

THE ZIBBY GARNETT TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP

Report by Ffion Howells



**Icon Conservation
At the St Petersburg State Academic Institute of Art, Russia**

9 July – 6th August, 2013

Table of Contents

Page 3.	Personal Introduction, Study Trip, Total Cost
Page. 4.	Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship Report, Introduction
Page 5.	The City of St Petersburg
Page 7.	Russian Art
Page 10.	The Academy
Page 13.	The Conservation Department
Page 14.	Conservation Work – The Icons
Page 18.	The Diploma Course
Page 20.	The Art of Copy Painting
Page 21.	Retouching
Page 25.	The Student Scientific Asset Exchange Programme
Page 26.	The People I Met
Page 29.	The Future of the Student Scientific Asset Exchange Programme
Page 30.	Conclusion

Personal Introduction

My name is Ffion Howells and I am a twenty three year old undergraduate student at the City & Guilds of London Art School. My studies in BA (Hons) Conservation, and a personal interest in art history has resulted in my interest in learning about differing conservation approaches across the world and particularly, in Russia. I had heard of The Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship during my first year at City & Guilds, as some more senior students had been fortunate enough to gain sponsorship in recent years. However, after my university department was contacted by an enthusiastic student representative from the Conservation Department at the St Petersburg State Academic Institute of Art, I hoped that the project at hand would be of interest to the Fellowship's Trustees.

Study trip

The study trip took place in the St Petersburg State Academic Institute of Arts, often referred to as the 'St Petersburg Academy of Arts'. I visited St Petersburg during the 'White Nights', from the 9th of July – 6th of August, 2013. I also travelled to several interesting provinces within 100km's of the city including Repino and Veliky Novgorod. During the short amount of time spent outside the Academy, I visited many churches and cathedrals in order to gain a richer understanding of the didactic Russian icons' place, in the lives of everyday Russians. It was also interesting to view such icons in a museum context, and I spent a great deal of time in the Hermitage and the Russian Museum; thus I came to learn much more about Russia's dynamic history of art and patronage.

Total Cost

As I was fortunately able to cover the cost of my return flight to St Petersburg, I had requested from the Fellowship the sum of £866. The Trustees generously awarded me £900 and I am pleased to say by total expenditure fell slightly shy of this amount.

The opportunity to travel to St Petersburg and to work within the Conservation department at the Academy of Arts arose when an enterprising student representative contacted my university department at City & Guilds of London Art School. Maria Kuzminykh was her name and the placement was entirely arranged by her and for this reason, I owe her much thanks. Although born in the Ukraine, Russia, and more precisely the Academy, has been her home for the past six years, since the young age of sixteen.



Satellite image of St Petersburg, courtesy of Google Maps

The City of St Petersburg

Russia is historically a country of much intrigue and fascination. Ancient Kievan-Rus was home to many peoples who were unified for the first time, by the adoption of Christianity during the 10th century. In the year 1237, Mongol armies invaded and besieged Kievan-Rus; and the people were banished to the forests. During the deep dark winters of this invasion, which lasted in some regions until 1400, people took comfort and solace in their religion. The wooden architecture and ‘onion domes’, still synonymous with Russia, first appeared during this time, when people came to worship and warm themselves in forest

churches. With this in mind, it is understandable how Christian worship has lastingly proved such an integral way of Russian life. The intensity with which the people revered their god and saints, for the sake of their survival, is embodied by the ceremonial worship of icons. The visual arts, in a very real sense, were essential to Russia's own sense of its identity, occupying a vital place in the cultural life of its people.

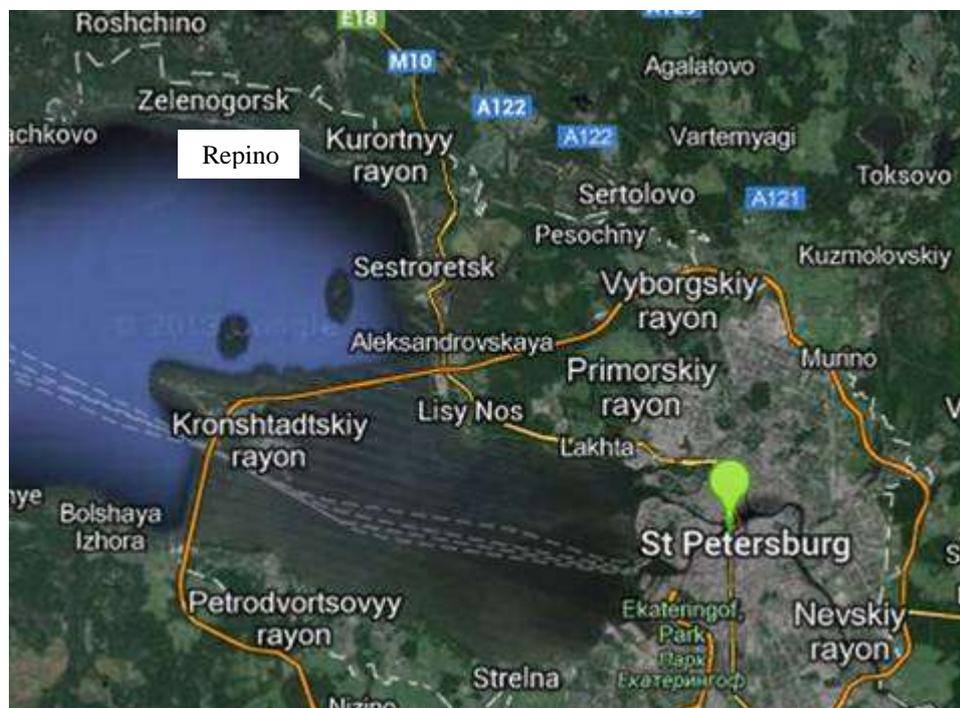
But in 1703, Tsar Peter the Great (b. 1672- d.1725) wished to propel his nation towards the sophisticated, cultured Western future and thus, St Petersburg was built as a '*window on the West*'. This imposed outward perspective and change of national alignment however did not nullify or reduce that historic importance of the representational arts to the Russian people. Catherine the Great (b.1729- d. 1796), commissioned the new Imperial Academy of Arts which was completed in 1789, in the young city, where new legions of artists were and are still to this day, trained in the Western academic style.

With a premier collection of fine art and artefacts on their doorstep, an iconic 18th century skyline and a fully integrated and publicised conservation diploma at the State Academic Institute, today's St Petersburgers are very aware of conservation efforts that take place in their city. St Petersburg is known as the 'capital of the North' and still embodies its conception as the arts and cultural capital of Russia. The Hermitage State Museum is the jewel in the crown of the un-adulterated southern Neva embankment and its vast collections rival any museum, gallery or private collection world-wide.

The Hermitage is undoubtedly St Petersburg's most famous museum; however this city of art hosts independent galleries on every corner. Some of The Hermitage's vast collection, as well as objects from the Museum of the Academy of Arts itself, formed the modest founding collection of The Russian Museum, around 1500 pieces in 1898. The Russian Museum now boasts the largest collection of Russian fine art in the world and tells the story of Russian art from its earliest roots. Rooms of Russian folk art sprawl in chronological order and, as you climb the floors of the museum, the tale unfolds before your eyes.

About Russian Art

Occupying several rooms at the Russian Museum, Ilya Repin (b. 1894- d.1930) is one of Russia's most revered painters and a founding member of 'The Wanderers' in the late 19th century. The Wanderers were a revolutionary and discontented group of student painters who rejected the conservatism of the then, Imperial Academy of Art, by walking out of their final exams. They went on to reform the face of Russian art; indeed the painters have become so highly regarded that the painting department within the Academy is today so called: 'The Ilya Repin Academy of Arts'.



St Petersburg to Repino, courtesy of Google Maps

For many of the Academy's students, summer school students and indeed my flatmate whilst in St Petersburg, Naranjaan – a visit to 'Repino', the home, studio and final resting place of Repin, is like a pilgrimage. The whole residence was destroyed during WWII, but the house was lovingly restored to the way it stood at Repin's death in 1930. On the coast of the Baltic Sea, a long bus ride from the outskirts of St Petersburg, 'Repino' is a vast expanse of pine trees growing right to the shore. The forest is occasionally studded with small wooden retreats or homes and feels a world away from metropolitan St Petersburg.



Repin's House at Repino

However the reverence with which Repin and his contemporaries are still regarded has not held the Russian art scene static. Repin and other revolutionary figures, did pave the way for today's Russian artists to infuse and confront this historic city. Indeed the top floor of the Russian Museum is home to its collection of 'Constructivist' art. Constructivism was Soviet Russia's leading art form. With some irony, art historian Andrew Graham Dixon remarks that this communist art movement has become the visual language of capitalism itself; a testament to the affecting style which had never been seen previously.

Despite their revolutionary history, citizens of St Petersburg are in many ways very traditional. This was evident in the dozens of marriages taking place every day in the city during the summer months. Religion is of great importance to even young generations of Russians; I was told that this was in part, due to their love of tradition. Regardless, the 'White Nights', in June and July, where the sun never sets on St Petersburg, are reason enough for people to feel jubilant and throng the streets on patriotic occasions such as 'Navy Day' (28th of July) and 'Paratroopers Day' (2nd of August).



Firework display spectators from Dvortsovy Bridge to The Hermitage, Winter Palace on Navy Day

It is widely regarded that icon paintings are the most traditional Russian art form. A day trip to Veliky Novgorod – Cathedral St Sofia, Yuriev Monastery and the Museum of Wooden Architecture did illustrate the way in which icons have historically been used and interacted with. In the most modest and unembellished dwellings, recreated in the open air museum, there was customarily an icon in every home, no matter how humble and, in the most grand cathedrals, they are revered ceremoniously, touched, kissed and venerated.



Cathedral St Sophia, Veliky Novgorod, completed c.1050

Pre-dating the 10th century arrival of icon painting in Russia (then Kievan-Rus), the native art and craft was naïve and vibrant. This naïve style continued in the art of icon painting. It wasn't until the late Russian renaissance which occurred in the 18th century that the influence of artists such as Da Vinci and Michelangelo becomes discernable in icon painting. Most notable is the introduction of architectural elements, conveying a sense of depth and realism, previously unseen. The dissemination of this new artistic method was the stimulus for the founding of the then, Imperial Academy of Arts, by Catherine the Great.

‘The Academy’



In the Academy

The biography of Catherine the Great describes how young St Petersburg's grandiose facades, housed the fashionable aristocracy. However these immaculately dressed courtiers would be sleeping on the floors of these bare and dusty shells of buildings. I couldn't help but see an element of that dualism in the current state of the Academy building. The electrical wiring hung loose from the

ceilings, a few stray cats roamed the corridors and courtyard and the centuries of paint layers were peeling from the window frames. In contrast to the rough and ready interior of the classrooms, the Academy's public spaces, the museum and exhibition hall are immaculate, with scarlet carpeted staircases and dotted with marble sculptures. This stately public image does extend to glossy brochures and volumes which are published by the Academy each year, to a very high standard. The content of these publications is largely the work of the students – diploma graduates or recent entrants and the drawings and paintings which secured their places at the Academy. The booklets pictured below are of the major treatments of icons by the Conservation department and the latest catalogue of paintings by my copy tutor, Mr Makhofin.



Catalogues of conservation at the Academy and the work of Vladimir Makhofin

When I began to read about the Academy, I learnt that the training of the Art History students is believed to benefit from working and learning alongside those students who are producing, planning and conserving such art, architecture and cultural history. When I arrived at the Academy I saw how this philosophy results in much cross-departmental interest and thus friendships. Whilst walking along the corridor with my host, Maria, we said '*priviet!*' to just about everyone. At the time of my arrival, prospective students were sitting an eight-day long exam, which lasts for ten hours a day with no weekends off. The entrants must produce a large copy painting and four study drawings in this time. Many of the entrants have already attended the school for a year but are by no-means guaranteed a place. The year that they have spent previously, has for some, been

an introduction to painting and draftsmanhip; but for all, the preparatory course is a familiarisation with the traditional academic style, the adoption of which is undoubtedly necessary to secure a place on the painting, sculpture, monumental art or conservation courses.

Many of the preparatory course students are international, and shared a student hostel, situated right next door to my apartment. I got to know a few of the students, some of whom had just been granted admittance to study at diploma level this autumn, and others had sadly, not passed the test. One such successful student applicant was Chilean student, Cristobal. When I asked him whether he felt that attending the preparatory course was essential in order to gain a place on the Painting course, his reply was as follows;

‘In all subjects you are guided by the teachers, but I would say that the guidance is especially important in composition, since the Academy has a particular style (more decorative and flat, avoiding perspective or too detailed nuances in tone or colour) and in the exam I assume you are expected to work in that manner’.

Despite this genuine traditionalism, the Academy’s website describes how teaching is ‘focused around the creative forces and modern methodology of arts education’; with reference to the re-naming of the Academy after the ‘Wanderer’ Ilya Repin, the cross-departmental practices and the scientific approach to conservation, I can agree with this representation. The unwavering but increasingly sophisticated approach with which the Conservation department treats its objects, means that its studios are full of icons from institutions which lack the resources to conserve them.

The Conservation Department



The Conservation Studio

Churches and small museums from a several hundred mile radius, turn to the Academy, entrusting with them the care and conservation of their icons. In return these museums and churches host the students' summer placements. The structure of the course puts a great emphasis on practical work and artistic ability and thus students are sent to undertake conservation work at St Petersburg institutions, The Museum of Religious and Non Religious Art, The Hermitage, The Russian Museum whilst fourth year students go further afield to Moscow to work in the Central Restoration Centre.

The Icons - Conservation Work



Example of the condition of icons, delaminating paint and ground layers

It is said that to paint a Russian icon, one must live the life of the saint whom they depict – for this reason, worshiping in front of an *Iconostasis* or a single icon, is an intense experience whereby the parishioner is said to be in the presence of the saints themselves¹. The intensity of this relationship does pose conservation problems – the icons are frequently kissed, handled, burnt by flame or splashed with candle wax and routinely cleaned and re-painted by the church to which they belong.

The course leader, Professor Yury Bobrov – an affiliate of the St Petersburg Arts Council among other posts - has devoted his career to the preservation and artistic appreciation of Russian icons. Such work has involved collaborations with the British Museum. Professor Bobrov has written extensively on the subject of Russian icons and has delivered many hours of teaching to the course students; some of this knowledge was imparted to me during my placement.

During my second day at the Academy I was allocated an icon on which to work. Senior tutor, Philip Bobrov, entrusted me with the conservation of an 18th century icon, depicting ‘The Annunciation’ and belonging to the History of St Petersburg Museum. My time at the Academy was limited and thus the icon was

¹ Andrew Graham-Dixon ‘The Art of Russia’ Episode 1 Out of the Forest

of a small and manageable size, however its size did not detract from the devotion with which it was crafted and the intensity with which it compels the viewer. The icon was made in the most traditional manner, using egg tempera painting on a chalk ground. The style is also very traditional; however the suggestion of architectural features alludes to the Western influences which had reached St Petersburg by this time.

Photographic documentation was the precursor to the treatment. I quickly learnt that my compact camera would not suffice. First year student Rain, helped me in the photography studio and allowed me to use her SLR camera. Soon I was able to take photographs to the exacting standards required.



Student, Rain in the photography studio

The icon had undergone conservation treatment in the 1950's and like many icons in the department's collection, the removal of an inappropriate facing was the first phase of the treatment. Very similar materials – Japanese tissue paper and fish glue - are used in present day treatments for facing and localised consolidation; however their application is more selective and consolidants are used at far lower concentrations.



‘The Annunciation’ c. 18th century before and after conservation

This particular icon familiarised me with skills crucial to icon conservation. The recognition and understanding of historic intervention - be that restoration or conservation measures – and their removal where necessary, identification of the ground and materials used as these factors will inhibit the use of certain solvents.

Professor Bobrov does argue that Russian icons cannot be thought of as simply art objects, nor can they be fully appreciated through a narrow scientific view. These icons are a resonant part of Russian cultural identity and art history, whilst in their original interpretation they are regarded as integral to Orthodox worship and are a gateway to conversation with the divine. In order to better understand this unique relationship between Russian Orthodox Christians and their icons, I visited many churches and cathedrals in and around St Petersburg. It was very interesting to see that the preventive conservation measures required to maintain these works of art, were enacted as devotedly as was their worship and adoration. In many churches, the tradition of kissing the icons was alive and well, but was now managed by protective glazing; however this physical barrier did not seem to impinge upon the spiritual act.

I was immediately made aware that conservation science has to an extent, established itself within the department. In order to identify correctly the type of

ground preparation present, micro-chemical spot testing was used. A drop of sulphuric acid was placed on a small sample of the ground. The sample was observed under magnification; the formation of gypsum crystals did indicate the presence of a gesso ground; whilst the formation of small bubbles was indicative of a more commonly found chalk preparation.



‘The Meeting’ c. 19th century after cleaning test

The second icon, on which I worked, ‘The Meeting’, came from the Pskovsky Museum and dated to the 19th century. The treatment introduced me to traditional varnishes used in icon painting and their subsequent degradation. This treatment was certainly the most painstaking and strenuous. In order to clean only a small area (12cm x 7cm), hours of cleaning under high magnification, using a sharp scalpel, was required. The words to describe the vast quantities of black deposit which required removing, my tutor took sometime to find... ‘flies’ crap’. Indeed the entire surface of the icon was speckled with this dirt as well as a degrading linseed oil varnish – known in Russia as ‘*oleafa* varnish’. To have cleaned the whole of the icon would have taken several months; the cleaned area (pictured above) took two weeks, interspersed with other treatments. During this treatment I learnt the importance of creating a gradient of cleaned/not cleaned varnish. Professor Bobrov explained, as photographs of cleaning tests are highly illustrative and useful to the students and their work, they have experienced

several occasions where it proved impossible to remove the visible evidence of such a test, and the outline of the cleaned area was always over-cleaned in comparison to the rest of the surface.

The Diploma Courses

I was fortunate enough to see what standards of conservation work is required to obtain a diploma from the Academy; as during my second week, the 2013 Graduate Diploma Exhibition was opened. A private view followed short speeches given by Rectors of all departments. The works were displayed in the Grand Hall on the first floor at the ascent of a marble staircase. The doors are flanked by classical marble statues whilst the work of recent graduates hangs at the feet of monumental Baroque paintings; that tradition of painting which would have been so intrinsic to the students' formal training.



Prof. Yury Bobrov at the Diploma Exhibition 2013

Conservation tutor, Phillip Bobrov described what inspires the Academy's art students as, 'their Soviet roots, traditional Russian art and...whatever else'. Of this year's graduate exhibits, their monumentality and the technical ability with which they are painted, may be interpreted as homage to the Great Masters, however the content is wholly current. Admittedly I was surprised by the work

produced. However, having spoken to students from several departments, I was advised that students felt frustrated that they were not able to produce something truly original, and what I had visually interpreted as modern was only that in so far as the subjects depicted.



Example of a conservation student's diploma work

The graduating conservators' work also hung in the main exhibition hall. Their exhibits consisted of one or two boards in the prescriptive format and their best copy painting produced during their training. The boards included information on scientific analysis, used to identify pigments, paint medium and ground material whilst X-ray photographs reveal original compositions, since over painted and now restored. Before, during and after photographs make the success of the treatments very apparent whilst the copy paintings are a testament to the students' painterly ability and are suggestive of their art historical awareness.

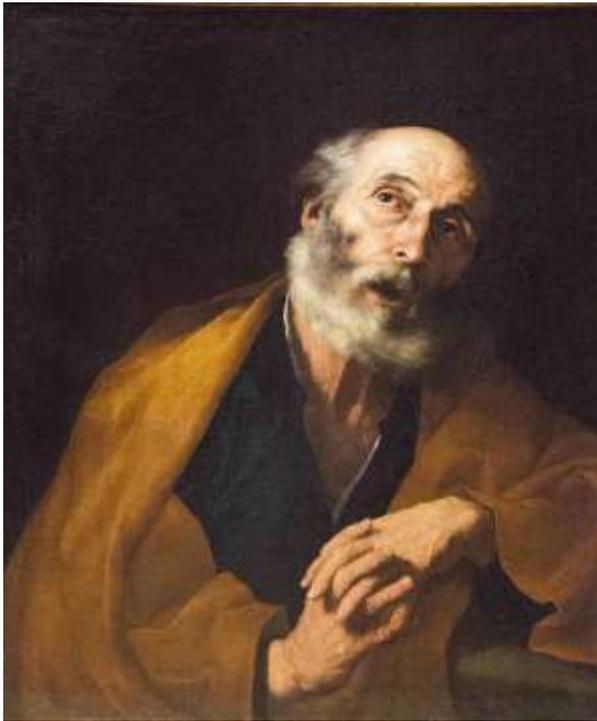
The Art of Copy Painting



Painting in the Copy Studio

‘Copy’ painting is an integral part of the students’ training, be they fine artists, architects or conservators. The practice of copy painting is so common place that great St Petersburg institutions such as the Hermitage and the Russian Museum allow students of the Academy to paint from original paintings during the summer mornings, before the museums are opened to the general public.

The setting in which I produced my copy painting was not quite as grandiose as this, however the ‘Copy Studio’, run by accomplished artist Vladimir Makhofin was wonderfully inspiring. Working surrounded by dozens of superbly executed copies, I felt as though I had wandered into the store room at the Hermitage. Faces of master painters, Rubens, Da Vinci, Rembrandt and their subjects, watched me as I sketched out my version of an old master painting – ‘St Peter’ (c. 1612) by Jusepe de Ribera (b.1591- d.1652); whilst volumes and volumes of their works were poured over with great relish by Mr Makhofin. Mr Makhofin’s great love of art and painting gave him the determination to sit the Academy’s entrance exams for five consecutive years, until he finally earned a place on the painting course in the 1970’s.



‘St Peter’ by Ribera (courtesy of Oceans Bridge) and my copy

I had never before painted, but when first reading about the Academy I understood that the opportunity to partake in such training was not to be missed. Despite the fact that Mr Makhofin spoke no English and I spoke next to no Russian, I managed to produce a portrait with which I was most pleased. Although such painterly training is not formally recognized by any British conservation programmes of which I am aware, the lessons I learnt - colour matching for example – will certainly aid my conservation practice.

Retouching

The benefits of this training - to produce paintings to an exceptional level - are numerous. The skills acquired during the painterly training at the Academy - such as colour matching and brush technique - lend themselves extremely well to the process of retouching. Retouching is an integral part of the students work. Aside from a few museum pieces, the majority of icons worked on by students and tutors at the Academy are from churches. Such churches may have never had

the means to maintain or repair their icons and for this reason many icons are in very bad condition on arrival, often necessitating much restoration.



‘St Solomon’ before and after retouching

The last icon on which I worked, gave me the opportunity to develop my retouching skills. The icon depicting St Solomon was one of a series dating from the 19th century, from the small Church of St Mary, in Pskov, 180 miles south of St Petersburg. The area depicting St Solomon’s foot had previously been consolidated by an Academy student and the next phase of the treatment was to give the new gesso areas a suitably aged appearance before retouching. A scalpel was used to simulate drying cracks which should be indiscernible from the original gesso. As I carefully troubled over the recreating of this effect, I asked Maria, ‘how does it look?’ Her reply was diplomatic: students are usually allocated several weeks to complete this ground preparation, I however had half an hour. But after being granted approval by a tutor, the area could be retouched using oil paint. Excess oil in the paint was to be removed, using absorbent newspaper, as it does yellow upon aging. This consideration as to how a

traditional material could be used in a way more appropriate to conservation was exemplary of how the conservation department has evolved from being, historically, a restoration studio.



‘Sky’ by Maria Kuzminykh

For some entrepreneurial students of the Academy, their ability to produce outstanding paintings has proved a lucrative business. Indeed Maria has established a clientele of paying customers who either request reproductions of certain paintings, or thoroughly enjoy the still life compositions thought up by Maria, with much homage to the Dutch Masters (of whom so many fine examples hang in the Hermitage). Her success in producing and selling her paintings at a remarkable pace has earned her a professional relationship with a local gallery and thus, her Fine Art student friends have a platform from which their work can gain exposure and even sales. The students make the most of their modest hostel. I visited the bedroom-come-studio of a Fine Art student, Katya Gribanova, where a bed was sacrificed, a mezzanine erected and space made for hundreds of canvases. I so greatly admired her skilful painting that I did not wish to spend my money on any tourist ‘tat’ – instead I bought a small, modestly priced acrylic painting from Katya, which I will treasure forever.



‘Evening Sunset’ by Katya Gribanova

The current Western disposition, not to make your own artistic mark on the objects you are working on, is appropriate and necessary to avoid further disastrous losses to objects of cultural heritage, as witnessed in Spain during the treatment of ‘Ecce Homo’ at the Misericordia Church, Borja. However I can’t help but feel that the Russian students need not give as much thought to their making their own mark on icons; the reason being is that their training in copy painting and re-touching is so meticulous that restored areas match perfectly their surroundings.

The Student Scientific Asset Exchange Programme



Maria at work in the studio

The work ethic of the Russian students was really astounding. To do well in their studies and earn enough just to get by, they attended the Academy six or even seven days a week and worked every spare moment they could. Of course I had heard the widely held belief that funding designated to help facilitate opportunities for students at the Academy had not been effectively deployed, but it was saddening to see first hand that there was reason to believe the veracity of the rumours. It appeared that money put in place to stimulate and facilitate the implementation of a student exchange or summer placement, had gone or been spent but to no avail. Many students were angered by what they felt as a betrayal and perhaps with a nod to the venturesome spirit of the ‘Wanderers’, some are vowing to take themselves out of St Petersburg and Russia, once graduated.

Maria, however, has taken a decidedly distinct approach to vocalise her discontent. Maria and some fellow students have established ‘The Student Scientific Asset Exchange Programme’ (SSAEP). The programme was delineated after Maria and students from Architecture and History of Art faculties were invited to work with conservators from the Portuguese Catholic University, in Porto. The opportunity for such work had arisen after Maria



Cooking in St Petersburg

Russian cuisine enjoys its own distinctive, and as of yet, not internationally appreciated character. None of my company felt this more so than Naranjaan from India, with whom I also shared the apartment. For his last night in the city a large group of us went for a delicious Indian meal. At our table were students from Russia, Ukraine, Germany, India, Chile, Denmark and Britain. We relished the multiculturalism of our company and attempted a toast in each of our languages. Despite all the differences which we enjoyed learning of, it was clear to me that what had drawn all these students to *this* academy was its unwavering traditionalism in teaching drawing and painting. Each of us spoke about art and conservation training in our countries and the general consensus was that the St Petersburg Academy was almost the last of its kind. I was happy to be able to discuss my training at City & Guilds of London Art School, where drawing is taught in much the same way and students are surrounded by historic craft skills. My discussing how I had come to be in St Petersburg lead me to tell of the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship. That there are such charities and institutions dedicated to helping students train in the art and heritage sector was of great surprise to some of my friends and I heard how such funding is largely non-existent in India and Chile.



Academy students at Repino

Due to the experimental nature of my placement at the Academy, which had come about solely through the enthusiasm of an undergraduate student, I didn't manage to achieve my aim of working on mural paintings in a Russian church.

However I am under the impression that with a little more support and involvement by the Academy tutors and students, future scholars who visit St Petersburg as part of the SSAEP will be able to undertake such tasks and take full advantage of the connections enjoyed by the Academy. For the same reasons, my contact time with tutors was often little and irregular. Aside from teaching students and running the department, tutors undertake numerous private projects and other positions of responsibility, meaning they are extremely busy. The number of tutors with whom I could converse was also limited, as I hadn't managed to grasp this difficult language.

The informality of the placement also meant I didn't get much of an introduction to the department, the studio practice, the materials or the process' undertaken. Of course, this did become familiar over time and I was able to work somewhat independently and on evenings and weekends; however a simple induction would

certainly have helped me to integrate amongst the other students. I was quite sure that almost none of the students knew who I was, where I was from and what I was doing there. My broken Russian explanations must have sounded quite funny but students were warm, friendly and encouraging.

I received a great deal of support from Olga, the teaching assistant. Olga was a recent graduate of the Conservation diploma course who had struggled to find employment in the city. Prof Boborov offered Olga her position within the department, to which she is well suited and content. Like many other graduates, Olga is able to work within a museum conservation department, but sadly the position, like so many, is unpaid. Fortunately for me, Olga was happy to make me feel at home in the studio and gave me much assistance with practical work in the absence of tutors. Olga does also undertake some private projects at the Academy, whilst I was in St Petersburg, she was working on a large 14th century icon as well as a large canvas, and each required extensive retouching.

The Future of the Student Scientific Asset Exchange Programme

The Conservation tutors are involved in global projects, raising the profile of icon conservation with the aim of establishing conservation methods for big institutions. Such collaborations take them worldwide, attending and speaking at conferences. Thus the St Petersburg Academy of Art is notable for its conservation practice and expertise and its participation in such projects is valued by International Institute of Conservation and the British Museum. Yet unfortunately, participation in such projects is not available to their students. Russian icons appear in collections world-wide, whilst contemporary Russian painters are regarded highly in countries such as China and India. The Academy's students are fantastically positioned to disseminate their knowledge of the treatment of these objects to others and have an innate understanding of the ethical issues surrounding their conservation. If only the resources, in the form of funding and formal organisation were to be implemented by the Academy, their students would be excellent ambassadors for the Conservation Department and Academy as a whole. I would hope that in turn this would lead

to the Russian students having the same opportunities made available to them as I have had, allowing them to travel and experience other countries, institutions and become exposed to a wider variety of conservation practice.

Conclusion

As a student from a metropolis, there was a sad tinge to this memorable experience. For all the talent, ability and passion displayed by the students, it became apparent that this alone would not secure them any paid positions once graduated. Even in affiliated museums, mostly all graduates without family or friends in high positions don't get a look in.

Hopefully the initiative of the students of the Academy, coupled with the interest in prospective summer placements displayed by students of other universities, will instigate a significant investment in the Student Scientific Asset Exchange Programme. If such resources were made formally available, I would encourage other students and future ZGTF scholars to consider attending a placement at the Academy. It is often remarked upon, that craft skills are scarce in Britain and in particular with regards to conservation/ restoration. For this reason I found my placement at the Academy refreshing and inspiring. The artistic capability of the students was to me, staggering but to them, an integral part of conservation training that is accepted, embraced and accomplished throughout. There was no room for students without exceptional painting and drawing skills and this made me consider how much room there is for artistic ability in a conservation setting in which reports, ethical considerations and scientific analysis is so dominant.