

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



Russian School, Nineteenth Century

La Bourse, St. Petersburg

signed with initials, inscribed and dated 'La Bourse. Petersburg/W.M.[?] June 3rd 1823' (lower left)
pencil and watercolour
19.1 x 29.3 cm (7½ x 11½ in)

A cavalry officer parades down the Dvortsovaya Embankment, whilst two other soldiers and two civilians stand by the embankment wall. Behind them the River Neva is almost completely calm, the reflections in its surface spoiled by a few gentle ripples, and the water is animated by a number of boats of various sizes. In the background is the spit of Vasilevsky Island, on which sits the Old St. Petersburg Stock Exchange (*La Bourse*), with its famous pair of rostral columns.

The Old Stock Exchange is one of the finest and most important example of neo-Classical architecture in St. Petersburg, a city famous for this style of building. It was built between 1805 and 1810 by the French architect Jean François Thomas de Thomon (1760-1813), inspired by the Greek Temple of Hera at Paestum. This imposing colonnaded building is flanked by the pair of terracotta coloured rostral columns which are decorated with allegories of the major rivers of Russia. The whole complex was a key part of the massive imperial building program that took place in Russia in the early nineteenth century and which saw the country's major cities take on an increasingly Classical appearance. As Dmitrii Olegovich Shvidkovskii says 'Through the first half of the nineteenth century it was Neoclassicism that gave buildings and urban plans forms expressive of state power...Never since the days of Ancient Rome had a single architectural style been so systematically used to express the idea of an established imperial order'.¹

The present work is comparable to a number of urban landscapes of the period, including [Benjamin Patersson's](#) print *The Strelka of Vasilyevsky Island, as seen from the Dvortsovaya Embankment* (Private Collection). In both works the foreground is made up of a small genre scene, showing a variety of figures from St. Petersburg life. The viewers gaze is then drawn across the water to the eye-catching building in the background. The Stock Exchange was often depicted at this time, due to its architectural importance and relatively new status on the St. Petersburg skyline, but in these two works it acts as an impressive and engaging background to the foreground figures. This blend of landscape and genre scene was extremely common in Russian graphic art in the first half of the nineteenth century. Artists often chose to depict this same view because the spit of Vasilevsky Island provides such a stunning backdrop. As Yevgenia Petrova says, in Russian art of this period 'genre scenes and landscapes were

closely linked and even intertwined' and the present work is an fine example of this artistic trend.²

¹ Shvidkovskii, D. O., *Russian Architecture and the West* (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 291.

² Petrova, Y., *Drawings and Watercolours in Russian Culture: The First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat. (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, 2005), p. 152.

Provenance:

The Estate of Peter Lerwill.