



Арт
& Музеи
in Russia

2012



The current publication celebrates the creative achievement of art students – participants of the summer program “Arts and Museums in Russia,” offered by The School of Russian and Asian Studies (SRAS) and hosted by the Youth Educational Center of the State Hermitage Museum (Hermitage Youth Center) in St. Petersburg, Russia. The catalogue of the student final show that you are holding in your hands reflects every participant’s accomplishments and their fondest memories.

This group of international students – like their predecessors during eight consecutive summers past – came to St. Petersburg to partake in an academic and artistic learning experience of vast scope and immense intensity. For three weeks in June – July from morning till night with hardly a respite, they were visiting artistic sites, exploring them, listening to specialists, getting instruction from artists, but, first and foremost, they were looking, seeing, absorbing and producing art of their own.

It was a real immersion into the element of art – into its history, its living artistic process and into the participant’s personal creativity. There is little doubt that all members of this group will remember those twenty days as some of the most joyful and fulfilling in their lives. Can you feel their jubilant vibe? It is there!

Dr. Elena Varshavskaya, curator of the program “Art and Museums in Russia”



“ I would be hard pressed to think of a city more saturated with cultural and historical significance than St. Petersburg. Home to the Hermitage, the Russian Museum, a plethora of galleries, foundations, and artist studios, every day spent in St. Petersburg presented an incredible opportunity for immersion in a cultural and artistic scene of extraordinary variety. Walking through St. Petersburg is literally treading upon history, and gazing over the Neva along the Palace Embankment, walking through Sennaya Ploshad, and visiting the homes of artists and writers of world-renowned significance allowed us to become introduced to Russia’s cultural and artistic legacy at its epicenter. Furthermore, St. Petersburg is not only a city of history, but a vibrant community where daring contemporary artists, writers, and performers find a curious and receptive audience, with many foundations, collectives, and art centers (like the Hermitage Youth Center) providing a space for education and experimentation; a place where eager participants are able to express themselves and actively partake in the formation of the culture of contemporary art.

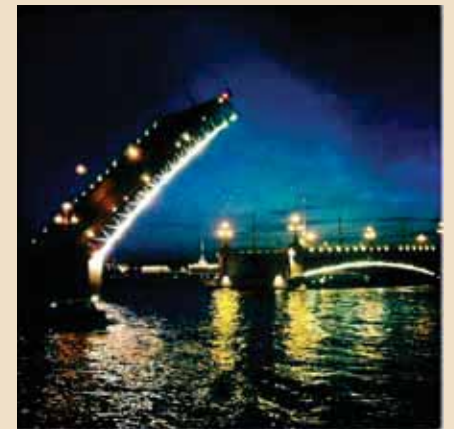
Many members of our small group had previously studied Russian literature, language, and culture, and had long dreamed of one day visiting the very locale where the objects of our studies had tread; writing and painting and living out the trajectory of their lives long before we arrived. Others among us were world travelers, coming from practical disciplines not exclusively concerned with Russian studies, but fields like art, architecture, and design that thrive on the ideas of a global connective tissue between all cultures. Coming from an inherently interdisciplinary perspective, we worked intensely with several museum collections and shared the unique opportunity to see and interact with the objects that have been the center of our academic pursuits, while simultaneously experiencing our studies from a distinctly Russian perspective.

Viewing a painting on the glossy textbook page is no substitute for the experience of absorbing the sheer materiality and presence of the real thing. As such, the firsthand experience of the subject is an absolute necessity for the research and study of art history. Indeed, we not only studied art history, but were also intensely engaged in studio art, working with our teacher Sergey Lebedev in intense three-hour sessions with objects from the Hermitage collections and “au plein air” sessions set among St. Petersburg’s wealth of unique and elegant architecture. During these hours, we became intimately familiar the processes and problems of artistic practice in a variety of mediums, while simultaneously producing works for our final show, “Beneath the Hermitage Vaults.”

However, we would soon learn that we were not alone in our artistic pursuits, as we had the opportunity to visit the studio of Yuri Shtapakov, and to work alongside him making monograph prints, while becoming introduced to his works and artistic philosophy. Furthermore, we were able to see the work of several living artists when we visited Erarta, St. Petersburg’s newest contemporary art museum and gallery complex, affording us a glimpse into St. Petersburg’s lively contemporary art scene.

Additionally, every member of our group took lessons in Russian language, which gave us the opportunity to learn about the culture we were being immersed in. Indeed, we were able to partake in all aspects of Russian life during our stay, from field trips to the small towns of Pushkin and Novgorod, to enjoying the hospitality of our host Ekaterina when she invited us to visit her family’s dacha outside of St. Petersburg, complete with a picnic and session at the banya. We enjoyed more blini, kvass, zakuski, and tea than I can accurately recount, and made friends with our host families and locals as we explored St. Petersburg and its cultural offerings through the long days, and equally lengthy white nights, where the city and its unique architecture literally turned to silver before our very eyes. Every aspect of the SRAS Art and Museums in Russia program was intensive, encompassing, and enlightening, and every day was spent seeing, absorbing, considering and partaking in the unfamiliar and exciting, all culminating into one final show of our collective works, and a life-altering experience for everyone lucky enough to join us for the journey.

Of course, this is no full and complete account of our adventures. Perhaps the most conclusive evidence is contained in the following pages of this catalogue of works; the fruits of our creative endeavors and the exhaustive support of our coordinators, teachers, and administrators who made our experience— so rich in depth, breadth, and variety – possible. In each photograph, written work, pencil mark and brush stroke lies the figments and pigments of our experience, one that can never be repeated, but will always be remembered as vivid and formative, shimmering and colorful as a White Night stroll in St. Petersburg.



– Nicole Mramor, 2012

Rawan Al-Saffar

“ I am passionate about education!

I firmly believe that it is at the root of all the challenges that society has faced from the past to the present. Education systems in the developed part of the world are based on an industrial model of teaching, creating citizens that perform at an average level, following narrow bands of labor. This education system based on standardization does not welcome the creativity to see the challenges of tomorrow let alone today. The fear is that this model is an example for developing nations around the world. We need to re-assess education so that it becomes a vital part of our society, engaging youth so that they can reach their full potential and become active members of their community. I believe that this is the key to developing dignity within societies, ending poverty and creating an environment of tolerance and compassion. I hope that one day I can start a school in Kuwait that would approach education differently, creatively and most importantly in a holistic way. My experiences in Russia last summer with the SRAS Art and Museums in Russia program has enriched how I think about education and the creative process.”



Above: Rawan looking at contemporary art at the Erarta Museum.



Above: Study after Eduard Vuillard in the Hermitage collection of French 20th Century Art. Right: Rawan at work.



Below: Pastel study of traditional costume in the Russian Ethnographic Museum (left) and watercolor view painted “en plein air” (right).

Rawan Al-Saffar is currently a student at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and a candidate for the Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Fine Art in 2013.





Андрей Бахари

“ I enjoyed the study and the fun I had in the company of good old and new friends, and hope to go there again soon. ”

Andy is interested in a wide range of things, including fine arts, design, languages and sociology. It is for this reason that he is pursuing a career in architecture, a field of great versatility that combines all these areas in one package. Andy loves to travel and to learn from first-hand experience. He is fluent in six languages and has traveled to more than twenty five countries. In most of them he participated in educational and creative programs. Andy is very interested in languages because language is one of the most fundamental elements of human life and he feels the more languages he knows the more he understands about other countries' culture, ethics, and social norms. In order to expand his personal knowledge and become a better designer, artist and linguist, he joined the SRAS Art and Museums in Russia program in St. Petersburg. He decided to come to Russia because he was drawn to its unique culture, architecture, art, people and language. During his stay, Andy learned the beginnings of Russian language, studied Russian history and art history in the original setting and practiced various studio arts with Russian art teachers. He drew and painted in various media and genres, printed, and photographed.



Top row: Pastel studies of a statue in the Hermitage Greco-Roman collection (left) and of a traditional Russian costume in the Ethnographic Museum (right). Middle row: Monotypes printed in the studio of printmaker Yuri Shtapakov. Bottom row: Decorative wooden board painted with traditional Ukrainian patterns (left), study after Fernand Leger (center) and photographs of St. Petersburg, Summer 2012.



Across the bottom: Andy responds to the spirit of Henri Matisse's The Dance and Music at the Hermitage.



Andy Bahari is currently a student at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and candidate for Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Fine Art in Architecture in 2014. Of Chinese heritage and born in Indonesia, he lives now in the USA.



Anne LaFond

“ Everything I'd hoped for and more!

For a mid-career artist such as myself, this program was a tremendous opportunity to study first-hand with Russian artists and art-professionals, to learn about the past of Russian art from the collections at the Hermitage, and find out what is happening in the arts in Russia today. It enriched my artistic practice as well as fulfilled a life-time dream.



Though my undergraduate degree was in Russian language and literature, I unfortunately wasn't able to study in what was then still the Soviet Union. This program more than made up for what I might have missed. I was able to live with a Russian family who spoke very little English, but were very patient with my coming to every meal with my dictionary! And I will not soon forget the sunny view from their kitchen window over the cranes on the Neva River.

I recently received my masters degree from the New York Academy of Art which emphasizes mastery of traditional techniques in painting, and this is very much in line with the Russian study of art. We spent our time both making art on-site – either in the galleries of the Hermitage, “en plein air,” or in the studio – and taking in the cultural abundance and historical resonance of St. Petersburg from the palaces at Tsarskoe Selo and the churches of Novgorod to the fabulous collection of the Russian Museum and the latest contemporary art at the Erarta Museum. We were busy non-stop, but how could it have been otherwise?

I particularly loved the vibrance of our group, as we threw ourselves into the creation of art while discovering St. Petersburg together.



Anne LaFond earned a B.A. from Tufts University in 1984 with a major in Russian language and literature. She lived in Jerusalem, Israel from 1988 to 1996 where she taught English and Art to high school and university students. She received an M.F.A. in painting and printmaking from the New York Academy of Art in 2011. She lives and maintains a studio in Brooklyn, NY.



Top: Pastel study of a traditional Russian costume in the Ethnographic Museum (left) and of a statue in the Hermitage Greco-Roman collection (right). Center: Watercolor of the Church of the Spilled Blood painted “en plein air” (left), pastel drawing of the Council Stairs in the Hermitage (right). Bottom: LaFond working on pencil drawing from the model.



Николе Мрамор

“ As the artist draws from the live model, so too must art historians study the authentic artwork. ”

Nicole Mramor is currently a graduate student in Russian and Slavonic studies at the University of Missouri, Columbia, where she also earned her bachelor's degree in art history. She continues to nourish a fascination with all things art historical, and is especially intrigued by Soviet photography, Russian Formalism, and Constructivist objects. She hopes to pursue a PhD in Slavic Studies, and intensively studied Russian language in St. Petersburg through The School of Russian and Asian Studies (SRAS) in the hopes of reading her favorite authors in their original glory. She additionally enrolled in the SRAS Art and Museums in Russia program to pursue her artistic interest even further. Recently, she has written about the uncanny collision between music and literary theory, and aspires to bridge her pursuits of artistic and academic practice through her scholarship.



Top row: Nicole Mramor (left), pastel study of a statue in the Hermitage Greco-Roman collection (center) and pencil drawing from the model (right). Middle row: At work with the group in the studio of printmaker Yuri Shtapakov (left) and watercolor painted "en plein air" (right). Bottom row: Study after Henri Matisse (left) and pastel drawing of the Council Stairs in the Hermitage (right).

Якоб Ядтн

“ It is always exciting to make art in a new location with a new group of people – and the SRAS Art and Museums in Russia program was no exception. Making art in Russia was a different experience from making art in America, and while on the trip I took a vacation from the type of work I usually make. The Russian art scene is more aware of the history of art than the American scene. I enjoyed seeing how the artwork of Russia often referenced the works that came before it, and how many of these influences were similar to artistic influences in America.

One piece that we saw in the Erarta that demonstrates knowledge of the classical canon while adding a new twist was a sculpture of the Last Supper. The figures in the sculpture were positioned in the exact same manner as Leonardo da Vinci’s fresco, and were covered in a giant blanket. It was amazing how iconic the outline of the figures was, and that the shape alone was enough to clue the viewer in to what was underneath.

I loved the museum tours and the studio classes, but my favorite parts of the trip were the times I got to experience everyday life. The things I found most intriguing and surprising were the most mundane. I remember being amazed by the fact that eggs came in packs of ten instead of packs of twelve in America. I was intrigued by how different the manhole covers and bathroom signs were in Russia. I loved watching people in the metro. I liked trying to figure out where they were going, and what they were going to do. I especially loved seeing people carrying flowers – and imagining who these people were going to bring the flowers to. By the end of the trip I decided to take photographs of graffiti. It was beautiful to see how simultaneously familiar and foreign these objects and actions were in Russia. ”

Jacob Rath is currently a student at Macalester College and a candidate for the Bachelor of Fine Art and Mathematics, 2013.



The Last Supper, Pavel Grishin, 2011. Erarta Museum, Photo by Yekaterina Panikorovskaya



Top: Decorative board painted with traditional Ukrainian patterns, Jacob at the Erarta Museum. Second row: Pencil drawing from the model (left), pastel study of a statue in the Hermitage Greco-Roman collection (center) and of traditional Russian costume from the Ethnographic Museum (right). Third row: Watercolor view painted “en plein air,” and monotypes printed in the studio of printmaker Yuri Shtapakov. Bottom row left: Study after Henri Matisse.

WHY ST. PETERSBURG?

A little bit more than three hundred years ago one man of unlimited means conceived a city he was resolute to make a marvel of the world in just about every way – the clarity of design, architectural beauty, utmost modernity and functionality. It had to be a fort, a port and a capital of a vast country he was destined to rule.



To achieve this purpose, he conquered a piece of land at a strategic point where a broad river discharges into a sea, invited the best architects of his time, encouraged boldness of their artistic thought. Being an absolute monarch, he spared no expense of his country's massive national product and had his dream come true. For another two hundred years the city continued to be the country's capital with every subsequent ruler adding to the city's splendor on a comparably grand scale, filling its museums with great art, opening theaters and many state institutions.

Later the city became also a center of the country's golden age in liberal literature, thought, visual arts, etc. – of the era of intellectual efflorescence comparable only with that of Classical Athens. And to this day the city continues to rank among the world's leading cultural centers.

Yes, it is St. Petersburg – the Venice of the North, Northern Palmyra, the Russian Versailles, and much, much more. It is hardly possible to think of a better destination for honing an art talent! The density of artistic monuments of every epoch and style, east and west, old and new – whether in the city streets



and parks or inside art museums, including the magnificent Hermitage – invites the study of the superb examples. Intensive cultural life with scores of formal and informal events always in progress is the perfect stimulating milieu for personal artistic growth via meeting people and through diversified creative exchange.

The powerful artistic impression of St. Petersburg is tremendously enhanced by the city's unique natural setting so far in the north: the sight of classical art forms either against the winter snowscapes or amidst the milk-white nights of the summer solstice never fails to intrigue and to inspire.



You think of Paleolithic art? See Paleolithic Venus from Kostenki and the petroglyphs of the White Sea. Interested in the archaeological discoveries of the Scythian art? Examine Scythian gold artifacts at the Treasuries of the Hermitage Museum.

Attracted to the art of Central Asia? Explore the finds of Russian expeditions to the Buddhist cave monasteries on the Great Silk Road. Fascinated by the art of Italian Renaissance? Survey paintings by Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael at the Hermitage. Want to see more works by French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists? Seek to discover Russian indigenous art forms, Orthodox icons, 19th century Russian art or Russian Constructivism? Folk-art tradition? Urban design? Park architecture? Jewelry at the Russian court? It is all there, in St. Petersburg – an exceptional all-encompassing source of artistic enrichment which you will have a chance to investigate under the enthusiastic guidance of museum workers and many other highly competent and dedicated art professionals.

Photos: Angela Cho



Many thanks for the generosity of all those who contributed their energy and enthusiasm to our experience of the Hermitage and St. Petersburg – from the program’s curator, Elena Varshavskaya, and director, Sophia Kudriavceva, to the artists who worked with us: painter Sergey Lebedev, printmaker Yuri Shtapakov, and studio instructor at the Hermitage Youth Center, Natalia Kruglova. We also appreciate the many professionals who shared their expertise with us on tours of the special collections we visited. Special thanks also go to Yekaterina Panikarovskaya for coordinating logistics, and to Inna Starkova, summer intern at the Hermitage Youth Center for translating and always making sure we were OK!



Top left: SRAS and RALI Art Program Director, Dr. Elena Varshavskaya, Senior Lecturer, RISD; top right: Head of the Hermitage Youth Center, Dr. Sophia Kudriavceva. Below left to right: Artist Sergey Lebedev; project coordinator Yekaterina Panikarovskaya, studio instructor at the Hermitage Youth Center, Natalia Kruglova. Bottom right: Inna Starkova, Hermitage Youth Center intern.





Participants in the program, Summer 2012 (from left to right): Nicole Mramor, Rawan Al-Saffar, Jacob Rath, Anne LaFond, and Andy Bahari, with Inna Starkova, Hermitage Youth Center intern (second from right).

SRAS and RALI Art Program Director: Dr. Elena Varshavskaya, Senior Lecturer, RISD
Special thanks to our hosts at the Hermitage Youth Center, Dr. Sophia Kudriavceva and project coordinator Yekaterina Panikorovskaya.

Photo credits: Yekaterina Panikorovskaya, Anna Khristich, Elena Varshavskaya
Brochure design: Anne LaFond

*Cover photo: The staircase at the Agate Rooms in Tsarskoe Selo (Pushkin) by Charles Cameron, 1780s.
Traditional Ukrainian patterns used throughout the brochure are courtesy of Natalia Kruglova.*

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