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FROM RUSSIA to Louvre. Fragonard's "Poor Family" (left) and Renoir's "Child with a Whip," both from the Hermitage collection.

Russia's French Treasures at Louvre

By John Ashbery

PARIS, Sept. 27.—More than 100 French masterpieces from Lenin-grad's Hermitage Museum and the Pushkin Museum in Moscow have just gone on view at the Louvre. This exhibition, the largest ever to leave Russia, was at the Bordeaux Museum during the summer and will be in Paris until Dec. 31.

Today whenever an American museum acquires an important piece of French art, there are sure to be angry articles in the French press about France's "national patrimony" being stolen by foreigners. But this situation is not new.

In the 18th century, Catherine the Great was already acquiring French art on a scale that would cause a modern collector's head to spin, and the cries of alarm in France at that time were perhaps justified.

Thanks to brilliant advisers such as Diderot, Grimm, and Prince Galitzine, the Russian ambassador to France, Catherine acquired a collection of French art whose size and quality can scarcely be matched today even in the Louvre.

One of her major triumphs was the acquisition of the *fermier general* Pierre Crozat's entire collection of 400 paintings, considered the finest in France in the time of Louis XV.

Seeing these marvelous pictures shown in France for the first time, Frenchmen may well feel that their national patrimony was unjustly usurped. But, as Jacques Chaban-Delmas pointed out in a note to the Bordeaux catalogue, they may also take pride in the *rayonnement* of French culture, testified to by the acquisitive lust that French art has traditionally inspired in foreigners.

Since almost every piece in the exhibition is a masterpiece, one can do little but enumerate the highlights. The earliest work shown, Clouet's portrait of the Duc d'Alençon, already sets down the basic principles of French art for four centuries to come: meaningful clarity of color, drawing, and massed volumes and a sense of mystery arising from the way in which these are put together. They dominate also in works of the following century like Louis Le Nain's magnif-

icent peasant interior called "The Grandmother's Visit," or even in Largillière's "Preparations of the City of Paris for Receiving Louis XIV," a coldly official group portrait which still manages to be an eloquent work of art.

Perhaps the greatest surprises in the show are the 18th-century paintings.

Accustomed as you may be to the greatness of Watteau, Chardin and Fragonard, you will still be amazed by the splendor of some of the works shown. Two masterpieces in Fragonard's frothy "impressionist" manner, "The Poor Family" and "Winning a Kiss," contrast with the more studied but equally powerful charm of his often-reproduced "The Stolen Kiss."

Chardin's 'Cubism'

There are anticipations in Chardin's "The Laundress" of both Cubism (in the curious geometrical modeling of the laundress' dress and cap) and Surrealism (in the ghostly figure of a second laundress looming through steam in a further room).

Watteau's "The Flying Column" is a military scene remarkable for the baroque proliferation of its tiny figures. Among the minor 18th-century painters, Jean-Baptiste Perroneau's "Child with a Book" and "Little Girl with a Hat" by Jean-Louis Voille, a Frenchman who worked almost entirely in Russia, are both profound studies in child psychology, distinguished by their rich, sober handling.

Although the czars who succeeded Catherine did not share her taste for collecting, a certain number of important 19th-century works by Delacroix, Corot, Boilly, David, Courbet and others, and especially Ingres's superb portrait of Count Nicolas Dmitri Gourlev, are included. But it was not until the early 20th century that other "creative" collections of French art were to appear in Russia.

These are the collections of modern art amassed by two brothers, Mikhail and Ivan Morosov, and by the industrialist Serge

Stchoukin, which were nationalized and given to the Leningrad and Moscow Museums after the 1917 Revolution.

Picasso's Art Nègre

Included are works by Renoir, Cézanne, Sisley, Pissarro, Gauguin, Van Gogh and others. But especially remarkable are the works from the first decade of the 20th century by Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard and Derain.

Picasso was at the height of his creative power in the so-called "Art Nègre" period of 1907-1909, of which five rare examples are shown here, together with two Cubist still-lives of 1912. Similarly, Matisse never surpassed the revolutionary boldness and newness of works like the "Nymph and Satyr" and "Dance Around the Nasturtiums" shown here, with their acid color contrasts, vast plane surfaces and rhythmically dislocated figures. Together with the Picassos just mentioned, they represent the high-water mark of 20th-century art.

This is the first of a number of exciting exhibitions scheduled by Paris museums this fall. Later this week the usually lively Paris Biennale opens at the Musée d'Art Moderne. In October an ambitious series of exhibitions of 16th-century European art opens at the Louvre, the Petit-Palais, the Mobilier National and the newly remodeled Orangerie. Sixteenth-century paintings, drawings, engravings and tapestries from all over Europe will be presented simultaneously in what promises to be a momentous reappraisal of this century, somewhat neglected in recent decades in favor of the 17th century.

Note: the "College Art Study Abroad" program begins its fall semester of classes in painting, life drawing and graphics this week at the American Center for Students and Artists, 261 Boulevard Raspail. A series of guided visits to museums and galleries is included in the comprehensive studio program.