



## THE STYLE THAT RULED THE EMPIRES: RUSSIA, NAPOLEON, AND 1812

February 14 – June 2, 2012

Exhibition of Russian and French art  
commemorates the bicentennial of  
The Patriotic War of 1812;  
Russia's army historically defeats Napoleon,  
while the Empire style rules



Russia's triumph over the French army in the Patriotic War of 1812, which dealt an arresting blow to Napoleon and his pursuit of European conquest, ignited a collective Russian pride and production of decorative arts celebrating the occasion that persist today. *The Style that Ruled the Empires: Russia, Napoleon, and 1812* brings together paintings, porcelain, glassware, metalware, attire, and Napoleonic armor and militaria to commemorate the bicentennial of this dramatic event. Exquisite Russian and French decorative art objects from Hillwood's renowned collection, as well as items on loan, will also explore how the *Empire* style, fashionable across Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was adopted by Russian artisans, signaling the continued enchantment with French art and culture.



“Housing the largest and most comprehensive Russian imperial art collection outside Russia, Hillwood is singularly poised to explore this great point of Russian pride as revealed in these exquisite objects,” said Hillwood executive director, Kate Markert. “Hillwood founder Marjorie Merriweather Post had discerned that Russian imperial art was intimately tied to the development of western European art and she assembled both together in the grand setting at Hillwood.” By exploring these Russian and western European treasures in the context of the Napoleonic Wars, *The Style that Ruled the Empires* will reveal how Russian art of the time

reflected both great pride and the adoption of the popular Empire style

### Napoleon's Defeat

The exhibition opens by setting the scene of Napoleon's seminal defeat in 1812. Plates, paintings, and medals depict the would-be emperor in the



midst of his campaign. Loans from a private collection include a Napoleonic cuirass (breastplate) and two helmets, as well as a sword once belonging to Prince Eugène de Beauharnais, stepson of Napoleon, who fought in the famous battles of Borodino and Maloyaroslavets.

### Highlights: Enduring Pride



Russia's victory over French forces in 1812 and the subsequent capture of Paris in 1814 took such a powerful hold on the Russian collective consciousness that art and objects chronicling and commemorating the events were in high demand and were produced for many years. "The magnitude of Russia's victory over Napoleon in 1812 has resonated throughout Russian history," explained exhibition curator and associate curator of Russian and eastern European art at Hillwood, Scott Ruby. "One need only look to Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or

Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* to detect the prominence the dramatic event has held in Russian culture."

In the exhibition, a selection of art objects, including intricate glassware and goblets, finely-crafted niello and ormolu boxes, bronzes, plates, and cups, illustrates the great desire for objects depicting the Russian commanders, as well as Tsar Alexander I, who became famous as heroes in defense of the country at the time of Napoleon's invasion. A glass dessert plate, dating around 1830-40, depicting the *Liberation of Berlin*, was cast by the Imperial Glass Factory from a set of medallions created by Count Fedor Petrovich Tolstoy, who was so proud of his countrymen that he spent 22 years creating medals marking the Russian victories. Plates portraying military figures that the Imperial Porcelain Factory began making shortly after the Napoleonic



Wars ended, proved so popular that production continued without interruption throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Empire Style

The style that ruled the empires at the time of Patriotic War was a result of Napoleon's ambitious program to enhance France's



artistic production. His team of architects, designers, and artisans created a style – marked by neo-classical and antique ornament based on Egyptian, Greek, and Roman models – that was soon uniformly adopted across Europe. With even greater exposure to western Europe than ever before, Russians increasingly demanded furnishings and objects tied to the prevailing European style. The *Marlborough Gem Table*, produced to celebrate the engagement of Princess Charlotte of Prussia to the future Tsar Nicholas I is replete with Empire decoration, including winged victories, eagles, and wreaths. A dress on loan to the exhibition from a private collection exemplifies the characteristics of women’s fashion in the period, complete with the ever-popular “Empire waist.”