

Tretyakov Gallery Defies Putin's Orders to Hand Historic Icon to Church

May 24, 2023



Andrei Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity at the Tretyakov Gallery. **Sofia Bagdasarova (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery has refused to hand over a renowned Orthodox icon to the Russian Orthodox Church in defiance of President Vladimir Putin's orders, the Fontanka.ru news website [reported](#) Tuesday.

According to Fontanka, a May 15 Tretyakov Gallery expert meeting with Church members concluded that Andrei Rublev's "Trinity" cannot be taken out of the art museum due to its "complicated and unstable condition."

"At the moment the icon is in the restoration workshop in the process of urgent restoration," according to the meeting's minutes.

The masterpiece is believed to have been painted for what is now the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, located in the town of Sergiyev Posad outside Moscow, in the 15th century.

Rublev's most famous work has only left the Tretyakov Gallery a handful of times since being

transferred there in 1929, including during World War II when it was evacuated to safety.

The medieval icon traveled back to the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius for religious celebrations in the summer of 2022 much to the criticism of art experts.

The Moscow Patriarchate has said the icon would be exhibited for a year at the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow before returning to the historic monastery in Sergiyev Posad.

The Tretyakov Gallery's May 15, 2023, expert meeting reportedly linked "Trinity's" damage to its transportation to Sergiyev Posad.

"The monument was subject to de-conservation, which is objectively confirmed by monitoring the results of its state of preservation," Fontanka quoted the meeting minutes as saying.

The Russian Orthodox Church said it "[understands](#)" the Tretyakov Gallery's refusal to hand over Rublev's "Trinity," according to Interfax.

Archpriest Leonid Kalinin, the Moscow Patriarchate's lead expert on Church art and restoration, told the news agency he expects the Trinity Lavra to prepare for the artwork's safe storage.

"But now it will be done with [...] the expectation that it will find its native harbor, for which it was painted, for centuries and forever," Kalinin said.

The Trinity's proposed handover to the Russian Orthodox Church came after its powerful leader Patriarch Kirill threw his support behind Putin's decision to send troops to Ukraine and urged believers to support the offensive.

The State Tretyakov Gallery has been under [new leadership](#) since February after a reported clash with Russia's Culture Ministry over its exhibitions' alignment with state values.

St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum said earlier in May that another Russian monastery will receive the memorial complex of the tomb of Alexander Nevsky, a medieval prince and national hero.

An agreement lending the tomb for 49 years with the possibility of extension was signed between the Hermitage Museum and the Church, with approval from Russia's Culture Ministry.

Handing the prince's tomb to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery of the Holy Trinity will be a sign of "particular social and spiritual unity," the museum said in a statement.

Following military setbacks for Russia in Ukraine, authorities in Moscow have sought to depict the military campaign in religious terms. Dozens of Orthodox priests have been sent to the front to support Russian troops.

AFP contributed reporting.

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