

# London Set for the Opening of Russian Art Week

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Leon Bakst's 1909 painting "Bathers on the Lido, Venice," is among the well-known works to be auctioned off.

The gloom of winter may fast be approaching, but Londoners need not fear: Russian Art Week is set to bring more than a splash of color to the British capital when it opens this Friday. The Moscow Times caught up with Theodora Clarke, editor of the website Russian Art and Culture and publisher of the Russian Art Week guide, to find out more.

"Christie's, Bonhams, Sotheby's and MacDougall's have always traditionally held biannual sales of Russian art in London, because London is very much at the center of the trade of Russian pictures" Clarke said over Skype. "They would always coordinate their sales for the same week in June and the same week in November."

Yet it was Clarke — whose Russian Art and Culture blog has since blossomed into a professional website with a readership of 50,000 — who first spotted a gap in the market.

"There was no one place for collectors to find out information about the separate auctions. [Potential clients] would have to ring up separate art houses to get the times of auctions and then make themselves a calendar."

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"I basically approached all of these different organizations and said 'look, we'll design you a new website, we'll actually create you a new publication,'" which will bring all this information together. It proved to be a success, and November marks the third edition, and the year anniversary, of Russian Art Week in its current form.

So what can Londoners look forward to during Russian Art Week? While it may revolve around the sale of art in the major auction houses, an accompanying program of exhibitions and performances will also offer the public the chance to experience a broader range of Russian culture.

The week officially kicks off Friday at the Westbury Hotel with Britain's first-ever retrospective of abstract expressionist painter Boris Chetkov. Clarke is curating the exhibition, with backing from the Pushkin Gallery in New Mexico, and the event will serve as the launch party for her book "Re-Imagining Russia: The Landscape and Genre Paintings of Boris Chetkov."

"One of the great things about doing this week and doing this exhibition is the opportunity to introduce a major contemporary Russian artist to British audiences." Clarke says of the retrospective. "And this also goes back to the original aim of the [Russian Art and Culture] website which is to introduce Russian culture to international audience ... and start the process of education and engagement with members of the public."

Among the pick of the other exhibitions is a collection of 60 major Russian and Greek icons, which are being specially flown over from Amsterdam and will be displayed at the Willow Gallery from Nov. 22 to 29. Several other exhibitions will run beyond November, so visitors will have a chance to dip into Russian culture long after the official event is over.

The week will also be marked by a series of lectures, and on Nov. 26, Clarke will be hosting a one-off roundtable entitled "Resurrecting the Past: Lost Stories of the Archives," at the Russian Bookshop at Waterstone's Piccadilly. Clarke will be joined by prominent historians Catherine Merridale, Vladimir Alexandrov and Giles Milton, who will discuss the challenges faced by Western historians when carrying out research in Russia.

As for the art itself, Clarke believes there will be a strong showing in the auction houses this

November, which is significant ,given that sales of Russian art in London hit £50 million (\$80 million) in June.

"MacDougall's have got an extraordinary painting called 'The Bathers on the Lido' by Leon Bakst, who was one of the great designers who worked with [Sergei] Diaghilev at the Ballet Russe." Clarke says. "There is also a wonderful painting by Ilya Mashkov of the 'Bathers' and a Faberge photo frame, which will be stand out lots at Christie's."

Sotheby's have an amazing masterpiece by the Russian avant-garde artist Robert Falk of "Man in a Bowler Hat," while Bonhams, who sold a painting by Nicholas Roerich for £7.9 million in June, have another painting by the same artist that is expected to go for more than £1 million.

Anyone hoping to pick up a bargain may therefore be disappointed: "I expect that all of these works will break records" says Clark. "The prices of these paintings are extremely high. All of the ones I have just mentioned have estimates of between £500,000 and £4 million."

*Russian Art Week is organized by Russian Art and Culture and runs Nov. 22 until Nov. 29. More information about exhibitions, lectures and sale times can be found at [russianartweek.co.uk](http://russianartweek.co.uk).*

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