



presents

Russian Ark

A film by
Alexander Sokurov

Produced with the participation of Seville Pictures

RT: 90 minutes

www.russianark.spb.ru

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SYNOPSIS

Invisible to everyone around him, a contemporary filmmaker magically finds himself in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg – back in the early 1700s! He meets a cynical French diplomat from the 19th Century (French aristocrat and author Marquis de Custine 1790-1857), and the men become accomplices in an extraordinary time-travelling journey through Russia's turbulent past – ending in the present day.

Exploring the splendid corridors and salons of the Palace, the Marquis and the filmmaker witness astonishing scenes from the Tsarist Empire: Peter the Great thrashes his general with a whip; during rehearsals of her own play, Catherine the Great rushes around looking for a place to relieve herself; Tsar Nicolas I hosts a ceremonial reception for Persian counsellors, the family of the last Tsar dine together, quite oblivious to the impending revolution. And hundreds of dancers, waltz at the last Great Royal Ball of 1913 with Valery Gergiev conducting.

As their time-voyage unfolds in a single, uncut steadicam shot, the two men engage in a passionate and ironic dispute. The Marquis clearly has a Western love-hate relationship with Russia, whereas the modern filmmaker questions his country's uneasy connection to its past and to Europe today. The two tease each other, and share their amazement at the scenes they encounter.

The Hermitage is the Russian Ark, affectionately guarding art and history until the world sees better days.

*A NOTE FROM MIKHAIL PIOTROVSKY
DIRECTOR OF THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM*

RUSSIAN ARK represents the author's dream, but it is at the same time the embodiment of the dream of many whose lives are linked with the Hermitage. The museum has come to life. That historical memory which is present within its walls, within all its open spaces, which can be felt by any person of intuition, has found embodiment in Alexander Sokurov's striking and strange images. The film is both entertaining and incredibly beautiful.

RUSSIAN ARK has proved to be an unusually dramatically intense narrative about the cultural history of Petersburgian Ruggia, about the eternal questions regarding the uniqueness, independence and significance of cultural life in a land which loves Europe yet which is not a part of Europe.

RUSSIAN ARK shows that cinema can relate to the world of authentic museum objects with tact, with reverence and with love, not merely from a fear of doing damage, but from a desire not to disturb, or rather a desire to pass on, that almost holy thrill of the museum air and atmosphere.

One does indeed watch this film "in a single breath", the breath of one of the world's most amazing museums.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER SOKUROV

I'm no theoretician, I'm a practical director. I have never had any desire to uncover anything new. This idea of the long, unbroken shot has existed for years. I never do anything new...I am interested only in classical form and content. In the professional world, much of the art has been utterly forgotten and therefore my conduct is sometimes seen as radical, but it's simply that I remember a lot...the very fact of art itself is unshakeable; art was perfected long ago. Here, shooting in a single take is an achievement in formal terms, but more than that it is a tool with the aid of which a specific artistic task can be resolved. It's just a tool.

What is this tool called?

Breathing. One has to live a specific amount of time in a single breath. Back in the spring of 1999 the producer Andrey Deryabin suggested that I take on a serious production based around the Hermitage collection. He knows my great admiration, my almost reverential attitude to this museum. I had an idea but it was very expensive and complicated to put into effect. This idea was for a film shot, as it were "in a single breath".

The screen format, cinematography – everything depends on the scissors, on the knife. Editors and producers accumulate, then edit using time according to their own whims. And I wanted to try and fit myself into the very *flowing of time*, without remaking it according to my wishes. I wanted to try and have a natural collaboration with time, to live that one and a half hours as if it were merely breathing in...and out. That was the ultimate, the sole artistic task...

Before this, nobody had ever tried it. In order to make a film in a single breath the many different components within the whole concept have to be in accord with each other, all the different parts have to be linked together, and each must flow from the previous part...one has to grow a tree, as it were. Whenever I'm working on a film I seek to grow a tree. Not a bush, but a tree. That is the principle which has guided me through many years in the cinema...

Does the action take place in different times?

In different times. The time of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, of Nicholas I and Nicholas II...For me it is all a single temporal space. I live in those times. For me, not one of those times has ever stopped or ended. Historical time cannot depart, cannot collapse.

This is a historic feature, in which there are central heroes. Some unknown foreigner, born in the 19th century, who has visited Russia. And another figure, a contemporary figure, the Author. Both find themselves in this situation, moving through a labyrinth. The labyrinth is the Hermitage, the only place in Russia where such a thing exists, for there is no other such artistic and vivid labyrinth.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Sokurov had a vision, which poured out and came together in a single moment. It was all in his head and ninety minutes later, it was all on film. A film that really was cut in the camera. A film that mirrors the flowing of time accurately. Like life, it is impossible to divide time.

The making of RUSSIAN ARK is a story of records and firsts – the first entirely unedited, single screen, single take, full-length feature film; the longest-ever steadicam sequence, the first ever uncompressed HD movie, recorded onto a portable hddisk system, rather than 35mm or tape.

But it is the making of a film with a director who is not at all interested in “firsts” And “records” and who has no special fascination for inventing anything “new”. Instead Alexander Sokurov is a director who is concerned with the simple principal elements of cinema: sound, image, time.

When we set-off on this journey that was to become RUSSIAN ARK, more than four years ago, it sounded novel but straightforward. “I am sick of editing,” Sokurov said, “let’s not be afraid of time.” His idea for a one-shot digital film moving in real time through the rooms and halls of the Hermitage seemed wonderfully simple and even easy. Digital video, one shooting day, no editing! A producer’s dream.

Of course, we were wrong. RUSSIAN ARK was a *tour de force* – beyond what always turns out to be a tough process. Years of developing an idea that most people could not comprehend or believed impossible to carry out. Months of rehearsals and preparation culminating in a single take of an entire feature film on a single shooting day. A joint crew from Russia and from Germany had to function together symbiotically for a simple adrenaline-pumping moment of sheer filmmaking nerve.

Yet, when it was over, it was simple, after all. Sokurov had a vision, which poured out and came together in a single moment. It was all in his head and ninety minutes later, it was all on film. A film that really was cut in the camera. A film that mirrors the flowing of time accurately. Like life, it is impossible to divide time.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Alexander Sokurov's extraordinary vision of filming *RUSSIAN ARK* in one uninterrupted take required extraordinary technical solutions. As it is physically impossible to record more than twelve continuous minutes of conventional film, we had to turn to video. However, it was only the fairly recent arrival of compact 24P High Definition cameras, that offered the visual quality and portability to make this film for cinema, eventually transferring the digital image to 35mm negative.

With the help of German HD-specialists KOPP MEDIA, a complex portable rig was designed to accommodate the demands of the script, which included precise architectural plans outlining the 1300m distance covered in the narrative. It was decided that the only way to move the camera would be using steadicam although, until after the final shoot, we could not be sure that such a long steadicam shot is even possible because of the extreme physical demands on the operator.

The next challenge was the recording medium. An HD camera can only record 46 minutes without changing tapes. We needed 90. A prototype hard disk recording system developed by the Cologne company Director's Friend provided the solution. Adapted to be portable and equipped with a special ultra-stable battery, this system could record up to 100 minutes of uncompressed image - but only once.

Hence there was but a single shooting day. With four hours of existing light. Thousands of people in front of and behind the camera simply had to work together perfectly. The Museum was closed and restored to its original condition. An equivalent of 33 studios had to be lit in one go throughout allowing for 360 degree camera movements. All within a vulnerable environment that holds some of the greatest art treasures of all from da Vinci to Rembrandt. After months of rehearsals, 867 actors hundreds of extras, three live orchestras and 22 assistant directors had to know their precise positions and lines.

The list of things that could have gone wrong is very long. But through the sheer determination of the director, or possibly a miracle, nothing did. It worked.

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM

A museum of world renown. The pride of Russia and of its northern capital, St. Petersburg. A very special world, a separate page in Russian history.

2003 will mark the 300th anniversary of the City of St. Petersburg. At the heart of this stunning city, on the banks of the river Neva, lies the Hermitage, one of the world's finest and most beautiful architectural ensembles: the Winter Palace (the former residence of the Russian Tsars), the Small Hermitage, Old Hermitage, New Hermitage and Hermitage Theatre.

First built by Peter the Great as a modest Winter Palace, then expanded by his heirs, it was Empress Catherine II who founded the Hermitage as a museum. In 1764 she acquired 225 paintings for her own private picture gallery. Her intention: to surpass all the other famous collections of her fellow European monarchs.

In 1917, the Winter Palace was the site of the October Revolution. During WWII, the city – and the Hermitage – survived a 900-day siege by Nazi forces, which cost more than one million lives.

Today the Hermitage is one of the largest and most celebrated museums in the world. Its collection consists of more than three million items: paintings and sculptures, prints and drawings, decorative and applied art, coins and medals, and a rich selection of archaeological artefacts. The Hermitage has branches in London, Amsterdam and Las Vegas.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON “RUSSIAN ARK”
FROM KENNETH BARLETT, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Russian Ark is a film that functions on several levels simultaneously. From one perspective it is the ultimate example of an *auteur* movie in which the vision and objectives of its director, Alexander Sokurov, emerge. It is an experimental essay on a difficult subject, filmed in a single take of 99 minutes, with the cameraman following the leading character through over 33 rooms of the Hermitage Palace in St Peterburg, Russia. Equally, it is a meditation on Russian history and culture, in which the Hermitage becomes in many ways the protagonist, the factor that unites the complex, often sordid and always dramatic, history of the Russian people. It is a model not of life mirroring art but of art as life itself. However, to grasp *Russian Ark* on this level, more information is required than Sokurov provides or than most North American audiences enjoy.

The film is held together by three forces working closely together: the spy - the point of view of the audience - represented by the camera; the historical character of Astolphe, Marquis de Custine, with whom the spy silently converses; and the Hermitage itself, representing the burden and hope of Russian culture. Of these the necessary elements to explore are Custine and the Hermitage.

Astolphe de Custine was chosen as the golden thread woven through the entire tapestry of the film because of his enormously influential 1839 publication, *Empire of the Czar*, which records his travels through Russia. The book reflected not only Custine's privileged experiences in the Russia of Nicholas I - he was after all travelling under the czar's protection - but his own family's past which in turn determined the marquis's personal perspective. Custine was the son and grandson of liberal aristocrats who nevertheless both fell prey to the guillotine during the French revolution. Young Astolphe and his mother survived, despite terrible suffering, largely because of his mother's heroism and accepting deprivation to save her son. These events turned Custine in a conservative, who saw in democracy the seeds of the revolution that had destroyed his family. He thought royal authoritarianism was the best protection against the violence and anarchy of the mob.

That was, at least, until his visit to Russia. It was in that empire that Custine saw the dangers in autocracy and became aware of the need to balance the ignorance and inefficiency that resulted from an omnipotent ruler and an oppressed people. This experience in Russia was then recorded not as the Czar expected - an encomium of enlightened despotism - but a call for some measure of civilized control and shared power. Custine's 1838 visit to Russia, then, was a kind of conversion that produced a far more sophisticated analysis of politics and society than either the marquis or his hosts anticipated. Furthermore, it is important to know that Custine was a revolutionary in other spheres of his life, characteristics which could prepare him for this deeper appreciation of the subtleties of Russian society. Custine was an open, practising homosexual in a world where one of his rank and position was required to lead at best a double life. The marquis cohabited openly with another man and did nothing to disguise the fact, one of the first recorded French aristocrats to do so. Custine was, therefore, an outsider on his Russian travels from two points of view: first as a

foreigner, second as one who refused to be controlled by accepted social rules. He is consequently a splendid example for Sokurov to have chosen as his film's narrative voice.

The Hermitage is the place where the voice and the visual images intersect, as seen in Custine's entry into the palace. To Sokurov it becomes not just a building, a palace or a great art gallery, it becomes a metaphor for Russia itself and the strength and endurance of Russian culture, especially as a strand of western European culture. Sokurov follows this theme visually as we see through Custine's and the spy's eyes Peter the Great acting with violence against one of his courtiers; we see the court of Catherine the Great and the empress witnessing a play in her palace theatre; we see a ceremony of Nicholas I in which the Shah of Persia offers apologies for a diplomatic incident, reflecting the Russian belief that Holy Russia is the first protection of Christian Europe against non-European peoples with values inimical to civilized western society; and we see common but cultivated Russians as well as simple sailors admiring and appreciating the riches of the museum galleries. But, we simultaneously see the slender thread on which these shards of civilization rest: first, there are the custodians shown protecting the heritage of the Hermitage during the terrible siege of Leningrad during the second world war; and, in the final scene, the last great court ball held by the last czar, Nicholas II, in 1913, just before the outbreak of that first great war which would destroy imperial Russia and, Sokurov implies, separate it from its European roots.

That last image, with its gorgeous uniforms and gowns, its beautiful setting and Russian music is the culmination of the film inasmuch as the end of the ball is the end of Russian civilization as it had been shown advancing over the previous 90 minutes. The noble guests of the fatherly, uxorious and kindly Czar Nicholas (at least as portrayed by Sokurov) descend the splendid ambassadors' staircase like the passengers of the *Titanic*, doomed but still unaware. The descent is both literal and figurative as it mirrors the descent of Russia into a tyranny that knew no culture or humanity. Custine knew, as all ghosts must, how the epic would end; but his foreknowledge was not to be shared by those still confident and content courtiers who were not only leaving the palace of Russian culture but entering hell itself, as Custine and his family had as a consequence of an earlier revolution.

Sokurov has, then, made the Hermitage the repository of all that is best in Russian culture and therefore worth preserving and celebrating, as its directors Piotrovsky senior and junior remark in the current museum director's cameo appearance. It is also the instrument through which Russia can regain its soul and its equilibrium after so many decades of terror. If Custine can return from the sleep of death, so can an entire people, awakened by the summons of history and culture. However, Sokurov should have asked some other questions: was not the elegance of Czarist Russia a kind of theatre masking the continued autocracy and inefficiency Custine observed in the 1830s? Was that imperial regime as benign and cultivated as the film suggests? And, not all the threats were eastern: Karl Marx was a product of European culture and enlightenment belief in scientism, managed progress and social engineering. How would those principles have been isolated and quarantined in any Russia which played a part in the cultural history of Europe?

To some extent these questions are not raised because the dangers of both revolution and autocracy are present in the biography and the observations of Astolphe de Custine. Without fully comprehending his central role as both narrator and symbol of paradox, the full complexity of the movie is lost. For North American audiences this is unfortunate, since so few of them have ever heard of the character that gives *Russian Ark* its integrity.

BIOGRAPHY – ALEXANDER SOKUROV

“It is difficult to find a musical equivalent to the acoustics of architecture. For me, it is important that our music expresses lyrical feelings. The images are the legs of the film, but the music is its soul. I want the film to become soft, beautiful, lyrical and memorable – that is my aim.”

- Alexander Sokurov, Director “Russian Ark”

Born in 1951 in the village of Podorvikha, Irkutsk Region, USSR. Graduated from the History Faculty of Gorky State University in 1974, then the Directing Faculty of The All-Union State Institute of Cinematography, Moscow. Since 1980 he has lived and worked in St. Petersburg. Director of feature films and documentaries.

In 1995 he was declared one of the best international directors by the European Academy of Cinema.

Winner of the International Vatican Prize “Third Millennium” (1998, for the development of humanist ideas in cinematic art).

FILMOGRAPHY – ALEXANDER SOKUROV

“This movie is a fantasy. It is about something that never happened before. But sometimes you wish it would have happened. I’m sick of editing. I do not want to experiment with time. I want to screen real time. One does not have to fear the flow of time.”

-Alexander Sokurov, Director “Russian Ark”

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

2001 Elegy of a Voyage
1999 Dolce...
1998 Confession
1997 A Humble Life
1996 Hubert Robert. A Fortunate Life
1996 Oriental Elegy
1995 Spiritual Voices
1992 Elegy from Russia
1991 An Example of Intonation
1990 A Simple Elegy
1990 On The Events in the Transcaucasus
1990 Soviet Elegy
1990 Petersburg Elegy
1986 Moscow Elegy
1986 Elegy
1985 Patient Labour
1984 Evening Sacrifice
1982 And Nothing More
1981 Sonata for Viola. Dmitri Shostakovitch
1979 Sonata for Hitler
1978 Maria

FEATURE FILMS

2002 Russian Ark
2000 Taurus
1999 Moloch
1996 Mother and Son
1993 Whispering Pages
1992 Stone
1990 The Second Circle
1989 Save and Protect
1988 Days of Eclipse
1986 Empire
1983 Painful Indifference
1980 The Degraded
1978 A Lonely Voice of Man

BIOGRAPHY - TILMAN BUTTNER
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / STEADICAM OPERATOR

Born in 1961 Tilman Buttner graduated from the Konrad Wolf School of Cinema and TV, Potsdam (1988). Specializes in steadicam filming. He made his name with the film RUN, LOLA, RUN (Lola Rennt) by Tom Tykwer (1997), for which he shot all the scenes in movement.

EXTRACTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH TILMAN BUTTNER

Sokurov immediately won me over with how serious how open he is; he somehow talked very trustingly. Which is not self understood, since he didn't really know anything about me. You are immediately struck by how Sukorov

Relates to his team, to his staff - with those who are closer or less close to him: there is a common style, a common tone, which wins you over straight off. I had the sense that we had known each other for years, a sense of mutual trust. Most importantly, what appealed to me on a purely human level, was that this director respected everyone equally, regardless of their rank, status or role in the process. And he seeks to support each and every one.

And when you first went through the sequence, what did you think?

You know, I didn't have any thoughts in particular. Apart from some feeling inside that I was entering an atmosphere in which the Russian Tsars had walked. People of another world, of another century, of another, unattainable, status. Which I, a simple mortal, would never have been able to penetrate. Not even come anywhere near it. So I had this kind of inner trepidation, I don't know what to call it. I'm walking across the same floors, touching the same objects, looking at the same walls...And I felt very small, a nonentity.

The second sensation which arose was of the vast mass of paintings, and here was all this art which seemed to press down on me. I understood in my head that it is Beautiful, that it is magnificent. But I could not see any beauty, I could not identify it behind the single, monolithic mass which immediately crushed me. And it's only now that I can begin to understand those people who come to the Hermitage once a week for half an hour or an hour at a time. I understand how you can really enjoy these objects. And even now I'm amazed by the vast spaces of the Hermitage. Sometimes I catch myself thinking that I can never truly comprehend the whole of this vast mass right to the very end.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTED)

- 2002 RUSSIAN ARK, Feature Film, Director: Alexander Sokurov
- 2001 BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY, Feature Film, Director: Maria von Heland
- 1999 GRIPSHOLM, Feature Film, Director: Xavier Koller
- 1998 GIGANTIC, Feature Film, Director: Sebastian Schipper
- 1997 RUN, LOLA, RUN, Feature Film, Director: Tom Tykwer
German Prize for Director of Photography

THE ACTORS

Sergey Dreiden as a STRANGER
Maria Kuznetsova as CATHERINE THE GREAT
Leonid Mozgovoy as THE SPY
Mikhail Piotrovsky as Himself
David Giorgobiani as ORBELI
Alexander Chaban as BORIS PIOTROVSKY
Lev Yeliseyev as Himself
Oleg Khmel'nitsky as Himself
Alla Osipenko as Herself
Artem Strel'nikov as a Talented Boy
Tamara Kurenkova as Herself
Maxim Sergeev as PETER THE GREAT
Nathalia Nikulenko as CATHERINE THE FIRST
Yelena Rufanova as the First Lady
Yelena Spiridonova as the Second Lady

Yuliy Zhurin as NICHOLAS I
Svetlana Svirko as ALEXANDRA FEDOROVNA, WIFE OF NICOLAS I
Kostantin Anisimov as the First Cavalier
Alexey Barabash as the Second Cavalier
Ilia Shakunov as the Third Cavalier
Alexander Kulikov as the Fourth Cavalier
Anna Aleksahina as ALEXANDRA FYODOROVNA, WIFE OF NICOLAS II
Vladmimir Baranov as NICHOLAS II
Boris Smolkin as CHANCELLOR NESSELRODE
Alexander Razbash as a Museum Official

CREW LIST - CREDITS

Director	Alexander Sokurov
Visual Concept and Principal Image Design	Alexander Sokurov
Script	Anatoly Nikiforov Alexander Sokurov
Dialogue	Boris Khaimsky Alexander Sokurov Svetlana Proskurina
DOP, Steadicam Operator	Tilman Buttner
Focus Puller	Andre Schneider
HD-Technical Operator	Stefan Ciupek
Technical Supervisor	Steffen Gorner
Creative Consultant	Sergey Ivanov

Lighting Concept	Anatoly Rodionov Bernd Fischer
Gaffer	Bjorn Susen
Art Directors	Yelena Zhukova Natalia Kochergina
Casting	Tatyana Komarova
Costume Designers	Lidiya Kriukova Tamara Seferyan Maria Grishanova
Lead Make-up Artists	Lyudmila Kozinets Zhana Rodionova
Sound Producers	Vladimir Persov Sergey Moshkov
Dubbing Mix	Manfred Arbter
Original Music Performed by	State Hermitage Orchestra
Composer Music Performed by Conducted by	Sergey Yevtushenko The Mariiiiinsky Theatre Orchestra Valery Gergiev
Choreographer	Galy Abaidulov
Project Coordinator	Marina Koreneva
Post-production Supervisor VFX Supervising Digital Imaging Post-production Manager	Benny Drechsel Betina Kuntzsch Sergey Ivanov Undine Simmang
Producer HBS Production Assistant Production Managers	Andrey Deryabin Julia Ananieva Mikhail Vavilov Victor Gailiunas
Legal Advisor	Daniel Goroshko
Producers ETF	Jens Meuer Karsten Stoter
Production Manager Production Assistant Production Accountant	Katrin Springer Christiane Thieme Hans-Jurgen Bubser

PRODUCERS

Hermitage Bridge Studio: Andrey Deryabin
Egoli Tossell Film AG: Jens Meurer, Karsten Stoter

COPRODUCERS

KOPP MEDIA: Sven Boeck
WDR / ARTE: Sabine Rollberg, Hans R. Eisenhauer
FOR A FILM M: Andrey Razumovsky
AST Studio: Sergey Astakhov
NHK: Nobuo Isobe

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Filmförderung Hamburg: Eva Hubert, Reinhard Hinrichs
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Kulturelle Filmförderung des Bundes
Kulturelle Filmförderung Sachsen-Anhalt

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Seville Pictures Inc.: David Reckziegel, Pierre Brousseau
Alla Verlotsky, Associate Producer
Director's Friend: Erhard Giessen
Studio Babelsberg: Gabriela Bacher, Gerhard Bergfried
Das Werk: Andreas Schellenberg, Sebastian Hellge

LINKS:

Alexander Sokurov's
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The State Hermitage
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www.EgoliTossell.com

RUSSIAN ARK website
www.russianark.spb.ru

Mariinsky Theatre
www.mariinsky.ru