SPHINX FINE ART



Apollinary Mikhailovich Vasnetsov (Riabovo, Viatka 1856 - Moscow 1933)

Hunters on Horseback in a Pine Forest

signed in Cyrillic (lower left)
pencil and watercolour on paper
14 x 20.7 cm (5½ x 8⅛ in)

Apollinary Mikhailovich Vasnetsov captures the quiet stealth of two hunters as they move through the long grass of a forest. The two men, both of whom are on horseback, guide their steeds away from the viewer and through an archway created by two fallen pine trees. The men are dwarfed by these thin and lofty trees, which cover the hillsides as far as the eye can see. The stillness and calm of the image is emphasised by the cool, overcast conditions in this remote and isolated corner of rural Russia.

Vasnetsov's art frequently depicts similar scenes of dense forest, *Noon* being one fine example. In a manner comparable to *Hunters on Horseback in a Pine Forest,* the figures are dwarfed by surrounding trees looming above them. Soft sunlight penetrates the overhead canopy, falling in shafts on the forest floor. Both works focus on the understated beauty of the forest; nature feels tranquil and untouched. They display the same masterful skill, evident in the free, broad brushstrokes and the vivid freshness of the colouring, and the same peaceful mood which is characteristic of so many of Vasnetsov's landscapes.

Similarly *Northern Territory,* which shows a river landscape at dusk, has an overriding sense of quiet. *Northern Territory* takes a more panoramic view of the landscape, depicting pine trees stretching away into the distance. This focus on the vastness of the Russian countryside is something explored to a lesser extent in the mountainous background of *Hunters on Horseback in a Pine Forest.* The present work, as a document and celebration of the Russian landscape, is typical of Vasnetsov's *oeuvre.*

Vasnetsov received his artistic training from his brother, Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov, one of the

leading Russian artists of his generation, who played an influential role in the evolution of Russian art away from nineteenth-century Realism. However, Vasnetsov's mature work seems more influenced by the work of Vasily Dmitrievich Polenov (1844-1927). Polenov's landscapes have the same freshness of colour, skilful composition and sense of tranquillity that characterises Vasnetsov's work.

Together with his brother, Vasnetsov was a member of the Abramtsevo Colony, a centre for the Slavophile movement amongst the artistic community. Here he met and was influenced by some of the most esteemed of his contemporaries. The forested terrain around Abramtsevo can be seen in the present work. In addition to his epic depictions of the Russian countryside, Vasnetsov developed a type of historical landscape, his love of history and archaeology leading him to paint imagined depictions of medieval Moscow. He shared in common with many of his contemporaries, including Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939) and Valentin Serov (1865-1911), an interest in the Russian North. The scale of the mountainous pine forests provided endless subject matter as he portrayed the power and beauty of an untouched Russian landscape.

Artist description:

Vasnetsov was a Russian painter and graphic artist whose elder brother was the famous Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov.

Vasnetsov did not receive a formal artistic education. He studied under his older brother. From 1883 they lived and worked in Abramtsevo where he fell under the influence of Vasily Polenov (1844-1927).

In 1898-1899 Vasnetsov travelled across Europe. In addition to epic landscapes of Russian nature, Vasnetsov created his own genre of historical landscape reconstruction on the basis of historical and archaeological data. His paintings present a visual picture of medieval Moscow.

Vasnetsov exhibited with the Wanderers from 1889 and became a member in 1888. His illustrations to Lermontov (1814-1841) were published in Moscow in 1891. In the 1880s and 1890s he visited Ukraine, Crimea, Caucasus and Urals, as well as France, Germany and Italy.

He was made an Academician in 1900 and exhibited in Paris the same year. He exhibited with the World of Art 1900-1901. He taught as head of the landscape studio at the Moscow College between 1901 and 1919, where his pupils included Dimitri Mitrokhin (1883-1973). He was one of the founder member of the Union of Russian Artists in 1903. He exhibited in Munich in 1913 and in Lyon in 1914. After the Revolution Vasnetsov was President of the Commission for the Study of Old Moscow from 1918. In the beginning of 1920 the Committee of Archeology invited Apollinary Mikhailovich Vasnetsov and some other painters, among them was Vikentii Trofimov (1878-1956), to draw old places of Voronezh. He was represented at the First Russian Art Exhibition in Berlin in 1922. He exhibited in New York, Boston and Baltimore in 1924 and in Venice in 1929. He died in Moscow.

Vasnetsov is represented in the following collections: the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; the Odessa Art Museum; the Kirov Art Museum; the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum, Moscow; amongst others.