SPHINX FINE ART



Alexander Osipovich Orlovsky (Warsaw 1777 - St. Petersburg 1832)

The Hay Market, St. Petersburg, 1820

oil on board
42 x 54 cm (16½ x 21¼ in)

This lively genre painting depicts the Hay Market at St. Petersburg or 'Sennaya Ploshchad', 'seno' being the Russian word for hay. The market place dates back to 1737 and was considered to be the 'belly' of St. Petersburg. It was the trading hub for peasants, farmers and merchants exchanging and selling firewood, cattle, crops and hay. The baker on the right is about to set up a trestle-table and uncover his freshly baked loaves, while the butcher has a sledge of slaughtered pigs, one of which is being pulled apart by an eager customer. Horses, peoples' legs, sledge-tracks and animals crowd the foreground, and the scene is equally full as your eye wanders upward through the dense mass of faces and figures, it is only the militaristic horseman with his plumed fur hat and lance that cuts through the icy middle-distance horizon.

During this time, Alexander Osipovich Orlovsky frequently sketched the streets of St. Petersburg, many of his drawings being strong in social commentary such as *Peasant on a Wagon* (1812), *Train of Peasant Carts* (1810), or *Destitute Peasants by a Carriage* (1815) quite sometime ahead of the French Realists. In some ways, similarities can, instead, be drawn with the English painter and printmaker William Hogarth, who often made a social critique within his work. Equally the energy of the market and its variety of characters, their interplay within the setting and the way the viewer is immersed into the scene as if taking part are also reminiscent of the work of Pieter Brueghel the Elder and works such as *The Wedding Feast*, (c.1567-68). Like Hogarth's pictures Orlovsky's were often engraved, and *The Hay Market, St. Petersburg, 1820* is a popular engraving.

At the time this work was painted, the Imperial capital of St. Petersburg was under the rule of Tsar Alexander I. Alexander's reign marked the heyday of Russian architecture with its linear classical designs. In this period the Admiralty was remodelled, the Stock Exchange built on Vasilevsky Island and work on St. Issac's Cathedral was begun. Alexander I enacted a series of reforms creating a new bureaucratical government structure and St. Petersburg became a very regimented city with heavy policing. In this painting Orlovsky, once again, makes a nod to the social climate of his time, as behind

bustling characters and jovial faces we see one of Alexander's horse-backed guards maintaining a hawk's eye on proceedings.

The area surrounding the Hay Market later became home to Dostoevsky. Renowned for unsavoury characters, the area provided him with ample inspiration for the setting and characters of Crime and Punishment in 1866. Dostoevsky himself spent a couple of days in prison for violating censorship rules in the journal *Grazhdanin*, in a building which is now called the Senior Officers' Barracks and which is situated just off the main square. The majestic Church of the Assumption (built between 1753 and 1765) that once dominated the square's skyline and which later became a focal point for anti-Soviet demonstrations, it was demolished in 1961 and replaced by a new metro station.

Orlovsky was a talented battle scene painter, portrait painter and caricaturist whose range of medium included watercolours, oils, engravings and pastels. Born in Warsaw in 1777 his father ran an inn in the small provincial town of Sedlitz. It was here that his talent was discovered by Princess Isabella Czartoryski, who sent him to the Warsaw Art School in 1793 where he trained under J.P. Norblin de la Gourdaine. He also studied under the Polish court painter Marcello Bacciarelli, the engraver Bartolomeo Follin and the Polish miniaturist Wincenty Fryderyck Lesseur (1745-1813). Orlovsky travelled extensively and was a volunteer in the partisan group led by Thadeusz Kosciuszko in the Polish liberation movement and uprising of 1794. His early work shows an interest in the national liberation movement, and following the defeat of the movement he worked with a group of travelling actors for a brief period, though few works from this period survive. In 1799 Orlovsky served Prince Józef Poniatowski (1763-1813) as a caricaturist and he subsequently travelled around Lithuania.

He moved to Russia in 1802 where he settled in St. Petersburg and was a court artist for the Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich, for whom he executed drawings of uniforms and military parades. During his period in St. Petersburg he created numerous genre scenes and also society portraits. Most of his paintings from this time, however, were scenes of army life and battles, as well as romantic subjects featuring brigands and shipwrecks. In 1809 he received the title of Academician of Battle Painting for his picture *Cossack Bivouac*. During the war of 1812 against Napoleon, Orlovsky produced several drawings of leading military figures. In 1816 he became one of the first artists to produce lithographs in Russia. He produced forty lithographs for Gaspar Drouville's book Puteshestviye v. Persiyn (1819), and in 1826 two large volumes of Russian scenes; *Russkiye al'bomy* and *Kollektsiya Orlovskogo* (Orlovsky's Collection). After 1819 he worked as a graphic artist for the Topographic Department of the Army Headquarters.

Literature:

Esfir Atsarkina, *Aleksandr Osipovich Orlovsky, 1777-1832,* Moscow, 1970. See p.164 for a lithograph based on this work.

Artist description:

Orlovsky was a Russian painter, draughtsman and printmaker of Polish birth. He trained at the Warsaw studio of Jan Piotr Norblin de la Gourdaine and received support from Princess Isabella Czartoryska. He also studied under the Polish court painter Marcello Bacciarelli, the engraver Bartolomeo Follin and the Polish miniaturist Wincenty Fryderyck Lesseur (1745–1813). Until the turn of the century, Orlovsky's career was marked by alternating periods of concentrated work and of travel abroad, often as a soldier or entertainer. Few works from this period survive. Orlovsky's early paintings were timid and imitative; his drawings, however, are assured, elegant and amusing, suggesting the influence of Norblin's combination of realism and imagination. From Norblin he also learnt a free treatment of the subject and a concern with artistic expression.

In 1799 Orlovsky served Prince Józef Poniatowski (1763–1813) as a caricaturist, and he subsequently travelled in Lithuania. In 1801 he produced a series of engravings showing the release of Tadeusz Kosciuszko. These drew Orlovsky to the attention of Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825), and in 1802 he went to St Petersburg.

In Russia Orlovsky was invited by Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich (1779–1831) to execute drawings

of uniforms and military parades (engravings of these were published in 1808). This work prompted many other commissions. In St Petersburg he came to know members of the liberal aristocratic intelligentsia, frequented the celebrated circle of the historian Aleksey Nikolayevich Olenin (1763–1843) and lived for a time at Uspenskoye, the estate of the patron of the arts Aleksey Romanovich Tomilov. Orlovsky frequently sketched the streets of St Petersburg, many of his drawings being strong in social commentary. Most of his paintings from this time, however, were scenes of battle and army life, as well as Romantic subjects featuring brigands and shipwrecks.

In 1809 Orlovsky was awarded the title of Academician of Battle Painting of the St Petersburg Academy of Art for his picture *Cossack Bivouac*. He continued to produce striking drawings, most notably a series of interesting portraits, outstanding among which is a *Self-portrait* (c. 1809). Executed with bold distinctive strokes in sanguine and charcoal, the drawing's appeal lies in its integrity and expressiveness. It sets the artist in opposition to an external environment that he will not accept, making a bold assertion of individuality.

During the war of 1812 against Napoleon, Orlovsky produced some remarkable drawings of leading military figures such as *Denis Davydov*. In these bravura gives way to observation and a sense of warmth of character. Orlovsky continued to treat themes taken from everyday life. His drawings of beggars, prisoners and the rural and urban poor, such as *Peasant on a Wagon* (1812), *Train of Peasant Carts* (1810) or *Destitute Peasants by a Carriage* (1815), are rare subjects in the art of the early 19th century.

Orlovsky was also one of the first Russian artists to take up lithography. He executed 40 lithographs for Gaspar Drouville's book *Voyage en Perse, pendant les annees 1812 et 1813* (1819), and in 1826 he produced two large volumes of Russian scenes, *Russkiye al'bomy* (Russian albums; St Petersburg), and also the volume *Kollektsiya Orlovskogo* (Orlovsky's collection; St Petersburg). He also retained, to the end of his life, his high reputation as an inventive but gentle caricaturist. The Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin greatly admired Orlovsky's drawings, both for their skill and for the national character of their subjects. In 1819 Orlovsky was appointed draughtsman in the Topographical Department of the General Staff, and in this capacity he travelled widely through Russia, sketching scenes and individuals found to be representative of the common people.

Collections

Orlovsky is represented in the following collections: State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; Tret'yakov Gallery, Moscow; History Museum, Moscow, amongst others.