

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



**Russian School, Nineteenth Century**

## **The Red Square, Moscow**

oil on canvas

71 x 92 cm (27.9 x 36.2 in)

In the central foreground, a vendor walks across the wide, open square, his wares carefully balanced on his head. To his right, a closed carriage scuttles along in the direction of St. Basil's Cathedral, luminescent with its distinctive and brightly coloured onion domes. Dotted about the spacious square, various groups mingle and interact; several figures converge in front of Ivan Petrovich Martos' (1754-1835) monument to Minin and Pozharsky.

Prince Dmitry Pozharsky (1578-1642) and Kuzma Minin (d.1616), a butcher by trade, were leaders of the army that repelled the Polish invasion of Moscow in 1612. The monument was erected in 1808 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of their heroic deeds in Nizhny Novgorod, and was Russia's first monumental sculpture. Inscribed with the words: 'To Citizen Minin and Prince Pozharsky, from a grateful Russia', the sculpture is decorated with bas-reliefs depicting the people of Novogorod bringing their sons to be conscripted - Minin famously forced the city's men to fight by holding their women hostage. Another relief shows the flight of the Poles from the Kremlin, fiercely pursued by Russian troops. Figure 1 provides a further nineteenth century vista of the square, with a close up, face on view of the sculpture, with Joseph Bové's (1784-1834) newly built covered market in the background.

*The Red Square, Moscow* shows the sculpture's original position, in the middle of the square, with the figure of Minin pointing towards the Kremlin. The Soviets moved it much closer to St. Basil's Cathedral, its present location, in 1936 because it was obstructing their military parades. To the right, the spire of Spasskaya (Saviour's) Tower soars heavenwards, and marks the principal entrance to the Kremlin.

Built in 1491 by the Italian architect Pietro Antonio Solario (c.1445-1493), the name of the tower originated in 1658, after an icon of the Saviour was placed at the gates. The gates were reputed to have mysterious powers, and when Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) rode through them in 1812, it is said that his horse shied, and Napoleon's hat fell off.

The Red Square was the hub of market activity in Moscow, the location of various festivals and ceremonies, and the site of public executions of political dissidents under Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584)

and Peter the Great (1672-1725). In 1804 the square was paved with cobblestones, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, further, considerable changes were made to the square, including the building of the Historical Museum (1874-1883), and the expansion of the Upper and Middle Trading Rows (1888-1893 and 1889-1891, respectively).