

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



Russian School, Nineteenth Century

The Garden Party

with partially effaced inscription in Cyrillic (on the reverse)
watercolour on paper
19.5 x 24 cm (7¾ x 9½ in)

Within the walled garden of this aristocratic residence, an afternoon party is in full swing. Some of the guests weave their way between the flowerbeds, admiring the richly coloured foxgloves and roses, whilst others perch on the long stone benches placed along the perimeter walls. In the central foreground, a man in military attire converses with a greying gentleman, who softly exhales smoke from his cigar, listening intently to the man's argument, which possibly pertains to the latest military campaign of the Imperial Russian army. A third, younger man, uninterested in the discussion, is distracted from the conversation by a group of three ladies sat to his left. Whilst most of the women in the garden wear full, long-sleeved garments in order to maintain their modesty, the three women appear to sport half-length sleeves; perhaps with their ever so slightly risqué form they are hoping to attract the attention of a suitor. Their dresses are European in style, as was typical of a Russian noblewoman's attire during this period, and the detailing suggests that they are made of sumptuous and richly embroidered silks or velvet.

Other military figures are scattered throughout the work: one in particular, in the left hand foreground, wears a top hat. Like the aforementioned gentleman, he wears an Order on his lapel. Its star shape and glinting appearance suggest it may be the Order of St. Andrew the First-Called. The first and the highest order of chivalry in Russia, the Order was established in 1698 by Peter the Great (1672-1725), and was only awarded to the most eminent civilian, or for military merit. What appears to be a red cross in the centre of his dress shirt may also be the Imperial Russian Order of St. Stanislaus, which was awarded in conjunction with the Order of St. Andrew the First-Called from 1831.

Stylistically, the present watercolour adopts the manner of primitive painting. The figures are executed with simple, homogeneous features, and seem to follow a basic schema. Contours are delineated with simplicity, and there is some flattening of form. The overall style of primitive Russian art drew on indigenous Russian art forms such as the icon, the *lubok* (a popular print), and folk art, with some forms

of Russian primitive art finding their roots in the prehistoric statuettes of the Trypillian people who inhabited the Dniestr Region between 5508 B.C. and 2750 B.C. In particular, the artist of the present work appears to combine the styles of two Primitive Russian painters of the nineteenth century: the landscape and icon painter Ivan Nikolaevich Polyakov (1805-after 1847), a serf who was initially apprenticed at an icon painting workshop, and [Pavel Kolendas](#) (b.1820), a portrait painter from the first half of the nineteenth century, who lived and worked in Pereslavl-Zalessky.