SPHINX FINE ART



Ivan Petrovich Prianishnikov (Russian, 1841 - 1909)

Soldiers Returning Home

signed in Cyrillic (lower left) and 'IPrianishnikov' (lower right)
watercolour over pencil heightened with white on paper
15.5 x 27 cm (6¼ x 10½ in)

In *Soldiers Returning Home,* Ivan Petrovich Prianishnikov presents the viewer with an uplifting scene of the joyful return of troops. The two central figures on the left-hand side stride briskly on. At the head of the convoy a dog, with an energetic spring in his step and an alert tail, appears to be leading the way home. The extensive trail of wagons fades out to a grey smudge on the left of the horizon, implying an almost infinite line of carts. Each of the wagons is stacked high, and on the peak of the mounds, one or two figures are perched. On the first, a bearded man sits wide-legged on the cloth-covered stashes, and urges his weary horses onwards. A Guard Hussar, his red dress-coat unbuttoned, sits on the side of the wagon soaking up the familiar sights of a longed-for homeland.

Prianishnikov's known *oeuvre* centres on subjects of a military nature. The artist was just fifteen years old when Russia was defeated in the Crimean War (1853-1856). Russia's subsequent military operations included a series of successful campaigns to conquer the khanates of Central Asia, the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), and most importantly, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, which saw huge defeats for the Imperial army. From the uniforms of the soldiers it is possible that this scene relates to the Russo-Japanese war and that the troops are returning from Manchuria.

The Russo-Japanese War originated from the struggle between Russia and Japan over their respective imperial ambitions in Korea and Manchuria. In 1896, Russia had secured an alliance with China against Japan and, consequently, had won rights to extend the Trans-Siberian Railroad across Chinese-held Manchuria to the Russian seaport of Vladivostok, thus gaining control of an important strip of Manchurian territory. Subsequently, in 1898, China granted Russia a lease for the strategically placed Port Arthur, located at the tip of the Liaotung Peninsula, in southern Manchuria, having forced Japan to relinquish such a right after their victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895.

In 1903, after Russia reneged on an agreement to withdraw its troops from Manchuria, Japan launched a surprise attack on the naval squadron at Port Arthur on 8th February 1904. The Japanese then quickly took control of Korea and by May had landed another Japanese army on the Liaotung Peninsula, severing the base at Port Arthur from the main body of Russian forces in Manchuria. The Japanese

moved northwards overcoming the Russians in a series of battles. The Japanese had also settled down to a long siege of Port Arthur after several costly general assaults on it had failed, and on 2nd January 1905, Port Arthur's Russian commander surrendered the port to the Japanese.

The final land battle was fought at Mukden in late February and on into early March 1905, between Russian forces, totalling 330,000 men, and Japanese troops totalling 270,000. After the final long battle at Mukden, which saw many casualties on both sides, the Russians withdrew their forces northward. A decisive naval victory at Tsushima by Japan saw the Russian government agreeing to a peace treaty and Russia evacuating southern Manchuria. Such a defeat however, can not detract from the soldiers' joy of returning home, expressed by Prianishnikov in this light, colourful watercolour.

Artist description:

Although biographical details for Prianishnikov are relatively scarce, it is known that he spent much of his life in the U.S.A. and France, though he exhibited frequently in Russia throughout the 1880s. His scenes of military life were often reproduced in journals throughout Europe, such as *Niva,* a 'journal of literature, politics, and public life' which was notable for the quality of its illustrations, and to which many of the leading luminaries of Russian art also contributed.