MOSCOW, RUSSIA

State Tretyakov Gallery: Masterpieces

Twenty paintings from the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, from Kramskoi's portraits and Levitan's landscapes to Vrubel's demon and Malevich's Black Square.



The State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow grew from the collection Pavel Tretyakov put together in the nineteenth century. It now holds one of the principal collections of Russian painting, from religious icons to portraits, historical scenes and the art of later periods, and many of its pictures are much better known in Russia than elsewhere.

The twenty paintings here leave out the icons. Portraits make up a large share: Kramskoi's Tolstoy, his unknown woman and his beekeeper, Repin's Mussorgsky, Serov's Vera Mamontova and the collector Ivan Morozov, and Nesterov's philosophers out walking. Savrasov and Levitan paint a rutted road, a thaw and monasteries across water. Vasnetsov and Roerich turn to legend and an imagined past, and Repin to a violent historical scene. The rest do not group easily: Vrubel's cramped demon, Petrov-Vodkin's red horse, Kustodiev's giant Bolshevik and Malevich's Black Square.

Several painters appear more than once, so some entries compare pictures as they go: Kramskoi's sparest portrait beside his more furnished ones, Repin's and Vasnetsov's scenes of aftermath, and Levitan's return to monastery buildings seen over water.

This selection was made independently of the museum. A painting's place in the collection does not mean it is on show, and any of these works may be on loan or off display.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/tretyakov-gallery

The selection · 20

1. Girl with Peaches
   Valentin Serov · 1887
2. Black Square
   Kazimir Malevich · 1915
3. Seated Demon
   Mikhail Vrubel · 1890
4. March
   Isaac Levitan · 1895
5. Bathing a Red Horse
   Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin · 1912
6. Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan
   Ilya Repin · 1883-1885
7. Portrait of an Unknown Woman
   Ivan Kramskoi · 1883
8. The Vision of the Young Bartholomew
   Mikhail Nesterov · 1890
9. After Prince Igor's Battle
   Viktor Vasnetsov · 1880
10. Portrait of Modest Mussorgsky
    Ilya Repin · 1881
11. Portrait of Leo Tolstoy
    Ivan Kramskoi · 1873
12. A Quiet Monastery
    Isaac Levitan · 1890
13. Evening Bells
    Isaac Levitan · 1892
14. Overseas Guests
    Nicholas Roerich · 1901
15. The Beekeeper
    Ivan Kramskoi · 1872
16. Country Road
    Alexei Savrasov · 1873
17. The Snow Maiden
    Viktor Vasnetsov · 1899
18. The Bolshevik
    Boris Kustodiev · 1920
19. The Philosophers Bulgakov and Florensky
    Mikhail Nesterov · 1917
20. Ivan Morozov
    Valentin Serov · 1910

01 / 20

Girl with Peaches

Valentin Serov

1887 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Valentin Serov. Girl with Peaches. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Serov painted Vera Mamontova at her family's home in Abramtsevo, and he lets the house into the picture. Peaches and a knife lie on the table, the ordinary clutter of a room in use, and light from the windows falls across the tablecloth, the furniture and her face. She sits poised but alert, as though she might get up at any moment.

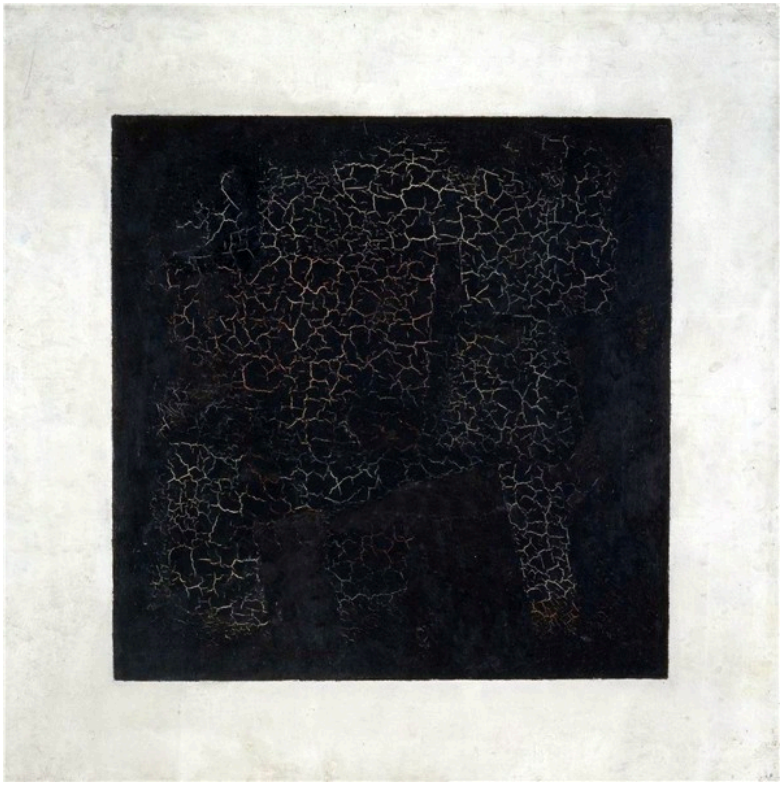
Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

Black Square

Kazimir Malevich

1915 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Kazimir Malevich. Black Square. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A dark quadrilateral on a pale field, and nothing else: no figure, no landscape. The relationship between the two is the painting's declared subject. The form looks absolute, but look longer and the hand shows. The edges are not mechanically drawn, and the aged surface has cracked. In a busier picture that cracking might go unnoticed. With so little else on the canvas, it becomes part of what you see.

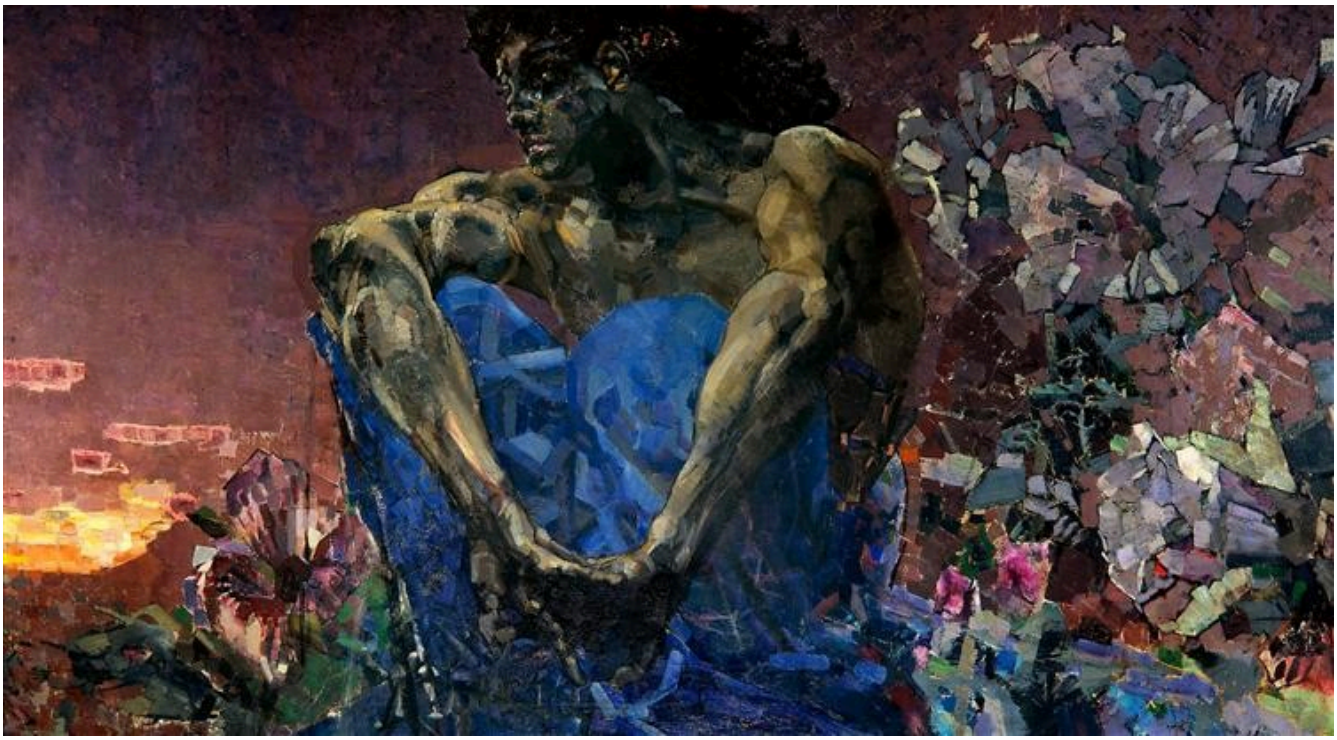
Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

Seated Demon

Mikhail Vrubel

1890 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Mikhail Vrubel. Seated Demon. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Vrubel gives his demon a powerful body and then denies it room. The low format squeezes the figure, and it draws inward in response: hands clasped, posture hunched, it holds its strength in. Angular, flower-like forms surround it and bind it into the patterned surface, as if the decoration were part of the confinement.

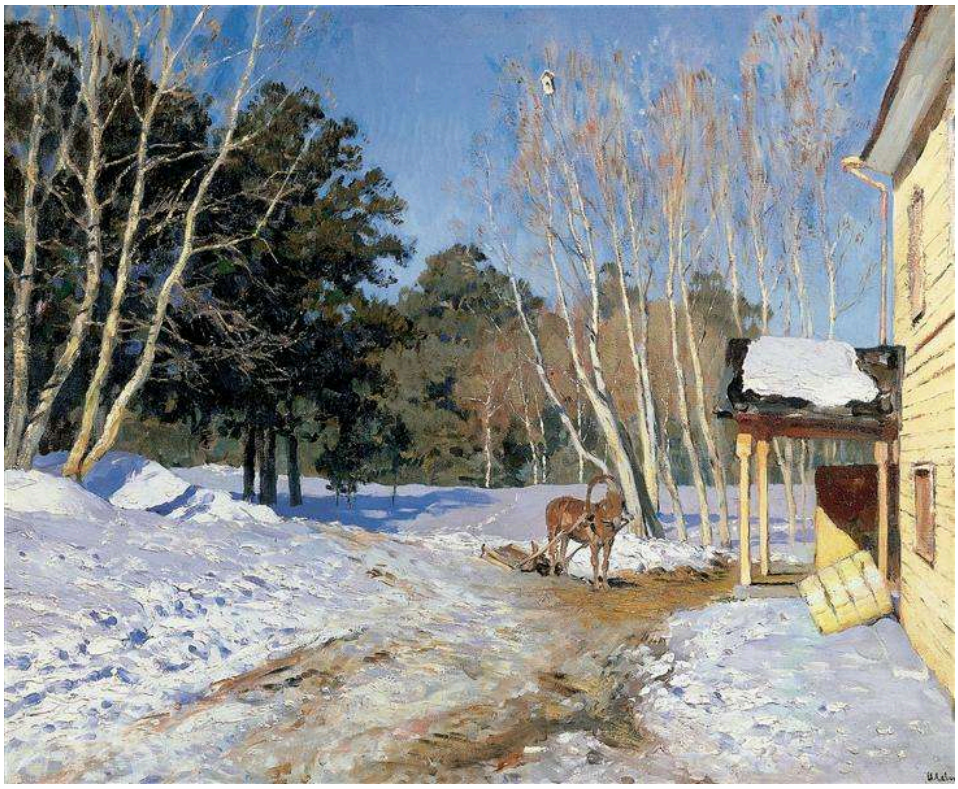
Object source · Open artwork

04 / 20

March

Isaac Levitan

1895 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Isaac Levitan. March. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The month in the title shows in the ground. Snow is melting from the track, leaving it partly snow-covered and partly bare earth, and the colour turns with the season too: warm light on the wooden building, blue shadow among the trees. A horse stands waiting.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

Bathing a Red Horse

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

1912 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin. Bathing of a Red Horse. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Horses are not this colour, and in a bathing scene they do not usually take over the canvas. Petrov-Vodkin's does both. Yet the picture never stops being a bathing scene. The figures and the water read clearly, and the animal keeps its bodily weight. Only colour and scale have been pushed, and that is enough to invite symbolic readings without the painting settling on any one of them.

Object source · Open artwork

06 / 20

Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan

Ilya Repin

1883-1885 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Ilya Repin. Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title names the two men as Ivan the Terrible and his son, and Repin paints the aftermath, not the violence itself. The older man holds the younger, their bodies joined around a wound his hands cannot undo. Patterned carpets and rich furnishings fill the room around that desperate embrace. This is Repin's historical reconstruction, not an eyewitness record.

Object source · Open artwork

07 / 20

Portrait of an Unknown Woman

Ivan Kramskoi

1883 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Ivan Kramskoi. Portrait of an Unknown Woman. Image credit: Ivan Kramskoi. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Who is she? The title calls her unknown, and her identity has not been established. Kramskoi sets her on a raised carriage seat above a snowy street, looking straight out, in dark, fashionable clothes, her public appearance carefully managed. The encounter feels particular, yet neither her costume nor her expression gives us a name or a story.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 5893

08 / 20

The Vision of the Young Bartholomew

Mikhail Nesterov

1890 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Mikhail Nesterov. The Vision of the Young Bartholomew. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title calls it a vision, but Nesterov keeps the sacred episode at human scale. A boy and a hooded monk meet at the edge of a broad landscape, and the encounter is carried by inclined heads and small gestures. The fields and woodland around them stay ordinary, recognisable country.

Object source · Open artwork

09 / 20

After Prince Igor's Battle

Viktor Vasnetsov

1880 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Viktor Vasnetsov. After prince Igor’s battle. Image credit: Viktor Vasnetsov. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Vasnetsov takes a battle known from both literature and history and paints it only once the fighting is over. Birds, scattered weapons and shields mark the open ground where the warriors lie, and no hero is shown in action. Repin's Ivan also comes after the violence, but it closes in on two figures in a furnished room. Here the aftermath spreads across an open field.

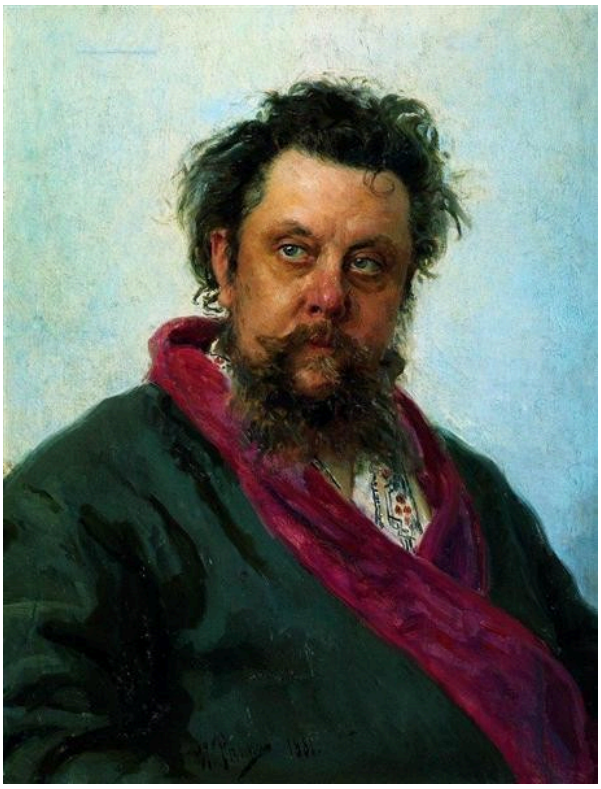
Object source · Open artwork

10 / 20

Portrait of Modest Mussorgsky

Ilya Repin

1881 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Ilya Repin. Portrait of the Composer Modest Musorgsky. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Mussorgsky is not dressed for posterity. He wears a loose dressing gown, not the formal dress expected in a portrait of a distinguished composer, and Repin gives the untidy hair and reddened features as much attention as the likeness itself. The signs of frailty are recorded exactly. Repin neither softens them nor offers a diagnosis or a judgement.

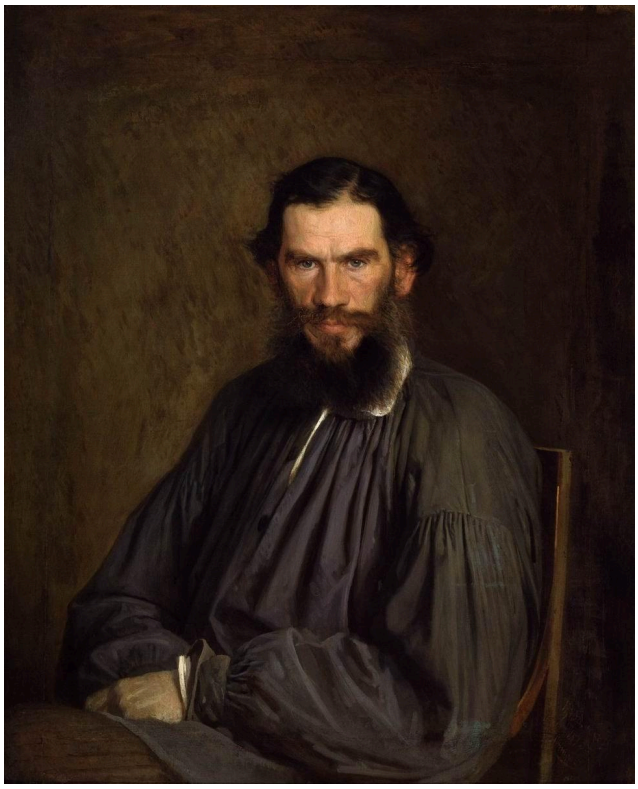
Object source · Open artwork

11 / 20

Portrait of Leo Tolstoy

Ivan Kramskoi

1873 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Ivan Kramskoi. Portrait of Leo Tolstoy. Image credit: Ivan Kramskoi. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Kramskoi gives his most celebrated sitter here the least to lean on: a dark, loose shirt, a restrained background, and no library, desk or literary emblem to announce the writer. His other two sitters in this selection are partly defined by their surroundings, the beekeeper by his hives and the unknown woman by her carriage and fashionable clothes, though not by her name. Tolstoy's name needed no such help. Attention goes to the gaze, the beard and the hands, gathered low.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 655

12 / 20

A Quiet Monastery

Isaac Levitan

1890 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Isaac Levitan. Quiet cloister. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A narrow bridge crosses reflective water towards monastery buildings in the distance, while trees and water break the approach into stages. Levitan makes the religious site somewhere you could reach, not an isolated piece of architecture seen across empty space. No large figure appears, but the bridge suggests that someone might cross.

Object source · Open artwork

13 / 20

Evening Bells

Isaac Levitan

1892 · Oil on canvas · State Tretyakov Gallery



Isaac Levitan. Vesper chimes. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/isaac-levitan/vesper-chimes-1892 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The title names a sound the painting can only suggest. Monastery buildings stand across broad water, at about the distance bells might carry, and Levitan describes that space precisely, with reflections, boats and evening clouds. In A Quiet Monastery a bridge carries the eye over the water. Here the title asks the ear to make the crossing.

Object source · Open artwork

14 / 20

Overseas Guests

Nicholas Roerich

1901 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Nicholas Roerich. Overseas Guests. Image credit: Nicholas Roerich. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Roerich builds an imagined historical scene from strong colour and ornament. The ship, with its red sails and row of shields, is a bold pattern as much as a means of travel. Boats and rocky shores set the scene, but the decorated vessel is what holds the eye.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: Ж-494

15 / 20

The Beekeeper

Ivan Kramskoi

1872 · Oil on canvas · State Tretyakov Gallery



Ivan Kramskoi. Beekeeper. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/ivan-kramskoy/beekeeper-1872 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

An elderly man in a pale shirt, staff in hand and head lowered, is seen among plants and wooden hives. Kramskoi leaves him in his working surroundings instead of lifting him out as a general emblem of the countryside, and sets his slow, bowed posture against the dense growth.

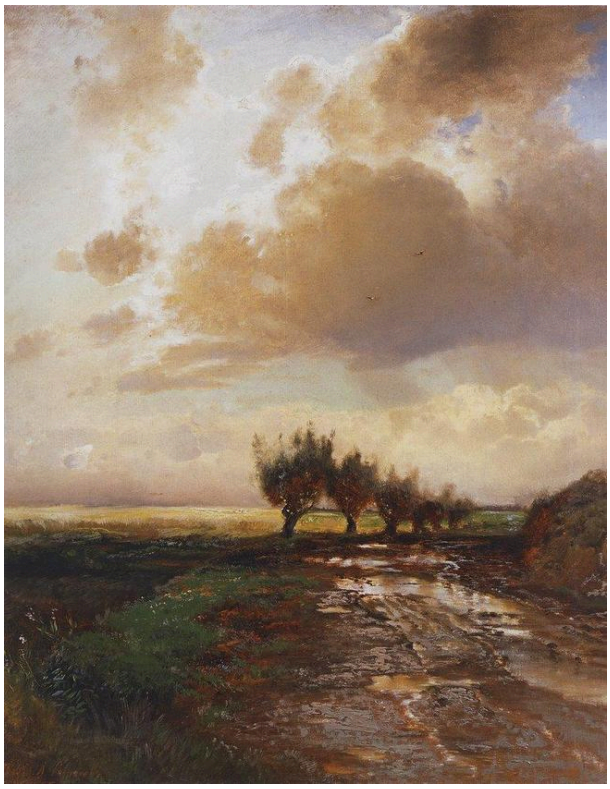
Object source · Open artwork

16 / 20

Country Road

Alexei Savrasov

1873 · Oil on canvas · State Tretyakov Gallery



Alexei Savrasov. Country road. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aleksey-savrasov/country-road-1873 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

A road leading into a picture usually serves to carry the eye into the distance. Ruts and pools interrupt Savrasov's, and what the painting shows is how the weather has marked its surface, not how perspective organises it. Broken clouds and changing light tie the near ground to the sky. Levitan's March also reads the season from the state of a track.

Object source · Open artwork

17 / 20

The Snow Maiden

Viktor Vasnetsov

1899 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Viktor Vasnetsov. Snow Maiden. Image credit: Viktor Vasnetsov. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

In her pale costume the Snow Maiden, a figure from legend, stands out against the dark forest that closes round her. Vasnetsov places her between lit snow and the trees, exposed, and that position alone shows how precarious she is. The picture has no need to retell the tale.

Object source · Open artwork

18 / 20

The Bolshevik

Boris Kustodiev

1920 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Boris Kustodiev. The Bolshevik. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A giant with a banner strides over the streets and roofs of a crowded city. Kustodiev gives revolutionary force an allegorical body, and the deliberate mismatch of scale carries the argument. Petrov-Vodkin's red horse also breaks with ordinary scale but leaves its meaning open. Here the title settles what the giant stands for. This is a constructed image of political power, not an impartial account of the events it refers to.

Object source · Open artwork

19 / 20

The Philosophers Bulgakov and Florensky

Mikhail Nesterov

1917 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Mikhail Nesterov. Portrait of the philosophers S.N. Bulgakov and P.A. Florensky. Image credit: Mikhail Nesterov. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Nesterov shows the philosophers S.N. Bulgakov and P.A. Florensky walking side by side. There is no emblem of philosophy, only an ordinary shared activity. As in his Vision of the Young Bartholomew, the picture rests on two figures and small differences of bearing: one wears pale clothes, the other dark, and their looks and gestures differ. They share a path but not an expression.

Object source · Open artwork

20 / 20

Ivan Morozov

Valentin Serov

1910 · State Tretyakov Gallery



Valentin Serov. Ivan Morozov. Image credit: Unknown author Unknown author. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Serov places the collector Ivan Morozov, in sober clothes and with his hands clasped, against pictures in far livelier colour. The portrait defines him partly through the art he chose to have around him, and the man himself is perhaps the quietest thing in it. Serov set Vera Mamontova in her family's house. Morozov he sets among his pictures.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 10872

Finding the works

The Tretyakov spreads its collection across several buildings, and this selection does not follow a route through any one of them. Check where each painting is before you set out.

Further reading

Concerning the Spiritual in Art

Wassily Kandinsky; translated by Michael Sadleir · Read free · English

Kandinsky's essay, in Michael Sadleir's English translation, makes the case for painting that goes beyond literal representation. It belongs to the same period of early modern art as Black Square but argues from a different position. That makes it a voice from the same moment on the same questions, though it does not set out Malevich's own aims.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12

Artline · State Tretyakov Gallery: Masterpieces