The purpose of this anthology is to acquaint people interested in Russian art, history, and culture with more than just the activities of the Association of Traveling Art Exhibitions (1870-1923), the first art organization in Russia to assert professional independence from the ubiquitous state management and controls. The anthology is also intended to give its readers a sense of the daring and novelty of the Association’s aims (and those of its predecessor, the Artel); its evolution from critical to affirmative realism; and the widespread recognition it gained among the public, first as a supporter of liberal aspirations, next as the creator of a national school of painting, and eventually as an obstacle to change.

The story of the Peredvizhniki (also known as the Wanderers or Itinerants) is relatively little known and appreciated in the West. They are often dismissed or derided as unoriginal practitioners of pedantic, story-telling naturalism of little significance before the advent of the great modernists who, at the start of the twentieth century, contributed so much to the development of art. Ignoring the Peredvizhniki overlooks the fact that the development of painting in any country is a continuous process in which the ever-present search for a new pictorial language is always willy-nilly grounded in the past.

Taking this broader and historically more correct approach, we must acknowledge the contributions the Peredvizhniki made to the renovation and modernization of Russian art in the second half of the nineteenth century. First and foremost, they legitimized and popularized Russia’s landscape, its history, and its people as a topic. It is true that their concentration on subject matter at the expense of style limited their achievement as painters. But it must be recognized that it was precisely this concentration on and fascination with the national that gave the Russian modernists we recognize and laud a rich lore for stylistic innovations. Furthermore, the style of the Peredvizhniki was
by no means uniformly prosaic. During the Association's creative pe-
riod (1870s-1880s), Surikov introduced color and decorative elements;
Levitan, painted emotionally charged and Impressionist-influenced
landscapes; Nesterov concentrated not on dry historical facts, but on
Russia's spiritual heritage; and finally, the Peredvizhniki, despite their
chauvinist pursuit of a Russian school of painting untainted by foreign
influence, did respond to new developments in the West. Nesterov, for
example, drew inspiration for his spiritual rendition of the Russian
Saint Sergii of Radonezh from Bastien-Lepage's Vision of Joan of
Arc.

In various ways, then, the Peredvizhniki prepared the soil for the
sudden, seemingly inexplicable explosion of original, innovative art in
the early years of the twentieth century that is often attributed alone to
a greater familiarity with the latest trends in the West. Their "prepara-
tory" role can be detected in three areas: 1) they made painting a mat-
ter of popular discourse and a factor in the search for national identity,
a very modern phenomenon in itself; 2) they made an appreciation of
things Russian - from landscape and history to peasant customs and
artifacts - into a driving concern; and 3) their stubborn insistence by
1900 on the superiority and uniqueness of Russian realism spurred the
young generation in their equally stubborn quest for an original, post-
Realist art.

These three legacies of the Peredvizhniki impacted the development
of Russian modernism. It is our hope that readers of this anthology
will gain, not merely a familiarity with facts related to the Association
of Traveling Exhibitions and its goals. We also hope that the material
presented here will enable the viewer to appreciate the role it per-
formed in the continuum of Russian art history.

* * * * *

The contents of this volume are divided into two parts.

In Part I, essays by Dmitrii Sarab'ianov and Rosalind P. Blakesley
provide an historical context for the documents that follow.

Part II contains a selection of primary documents related to the his-
tory of the Association of Traveling Exhibitions. Most are translated
into English for the first time. The first section of documents is de-
voted to the prehistory of the Association. It deals with the 1863 se-