**The making of the collection**

Although visited now by thousands of people the Museum traditionally retains the old name of the Hermitage attached to it in the 1760’s and meaning «a hermit’s dwelling», or «a solitary place». The name is due to the fact that the Hermitage was founded as a palace museum accessible only to the nearest of the near to the court.

A number of objects of which but a small part was later incorporated in the museum’s collections were acquired in different countries by Peter I. These were antique statues Marine landscapes, land a collection of Siberian ancient gold buckles. However, the foundation of the Hermitage is usually dated to the year 1764 when a collection of 225 pictures was bought by Catherine II from the Prussian merchant Gotzkowsky.

A feature characteristic of the 18th century accusations was the purchase of large groups of paintings, sometimes of complete galleries, bought en blok at the sales in Western Europe.Count Bruhl’s collection acquired in Dresden in 1769, the Gallery of Crozat, bought in Paris in 1772 and the gallery of Lord Walpole acquired in London in 1779 were the most prominent among the acquisitions made in the 18th century. Together with numerous purchases of individual pictures, they supplied the museum with most outstanding canvases of the European school ,including those by Rembraandt,Rubens,Van Dyck and other eminent artists, and made the Hermitage rank among the finest art galleries of Europe. Works , commissioned by the Russian court from European painters also enriched the Picture gallery.By 1785 the Museum numbered 2658 paintings. Prints and drawings, cameos, coins and medals were likewise represented at the Hermitage.

The acquisition of complete collections and of individual works of art was continued in the 19th century but on a more modest scale than during the previous period. Among the most notable acquisitions of the 19th century were: Mathew Malmaison Gallery of the Empress Josephine bought in 1814; the collection of the English banker Coesvelt consisting mainly of Spanish paintings, purchased in Amsterdam the same year; as well as the paintings from the Barrbarigo Palace inVenice which gave the Museum its best Titians.

As to the individual works of art, the acquisition in 1865 of Leonardo da Vince’s «Madonna Litta»fromthe Duce of Litta collection and the purchase of Raphael’s «Virgin and Child» from the Conestebite family in 1870, were important landmarks in the growth of the treasures of the Hermitage.

In 1885 the Hermitage received an important collection of objects of applied art of the 12th – 26th centuries, gathered by Basilevsky; , together with the Armoury transferred from Tsarskoe Selo, notably enriched the Museum with a new type of material

The first decade of the 20th century witnessed the acquisition of a magnificent collection including 730 canvases by the Dutch and Flemish artists, which had been in the possession of the eminent Russian scientist Semenov-Tienshansky. Another most important acquisition was Leonardo da Vinci’s «Madonna and Child» purchased in 1914 from the family of the architect L.Benois.

The Great October Revolution created highly favourable conditions for the further growth of the Museum collections and their systematic study. Since October 1917, due to the care taken by Soviet Government for the preservation of art treasures, the Museum was enriched with a great number of first-class works of art. Among these were the best pictures chosen by the Hermitage the nationalised private collections such as those formerly owned by the Yussupovs, the Shuvalovs, the Stroganovs; paintings transferred from the imperial palaces; art treasures, acquired by exchange from other museums within the country.

The policy of planned distribution of art treasures among the museums carried out by the state, enabled the Hermitage not only to fill up many gaps and deficiencies by adding to its picture gallery Italian paintings of the 13th-15th centuries, works of the Netherlandish school, and of the French school of the 19th and 20th centuries but to form a museum free from private taste , and made it possible to arrange the collections systematically. The accumulation of materials which had not been represented in the museum in the pre-Revolutionary period ,led to the formation of new departments: the department of the history of culture and art of the primitive society, of the culture and art of the peoples of the East, and that of the history of Russian culture.

He immense growth of the collections made it necessary to extend the exhibition space This is why the building of the Winter Palace was placed at the disposal of the Hermitage, the name «The State Hermitage» being now applied to the whole great museum thus formed.