

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Joseph Andreas Weiss (Freising 1814 - Munich 1887)

The Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos

signed, inscribed and dated 'Jos Andreas/Weiss St Petersburg/1845' (on the reverse)
watercolour on paper
29.2 x 40 cm (11½ x 15¾ in)

The Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, a structure of great architectural importance, formerly stood on Pokrova Street in Moscow before it was destroyed in 1936. In the present work, Joseph Andreas Weiss has depicted the magnificent church standing elegantly in the centre of the composition, its rich colour and ornamental details contrasting markedly with the simple, neutral buildings to its right. Indeed, the location of this church instils in the painting a sense of melancholy.

The unkempt land around it, with overgrown grass, planks of wood strewn about, a dusty path and murky pool of water indicate neglect and hint at a similar fate for the church. The only visitor in the painting is a solitary man who appears to have stumbled upon this lost gem and who looks up admiringly at the church. His gaze draws the viewer's attention to the birds which fly about the church's steeples. In the background, the spires and domes of Moscow recede into the distance.

The church was famous throughout Russia and was widely considered to be one of the finest examples of Moscow Baroque architecture. Designed by Peter Potapov, and constructed between 1696 and 1699, it amazed and influenced a variety of people, from the architect Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli (1700-1771), reflected in his Smolny Convent in St. Petersburg, to Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881), whose wife recalled his repeated visits. Despite its architectural importance, and the admiration it attracted from the Soviet Commissar Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky (1875-1933), in 1935 the Moscow City Council decided to demolish the church, to improve traffic congestion in the area. Weiss' watercolour, therefore, stands as an important record of this outstanding architectural achievement.

Weiss was a resident of St. Petersburg from 1839 to 1852 as a court painter to Duke Maximilian von Leuchtenberg (1817-1876), president of the Imperial Academy of Arts and the son-in-law of Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855). In 1852, Weiss was awarded the title of Academician and left Russia soon afterwards. He maintained close links with his Russian patrons, however, and continued to paint views

of Russian cities, primarily Moscow and St. Petersburg. These were often dramatic and heavily glazed large scale oil paintings, which were based on his earlier sketches and compositions of a similar nature to the present work.

In *The Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Moscow*, Weiss delicately depicts the ornamentation of the church in exquisite detail and pays great attention to the proportions of the building and the space it occupies. Such attributes are typical of the artist's paintings, noted as he was for his close attention to topographical accuracy and precision in portraying his favourite subject matter, the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Artist description:

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