this unconventional arrangement von Klenze's innovation was no doubt necessary because of the shortage of space beside the palace.

The Small Italian Gallery is another room which has remained a feature of particular note in the design scheme (fig. 8). One of several rooms designed with a skylight, it was intended to hold the largest paintings in the collection. This device is reminiscent of the Louvre's Grande Galerie, the first public museum to employ this lighting strategy on a large scale. Aside from imitating Western technique, the use of skylights was of particular importance to von Klenze. In a country where winter spans so many months, afternoon light coming in through windows would simply not have been enough to illuminate the room. As Custine was quick to point out in his visit, "so near the pole the light is unfavorable for seeing pictures; no one can enjoy the admirable shading of the colours with eyes either weakened by snow, or dazzled by an oblique and continuous light."[35] The architect paid particular attention to the décor of this room partly because of its inclusion in what was still an integral part of the Tsar's palatial complex. Vaults and friezes were decorated in an ornate style, and even the furnishings of the room were designed and constructed in von Klenze's workshop specifically for this gallery.[36] These furnishings included gilded sofas and armchairs upholstered in crimson velvet to match the colour of the walls, and three massive candelabra of gilded bronze and semi-precious stones, which can be observed today in their original location. The furnishings in this gallery belong to the Russian Empire style, and were continued

[34] Guthrie, 35.
[35] De Custine, 232.
[36] Though ultimately Nicholas voiced his displeasure with these objects and had them replaced with sofas and armchairs from the royal stores.

throughout the palace. Incorporating the clean lines and Egyptian accents of the French Empire, these features were given a distinctly Russian flavour in their execution and the use of indigenous materials such as lapis lazuli and malachite.[37]

Russian Works in the New Hermitage

Russian works of art formed a special part of this new showcase embedded in the palatial complex. Leo von Klenze's design allowed space for two galleries to be set aside to exhibit works by Russian artists who received their training both abroad and at the Academy in St. Petersburg. The first of these encountered by the visitor was placed adjacent to the main staircase directly above von Klenze's celebrated Atlas portico. Works hung in this room and its partner (adjoining to the east) included religious and historical subject matter such as Karl Bruyulov's *Last Day of Pompeii* and Aleksandr Ivanov's *Christ before Mary Magdalene*.[38] The curator of painting, Feodor Bruni, upon the opening of the new structure also made a contribution to these contemporary works with his own *Copper Serpent* of 1841. The placement and preferred subject matter of these works suggest that Nicholas and the curators wanted visitors to make comparisons between the Russian works and those of the European schools. Russian artists, having imitated Western masters for more than a century had become the skilled equals of their contemporaries on the continent. This gallery provided the opportunity for visitors from court and abroad to admire their proficiency first hand.

Apart from canvases (the major focus of the second floor), Russian crafts also found their place. More specifically, medals figured in this display and pointed back to the Old Hermitage building where objects collected by Peter I were displayed alongside

[37] "A Walk Through the Imperial Hermitage: Construction of the Public Museum," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_2.html> (28 January 2006).
[38] Piotrovsky, 186.

portraits of his ancestors. The fluid coherence of the second floor was disrupted with the founding of the Alexander III Museum, to which all canvases by Russian artists were removed in 1895, with items belonging to Peter remaining in the Hermitage collection.[39]

Watercolours Commissioned of the New Hermitage

The appearance of the Russian galleries and of the other rooms of the New Hermitage have been preserved in numerous watercolours which were commissioned for Nicholas from 1852 to 1861. Edward Hau, Luigi Premazzi and Konstantin Ukhtomsky were asked over these nine years to record the ornate spaces of von Klenze's New Hermitage and this collection has proven to be one of the most valuable primary sources in the study of the nineteenth-century Hermitage. All three artists were considered in their time to be "perspective artists," a strain of painting which had been taught at the Academy of Arts since the late eighteenth century.[40] The set of watercolours totals fifty five, the final addition showing the exterior façade and Atlas Portico (fig. 9). The goal in completing these works was not to portray the rooms as a visitor would have seen them but to record accurately the structure and architectural decoration of the galleries. The resultant watercolours inform us of the original placement of works since several of the rooms were rearranged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite slightly differing techniques and colour schemes of the three hands there is nonetheless congruence among the works. If we endeavour to study these rooms with the intention of examining nineteenth-century strategies of display and classically inspired architecture there is perhaps no greater source of information.

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[39] Piotrovsky, 186.
[40] "Watercolour Views of the New Hermitage," n.d., <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_4.html> (28 January 2006).

The changes that took place in the palatial complex between 1837 and 1852 illustrate an affinity for Prussian design and the increasing importance of the Neoclassical style. Its popularity can be further explained by the events of the Congress of Vienna, where France was ousted from its former stronghold of power. Napoleon's demise and the fragmentation of his artistic holdings sparked a shift in visual culture which inspired artists and architects in St. Petersburg. This, coupled with Nicholas' personal attraction to the Prussian style, resulted in a purpose-built structure for the collection which could rival any contemporary in Europe. Von Klenze's architectural innovation cannot be overlooked in this, for the harmony produced between technical and artistic considerations in the New Hermitage were widely complimented as being the height of modern standards of display.

The collection itself also took a turn toward permanent change with its division and the sale of many works. The New Hermitage also acquired several important pieces during this period under artist and curator Feodor Bruni which are still the cornerstones of the present day collection. Finally, in a new Europe which privileged the cultural and educational aims of the museum, Nicholas saw that Russia was capable of taking its place on this stage. This role would enable the Tsar to assert greater influence on diplomacy in Europe after the age of Napoleon. As we will soon see, the monarch made a calculated attempt in the mid-nineteenth century to change European notions of Russia to evoke a less autocratic and more forward thinking empire. Nicholas took what he already had in abundance—European masterworks, wealth, and a Westernized court—and appropriated that structure to advance his political ideology.

Chapter III

New Europe: The Congress of Vienna and Travels in Russia

A Europe without Napoleon

If paradox seems firmly embedded in the Hermitage as a museum which displays the best of Western art yet denies its central political tenets, these problems are ever more frequent in the study of European diplomacy in the nineteenth century. With the defeat of Napoleon the future political development of Europe was thrown into question. Indeed, it opened new avenues for nations to pursue governance according to three important factors: the duration of Napoleon's rule in a given territory (or conversely his absence from it), the degree to which the legacy of the French Revolution was absorbed by the people and their government, and finally the type of rule that characterized a nation prior to or throughout the Napoleonic invasions.[1] Examining Napoleon's longstanding effects on the continent as well as the proceedings of the Congress of Vienna reveals the political ambition of member nations. Further, the congress outlined the direction that Europe would take for the first half of the nineteenth century and saw the rise of nationalism in most states.[2] These facets of diplomacy must be surveyed and evaluated as the political environment that led to Nicholas I's opening of the New Hermitage Museum. Additionally, understanding Western perceptions of Russia's people and reigning ideology can assist in unraveling these diplomatic interactions. Contemporary accounts of visitors to Russia in the nineteenth century, particularly the letters and memoirs of Astolphe de Custine as we have previously observed, reveal

[1] Simpson and Jones, 80-81.
[2] Simpson and Jones, 85.

astonishment, disbelief and frequently disdain for a culture which seemed steeped in mysticism and obsessed with the art of mimicry.

To examine the effects of Napoleon's rule on the continent it is often suggested that his impact is best measured by the duration of his influence and secondly the type of rule which was extended.[3] Nations can accordingly be drawn into three groupings: *pays réunis* such as the Austrian Netherlands and Northern Germany which were directly annexed to France, *pays conquis* which were under Napoleon's direct rule to a lesser degree (portions of present-day Holland, Switzerland and Germany), and finally *pays alliés*, who were at various points allied to France, including Russia, Bavaria, Prussia and Sweden.[4] In addition Britain and Spain cannot be forgotten as they exerted a total opposition to Napoleon's forces. Although placing his relatives as the heads of state in numerous regions sometimes proved successful this was impossible in Britain where the monarchy held fast to their dynastic rights, and in Spain, where a populist movement proved too powerful to overcome.

Russia's position in this maze of diplomacy was as precarious as the others. While Alexander I can be considered to have aligned himself in 1807 with Napoleon in his desire to introduce a new code of law and constitution the failed French campaign in Russia brought forth unprecedented nationalism and legitimacy for the tsar's government among the people and the Russian armed forces.[5] Russia was subsequently also recognized as a liberating force in Europe, signaling to Napoleon's former allies Prussia and Austria that defeating the emperor was indeed a possibility. Tsar Alexander's leading role was furthered in signing the Treaty of Chaumont in 1814. Beside Austria,

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[3] Simpson and Jones, 80.
[4] Simpson and Jones, 80-82.
[5] Simpson and Jones, 83.

Britain and Prussia, these four great powers declared their intention to fight together against the return of Napoleon's dynasty to continental Europe, additionally deciding that the Bourbon monarchy needed to be restored in France.

The Congress of Vienna

The proceedings of the Congress of Vienna prove crucial to understanding how the nations that comprised the Concert of Europe attempted to restructure the distribution of power. Their main objective was to prevent another Napoleonic figure from dominating the diplomatic platform of the West.[6] Constructing a system of political stability in Europe first involved the consideration of the ideological heritage of each nation. In each case nations would have to struggle with either the remaining beliefs and institutions of the Revolutionary-Napoleonic era, or in the case of Austria, Prussia and Russia the vestiges of the ancien régime.[7] The central source of contention was the issue of sovereignty: was it to be found in the people as was the attitude in France, Britain and Spain, or with a monarchial system as in the three aforementioned northern dominions? With constancy and legitimacy the ultimate goal it was most often from consensus that decisions were put into action.[8]

In creating a post-Napoleonic structure of rule and justice the main danger lay in dismantling a system of wide uniformity. Administrative structures set up by Napoleon across Europe were a major key to the success that his influence enjoyed, and in restructuring the continent each nation was left to decide how to handle these governmental bodies. There were states which agreed to accept a limited constitution,

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[6] Malia, 87.
[7] Michael Broers, Europe after Napoleon: Revolution, reaction and romanticism, 1814-1848 (New York: Manchester UP, 1996), 15.
[8] Broers, 15.

thereby demonstrating that they had taken lessons from the French Revolution, while others chose to accept Napoleon's administration almost intact and without a constitution as was the case with Prussia and Austria. As these two nations had never fully been subjected to Napoleon's will they chose to reject constitutionalism but to make reforms on their own terms. This strategy would also extend into Russia, where the absence of Napoleonic administrative structures made the stability of the nation less questionable. There was still a third group, guided by Spain and Piedmont-Savoy, that chose to reject the Revolutionary experience altogether.[9]

From these categories, then, it is possible to isolate three political models that would endure well into the mid-nineteenth century: first, the Parlimentarianism that was best associated with Britain and seemed to draw on only the best achievements of the Revolution. To this group Parliamentarianism "...seemed to offer the hope of confining traditional sources of authority with the political aspirations of the propertied classes."[10] A second faction, believing that sovereignty lay in the people, attempted to maintain a popular democracy based on "universal manhood suffrage."[11] This was derived from the constitution first proposed by Robespierre and later discarded, based on the aspiration to universal suffrage for men.[12] Finally, a new form of "enlightened authoritarianism" emerged from enlightened absolutism. It aimed to operate within monarchial principles, using a closely watched framework of law to guide this governance.[13] Basically meritocratic, this system was adopted by Prussia, Austria and Russia, allowing these

[9] Broers, 13.
[10] Broers, 17.
[11] Broers, 17.
[12] Broers, 17.
[13] Broers, 16.

monarchies to hold fast to the ancien régime while lending themselves to the pursuit of legitimacy.

Progress during the congress was at times extremely slow. The ambitions of the most powerful states were complicated by the individual leanings of the men who represented them. In particular, as France's Vice Grand Elector, Talleyrand advocated the placement of Louis XVIII on the throne when his legitimacy was at the outset quite questionable.[14] Competing ideologies led many nations to harbour feelings of suspicion toward one another. This was particularly the case with Britain's Castlereagh, Austria's Metternich and Talleyrand, who became so concerned over the ambitions of Russia and Prussia that they signed a secret pact to frustrate their interests in Poland and Saxony respectively.[15] France was also feared by member nations. While initially the Bourbons were asked to return to rule under quite lax conditions, the attempted resurgence of Napoleon brought harsher sanctions. The Quadruple Alliance was formed further to counter the weight of the French army.[16] As for the remaining powers, it soon became clear that Austria strove to regain control of Northern Italy, while Britain wanted to maintain its maritime control, to retain its colonies, and hoped to strengthen each of the nations that bordered France.

Russia would play a leading role in this effort. In using its vast militaristic might it became a liberating force from the crushing weight of Napoleon's despotism. Alexander I had proved himself a hero when he rode into Paris alongside his allies Frederick Wilhelm III of Prussia and Prince Schwartzenberg of Austria. Their imposing

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[14] Shlomo Barer, The Doctors of Revolution: 19th Century Thinkers Who Changed the World (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 100.
[15] Simpson and Jones, 86.
[16] Simpson and Jones, 87.

party was fortified by hundreds of senior military staff from all three nations in full regalia. Historical record tells of Alexander being the most fascinating member of this liberating force.[17] This impression of Russia, however, would quickly shift to suspicion and doubt once the Congress completed its sessions. While Russia was initially heralded as heroic by many nations its huge military was increasingly villanized by all other European powers as a threat during the formation and implementation of the Concert of Europe: "in all other quarters [but for Prussia], the fear was abroad that Europe had thrown off the hegemony of France only to risk falling under that of Russia."[18] Among the rulers present in Vienna Alexander I played a large role in the proceedings. His main ambition was to form a Poland that was large and dependant on Russia. He hoped that this would provide his government with a new arena in which to test out his occasional constitutional leanings.[19] Ultimately he was successful in setting up Poland in the Dutchy of Warsaw, which under Russia's protection would be ruled by constitution that emphasized the rights of Jews and the peasantry.

The driving force behind this new Western organization was to find a peaceful co-existence. A problem emerged when member nations realized that any political uprising or instability in one state would threaten the sovereignty of all the others. Rather than a balance of power among these nations, the congress became divided into two factions: the liberal maritime powers of France and England, and the Northern monarchies that held fast to the old regime—Austria, Prussia and Russia. Signifying an intellectual binary, political ideologies in Europe became divisible along geographical lines.

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[17] Barer, 99.
[18] Malia, 89.
[19] Simpson and Jones, 87.

Geopolitics and statecraft, it has been observed, also had a concrete influence over the ordering of public museums in the nineteenth century.

Alexander I's contribution to the proceedings at Vienna were concluded with the consecration of the Holy Alliance. His religious commitment and desire to bring Christianity to the realm of politics led to his proposal of fraternity to Austria and Prussia. United by a shared ideology of enlightened authoritarianism these three nations vowed to protect each other and to give service to God.[20] Castlereagh and Metternich dismissed it as a document of mysticism and fantasy but eventually all heads of state signed on to the Holy Alliance. Only the Pope and the Sultan of Turkey refused to align themselves with the Orthodox Church or Protestantism. While largely ineffectual, the pact did serve to bond the conservative dynasties of Central and Eastern Europe: Francis II of Austria, Frederick William IV of Prussia and Alexander I of Russia.[21]

Nicholas I, the collapse of the Congress System and the Crimean War

Another outcome of the Congress of Vienna was the dedication to an ongoing evaluation of their measures. During Nicholas' reign the Tsar viewed this as a critical avenue through which Russia could maintain its status as a liberator of Europe. Nicholas, together with heads of state, were thus determined to meet at regular intervals. While the initial aim of these subsequent meetings was to put forth the perception of solidarity among member nations, it became clear at an early stage that it was impossible to maintain in the context of the threat of revolutions across the continent. Britain soon proved a stubborn partner in many ways. After the death of Castlereagh Britain did not

[20] Simpson and Jones, 92.
[21] Simpson and Jones, 92-93.

send a representative to the congress of 1825, held in St. Petersburg.[22] The Polish revolt of 1830, however, seemed one obstacle easily overcome. Tired of the iron bond that forged it to Russia, the Polish people sought to escape the leadership of the Tsar's brother, the Grand Duke Constantine. Poland was quickly contained by the Russian army in 1831. Russian rule was even more strictly guarded thereafter.

Russia's alienation did not come to the fore of European politics until the second half of the nineteenth century when amidst the revolutions of 1848 Russia managed to isolate itself and avoid virtually all the turmoil taking place on the continent. Russia and Nicholas in particular needed to maintain a degree of political autonomy in diplomatic relations. The intellectualism that penetrated European society at this time (and culminated in the chaos of 1848) threatened the absolutist nature of his rule.[23] For this reason it could not be tolerated within his realm. In this state of extreme repression Nicholas' state thus became a kind of hole in the intellectual fabric of Europe.

Holding fast to the ideological convictions of the old regime and fearful of further insurrection, Nicholas attempted after 1848 to reconsecrate the Holy Alliance. In a contradictory movement of diplomacy, he insisted that Russia was not part of this new Europe. Instead, he maintained that its traditions and political structure remained true to the Europe of Peter the Great and Alexander I. With liberal and constitutional outcry becoming ever more popular in the West Nicholas saw no alternative but to distance himself from this turmoil. The failed Decembrist uprising of 1825 provided a warning that Nicholas, like his brother Alexander I, could also easily meet his end at the hands of

[22] Simpson and Jones, 116.
[23] Malia, 96, 150.

terrorists.[24] The presence of societies of aristocratic young men signaled to the Tsar that Western ideologies were more entrenched among the young nobility than previously thought. The seeds of revolution were planted during Alexander's reign when young aristocratic officers returning from Paris after defeating Napoleon began to form groups which advocated a Russian constitution. This uprising thus became a caveat for Nicholas to focus more of his attention on domestic issues rather than pursuing the question of Russia's position in the European state system.

The history of Nicholas' reign, then, is not a simple evolution of Russia's place within Europe or Asia. Indeed it was in still a third region of the world that Nicholas and Louis Napoleon came into conflict: the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Opposing European interests in the area coupled with its already weakened leadership and repeated disputes over its leadership resulted in the Crimean War. The result was humiliation for Russia and the ultimate demise of the congress system.[25] Both Louis Napoleon and Nicholas sought to protect areas of Palestine that were significant to both Catholic and Orthodox faith. In 1850 this conflict came to a head as the French and Russians battled to protect sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the grotto of the Holy Manger.[26] Nicholas also saw it as his duty to protect the vast number of Orthodox Christians living under the Sultan's rule. The Greek movement for independence further played a major role in Russia's conflict with the Turks. Nicholas could not ignore the victimization of a large branch of the Orthodox Church. Once Russia was involved France and Britain joined in the conflict for dominance in the Ottoman Empire which also involved sea passages and inland trade routes of great importance to all three states. Full

[24] Barer, 216.
[25] Simpson and Jones, 117-118.
[26] Simpson and Jones, 118-119.

independence for the Greeks was finally granted in 1830. Russia was viewed in a positive light in working for the liberation of Serbia in the same decade.

Travel Writers in Nineteenth-Century Russia

Contemporary accounts of European travelers in Russia provide much information on the mixed reaction to Russia's political position during this time. Many common misconceptions and cultural incompatibilities become further apparent upon the examination of these documents. The Marquis de Custine wrote *Russia* on his visit to Nicholas' empire in the summer of 1839 and published letters written on this same expedition. His impressions of Russia and Tsar Nicholas have long proven invaluable to scholars of the nineteenth century. They are equally useful in interpreting the political motivations behind the State Hermitage Museum. De Custine observed first hand the administrative secrecy, the arbitrary police rule and the suspicious treatment of foreigners. Like many of his contemporaries he made generalizing statements that frequently took a hostile tone of superiority and condemnation. In the case of the Marquis the tendency of these observations are made more clear when divided into three categories: general observations on the character of the Russian peasantry and nobility, on the political functioning of the nation and those directly related to the Tsar whom de Custine had the privilege of meeting.

De Custine found the peasantry and nobility's willingness to submit to Nicholas' authoritarian rule particularly condemnable. He noted the harmony of the people and the government when it came to knowing what was best for the nation: all could agree that Nicholas' faith and intelligence always led him to the right decision. Nicholas was viewed as a ruler who endeavored to modernize his realm to keep trade and diplomatic

relations open to the West while also remaining true to ancestral and Orthodox traditions. According to Custine there is not a man in the realm who would "...separate [himself] from the universal chorus, to protest in favour of humanity against such autocratic miracles. It may be said of the Russians, great and small, that they are drunk with slavery."[27] His scorn remains unveiled throughout, and yet it is evident that he bears a great respect for the Tsar. It is clear that as a member of the French nobility and with a superior education de Custine was unable to reconcile this collective submission with the ideology of his own nation. This is revealed in numerous lengthy passages in which he contemplated change:

> Among a people thus bereft of time and of will, we see only bodies without souls, and tremble to think that for so vast a multitude of arms and legs there is only one head. Despotism is a union of impatience and of indolence; with a little more forbearance on the part of the governing power, and of activity on the part of the people, equal results might be obtained at a far cheaper cost; but what then would become of tyranny?[28]

Nicholas stood at the helm of an immense nation which brought together many different cultures and languages under one banner. Yet amongst the people there existed no debate. The people did not question the direction of governance as had been taken up in the West, save pockets of intellectuals who were quickly punished or exiled. The people of Russia were thus recounted in the West as uneducated and without real civilization. If we are to believe de Custine the only culture in Russia was that which was adopted and performed from Western Europe: "according to their notions, discipline is civilization. Notwithstanding all their pretentions to good manners, their showy eduction, their precocious corruption, and their facility of comprehending and appropriating the

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[27] De Custine, 53.
[28] De Custine, 56.

materialism of life, the Russians are not yet civilized."[29] If we consider the contradictions between an autocratic form of governance and adopted "enlightened thought" the idea that the Russian court centered on performance and mimicry is better understood. A paradox existed in addressing a court which maintained all the pretenses of modernity in regard to dress and manner while neglecting the liberal intellectual discussion that fuelled the move to modernism in the West. In Russia such discussions would have constituted treason.

De Custine frequently returned to the questionable Asian heritage of the Russian people. It is used by the author as evidence that the nation was not yet the cultural equal of its Western contemporaries. There is a sense in these chapters that the Russian spent his life learning how to imitate the European gentleman. If he were revealed to be an impostor the balance of Russia within the diplomatic stability of the continent would be disrupted. The answer to the European versus Asian question was clear to the Marquis: "it must never be forgotten that we are here on the confines of Asia: a Russian in a frock coat, in his own country, appears to me like a foreigner... Russia is placed upon the limits of two continents. It is not in the nature of that which is European to amalgamate perfectly with that which is Asiatic..."[30]

In keeping with the submissive character of the people and the despotic nature of the Tsar, the government of Russia was deemed equally hypocritical by the Marquis. Incompatibilities with the West largely hinged on the absence of the separation of Church and State. In Russia the Orthodox Church was inseparable from the daily workings of government. The Tsar, as protector of the faith, still legitimated his rule through divine

[29] De Custine, 89.
[30] De Custine, 163.

right, a practice which had been scorned by the West for centuries. Nicholas I as both the centre of the church and the body politic was ever-present on the minds of noble and common Russians alike. As de Custine remarked,

> the absence of the Emperor does not render conversation more free: he is still present to the mind... In one word, the Emperor is the god, the life, the passion of these unhappy people... It is thus, that, in Russia, the whole of life becomes nothing more than a school of ambition.[31]

The notion of Russia being stuck in the past was attributed to this spiritualism, which de Custine's writings characterized as mere mysticism. Another factor was the Tsar's ideological convictions which bonded him to the ancien régime. The visitor emphasized discipline and order in describing Russia's diplomatic relations with the West, on the battlefield and especially at court. This penchant for militarism made Russia feared by other European powers. It also kept the nation mired in the reigns of great military leaders like Peter I and Alexander I. De Custine's appraisal of Russia's place in the political scheme of Europe was largely negative:

> There is much misapprehension as regards the part which this state would play in Europe. In accordance with its constitutional character, it would represent the principle of order, but influenced by the character of its rulers, it seeks to propagate tyranny under pretext of remedying anarchy... It is the elements of moral principle that this nation lacks; with its military habits, and its recollection of invasions, it is still occupied with notions of wars of conquest, the most brutal of all wars; whereas the struggles of France and the other western nations will henceforth assume the character of wars of propagandism.[32]

Nicholas' extreme despotism was viewed as an immense threat to the balance of power in Europe. Russia's interests were far-reaching, spreading into continental Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Compared to less populated nations with territorial interests Russia appeared more capable of realizing these ambitions.

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[31] De Custine, 216.
[32] De Custine, 23.

Astolphe de Custine was present at the Congress of Vienna which gave him a firm grasp of the national interests presented during these sessions. His writings on Russia, while frequently ill-informed, simultaneously demonstrate an acute understanding of the path Russian governance had traveled to Nicholas' reign. He viewed Russia as a country on the fringes of both Europe and Asia, facing the uncertainty garnered by gathering such a great number of peoples under one banner. De Custine asks

> ...is it the character of the Russian which has made the autocracy, or is it the autocracy which has made the Russian character?...the influence is reciprocal: the Russian government could never have been established elsewhere than in Russia; and the Russians would never have become what they are under a government differing from that which exists among them.[33]

This is the eternal paradox of not only Russia, but of the other autocratic states of the Holy Alliance, where legal structures took hold much earlier to keep monarchs in check. Russia's experiment with constitutionalism under Alexander I was crushed under the rule of his successor.

Finally, it is important to understand the Tsar's character if we are to situate Russia amongst the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite de Custine's vehement rejection of the legitimacy of enlightened authoritarianism, he leaves a most favourable account of Nicholas. He believed the Tsar to be a true European gentleman, far more genuine and exacting than the members of his court who scrambled to obtain his favour. Nicholas exhibited the precise gestures and behaviours of a Western monarch, and revealed none of the tendencies to mimicry that overwhelmed de Custine at court in St. Petersburg. The Emperor is described as handsome, graceful and severe:

> The Emperor has a Grecian profile, the forehead high, but receding; the nose straight, and perfectly formed; the mouth very finely cut; the face, which in shape is rather long and oval, is noble; the whole air military, and rather German than

[33] De Custine, 52.

> Slavonic. His carriage and his attitudes are naturally imposing. He expects always to be gazed at, and never for a moment forgets that he is so.[34]
>
> The Emperor is, by extraction, more a German than a Russ. The fineness of his features, the regularity of his profile, his military figure, his bearing, naturally a little stiff, all remind me of Germany rather than of Muscovy.[35]

Nicholas' severity and constant attentiveness to the watchful eyes of the court are according to de Custine explained by the fact that he was at the helm of an "immense machine."[36] This responsibility necessarily comes with paranoia. Educated and wise beyond all others he was also accountable for the great price the nation had paid to gain entry to the great four powers of Europe. In de Custine's final evaluation "responsibility is the punishment of absolute power."[37]

With the widespread emergence of nationalism and the enforcement of diverse and frequently contrasting ideologies the restructuring of Europe after the defeat of Napoleon marked a turning point in Western history.[38] The dangers associated with dismantling a system of wide uniformity across the continent were checked by the solutions of governance as outlined during the Congress of Vienna: the options were Parliamentarianism, popular democracy or Enlightened Authoritarianism.[39] Alexander I and Nicholas I both worked to carve out a unique place for Russia on the diplomatic stage of Europe. Weaker states were left dependant on its support and major powers reliant on its cooperation in checking the ambition of a post-Napoleonic France.[40]

Nicholas protected the constancy of his state in providing a degree of political isolation but also carved a distinctive role for St. Petersburg among the cultural centers of

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[34] De Custine, 86.
[35] De Custine, 105.
[36] De Custine, 85.
[37] De Custine, 85.
[38] Simpson and Jones, 83-85.
[39] Broers, 16-17.
[40] Malia, 87.

Europe in constructing the Hermitage. By focusing so much attention on dividing the collection according to contemporary standards of collecting and display, in other words by subjecting the New Hermitage to the canon of museology in the nineteenth century, Nicholas made a concerted effort to further the work of his eldest brother in overcoming the European perception of Russia as threatening and alien. Instead he presented Russia as sharing a cultural heritage with the continent.

Chapter IV

Mimicry and Mockery: The Hermitage in the European Context

The New Hermitage Inaugurated

With the Hermitage decoration scheme completed and the display of works in place the museum opened its doors on February 5, 1852. The event was marked by a gala dinner hosted by Nicholas for six hundred members of the aristocracy and included a performance of the ballet "Catarina" and Donizetti's opera "Don Pasquale." The sight of so many people in finery filling the space must have been overwhelming. One of the attendees, curator Florian Gilles, recalled

> ...ladies of the court in their beautiful garments among the glittering lights and treasures of the Hermitage, elegant groups of the military men in the shining full dresses, ministers, statesmen of the highest ranks, all of them collected in one charming place... added a new lustre to the selected rooms.[1]

For members of the court, the museum's opening was the greatest event of the social season. It satisfied months of speculation about the interior appearance of von Klenze's work and the richness of the Tsar's previously cloistered collection. Finally the Romanov's celebrated European and Russian masterworks had a stately home on par with its value.

Visits to the museum were filled with rigid requirements for admittance, dress, behaviour, and the order in which it was to be viewed. Though admission was technically the privilege of the Russian public one could not enter until he or she had been issued a ticket by the court office of the Tsar. As the collection was still privately owned by the Tsar only members of court and foreign dignitaries or wealthy travelers

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[1] "The New Hermitage: The First Public Art Museum," n.d. <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).

were granted permission to tour the new building.[2] The admittance to the Tsar's private realm of someone who did not prove to have a suitable lineage would have been inappropriate. Even once permission had been obtained, the visitor was still not allowed freely to explore the museum. He or she was led by a guide who would provide a narrative of the collection by reading from a guide book during the tour. A common feature of public museums on the continent, the purpose of guided tours was first to protect the works of art.[3] Nobles were permitted to address the curators of the Hermitage but only if they proved to have sufficient knowledge of the art in question. As court officials and specialists in their field the curators had little time for general inquiries. Visitors were asked to justify that their questions were of a pressing nature. They had to behave at the Hermitage as at Nicholas' court, following a proscribed canon of appropriate comment and discussion.

These specifications all fall in line with Nicholas' rigid restrictions on intellectualism. The policing evident on a wider scale in Russia was stifling inside the museum, where guides were effectively employed as spies. These agents in fact circulated among many cultural attractions to keep track of the movement of foreigners within the empire. Nicholas restricted the movement of visitors, thereby using his museum as a disciplinary tool through which he could regulate noble guests from both the Russian court and abroad. While their invitation came under the guise of a cultural exploration of Russia's European ties, it was in truth another apparatus for Nicholas to survey foreigners and members of his court. The grandiose and imposing nature of the museum sought to make visitors conscious of being constantly under the eyes of the Tsar.

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[2] "The New Hermitage: The First Public Art Museum," n.d. <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).
[3] Noorgegraaf, 56.

As the Marquis de Custine reminded readers, the physical absence of the Tsar did not eradicate his presence from the minds of the aristocracy.

Considering the panoptic capabilities of Nicholas' new cultural treasury thus clarifies the ways in which the museum could be used to guard against insurgencies within his empire. Though the Tsar was not always visible he put in place a mechanism that allowed him to observe dissident members of society around the clock. Perceived intellectual threats to the Tsar's authoritarianism needed to be stamped out before they could have time to organize. The main function of the Panopticon according to Foucault was "...to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[4] In the New Hermitage this was in part ensured by the carefully mapped path of exploration through the museum. Additionally, the spies that circulated in the structure were not incognito but recognizable, leaving the visitor with the impression of being continuously observed.

The Russian government kept careful records detailing the movement of foreigners and suspected subversives throughout the empire. In this way "the crowd...is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities."[5] Groups accordingly lost the capability of rallying support for a revolt. With the threat of constant surveillance factions with the potential for rebellion in Russia were incapacitated from organizing on a horizontal level.[6] This model of behavioural control, or "discipline-mechanism"[7] in Russia filtered down through society, percolating so that people even began to report on the behaviours of their neighbours. This marks an important distinction from the model

[4] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201.
[5] Foucault, 201.
[6] Foucault, 219.
[7] Foucault, 209.

as described by Michel Foucault, who wrote that this mechanism was democratically controlled to prevent any turn to tyranny.[8] In Nicholas' empire, however, residents were frequently rewarded for reporting on the behaviours of their neighbours no matter how insignificant their actions. The New Hermitage, while modeled after a democratic institution in the West, proved to have the capacity to influence the everyday conduct of its visitors.

De Custine on the state of art in Russia

Comparisons to the great museums of the West and the foreign reception of the New Hermitage collection can be quantified by examining Western perceptions of the state of the arts in Russia. Art had taken great strides very rapidly there but the conception of Russians as mere actors persisted nonetheless. Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed that Russia's courtiers had modeled their behaviours after the West while underneath this façade lurked an Eastern world view. Their architectural monuments were mocked as poor copies without ingenuity or inspiration although many Russian sculptors, painters and architects from the nineteenth century are celebrated today for equaling and rivaling their Western counterparts. Indeed, competition and notions of cultural superiority played a significant role in past interpretations of Russia's arts.

This is nowhere more apparent that in the Marquis de Custine's observations in St. Petersburg. It would seem by his account that the state of Russian arts was degraded by the spiritual heart of the realm and its cultural ties to Asia and Byzantium. De Custine's main complaint about the capital was of its imitation of ancient monuments. In his mind there was nothing innovative in these structures that could make them suitable

[8] Foucault, 207.

tributes to the masters of the ancient world. Further, it was the erection of these monuments in a harsh Northern climate which was most offensive. The swampy, grey appearance of the capital repeatedly surfaced in de Custine's account, factors which he believed were hardly complimentary to aesthetics most flattered by their situation in fair weather:

> Partially to imitate that which is perfect, is to spoil it. We should either strictly copy the model, or invent altogether. But the re-production of the monuments of Athens, however faithfully executed, would be lost in a miry plain, continually in danger of being overflowed by water whose level is nearly that of the land... I begin to understand why the Russians urge us with so much earnestness to visit them during winter: six feet of snow conceals all this dreariness; but in summer, we see the country.[9]

The architecture of the city was seemingly at war with the overflowing banks of the Neva, which as in Venice, frequently threatened to swallow the city's architectural treasures. It is curious that de Custine's main concerns with the legitimacy of Russian art are linked solely to its mimicry of the West and the implantation of these values in this harsh climate. He asserts that artists visiting the Russia to study or to complete commissions do not remain long in the country because of these factors. In his estimation "...if ever they prolong their stay, they wrong their talents. The air of this country is unfavourable to the finer arts. Productions that spring spontaneously elsewhere, will here only grow in the hot-house. Russian art will never be a hardy plant."[10] In truth, numerous Western artists enjoyed their greatest fame in Russia under the patronage of the Romanovs and other noble families like the Stroganovs, the Sheremetevs and the Yusupovs. St. Petersburg could be viewed as a blank slate for artists like Bartolomeo Rastrelli who began his career there at the age of sixteen and

[9] De Custine, 46.
[10] De Custine, 57.

remained there to complete many of the most important commissions of the Empresses Anna and Elizabeth.[11] The wide and initially barren canals offered architects the chance to create enormous palaces which space on the continent did not allow. In this way the technique of Russian Baroque was born as a trajectory of the Italian Baroque style.[12]

De Custine, however, did admire that in all areas of life the Russian aristocracy and even a great part of the lower classes took pleasure in contemplating aesthetics. This consideration seemed firmly embedded in the home with objects like utensils, costume and furnishings as well as in the public realm: "The Russian people have a natural perception of the picturesque...[they] would all furnish subject for the painter, and the corner of every street in Petersburg might suggest material for a picture graceful in its kind."[13] All along the Nevsky Prospekt could be found quaint tableaus which were appreciated by tourists and royals alike. Such scenes are comparable to the "Potemkin villages" hastily erected along the banks of the Dniepr in the eighteenth century for the pleasure of Catherine II as she traveled to and from her summer residence.[14] Indeed, the idea of Russian life as a theatrical set pervades de Custine's narrative. Without a doubt it was the perceived mimicry of Western traditions and manners that was condemned in his writing: "I do not reproach the Russians for being what they are, what I blame them is, their pretending to be what we are..."[15] These adopted behaviours were viewed as inferior performances of European style and social conduct. To de Custine it was impossible for the Russian courtier completely to veil his spiritual and ideological leanings in the frock coat of a Westerner. If, however, the Russian aristocracy had a

[11] Figes, 24.
[12] Figes, 24.
[13] De Custine, 55.
[14] Figes, 8.
[15] De Custine, 79-80.

fixation with imitating their European equivalent it meant also that they were great observers. With their careful surveillance of Western trends what nation was more fitting to create what the Louvre had established as the "universal museum"? Hermitage curators made sure to organize the placement of works in the manner which had become standardized in Europe, as will soon be discussed further. The creation of this European institution in Russia's glittering capital served to situate the state amongst the great cultural centers of the West.

The extent to which these thoughts on Russian art by early European visitors to the New Hermitage were influential in their time we cannot be sure. While on one hand de Custine's account addresses this undefined mimicry which he identified as an underlying Asiatic character, he acknowledged the merit of the collection and von Klenze's work.

The Louvre

A comparison to the Hermitage's main competitor, the Louvre, must be made in order to determine the position it occupied within the nineteenth-century order of public museums. Did the Hermitage satisfy the objectives set out by public museums in the West? Did it demonstrate an interest in public education, nationalism and competition with its contemporaries? Such a comparison is warranted by the fact that the Louvre in the nineteenth century became "...identified as the archetypal state museum and model for subsequent national art museums the world over."[16] Andrew McClellan's study of the Louvre is a particularly valuable source in evaluating these two museums in terms of their political and artistic missions as well as the ideologies which governed them. While acknowledging that the public museum had a largely aesthetic principal underlying its

[16] McClellan, 2.

arrangement, McClelland chooses to examine how this was also "...deeply political...on various levels art museums carry a heavy symbolic load on behalf of the governments and factions that sponsor them."[17] McClellan thus reminds the reader that there is nothing organic or evolutionary about the way public collections came to be arranged. Instead, these spaces were conceived and constructed from layers of political ambition.[18]

Enlightenment and intellectual freedom in the centres of continental Europe at this time threatened the integrity of Nicholas' absolutist ideology. The Hermitage bore symbolic weight since its opening signaled a very specific effort to reinforce the values of the old regime. Indeed there existed within Europe a community of learning which placed liberalism above all other ideologies, and which used the museum as a way of dedicating "all the thoughts and efforts of right-thinking politics and philosophy...towards maintaining, promoting and developing this community."[19] Museums emerged in the nineteenth century as vehicles for fostering intellectual freedom and pride both in the nation and in the historical community of Europe. By displaying works of art by the succession of national schools public museums established cultural links between states. Such a display strategy also mapped the migration of artistic advances. The movement Russia to the West was more difficult to show, however, as the work of Russian artists was not prevalent in the rest of Europe.

A very specific division must then be observed between the political functions of the Louvre and the Hermitage. Museums in the West operated as sites of cultural patrimony insofar as the nationalization of works of art fostered collective pride and

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[17] McClellan, 2.
[18] McClellan, 12.
[19] Quatremere in Jean-Louis Deotte, "Rome, the Archetypal Museum, and the Louvre, the Negation of Division" in Grasping the World, the Idea of the Museum (New York: Ashgate, 2004), 52.

enlightened thought, enforcing the belief that the future of France lay in a Republican government.[20] McClellan further observes that the Louvre foresaw the evolution of the public museum especially by linking collective ownership to nationalism.[21] These facets of public collecting remain central to museums and the bodies that govern them today. In opening the New Hermitage Nicholas became the primary protector of cultural values. During the French Revolution the placement of national property in the former see of the monarchy shaped its Republican ideology whereas the Hermitage's opening to the public can be seen by modern observers as a calculated attempt to maintain the absolute nature of the monarchy, long established as the path of Russian governance. To foreign visitors, it also sent the message that the Tsar would generously agree to share his astounding private collection with Europe.

When considering the political significance of the public museum's urban setting it must also be remembered that St. Petersburg was a very new capital compared to those of Western Europe. From its outset under Peter I it struggled to establish itself as a capital city distinguished from Moscow. Cities like Paris and London formed centers of the nations' cultural heritage and remained the locus of their states' artistic invention. Nicholas had to push the limits of history by forging old links to the West to legitimate his capital's presence in the European realm of politics. The museum, in other words, made the city appear more established than in reality. In his reign the presence of a large purpose-built structure for the collection further signaled the arrival of St. Petersburg on the international stage of cultural diplomacy.

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[20] McClellan, 7.
[21] McClellan, 7.

The socio-political atmosphere of France and Russia tells us that the Louvre and the Hermitage shared at least one aspect in common, the desire to "...integrate the museum into the political fabric of the nation—to influence the public with respect to moral and political welfare as well as artistic taste."[22] Museums as institutions capable of nation building inspired popular support for the governments that oversaw them. Hence in France museums continued to inspire support for the new Republican model while in Russia visitors to the Hermitage remained in awe of Nicholas' power, influence and wealth. Moral and political wellbeing were particularly important to both institutions which were educational models in addition to disciplinary tools. First on the agenda of the public art museum was dedication to instruction and conservation. Links between government and conservation gave authorities the responsibility to protect cultural treasures.[23] This also in part emphasized the connection between museum and Royal Academy. In the nineteenth century it was possible for living artists to see their work hung in the halls of the Louvre if they were adherents to Academic painting. The Hermitage was no exception. The Russian gallery was filled with the works of Russia's most prominent contemporary painters including one of its curators, Feodor Bruni. Contemporary artists would create works for what McClellan calls an "ideal viewing community,"[24] a group which in Russia was wealthy, highly educated and close to the Tsar's inner sanctum. The Hermitage collection thus became a symbolic institution which allowed its privileged visitors to trace their cultural lineage to the aesthetic traditions of Europe. It provided an alternate and official history according to Nicholas' political aspirations.

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[22] McClellan, 49.
[23] McClellan, 7.
[24] McClellan, 8.

This education extended beyond a mere aesthetic heritage to actual instruction on the schools and masters of European painting. Like the organization of the Louvre, schools were separated and the works of their most celebrated artists were hung together to provide an understanding of their oeuvre. The arrangement of works by national school and time period was a way of setting the public collection apart from the princely collection, which were organized principally according to aesthetic considerations.[25] As McClellan remarked of the Louvre, the publicly exhibited history of art thus became organized by the masters and their studios along national lines.[26] As Carol Duncan writes, the Hermitage, just as the Louvre "...still pitched to an educated elite and [was] still built on a universal and international standard, the new system, by giving emphasis to the 'genius' of national schools, could both acknowledge and promote the growth of state power and national identity."[27] Certainly, as aforementioned, the stylistic narrative presented by the Hermitage addressed a European history to which every Russian aristocrat belonged. Since this institution possessed the ability to control the public's memory of the past, visitors exploring the Hermitage were pressed to understand the link between Russian and European stylistic traditions. Further, its collection of paintings by indigenous artists served only to show that their technique was born of the great cultural centers of the old world. Just as in the Louvre, visitors would have been united by a common aesthetic heritage.[28]

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[25] McClellan, 4.
[26] McClellan, 4.
[27] Carol Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum: The Louvre Museum and the National Gallery, London," in Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, Grasping the World, The Idea of the Museum (New York: Ashgate, 2004), 255.
[28] Duncan, 255.

The Hermitage Galleries

It must not be assumed, however, that with the heavy impact of French culture in Russia that the Louvre was the only model museum in consideration. The design of the New Hermitage was equally indebted to the Bavarian Leo von Klenze and therefore employed strategies of display made popular in Central and Northern Europe. These were largely developed in tandem with the halls of the great Universal Exhibitions of the early nineteenth century and were also used in emerging department stores. Von Klenze's Alte Pinakothek demonstrates the fluidity and openness of these design schemes and contributed greatly to his fame as a master of museum building. He also had a firm understanding of the division of works by nationality and could skillfully link together the wide reaching elements of a large collection. Borrowing from both exhibition halls and earlier features associated with private collecting, the Alte Pinakothek experimented with top-lit galleries and glass display cases. Those features in combination with a central urban location, the monumental staircase entrance, side-lit sculpture gallery and physical barriers to the visitor must be explored further in the Hermitage context.

Physical limitations on the body of the visitor are of particular note in a state where surveillance and discipline took on such extensive proportions. Such limitations encouraged prudent behaviour among visitors. As we are reminded by Foucault, actual physical barriers were less important than the clarity by which they were perceived.[29] These restrictions began at one's entrance to the New Hermitage where walking sticks and umbrellas were to be surrendered, also a requirement of the Louvre. The entrance itself with its Atlas Portico and heavy pediment gave an intimidating impression to those approaching the structure. As with von Klenze's Glyptothek in Munich the Hermitage

[29] Foucault, 202.

was conceived as a temple to art and was not without physical features reminiscent of Greek and Roman architecture. After passing through the imposing Atlas Portico the visitor was ushered in to an entrance hall where their ticket for admission would be issued (fig. 10). Standing in this hall the eye was immediately guided upward to a central grand staircase extending upward to the painting galleries (fig.11). The solemn atmosphere would strike the visitor mounting the stairs as if approaching the altar in a cathedral.

It has been observed that "...the nineteenth-century museum expressed a grandeur that was not necessarily inviting to the general public,"[30] and the same can be said of the Hermitage. The privilege of viewing the collection was predetermined by the visitor's social status. Entry to the museum meant entry to the heart of the palatial complex which the Tsar used daily. There was thus a distinct need to ensure the proper conduct of bodies circulating in this space.

Sofas and chairs in the galleries formed fixed locations from which the works were to be viewed. The selection of their aesthetic was made by Nicholas although von Klenze had originally designed purpose-built furniture for the rooms. Nicholas preferred to use furniture from other palaces, careful to ensure that they blended with the décor of the galleries as well as being of sufficient value to reflect the rest of the palatial complex. The placement of doors, glass cabinets and ropes cordoning off exhibits also worked to regulate the movement of visitors and their proximity to the objects on display. Features such as these ensured the collection was explored through a pre-determined chronology. While one function of the space was to educate artists and specialists it was certainly also meant to instruct the aristocracy on proper taste. Guides touring the collection with

[30] Noordegraaf, 50.

visitors informed Russian aristocrats on their aesthetic heritage as emerging from Europe. The original art of Russia, those Orthodox Icons still in use throughout the state, were conspicuously absent from this environment. Canvases, sculpture and architectural decoration were the focus instead. For foreigners, the collection justified the Russian presence in academic painting, which had only emerged a century before. In this way Nicholas and his curators were certain that focus would be given to masterworks in the collection and that each work would be viewed from its greatest vantage point. Scholars like Julia Noordegraaf note, however, that these tours had less to do with instruction than on protecting the works of art.[31] Small groups of tourists were in fact considered to impede more academic functions of the space.

When the New Hermitage was unveiled in 1852 its stunning imagery made it evident to visitors that Russians had acquired their aesthetic taste from the West. As an institution aimed at legitimating Russia's presence on the European stage of visual art the collection was arranged to provide instruction on taste and the history of art. It catered to both the cultured elite of the court whose ancestors had made the difficult shift from Muscovite to European and visiting foreigners who wished to explore a capital mired in mysticism. The Hermitage adopted strategies of display from the West which also entailed adherence to a European organization of the world according to the succession of national schools. Moreover, this institution fit perfectly into Nicholas' scheme of surveillance in an empire where discipline had long been established. The success of this enterprise can be evaluated by considering the number of museums which were soon after established in the capital such as the State Russian Museum (1898).

[31] Noordegraaf, 56.

Conclusion

Tsar Nicholas' New Hermitage continued to flourish in subsequent decades thanks to the acquisitions made by successive curators and partnerships with similar institutions. It was a site of cultural intersection where the boundaries of nationalism were blurred due to Russia's extensive history of courting the West. In other words it was obvious by the nineteenth century that the Russian aristocracy had sacrificed its native culture for integration in Western diplomatic and social affairs. By examining contemporary accounts of European travelers to the empire such as the Marquis de Custine I have demonstrated that in the middle of the nineteenth century there were still many characteristics of "old holy Russia" that lingered beneath the surface of this seemingly Western society. While de Custine wrote of Russian courtiers as mere puppets on the stage of European culture this sense of imitation was not shared by the aristocracy who had become largely alienated from their ancestry.

The limitations of Russia's Muscovite heritage maintain an ambiguous status today. The State Hermitage Museum, as the only major museum to be tied to the creation of a capital city, had a great deal of influence in the creation of a new elite culture. Former Hermitage curator Boris Piotrovsky wrote of the museum's role in the struggle to define Russia for the West that:

> the development of the Hermitage has been not so much an effect as a determining cause of the transformation of old holy Russia into an increasingly modern country[1] that is interested in finding and undertaking its relations with the West, and that is culturally restless and beset by ever deeper social changes.[2]

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[1] With the fall of the Soviet Union literature on the art and culture of Russia has taken a determined shift against this view. Soon after the breakdown of the Soviet Union the revival of "old holy Russia" was taken up with surprising fervor.

[2] Piotrovsky, 9.

While Russians tended to align their tastes and interests with those of Europe to characterize themselves as members of a common heritage, there was also a point when the excesses of Western ceremony were viewed as gratuitous. Since Peter the Great's initial conception of a northern capital in the European style a great deal of tension had been building amongst the aristocracy which must be attributed to the superficial adoption of European dress, manners and customs. The strain of these alien facets of culture frequently surfaced in literature and social criticism. Russian courtiers and in particular intellectuals began to equate the lavish rituals of European aristocrats (particularly the French) with moral corruption: "the idea that the West was morally corrupt was echoed by virtually every Russian writer from Pushkin to the Slavophiles."[3] This is just another paradoxical example of the confusion which surrounds the cultural definition of Russia in today's scholarship.

Still, throughout the last three hundred years of Romanov history Russians have sought the approval of their European contemporaries. The imperial collection at St. Petersburg proved a powerful tool for Nicholas to join the ranks of Europe's major powers. Using cultural imports such as a foreign architectural vocabulary and the employment of the Bavarian architect Leo von Klenze Nicholas attempted to solidify Russia's inclusion in the modern history of Europe. In evaluating the impact of these imported facets, however, I have shown that they were devoid of the ideological underpinnings created in the West.

The Hermitage therefore did not take shape like museums of the West despite their outstanding visual similarities. In examining the layout of the New Hermitage we have seen that it adhered to all of the structural components standardized in nineteenth-

[3] Figes, 65.

century public collecting. The employment of new lighting solutions and the arrangement of works in gallery spaces mirror European approaches to education and conservation. Von Klenze's new galleries, as illustrated in the watercolours of Premazzi, Ukhotmsky and Hau, adhered to contemporary principles of display but additionally engaged an elaborate decorative scheme which paid homage to the art of the ancient world. Strategies of display developed in Europe and the acquisition of canonical Western works of art brought Russia closer to the continent by illustrating that it had a shared artistic history.

Examining the original layout of the New Hermitage shows us, however, that the decorative scheme of the Hermitage goes further than merely imitating or acting out European design strategies. Like museums in Paris, London and Berlin the Hermitage was envisioned as an institution capable of inspiring nationalism. In this case, for Europeans the museum stood in testament to the fact that Russia's Byzantine sensitivities were mired in the Middle Ages and had long given over to a "modern European" world view. In order to fuse Russia's rich past to its Western inclinations Russian architects Stasov and Yefimov assisted Leo von Klenze in completing the Hermitage design and campaigned for the use of indigenous materials. Stones such as malachite, granite and lapis lazuli were intended to endure the cold, damp climate near the Neva. They also testified to Nicholas' great wealth and power in having them excavated from remote regions of the empire. This care was continued with the interiors, where vases and candelabra were crafted by Russian tradesmen over a period of many years to blend with the overall design scheme of the palatial complex. Meticulously painted ceilings and friezes were also a feature of note. In particular, special efforts were made to pay

homage to the painting of the ancient world and are present in several painting galleries and all of the sculpture galleries. Scholars today are fortunate that these features have survived the turmoil of two world wars. Though works of art in the galleries have been rearranged several times since the nineteenth century the original decorative scheme remains undisturbed and the majority of furnishings still occupy their intended locations. From its inception the Hermitage went beyond the criterion of a modern public museum, extending itself to a temple dedicated to the appreciation of European achievements in the visual arts.

The museum also proved a perfect vehicle for monitoring and regulating the movement of foreigners and intellectuals within the empire. With the migration of new liberal ideologies to Russia intellectual insurgency became Nicholas' greatest fear. The museum became another mode of preserving his autocratic control over the nation, a space in which he could observe the actions of visitors to his inner realm. As Michel Foucault reminds us, "visibility is a trap," and the eyes of the Tsar's army of spies were continually surveying the galleries.[4] Physical limitations on the visitors' bodies were less important than communicating the fact that they were constantly being watched.

In conclusion, the New Hermitage presents a myriad of interesting challenges to the study of museology. While in many respects it does satisfy the central tenets of nineteenth-century public collecting as defined by Andrew McClellan—the "...arrangement of works, lighting, restoration and conservation of works, public education and service to the state"[5]—it was also nonetheless an undemocratic institution

[4] Foucault, 200.
[5] McClellan, abstract.

open to an extremely limited public. Additionally, its architecture and layout demonstrate some unique innovations in unfolding a narrative of Western art.

When considering the rich collection housed at St. Petersburg and the Romanov's enduring tradition of celebrating the legacy of their ancestry it seems almost a historical inevitability that Russia would join the fervour for public collecting in this age. This is not to take away from Nicholas' agency, however, for it was his personal interest in the inner functions of the museum that made him realize the great political potential of this institution. In addition to minimizing the impression of Russia as a large aggressor in Europe the New Hermitage stood as testament that in terms of culture Russians were in fact of the West.

Improving relations with Europe and North America in fact remains an important feature in the Hermitage's agenda today. Projects such as the Canadian Friends of the Hermitage, a subsidiary of The State Hermitage Museum Foundation of Canada are "...dedicated to the enrichment of Canadians through [their] cultural, educational and exhibition exchange programs, and to the preservation of the world-renowned collections of art in the Hermitage Museum."[6] Nicholas' museum proved in his time to be a successful cultural ambassador as increased travel to his empire attests. It continues to do so today.

[6] "About the Canadian Friends of the Hermitage," <http://www.hermitagemuseum.ca/HermitageFriends/AboutTheFriends.shtml> (4 June 2006).

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"The New Hermitage: The Building and the Rooms"
<http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm5_4_2_3_2.html> (7 November 2004).

"Watercolour Views of the New Hermitage"
<www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/05/hm88_5_2.html> (28 January 2006).

Appendix

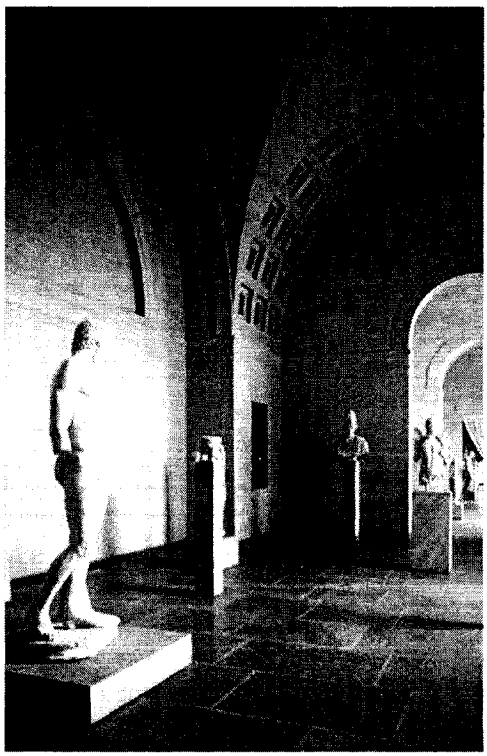

Figure 1 The Glyptothek, Munich. Interior of sculpture gallery with vaulted ceiling.

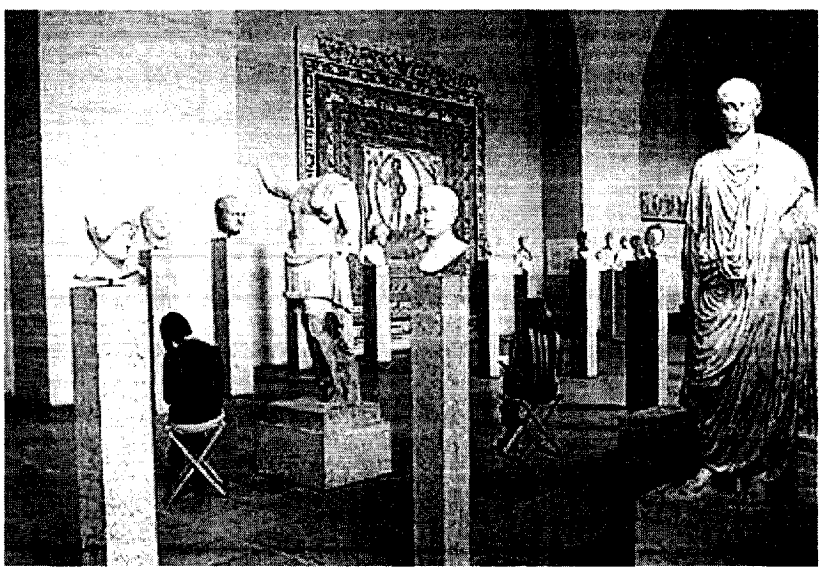

Figure 2 The Glyptothek, Munich. Interior of sculpture gallery with vaulted ceiling.

Figure 3 Leo von Klenze, New Hermitage, The Atlas Portico. Entrance to the New Hermitage on Millionnaya Street.

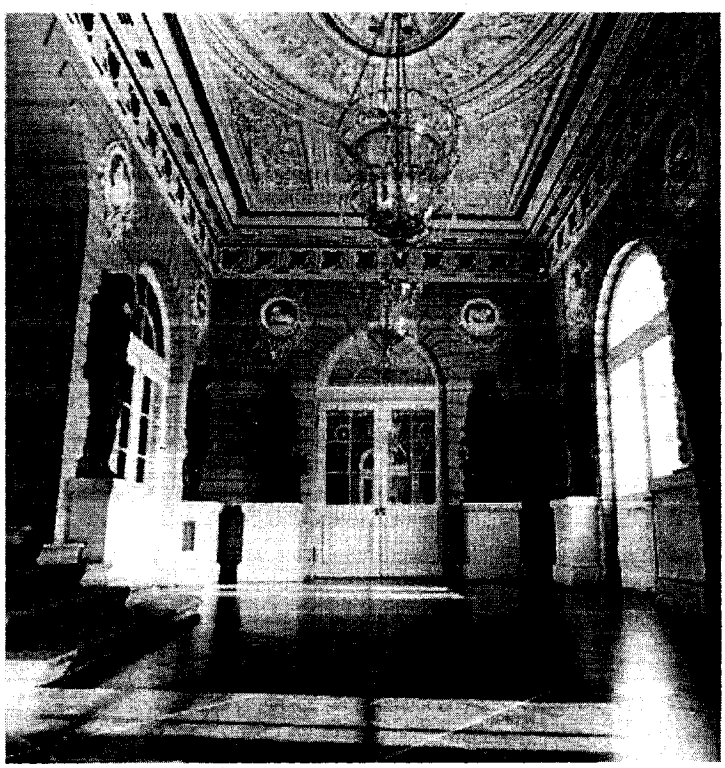

Figure 4 Charles Cameron, Pavlovsk at Pushkin, formerly Tsarskoe Selo. Interior of today's visitor entrance.

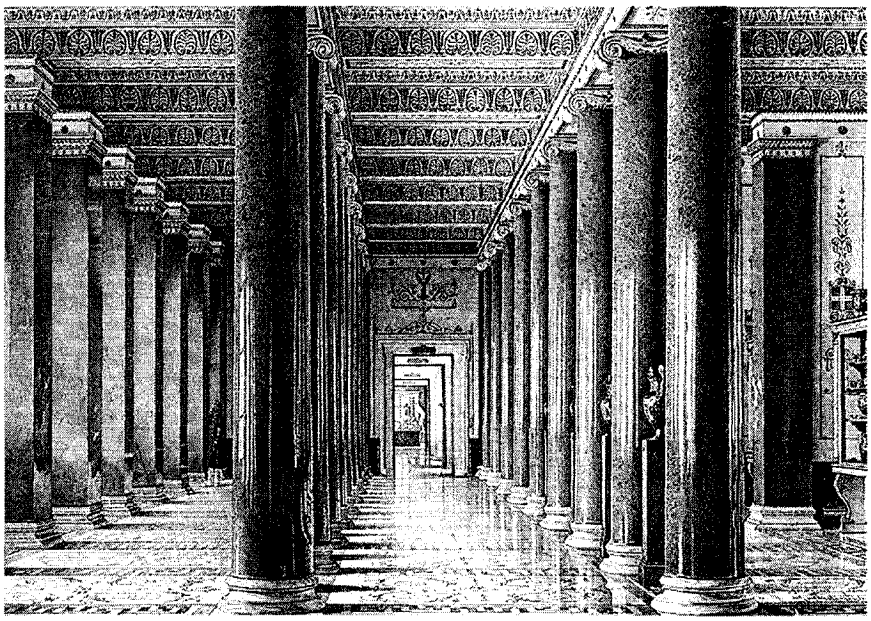

Figure 5 Constantin Ukhotmsky, Watercolour view. The Hall of Graeco-Etruscan Vases (Hall of Twenty Columns), 1853.

Figure 6 Edward Hau, Watercolour view. Gallery of the History of Ancient Painting, 1859.

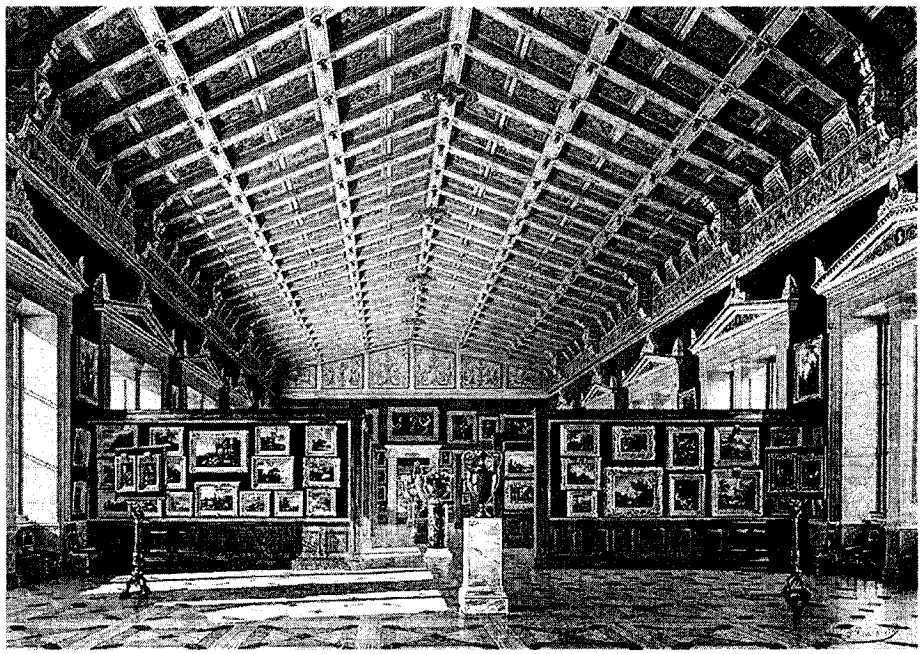

Figure 7 Luigi Premazzi, Watercolour view. The Room of the Dutch and Flemish Schools, 1858.

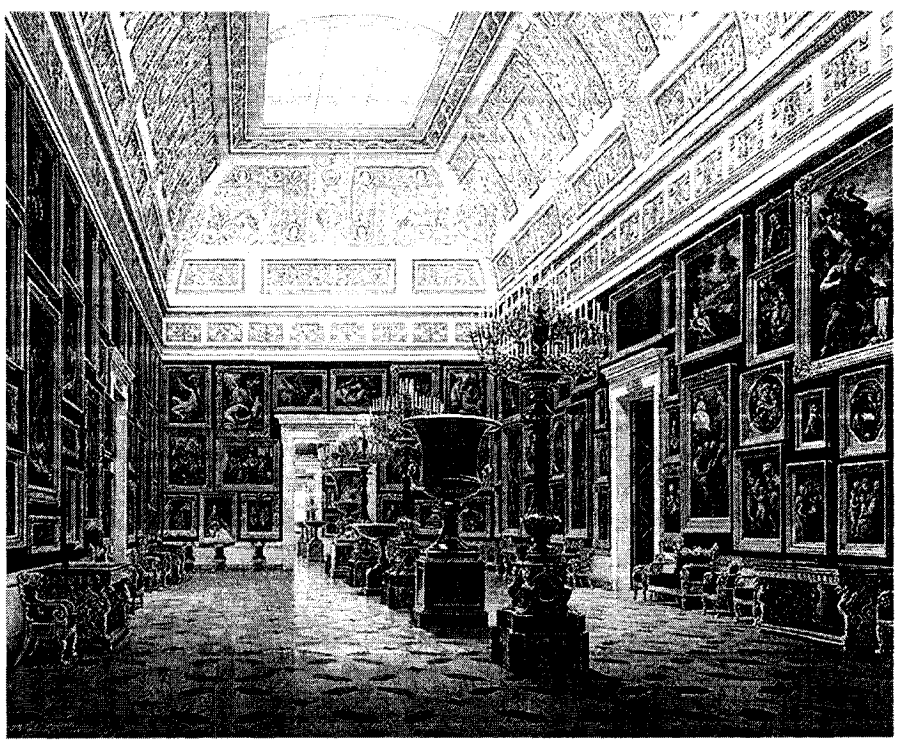

Figure 8 Edward Hau, Watercolour view. The Room of the Italian Schools (The Small Italian Gallery), 1853.

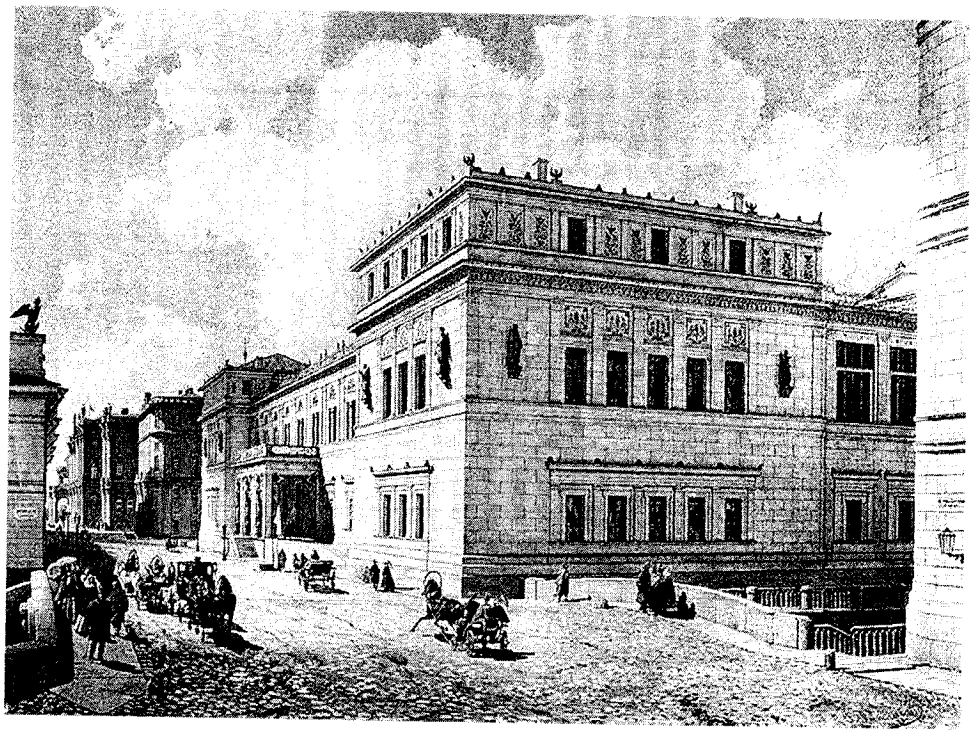

Figure 9 Luigi Premazzi, Watercolour view. View of the New Hermitage Building from Millionnaya Street, 1861.

Figure 10 Admission Ticket, 1859.

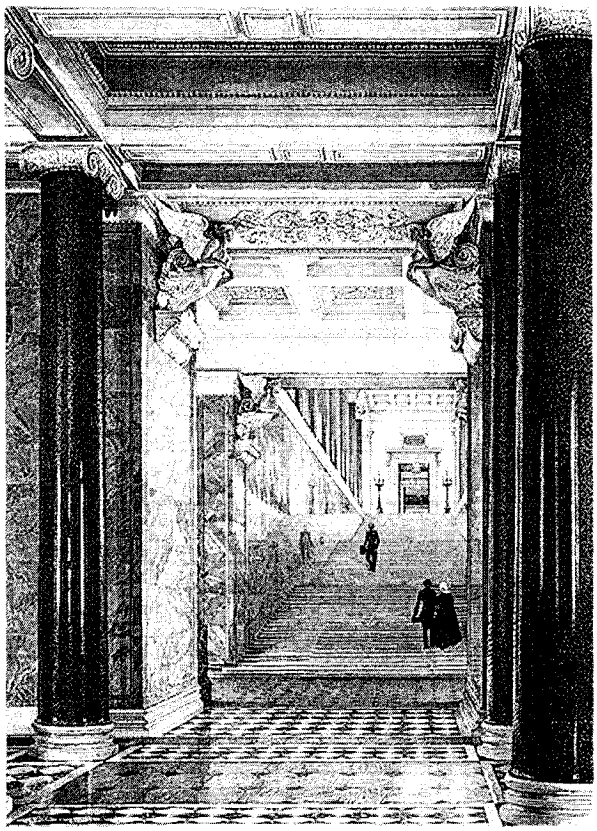

Figure 11 Constantin Ukhotmsky, Watercolour view. Main Stair and Vestibule, 1853.