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‘A thrilling moment for Russian art’: the rediscovery of two life-size statues by Evgenii Lanceray

Specialist Margo Oganessian reveals the tale of ‘one of the most important discoveries in Russian art in the 21st century’

The Russian sculptor Evgenii Lanceray (1848-1886) wasn't one for confining himself to his studio. Born in the town of Morshansk, 260 miles southeast of Moscow, he enjoyed travelling widely across his vast homeland, from Kyrgyzstan to the Caucasus.

On his trips he heard all sorts of folktales and witnessed all manner of customs. This immersion in things Russian would inform the art he created — such as his sculpture of the legendary knight, Ilya Muromets, below, which sold at Christie's in 2011.

Equestrian bronzes were Lanceray's speciality — and they earned him commissions from powerful clients.

‘If you're writing down the names of major Russian artists of the 19th century, his is one of the first on the list,’ says Margo Oganessian, co-head of Russian Art at Christie's in London.

The models for two of his best-known works, *The Tsar's Falconer* and *Kirghiz with a Golden Eagle*, were sculpted in 1872 and 1876 respectively. Both feature a single human figure on horseback.

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*The Tsar's Falconer*, cast by Chopin after the model by Evgenii Lanceray, 1878. 80% in (204 cm) high, and smaller. Estimate: £100,000-150,000. Offered in [Russian Art](#) on 23 November at Christie's in London

The latter work is similar, depicting a hunter from Kyrgyzstan with a golden eagle perched on his right arm. Such birds can weigh up to 14 lb (6.5 kg), hence the support the hunter's left hand gives to his right.

‘Lanceray was famous for his mastery of detail,’ says Oganessian, ‘whether it was the plumage on his birds or the saddles on his horses. He was utterly meticulous in the way he worked his models up.’

The viewer’s eyes are never allowed to rest, drawn from one detail to the next. In the case of *Kirghiz with a Golden Eagle*, the carcass of a hare can be seen slung over the back of the saddle. Look closely and the hunter’s drinking cup, located by his right thigh, is also visible.



*Kirghiz with a Golden Eagle*, cast by Chopin after the model by Evgenii Lanceray, 1878. 80¼ in (204 cm) high, and smaller.

Estimate: £100,000-150,000 each. Offered in Russian Art on 23 November at Christie's in London

Given such attention to detail, it's perhaps no surprise that Lanceray's sculptures tend to be modest in size: usually between 40 and 60 cm high. Examples can be found in several Russian institutions, from the State Tretyakov Gallery to the State Russian Museum and the Kremlin.

As a sign of Lanceray's importance in his own time, it's worth noting that Fabergé produced a magnificent silver *kovsh* (drinking vessel) inspired by *The Tsar's Falconer*. (This fetched £301,250 when it sold at Christie's in London in 2012.)



A highly important monumental gem-set parcel-gilt silver kovsh, marked K. Fabergé with the imperial warrant, Moscow, circa 1909, scratched inventory number 24682. 21 in (53.3 cm) wide, 125.28 oz (3896.5 gr) gross. Sold for £301,250 on 26 November 2012

Nobody quite knows why, but in 1878 the artist had three life-size versions of *The Tsar's Falconer* and *Kirghiz with*

*a Golden Eagle* cast. He had never made works on such a monumental scale before — and never would again.

The fate of all three pairs is well known. One went to the Grand Duchess Olga Constantinovna, the wife of King George I of Greece, to grace the gardens of Tatoi Palace, their summer residence outside Athens.

Another pair was sent as a gift to the French town of Menton, and both statues are still on display there in the Jardins Biovès. The third pair is part of the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art's collection in Baku.

In a remarkable turn of events, a fourth pair of sculptures has just been discovered — and it is offered for sale in Russian Art at Christie's in London on 23 November.

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*‘Nobody knew this final pair existed. It’s a truly wonderful find, brought to the market by the original owner’s family’*

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‘Nobody knew this final pair existed,’ says Oganessian. ‘It’s a truly wonderful find, brought to the market by the original owner’s family.’

The original owner in question was Derrick Westenra, the 5th Baron Rossmore, who assumed his title in 1874 and

held it until his death in 1921, inhabiting the family seat of Rossmore Castle in County Monaghan, Ireland.

It was there that Lanceray's two equestrian sculptures had their first home. The Baron was a keen hunter, so their appeal was obvious.

He would bequeath the works to his daughter, Mary Bailey — a fascinating figure, who, after having five children, felt the sudden urge to 'get away from the prams', as she put it. She started taking flying lessons and, within just a few years, was awarded a DBE for services to aviation. Among the many records she set was that for the longest ever solo flight, when she flew from London to Cape Town in 1928.

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Dame Mary's husband, the diamond tycoon Sir Abraham Bailey, was South African, and the couple moved Lanceray's sculptures to their home in Kenilworth,

outside Cape Town.

It's easy to see why Sir Abraham, too, found the bronzes to his taste: he owned several farms and bred some of the most successful racehorses in South Africa.

The two sculptures were inherited by the current owners by descent from the Baileys.

'They're absolute masterpieces,' Oganessian says. 'This is one of the most important discoveries in our field in the 21st century. Bringing them to auction is a thrilling moment for Russian art.'

30 October 2020

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MODERN ART |  
AUCTION PREVIEW

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Main images:

Two monumental and very rare bronze models: *The Tsar's Falconer* and *Kirghiz with a Golden Eagle*, cast by Chopin after the model by Evgenii Lanceray, 1878. 80¼ in (204 cm) high, and smaller. Estimate: £100,000-150,000 each. Offered in [Russian Art on 23](#)



November at  
Christie's in  
London. Both  
sculptures at Lady  
Bailey's house in  
Cape Town,  
South Africa,  
before 1960

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