Ilya Repin

(1844-1930)



Repka Nick form 11 “B”

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Ilya Efimovich Repin was born in 1844 in a small Ukrainian town of Tchuguev

in the family of a military settler. As a boy he was trained as an icon

painter. At the age of 19 he entered the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts.

His arrival to the capital coincided with an important event in artistic

life of the 60s, the so-called ‘Riot of the Fourteen’, when 14 young artists

left the Academy having refused to use mythological subjects for their

diploma works. They stood on the point that art should be close to real

life. Later Repin would be closely connected with some of them, the members

of the Society of Peredvizhniky.

For his diploma work Raising of Jairus' Daughter(1871) Repin was awarded The Major Gold Medal and received a scholarship

for studies abroad. Barge Haulers on the Volga(1870-1873) was the first considerable work painted by Repin after graduation.

It immediately won recognition.

In 1873, Repin went abroad. For some months he had been traveling in Italy

and then settled and worked in Paris up to 1876. It was in Paris that he

witnessed the first exhibition of the Impressionists, but, judging by the

works created then and by his letters home, he didn't become the ardent

follower of this new Paris school of painting, though he didn't share the

opinion of some of his country-men who saw a dangerous departure from “the

truth of life” in Impressionism.

After returning to Russia Repin settled in Moscow. He was a frequent visitor

in Abramtsevo – the country estate of Savva Mamontov,

one of the most famous Russian patrons of art. It was a very fruitful period

in his creative activity. During 10-12 years Repin created the majority

of his famous paintings. In 1877, he started to paint religious processions

(krestny khod): Krestny Khod (Religious Procession)

in Kursk Gubernia (1880-1883). The composition was based on

the dramatic effect of different attitude of the participants of the procession

to the wonder-working icon carried at the head of the procession. There

were two different versions of the picture. The second one, completed in

1883, became the most popular. At first glance, the spectator discovers

an abundance of social types and human characters in the crowd .

A series of paintings devoted to the revolution theme deserves special

attention. The artist was no doubt interested in creating the character

of a fighter for social justice. The range of social, spiritual and psychological

problems, which attracted Repin, is revealed in his works: Unexpected

Return (1884) and Refusal from

the Confession (1879-1885).

Repin is the author of many portraits, which are an essential part of his

artistic heritage. Repin never painted faces, he painted real people, managing

to show his models in their natural state, to reveal their way of communicating

with the world: Portrait of the Composer Modest

Musorgsky (1881), Portrait of

the Surgeon Nikolay Pirogov (1881), Portrait

of the Author Alexey Pisemsky (1880), Portrait

of the Poet Afanasy Fet (1882), Portrait

of the Art Critic Vladimir Stasov (1883), and Portrait

of Leo Tolstoy (1887) and many others are distinguished by

the power of the visual characteristic and the economy and sharpness of

execution.



Repin rarely painted historical paintings. The most popular in this genre

is Ivan the Terrible and his son Ivan (1895). The expressive, intense

composition and psychological insight in rendering the characters produced

an unforgettable impression on the spectators. Another popular work of

the genre is The Reply of the Zaporozhian

Cossacks to Sultan Mahmoud IV (1880-1891). The faithfully rendered

spirit of the Zaporoguus freemen, who, according to the artist, had a particularly

strong sense of “liberty, equality and fraternity” undoubtedly gives the

picture its significance. The contemporaries saw it as a symbol of the

Russian people throwing off their chains.

The last quarter of the 19th century is the best period in Repin’s work,

though his creative activity continued in the 20th century (the artist

died in 1930), he did not paint any masterpieces then. After the bolsheviks’

revolution in 1917 he lived and worked in his estate Penates in Finland.

There is a Repin museum. The museum visitors have the opportunity of gaining

a detailed knowledge of the artist's life and work.