

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



English School, Nineteenth Century

The Trinity Gate, Moscow & The Kremlin from the Moskvoretsky Bridge

watercolour on paper, a pair
each 26.5 x 20 cm (10½ x 7¾ in) (2)

This pair of watercolours portrays the intriguing sight of the Moscow Kremlin as it was in the nineteenth century. When one compares the appearance of the magnificent citadel shown in the present works to [how it appears today](#), one is immediately struck by the colour of the walls. The walls in the watercolours are a bright white, gleaming in the crisp sunlight, whereas today the walls appear a rusty red. Konstantin Nossov explains this drastic change, writing, 'Originally, the brick-built Kremlin of the 15th century was red, but later it was whitewashed all over...up to the 20th century it was white, and only in the Soviet period was the white wash removed and the Kremlin coated with a special red paint to make it look like brick.'¹ Thus the present pair, in addition to being charming individual depictions, stands as a valuable and interesting historical document.

In *The Trinity Gate*, the viewer is presented with a splendid view of the Troitskaya Tower, the tallest tower of the Kremlin at eighty metres. Built at the end of the fifteenth century by the Italian architect Aloisio da Milano, it is located in the centre of the north-western wall and was, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, one of the most important access points to the complex. It also served as a prison and as a vital point in the Kremlin's defences. The gate was the entrance which led to the palace of the Tsarina, the princesses and to the Patriarch's Chambers. The present work portrays the tower as an intimidating and magnificent structure. The small foreground figures emphasise the pure architectural size and bulk of the fortifications, and the height of the Troitskaya Tower. On the left-hand side we can

see the squat bulk of the Kutafya Tower, which served to protect the bridge between it and Trinity Gate.

The Kremlin from the Moskvoretsky Bridge, probably places this pair between 1829 and 1872, the years that the original Moskvoretsky Bridge was built and then destroyed by fire. It was replaced in 1937 by the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge, built about fifty metres east of the original site. Again this is an image which emphasises the size and magnificence of the Kremlin, gleaming in the bright Moscow sunshine.

Works similar to the present pair were common in the nineteenth century and on the tenth anniversary of her reign, Queen Victoria (1819-1901) was presented with a watercolour series entitled *Views of St. Petersburg and Moscow*. E. Gilbertson's [*Ivan the Great Bell-Tower and Archangel Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin*](#), was one of this series and is comparable to the present pair, in that Gilbertson emphasises the grandeur and splendour of the Kremlin, he uses a few small foreground figures to contextualise the architecture, and he uses a soft palette of blues and whites. Gilbertson has provided an informative and charming architectural description, which can similarly be said for the present pair.

¹ Nossov, K., *Russian Fortresses 1480-1682* (Osprey Publishing, 2006), p.29.