

Ilya Repine (1844–1930)

Painting the soul of Russia

5 October 2021 – 23 January 2022



Petit Palais
Musée des Beaux-Arts
de la Ville de Paris

Information
petitpalais.paris.fr

From 5 October 2021 to 23 January 2022, the Petit Palais presents the first French retrospective dedicated to Ilya Repine, one of the greats of Russian art. Little known in France, Repine's oeuvre is nevertheless considered a milestone in the history of Russian painting of the 19th and 20th centuries. Some one hundred paintings, including very large format works, will be on loan from, notably, the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg and the Ateneum art museum in Helsinki, Finland. The exhibition allows visitors to retrace the career of this illustrious Russian painter through his masterpieces.

A key figure in the art world of his time, Repine took an interest in different aspects of culture, from literature to music and science. He was very close to many Russian personalities such as the writer **Leo Tolstoy**, the composer **Modest Mussorgsky**, and the collector **Pavel Tretyakov**. Witness to the many upheavals that shook Russia during his lifetime, Repine was particularly attentive to the profound historical and social changes that shaped his country, echoing them through his work.



Ilya Repine, *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, 1870–73. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Associated with the Realist movement, Repine began his career at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. He then joined a group of artists known as "The Wanderers", who promoted painting inspired from the ordinary life of Russians. His first major work, *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (1870–73), immediately established his reputation. Artist, but also professor, art theorist and writer, Repine's work goes beyond borders. An avid traveller, he discovered French art in the 1870s and enjoyed success in Universal Exhibitions.

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From the 1860s, Repine painted many portraits of his family and close friends with obvious affection in the Realist style. A prolific portraitist, he also painted major artists of his time, like “The Mighty Five” composers, Ivan Turgenev and even Leo Tolstoy, whom he counted as a close friend. The Old Russia inspired him to paint several large, cinematic pictures, like *Zaporozhian Cossacks writing a letter to the Turkish Sultan* (1880–91), one of his most famous works. Fascinated by populist movements that violently called into question the Tsarist regime, he nevertheless accepted several major commissions from the highest echelons of power, notably the monumental composition *Alexander III receiving rural district elders* (1886), the *Portrait of Nicolas II* (1896), and other important official projects. The Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 gave Repine a chance to depict current events and examine Russian history.

Professor at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, Repine observed what was happening on the art scene and trained many students. In 1903, he settled for good in his home in Penates, in Kuokkala (modern Repino), in the former Grand Duchy of Finland which was then part of the Russian Empire. There, he continued to paint and experiment, receiving many visitors. In 1918, Finland declared independence, making Repine an exile in spite of himself. He nevertheless refused all invitations from the Soviet regime to return to Russia. And so it was there, just a few kilometres from Saint Petersburg, which had since become Leningrad, that he died, in 1930, after a career spent in a front-row seat to all the earth-shattering events of his times.

Thanks to an immersive design approach and exceptional loans, the exhibition transports visitors to the Russia of Tsars and revolution. It presents the diversity of subjects and styles developed by Repine over the course of his career, offering a vast panorama to better discover this painter of the soul of Russia.

Exhibition curators

Christophe Leribault, Director of the Petit Palais
Stéphanie Cantarutti, Chief curator of 19th-century paintings at the Petit Palais

Tatiana Yudenkova, Head of the painting department (second half of the 19th century – early 20th century) at the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

With the generous support of Mrs. Natalia Logvinova Smalto, founder of the Fondation Signature – Institut de France



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Ilya Répine, *Portrait of Yury Repine*, 1882.
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



Ilya Répine, *Dragonfly*, 1884
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow