

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM EXHIBITION CENTERS

Nowadays it has become a good tradition in largest museums of Russia, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands to have their own museum branches around the world. These exhibition centers represent important elements of the museum life centralization process and unite various small museums under the aegis of one large museum. This system certainly faces all kinds of problems that should be dealt with. On the one hand, it is sometimes difficult to keep a museum branch from the financial point of view - when the local authorities do not take part in its financing. On the other hand, 'strong' branches always tend to become independent museums. On these tendencies one of the schemes of organizing the external museum space in Russia is based.

The exhibition centers that the State Hermitage Museum is organizing are of completely different nature. They are in no way means of museum centralization; on the contrary, they help in decentralizing the Hermitage, serve as international centers of museum space integration and add to the general enhancement of the museum activity.

The State Hermitage Museum comes not to the places without any museum activity – we come to the cities with active art life, to which we contribute with introduction of our collections and with our exhibition experience. The activity of our exhibition centers is co-ordinated by the rules and regulations of the places where they are situated, incorporating the Hermitage into the already existing museum and artistic environment. Thus the new forms of contact and co-operation are being developed. A lot of new problems also arise, and by solving them we increase the quality of the art museum process.

At present the State Hermitage Museum has *The Hermitage Amsterdam* Exhibition Complex (which houses *Nicholas and Alexandra* exhibition at the moment), the Hermitage Rooms at Somerset House, London, where we have opened the *Russian Avant-garde Porcelain* exhibition, and the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Las Vegas demonstrates *The Pursuit of Pleasure* exhibition organized in co-operation with the Guggenheim Museum. Next year we are to open the Hermitage branch in Kazan with the exhibition *Civilization of the Golden Horde*. We are also negotiating on the possibility of opening the exhibition centers in Hiroshima and Mantua.

The present stage of creating exhibition centers – museum branches represents one of the possible ways of humanizing the natural and inevitable process of globalization.