

RUSSIAN SCHOOL, NINETEENTH CENTURY

*Three Views of St. Petersburg: Gatchina Palace;
The Stock Exchange; Senate Square with the Neva beyond*

gouache on paper

two 28.8 x 42.2 cm (11 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ in); one 24.1 x 36.8 cm (9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in) (3)

SENATE SQUARE, GATCHINA PALACE AND THE STOCK Exchange were key locations of nineteenth-century life in St. Petersburg. They are representative of three aspects of life; the Gatchina Palace was the seat of the Imperial family since 1796, the Stock Exchange was where the financial prosperity of Russia was being crafted and Senate Square was the seat of politics after the Senate moved from the Twelve Colleges, in 1763.

The view of Senate Square looks from the south-west corner of the square and so includes the River Neva, the city's vital artery. This orientation meant the exclusion of St. Isaac's cathedral, which was the largest in the city and in the whole of Russia when it was built. Instead the view is of the Neva and the Admiralty, and this focus is further reinforced by the inclusion of the St. Andrew's flag, which since 1712 had been used as a naval ensign. Senate Square was surrounded by St. Isaac's Cathedral, the Russian Admiralty and the Senate and Synod buildings. It was in many ways a rival to the Red Square, Moscow, as the centre of Russia and it can be easily linked with the Capitol, Rome.

The view of the Stock Exchange includes many boats and ships, which was important to reinforce the naval role of St. Petersburg. It also reminds the viewer of the importance of maritime activities to the economy, the hub of which was housed behind them. The Stock Exchange was built between 1805 and 1810 by Jean-François Thomas de Thomon (1760-1813), who clearly drew influence from the Greek temple of Hera at Paestum.

The artist has chosen to depict a view of Gatchina Palace which includes one of the tributaries of the Neva. The Gatchina Palace became the official residence of the Imperial family in 1796. It was passed through a number of hands before Catherine the Great (1729-1796) gave the estate to Count Orlov (1734-1783) who built a castle with 600 rooms and laid out an extensive English landscape park over seven square kilometres, with an adjacent zoo and a horse farm. The

Empress took such a great liking to the Gatchina Palace and park that upon Orlov's death in 1783 she bought it from his heirs and presented it to her son, the future Emperor Paul I (1754-1801). Paul I owned Gatchina for eighteen years and invested many resources in it, as well as using his experience from his travels around Europe to make Gatchina an exemplary residence. During the 1790s, Paul expanded and rebuilt much of the palace, and renovated the palatial interiors in the sumptuous neo-Classical style. Paul graced the park with numerous additions of bridges, gates, and pavilions, such as 'The Isle of Love', 'The Private Garden', 'The Holland Garden' and 'The Labyrinth'. In 1796, after the death of his mother, Paul became Emperor and granted Gatchina the status of Imperial City - official residence of the Russian Emperors.



Photograph of the side of the Gatchina Palace (Figure 1)



NEAPOLITAN SCHOOL, NINETEENTH CENTURY

A View of the Neva River, St. Petersburg

gouache on paper
22 x 35.5 cm (8½ x 14 in)

IN THIS MAJESTIC WORK, A GRAND PANORAMA OF THE Neva River and its impressive embankments is portrayed. The left-hand river bank is known as *Angliyskaya Naberezhnaya* or ‘English Embankment’, where the English embassy was located and which once served as the main port of call for English traders. Behind the buildings in the distance, the distinctive domes of Russian church architecture can be seen. To their right, the famous spire of the Admiralty, a dockyard where some of the first ships of Russia’s Baltic Fleet were built, stretches into the sky.

Just visible at the right-hand edge of the painting is the corner of the Peter and Paul Fortress, founded in 1703. It is the first and oldest landmark of St. Petersburg and marks the city’s birth. Ultimately it never saw any fighting but part of it was converted to serve as a high security political prison, housing famous inmates such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), Maxim Gorky (1868-1939), Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) and Lenin’s older brother, Alexander Ulyanov (1866-1887). Behind it on the horizon stands the Alexander Column, the focal point of Palace Square. It is a monument to Russia’s military victory in the war against Napoleon’s France and named after Tsar Alexander I (1777-1825), who ruled Russia between 1801 and 1825, during the Napoleonic Wars.

The Neva River, its banks lined with architectural splendours such as the Winter Palace, carves a graceful pattern through the heart of the city. As



Neapolitan School, Nineteenth Century, *A View of the Neva River, St. Petersburg* (Detail)



A view of the English Embankment today (Figure 1)

such, it has held a strong aesthetic allure for artists eager to depict its beauty. The river occupies a fundamental place within the geographical and cultural heritage of St. Petersburg. From the foundation of the city the river was intended to serve as the main ‘street’ of St. Petersburg, transporting people and goods, just as Peter the Great (1672-1725) intended when he founded his ‘Venice of the North’. This vision is clearly indicated in the present work by the multitude of boats seen ferrying people across the river.

The River Neva extends 2,600 feet across where it flows past the Peter and Paul Fortress. The diagonal line of the embankment leads the viewer’s eye into the centre of the canvas where the diminishing river and buildings create the illusion of space and depth.

With the tall ships that sit elegantly upon the tranquil river and the impressive columned buildings, *A View of the Neva River* is a picture of order and serenity. A composition dominated by soft, calm shades of blue and white, the well-proportioned lines and controlled, meticulous brushwork evident in the rigging of the ships or buildings of the English Embankment, imbue the painting with an air of refined elegance. Such tones and techniques and a considered, subtle rendering of light define the work of the Neapolitan School at this time. The early nineteenth century vogue for gouache on paper representations of renowned places from Naples to St. Petersburg was ably met by artists like the present one.