

New painting goes on display at the Scottish National Gallery

A new painting has gone on display at the Scottish National Gallery today. It is on loan to the Gallery from the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards Regiment Trust and it shows the last Tsar of Russia in the uniform of the Royal Scots Greys.



Brigadier David Allfrey MBE, Colonel, The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards was joined by Brigadier Melville Stewart Jameson CBE to mark the loan of the painting to The National Galleries of Scotland.

Painted by Valentin Serov one of the greatest Russian painters of the pre-revolutionary era the Tsar, His Imperial Majesty Nicolai II Alexandrvitch, Tsar of All the Russias, wears the

dress uniform as Colonel-in-Chief of Scotland's senior regiment the 2nd Dragoons (The Royal Scots Greys. He sported this uniform at Balmoral during a visit there in autumn 1896.

It was Queen Victoria who appointed him to the position which he held until his death. Now the Guards as successors to the regiment have lent it to the Gallery for public display. There is some historical significance as it is a century since the Bolsheviks executed the Imperial family.



Portrait of His Imperial Majesty Nicolai II Alexandrovitch, Tsar of All the Russias, 1902

by Valentin Serov (1865-1911). Collection: The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards Regimental Trust, Edinburgh Castle

Nicholas II visited Britain five times. In 1894 he stayed with Queen Victoria and then married one of the Queen's granddaughters, Princess Alix of Hesse.

Queen Victoria recognised the close relationship between the two royal households and made the Tsar a Knight of the Garter, an Honorary Admiral of the Fleet and in 1916 a British Field-Marshal.

Serov was born in St Petersburg and trained as an artist in Munich, Paris and Moscow. He was chiefly a portrait painter but also excelled at genre scenes and landscapes as well as theatrical sets.

The portrait of Nicholas II – which is the only major oil painting by the artist in any British public collection – formed part of a group of studies of members of the Imperial family depicted in military uniforms which date from the years around the turn of the century. The Tsar's uniform survives in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. A major and very popular exhibition of Serov's work was mounted in 2016 at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

Christopher Baker, Director of European and Scottish Art and Portraiture at the National Galleries of Scotland, said : "This impressive portrait of the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, is an important, poignant and generous loan to the National Galleries of Scotland, a century after the execution of the Imperial family. What makes the painting so arresting is its relative intimacy, the intense eye contact with the viewer and singing colours. Painted by one the greatest of Russian artists, whose work is little known in Britain, it has strong and fascinating connections with Scottish military history."



Brigadier David Allfrey MBE, Colonel, The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (left) was joined by Brigadier Melville Stewart Jameson CBE to mark the loan of the painting to The National Galleries of Scotland.

Brigadier David Allfrey MBE, Colonel, The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, added: "We are tremendously proud of our Regiment's history and our association with our Royal Family right back to 1678 and Charles II. In similar vein, our connections with Russia are long-honoured, not just through Tsar Nicholas as our Colonel-in-Chief but through a number of regimental customs and routine contact with friends and families across the years. We carry an icon of Saint Nicholas with Regimental Headquarters on operations and on training and the Serov portrait has traditionally hung at the end of the Officers Mess Dining Room. It is a precious and important object for all of us."

"We are delighted the National Galleries of Scotland has accepted our Trust's offer to loan the picture and we are honoured that it will hang in close company with a host of other notable works of art. Great portraits offer an intimate view into the world of the sitter and the painter and this picture serves as a fabulous marker in the colourful and

oscillating relationship between our country, Russia and our people over several centuries.”

The portrait is on display at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh from today. Entry to the Gallery is free.

Photos by Neil Hanna Photography

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