

PAGEANT OF THE TSARS

THE ROMANOV CORONATION ALBUMS

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Images available on request

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Pageant of the Tsars: The Romanov Coronation Albums February 16–June 8, 2013

Marking the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Romanov dynasty, lavish albums reveal the pomp and pageantry of the tsars' imperial coronations

WASHINGTON—Marking the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Romanov dynasty in 1613, the history and spectacle of Russian tsars' coronations are revealed in the exhibition *Pageant of the Tsars: The Romanov Coronation Albums* at Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens from February 16 to June 8, 2013.

Beginning in 1724, a total of seven Romanov coronations were commemorated with the production of lavish albums. The core of *Pageant of the Tsars* is a set of five albums from the Hillwood Library, plus supplemental material on loan from the New York Public Library, the Morgan Library, the University of Texas at Austin, the Wolfsonian-FIU, and more, bringing together six of the seven coronation albums for the first time in an exhibition in the United States. As the albums were printed in limited editions and not for sale, a grouping like Hillwood's outside of Russia is rare, with only the New York Public Library—holding six of the seven produced—home to more. Objects from Hillwood's Russian decorative arts and paintings collection will provide further exploration into the Romanovs' lasting influence on Russian art and culture and add to the understanding of their reign and the coronations themselves.



“An exploration of these revealing albums is a way in which Hillwood uniquely is able to add perspective to the historical significance of the Romanov dynasty,” explained executive director Kate Markert. “Thanks to the prescience of founder Marjorie Merriweather Post, today Hillwood houses the

Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008 (202) 686-5807 www.HillwoodMuseum.org

largest and most representative collection of Russian imperial art outside of Russia and the rich library holdings add to the valuable insight and research this comprehensive assortment affords.”

Coronations Commemorated

Coronations were perhaps the most important event in imperial Russia. “The pomp, pageantry, and ceremony associated with them were put down for posterity in albums to express the power of the rulers and persona the emperor wished to create,” explained exhibition curator and Hillwood’s head of collections research Kristen Regina.

Influenced by a centuries-long tradition in Europe known as *fête* or festival books—volumes created to commemorate a royal entry, marriage, funeral, coronation, or other courtly festival—the coronation albums of the Romanovs give the public a glimpse into the world of the court and its rituals and serve as historical objects for study. The tradition began in Russia in 1724, when Peter the Great commissioned an album to celebrate the crowning of his wife Catherine I, and continued until the end of the empire with the last tsar, Nicholas II.

Of the 20 Romanov tsars, only seven commemorated a coronation with such an album. Highlights include the album for Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (Elizabeth I) in 1742, considered the most extravagant Russian book of the 18th century, and a rare 19th-century engraving that depicts the fireworks celebrating Catherine the Great’s coronation in 1762—the only example of this image located in the west. There will be two copies of the 1856 Alexander II album, the largest of all the Russian coronation albums, measuring three feet tall, two feet wide, and weighing 60 pounds. Encouraging the appearance of Alexander as a strong and assured leader, it illustrates highlights from the six weeks of ceremonies and celebrations that accompanied his coronation. The album of Alexander III in 1883 was the first created and printed entirely in Russia, including the text, the images, and the artists commissioned to work on the book. The image of the regalia in the album on view for the exhibition is by Konstantine Makovsky, who painted the popular *Boyar Wedding Feast* in Hillwood’s collection.



The final Romanov coronation was also the most international, lavish, and technologically sophisticated. Nicholas II was crowned in 1896 in the midst of more dignitaries, correspondents, and artists than any of his predecessors. His were the first ceremonies to be recorded on film and to use electricity, and all of this is reflected in the modern two-volume album commemorating the occasion.

The story of each coronation and the context in which it takes place is told further through portraits, medals, decorative arts, and ephemera from Hillwood’s collection and other lenders. Imagery

exploring the Romanovs after the revolution and the renewed interest in their legacy will also be presented in the exhibition.

Digitized versions of each album will allow visitors to see beyond the image on display and page through highlights of the illustrations on iPads installed in the gallery. Comprehensive versions of each of the six albums will be downloadable as e-books to personal devices.

Hillwood's Collection

Marjorie Merriweather Post was the only child of cereal magnate C.W. Post. She inherited the Postum Company, later to become General Foods, in 1914 and began collecting art in the 1920s, with a focus on French furniture and decorative art. Her impassioned eye for the classical and finely-crafted was promptly turned toward Russian imperial art while she was posted in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. During these years, the Soviet government was selling many of the treasures it had appropriated from the church, the imperial family, and the aristocracy in an effort to finance the new government's industrialization plan. She acquired the nucleus of her Russian holdings at this time, but she continued to collect French and Russian art for the rest of her life, eventually amassing the most comprehensive Russian imperial collection outside of Russia.

Already home to the most important collection of Russian art in the United States, supplemented by a significant library, Post's Hillwood made the perfect repository for three of the albums—Nicholas I (1828), Alexander II (1856), and Nicholas II (1899)—when owner Prince Serge Belosselsky-Belozersky (1895-1978) made a gift of them in 1968. The Hillwood Library purchased two additional albums—Elizabeth I (1744) and Alexander III (1883)—in the late 1980s, before the fall of the Soviet Union and at a time when interest in Romanov material was generally low.

Lenders

Lenders to the exhibition include the New York Public Library, Morgan Library and Museum, University of Texas Libraries, Boston Public Library, Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art, Wolfsonian Florida International University, Foundation of Russian History, Galerie Blue Square, and two anonymous private lenders.

Sponsors

Hillwood thanks the Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Nancy and C.G. Appleby, Amy Ballard, John and Sally Burns, Kyra Cheremeteff and Tom Richardson, Mrs. Daniel P. Davison, Miss Suzanne Kuser, and Andrea Tokheim for their support of the exhibition.

Funded in part by the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, an agency supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Programs and Events

An array of social events, lectures, and gallery talks will offer additional opportunities to learn about the Romanov dynasty and its role in Russian and European history.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Location:** 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)
- Information:** www.HillwoodMuseum.org or call (202) 686-5807 for information and reservations.
Follow us www.Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum or Twitter @HillwoodMuseum
- Hours:** Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; Select Sundays, 1 to 5 pm. Closed Mondays, most national holidays, and January 21-February 1, 2013.
- Café:** The HILLWOOD Café serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 am to 3:30 pm.
Afternoon Tea is served on Sundays only from 1 to 3:30 pm.
Express Dining, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages is available Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm and Sunday from 1 to 4 pm.
Call (202) 686-5807 for café reservations.
- Suggested Donation:** \$15, \$12 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18.
No donation is suggested for children under 6.

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One of the premier art collector's museums in the United States, Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens is dedicated to enlightening and engaging visitors with an experience inspired by founder Marjorie Merriweather Post's passion for excellence, gracious hospitality, and intent to preserve and share the beauty and history of her collections, garden, and estate. Home to the foremost collection of Russian imperial art in the United States and impeccable French furnishings and objects, Hillwood is set upon 25 acres of gardens and surrounding woodlands in northwest Washington, D.C. Twelve acres of enchanting formal gardens include a Japanese-style garden, a Rose Garden, a French parterre, and a working greenhouse with over 2,100 exotic orchids.