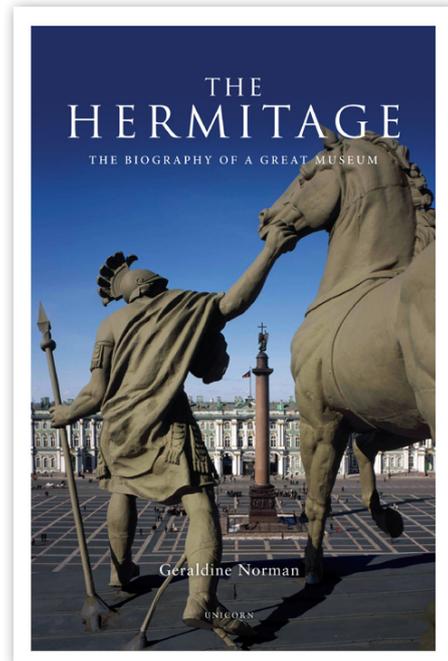


THE HERMITAGE

The Biography of a Great Museum

Geraldine Norman

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The Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg is possibly the greatest museum in the world. It began as a showcase for the art treasures of the Tsars and reflects their legendary extravagance. Imperial romances, marriages and murders all had an impact on the collection, as did the byzantine bartering of international politics. Nationalised by the Bolsheviks in 1917, the museum expanded to fill the imperial family's Winter Palace from the museum wing which was added to it by Nicholas I in 1852. Vast, confiscated collections came the way of the museum as a result of the Revolution – treasures of the Russian nobility, as well as two great merchant collections of Gauguin, Matisse and modern masters.

The courage and devotion of its curators have helped the museum survive the terrible trials of the twentieth century: the exile, imprisonment and execution of many staff during Stalin's purges, and extremities of hunger during the siege of Leningrad – when 2,000 people lived in a makeshift bomb shelter in the museum cellars. With the 1990s came a new battle, as the Hermitage struggled to survive amidst the economic chaos of post-Communist Russia.

The Hermitage is the first full history of this great museum in any language, written by a leading expert in the field. It highlights the human adventures involved in the creation and preservation of one of the finest art collections in the world and reveals the hitherto unchronicled dramas of the Communist years, providing an unusual perspective on Russia's troubled history.

Born in Wales in 1940, Geraldine Norman received a BA in Mathematics from the University of Oxford and joined *The Times* newspaper as a statistician in 1962. In 1967 she launched the Times-Sotheby index of art prices and later became the Sale Room Correspondent of *The Times*. She became Art Market Correspondent at the *Independent* newspaper in 1987, leaving 8 years later to write her book *The Hermitage: The Biography of a Great Museum* (first edition 1997). Director of the Hermitage Development Trust (1999–2001), editor of *Hermitage Magazine* (2003–2005), chief executive of the Hermitage Foundation UK (2003–2012) and currently Director (2014–present). Geraldine's books include *The Sale of Works of Art* (as Geraldine Keen, 1971), *Nineteenth Century Painters and Painting, A Dictionary* (1977), *The Fake's Progress* (with Tom Keating & Frank Norman, 1977), *The Hermitage: The Biography of a Great Museum* (1997), *Bob Hecht by Bob Hecht* (ed. 2014) and *Dynastic Rule* (2016).

'For over 250 years the Hermitage has been a leading character in the drama that is Russian history, and this is a place where all the secrets are kept. Geraldine brilliantly, academically yet engagingly, tells the history of Russia through the eyes of the museum. She unveils a suspenseful, dramatic, even epic story, tragic at times, filled with hope at all times. No one could possibly capture this story better than Geraldine' – Karine Hagen

This new edition is a guide to the deep workings of the Hermitage spirit. It is fascinating for an insider to read and re-read. I am sure it will be equally so for our visitors' – Mikhail Piotrovsky Director of the State Hermitage