SPHINX FINE ART



Pyotr Petrovich Sokolov (St. Petersburg 1821 - St. Petersburg 1899)

Tales of the War

signed in Cyrillic and dated '1859' (lower right)
watercolour on paper
16 x 21 cm (6¼ x 8½ in)

Executed with great charm, Pyotr Petrovich Sokolov's *Tales of the War* provides us with an affectionate insight into the reception given to two returning war heroes. Set within an idyllic rural surrounding, the two soldiers sit on a bench as a group of children admiringly gather round their returned village heroes to hear their tales from the war. One of the soldiers leans back, pipe in hand, whilst the other reaches out and affectionately touches the chin of a little boy. Each of the valiant men displays a medal on their frockcoat. Their caps are decorated with a scarlet red band, the colour of which is mirrored by their red *epaulettes,* which are in turn emblazoned with brass buttons.

It is possible that the soldiers are survivors of the Crimean War (1853-1856), which was fought between the Russian Empire and an alliance formed of the British and Ottoman Empires, France and the Kingdom of Sardinia over territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire. Also known in Russia as the Oriental War, the conflict saw warring take place principally on the Crimean Peninsula, but also in western Turkey, the Baltic Sea, the Pacific Ocean and the White Sea, and resulted in the heavy loss of around 450,000 men for the Imperial Russian Army.

In order to fill the army's ranks, draft notices specifying the required number of recruits were sent out to village communes, such as the one depicted here, and the Elders (*Starosta*) would decide who would be called up, with first sons and only sons usually declared exempt.

Sokolov was from a family of Russian artists and studied under his father Pyotr Fyodorovich Sokolov (1791-1848), the famous watercolour portraitist. His father studied at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg from 1800 to 1810 and continued to live there until 1846, when he moved to Moscow. He popularised the painting of portraits in pure watercolour, a technique that supplanted the miniature portrait during the period from 1820 to 1850.

Sokolov specialised in genre scenes, many depicting hunting subjects, portraits, and war, and his

subtle lyricism, the delicacy of his use of colour, the lightness and vivacity of his style of painting and the sincerity of his interpretation of character, all contributed to the widespread popularity of his work. He travelled widely in Russia and painted a number of acutely observed genre scenes depicting the everyday life of peasants and landowners, such as *The Journey Home.* He was also a leading book illustrator, and his illustrations for the novel *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) are especially renowned. These were executed in watercolour in the late 1880s and 1890s and were produced in two cycles, the first in colour, and the second in black and white. His interpretation of the text was intensely dramatic, verging on the grotesque, but it was also extraordinarily detailed in its observation of everyday life. From 1877 to 1878 he was an official war correspondent during the Turko-Russian war, and was represented at the Paris International Exhibition in 1889, where he was awarded a gold medal.

Artist description:

Pyotr was from a family of Russian artists. His father Pyotr Fyodorovich Sokolov (Moscow 1791 - 1848 Stary Merchik, now in Kharkiv region, Ukraine), studied at the Academy of Arts in St Petersburg from 1800 to 1810 and continued to live there until 1846, when he moved to Moscow. He was the first Russian master to paint portraits only in pure watercolours, a technique that supplanted the miniature portrait during the period 1820–50. Sokolov's subtle lyricism, the delicacy of his use of colour, the lightness and vivacity of his style of painting and the sincerity of his interpretation of character all contributed to the widespread popularity of his portraits. Among Sokolov's best works are portraits of Nikita Murav'yov (1824), a leading member of the Decembrist conspiracy of 1825, General Nikolay Rayevsky (1826), hero of the War of 1812 against the French, and Aleksandr Pushkin (1836; all Pushkin, A. S. Pushkin Museum).

Sokolov travelled widely in Russia and painted a number of sharply observed genre scenes depicting the everyday life of peasants and landowners. He was also a leading book illustrator, and his illustrations for the novel *Dead Souls* by Nikolay Gogol are especially renowned. These were executed in watercolour in the late 1880s and the 1890s and were produced in two cycles, the first in colour and the second in black and white. His interpretation of the text was intensely dramatic, verging on the grotesque, but it was also extraordinarily detailed in its observation of everyday life.