

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



Russian School, Nineteenth Century

View of Reval

brown wash on paper
11 x 16.5 cm (4³/₈ x 6¹/₂ in)

The remnants of a dilapidated church in the left-hand foreground of this work immediately catch the viewer's eye and provide a strong backdrop to this delicate work. Against this, the watercolour opens up to the right to reveal the wide expanse of the Gulf of Finland, creating a well-balanced and thought-out composition. The darkened watercolour applied to the church and surrounding ground stands in contrast to the delicately applied, bright wash used to paint the city of Reval. Glimmering in the distance, Reval is highlighted as a symbol of continuing history and growth, the numerous craft on the serene water testifying to the city's importance as a trade port.

Reval was the German and Danish name for the city of Tallinn, Reval being the Russian derivation, and originated from the thirteenth century Estonian name for the county of Rāvala. It is believed that the name Tallinn is derived from the word *Taani-linn(a)* meaning Danish-castle/town, after the Danes built the castle in place of the Estonian stronghold at Lindanisse. Dominating structures, such as Tall Hermann tower, can be distinguished from the skyline of turrets in this watercolour. Built in the south-western corner of the Toompea Fortress at the end of the fourteenth century, the tower's name derives from the tales of the medieval hero Hermann, and is usually reserved for the most powerful turrets in a fortress.

As an important port for trade between Russia and Scandinavia, Tallinn was a strategic target for the Kingdom of Denmark, and in 1219 Valdemar II of Denmark (1170-1241) landed in the Estonian town of Lindanisse and defeated the Estonians. The Danes sold Tallinn to the Teutonic Knights in 1346 and it thrived as the centre of trade between western and northern Europe and Russia. In 1561 Tallinn became a dominion of Sweden. In 1710, during the Great Northern War, the Swedish troops based there surrendered to Imperial Russia, but retained local self-governmental institutions, and cultural and economic autonomy within Imperial Russia under the Duchy of Estonia. The Independence Manifesto, proclaimed in Tallinn on 24th February 1918, was followed by Imperial German occupation and a war of independence with Russia, ending on 2nd February 1920 with the negotiation of the Tartu Peace

Treaty, wherein Russia acknowledged the independence of the Estonian Republic. However, after World War II, Tallinn was occupied by the Soviets, then by the Nazis, and again by the Soviets. It was not until 1991 that the city became the capital of a *de facto* independent country.