

DEAR READER,

A RUSSIAN TASTE FOR FRENCH ART

The *State Hermitage Museum* in St. Petersburg owns such a vast collection of modern French art that it was impossible to present it within one exhibition in the museum's most famous satellite – *Hermitage Amsterdam*. A decision was thus taken to divide it into three shows, and to present it in a non-linear way, i.e. the first exhibition was dedicated to the youngest group of artists, the leaders of the avant-garde at the start of the 20th century, who made such a huge impact on the artistic world. That first exhibition, *Matisse to Malevich – Pioneers of Modern Art from the Hermitage* (6 March – 17 September 2010) was a celebration of the paintings of Matisse, Picasso, Derain, Vlaminck, Van Dongen and their contemporaries. The second part, entitled *Impressionism: Sensation & Inspiration – Highlights from the Hermitage* (16 June 2012 – 27 January 2013) revealed the treasures of the Impressionists and their immediate predecessors, the Romantics and the Barbizon school. It remained the task of the third exhibition to cover the 'middle-ground'.

That was held between 14 September 2013 and 28 February 2014 under the title: *Gauguin, Bonnard, Dennis – A Russian Taste for French Art*. The core of the exhibition was made up of the artistic output of a group of artists who called themselves Les Nabis (nabi is Hebrew for 'prophet'). In order to show their work at best a revolutionary step was taken: the whole collection of the paintings by Nabis in the possession of the St. Petersburg's museum was sent to Amsterdam. In this was such masterpieces were shown like Maurice Denis' series *The Story of Psyche*, or Pierre Bonnard's *Méditerranée* triptych. The greater part of the exhibition reflects the taste and collecting fervor of Ivan Abramovich Morozov, and the large gallery in the wing on Nieuwe Keizersgracht could ideally house the music room of this collector, including The Story of Psyche series among others.

This third exhibition thus completes the presentation of the modern French art of the Hermitage's collection. As a visitor to all exhibitions in the Hermitage Amsterdam Museum, including these three exceptional ones on modern French art I am very pleased that I had the opportunity to enjoy this art at full display, which bore witness of the fine taste of the two main Russian collectors of modern French art, Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin and Ivan Abramovich Morozov. Especially because according to the plans, the State Hermitage Museum's entire collection of 19th and 20th century French art will be given a permanent home in the General Staff buildings opposite the Winter Palace and will not leave Russia again for some time.

Flórián Farkas

Editor-in-Chief

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