

ILYA YEFIMOVICH REPIN

(Chuguyev, Ukraine 1844 - Kuokkala 1930)

Studies for Figures on the Nevsky Prospect in St. Petersburg

signed in Cyrillic (lower center);
authenticated in Russian 'The drawing of Professor I.E. Repin "Nevskii Prospekt" Spb 1891
I verify, his daughter Vera I.L. Repina Kuokkala Penati 1937.' (on reverse)
charcoal on paper
29.7 x 40.5 cm (11¼ by 16 in)

Exhibited: Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, *Repin*, (1999), no. 202, ill. p. 163.

NEVSKY PROSPECT IS THE MAIN THOROUGHFARE of St. Petersburg. It is named after Saint Alexander Nevsky, the thirteenth century Grand Prince of Novgorod. Planned by Peter the Great (1672-1725), the avenue runs from the Admiralty to the Moscow Railway Station and on to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. Many of the stunning and monumental buildings that lined the street during Ilya Yefimovich Repin's time still exist today, such as the Rastrelliesque Stroganov Palace (1752-54), the huge neo-Classical Kazan Cathedral (1801-11), the monument to Catherine the Great (1873), the enormous eighteenth century shopping mall, Gostiny Dvor, the Russian National Library (1795) and the Anichkov Bridge (1841-42). Indeed, it is a street that has caught the imagination of artists, photographers and writers alike; the hectic life of the avenue was described by Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) in his story *The Nevsky Prospect*, published in 1835.

This work is a preparatory sketch for the pencil drawing, *Nevsky Prospect, At Dominiks Place* (fig. 1). Many parallels can be drawn not only between the stylistic approach of Repin's drawing and the Impressionists but also



Ilya Yefimovich Repin, *Nevsky Prospect, At Dominiks Place*, 1887, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg (Figure 1)

between their chosen subject matter. Just as the Impressionists depicted everyday bourgeois Parisian life on the Grands Boulevards, so Repin chose to portray the new class of elite Russian bourgeoisie. By the time Alexander III (1845-1894) came to power in 1881, St. Petersburg was already in a state of transition; it was fast becoming a capitalist city, with an increasing number of factories being built. Nevsky Prospect was changing rapidly, filling with banks and offices and, during the 1890s, witnessing the construction of new and technically advanced multi-storey buildings.

Individual elements from the preparatory sketch, such as the horse's head and the loaded cart, can be found in the final work. The present studies provide a good insight as to how Repin worked; how he would create individual characters, elements, objects and layer them to create the finished drawing. Variations on the characters were also used to illustrate an article 'Nevsky Prospekt' in *Scribners Magazine*, in 1892.¹



Ilya Yefimovich Repin, *Studies for Figures on the Nevsky Prospect* (Detail)

¹ Hapgood, I.E., 'Nevsky Prospekt' in *Scribners Magazine* (Vol. 12, Issue 3, September 1892), pp. 301-323.

