

LEVELED BOOK • P

# The State Hermitage: Russia's Amazing Museum



Written by Francis Morgan

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*Fly Eating a Pear,*  
a Japanese netsuke,  
1700s–1800s

Netsuke were used  
to attach small  
pouches or boxes  
with a cord to  
a person's belt.



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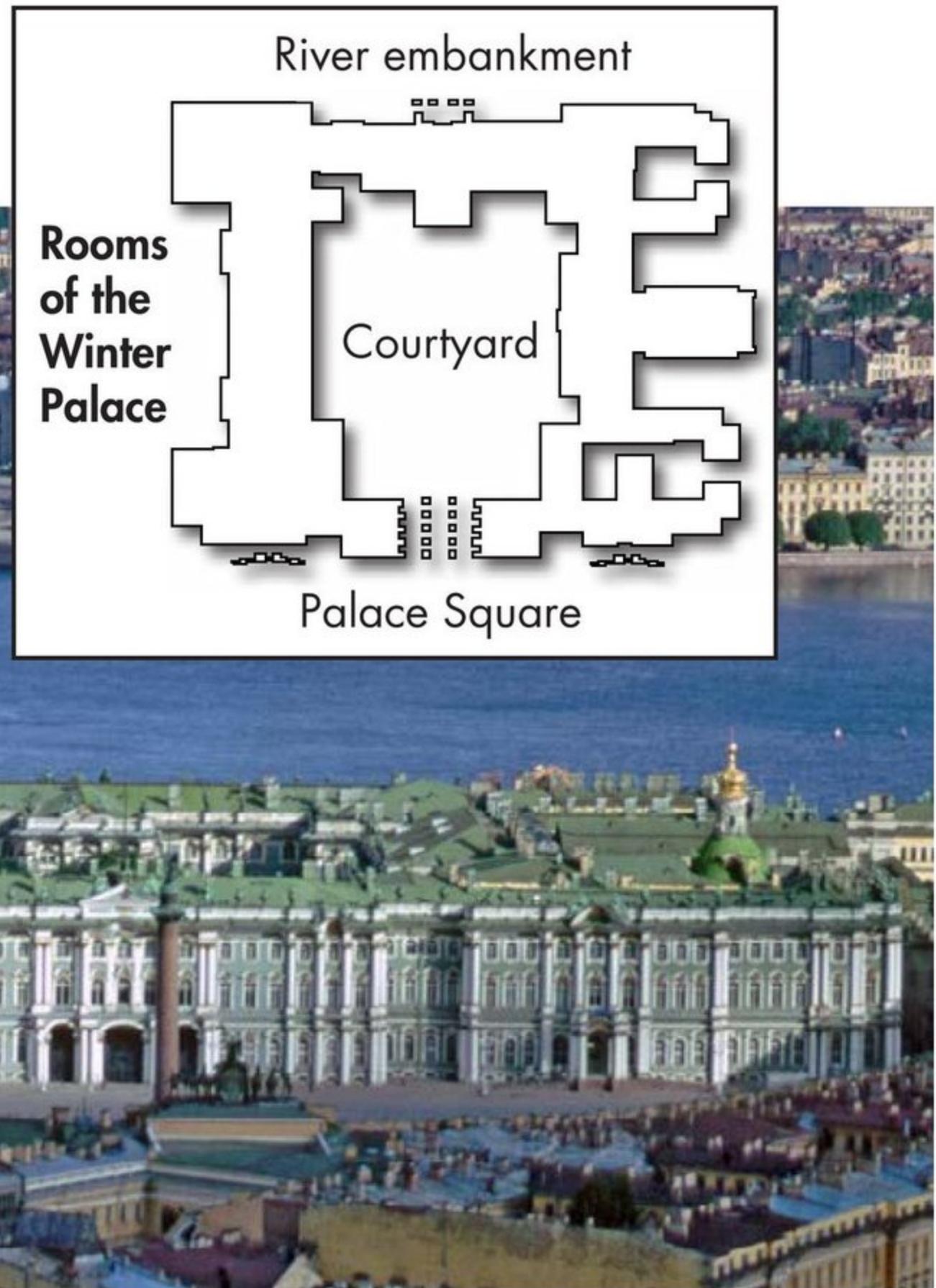


This gallery is a reproduction of a famous painter's work in the Vatican.



## Introduction

Welcome to the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. My name is Pavel. Let me show you my home—the greatest museum in the world. It has a rich history, more than three million works of art, and has survived many disasters. All of these **characteristics** make my home great, but just you wait and see.



The Winter Palace is on the bank of the River Neva, which flows through St. Petersburg. The palace is painted a distinctive green color.

## Do You Know?

The Hermitage can't display all three million works of art in its collection at the same time. Many are in storage. The museum is open for about eight hours each day and is closed for many holidays. If you spent only two minutes looking at each work of art during museum hours, it would take you more than forty-three years to see the entire collection.



Catherine  
the Great  
miniature

## History of the Museum

From 1762 to 1796, Catherine the Great was Russia's empress, which is like a queen. My great grandmother's grandmother knew Catherine well. They lived in the Winter Palace together. The

Winter Palace is the largest building of the seven that make up the Hermitage today.

### Word Wise

*Hermitage* (noun)  
a French word meaning  
"place of seclusion"

## Quotable Quote

No one was allowed to see Catherine's collection during her reign. She once said, "Only the mice and I can admire all this." Mice have been a big problem for the Hermitage for hundreds of years. Cats were brought in to patrol the palace to keep mice from destroying the collections. About fifty cats still patrol the Hermitage.

The Hermitage began as the art collection of Catherine the Great. Catherine began her collection by buying paintings. In 1764, she bought 225 paintings by Dutch and Flemish masters. Like most collectors, Catherine continued to expand her collection over the years. Several of the paintings she collected were by famous artists, including Rembrandt and Rubens. You can still see some of these paintings at the Hermitage.

Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin's influence on painters was once compared to Rembrandt's by painter Vincent Van Gogh.

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For more than 200 years, the collection has grown from those first paintings purchased by Catherine. It has become one of the world's largest and most **impressive** collections of art. It includes not only paintings but also coins and medals, gold treasures, gemstones, books, armor, sculptures, furniture, and more. It makes my collection of shiny objects seem very small. But I am just beginning my collection. Come with me as I show you a few pieces in the Hermitage's collection.



The Knights' Hall shows armor and arms from the 15th to 17th centuries.



Da Vinci's painting *Madonna with a Flower* was added to the State Hermitage's collection in 1914.

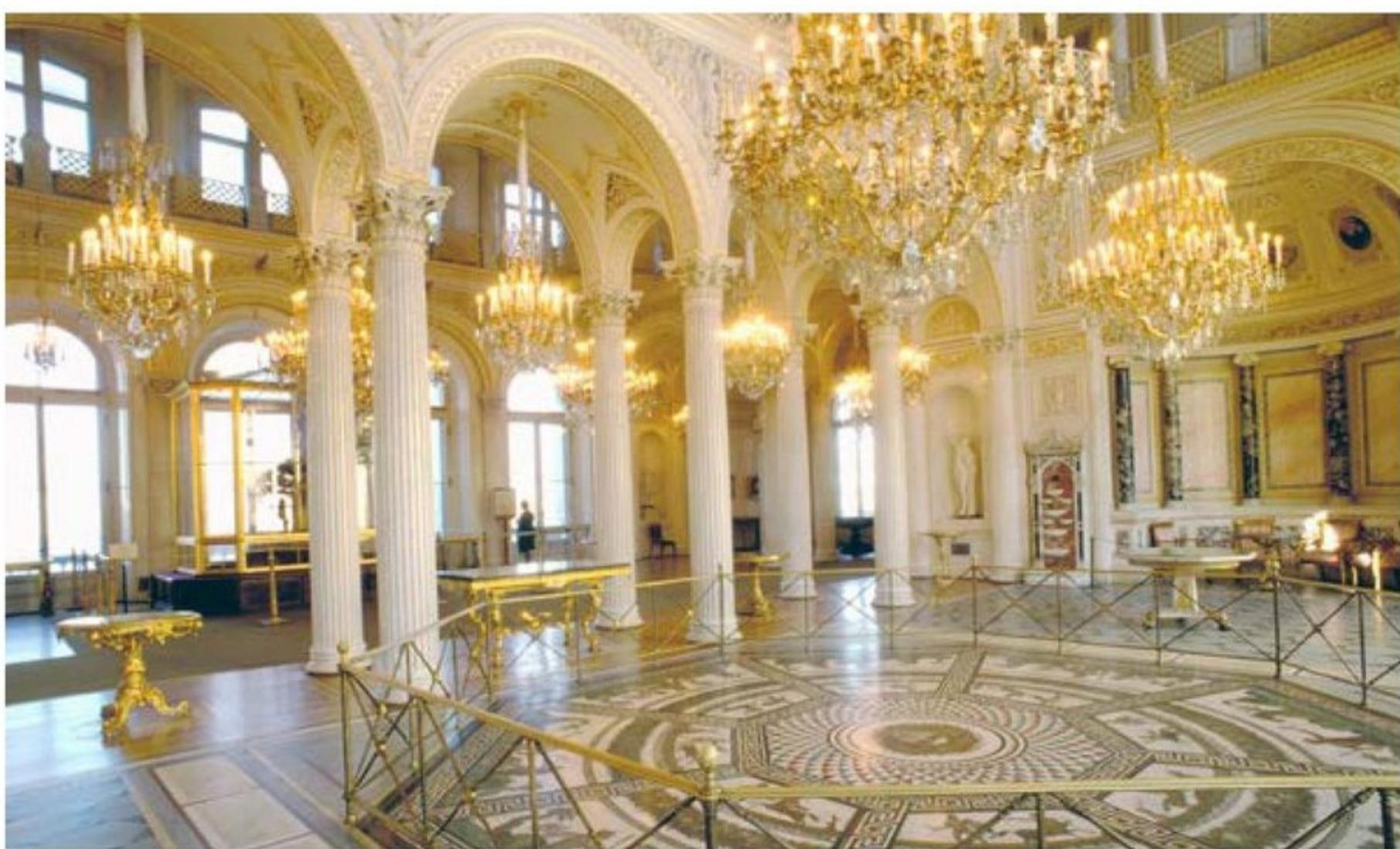
## My Favorite Art

Probably two of the most popular paintings in the Hermitage are by Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci. They are called *Madonna with a Flower*, painted in 1479, and *Madonna and Child*, painted in 1490. I can usually see both paintings up close since I'm so small. There is almost always a crowd of people around them.

My favorite paintings are in the museum's collection of works by the French artist, Gauguin. He has a whole room devoted to his work (as do other artists such as Picasso and Matisse). I can stand in the Gauguin room all day, imagining myself on the island of Tahiti, where he painted many of the works in the Hermitage's collection.



I really admire the shapes and colors in the painting titled *Conversation (or the Gossips)* painted by Gauguin in 1891. I love all the paintings from Gauguin's trip to Tahiti.



The decoration of Pavilion Hall reminds me of cake frosting.

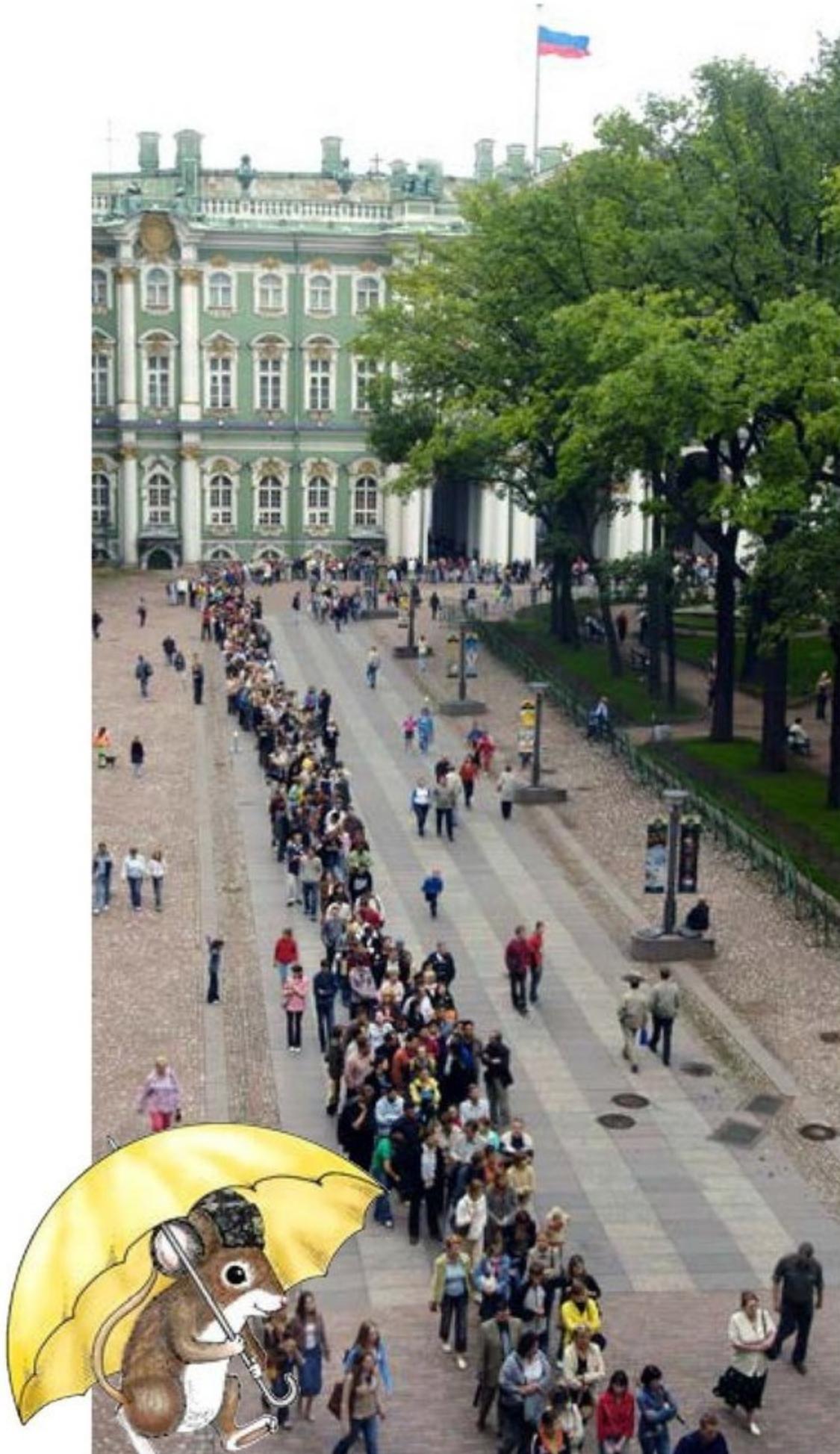
My other favorite work of art in the museum is the museum itself. Many of the rooms are **elaborately** decorated and painted. I feel as if I'm inside a wedding cake whenever I walk into Pavilion Hall. Feelings like that keep me interested in exploring all the rooms, halls, and corners of the museum.



## Pretender to the Throne

In one room, I can pretend to be Peter I. He ruled Russia from 1689–1725. His clothes, furniture, books, tools, and other everyday objects make up part of the exhibits in the collection. It's fascinating to peek into the life of a real Russian emperor.

# Museum Faces Disasters



Come early to the museum, as the line to get inside can be very long.

Tourists explore the museum with me on most days. It makes me proud that Russian emperor Nicholas I opened the museum to the public in 1852. He built a new building and called it the New Hermitage.

It would have been terrible not to have this beautiful collection on display for all to see. But three times in the Hermitage's history **disaster** nearly destroyed everything.

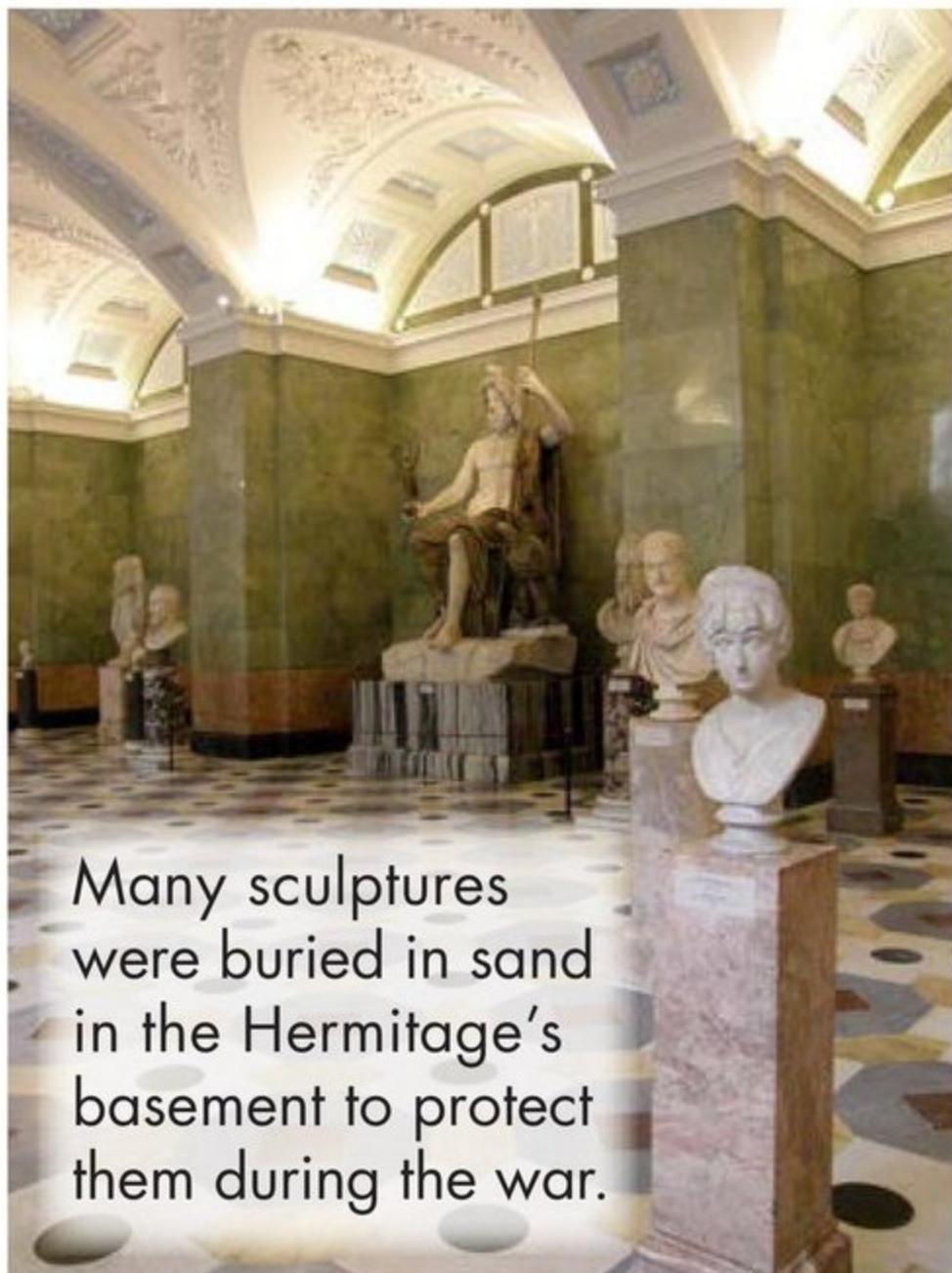
My great-great-grandmother survived the first disaster in 1836. A big fire at the Winter Palace threatened the collection. Palace soldiers took **precious** items from the palace out onto the square as fast as they could. Nearly everything was saved.



After the 1836 fire, many rooms were restored to their original design, including the War Gallery of 1812.

My grandmother told me stories of the second disaster in 1917. A **revolution** happened in Russia. Nicholas II and the royal family were thrown out of the palace. The new government moved the art collection to the capital city of Moscow. No one really knew what would happen to the art.

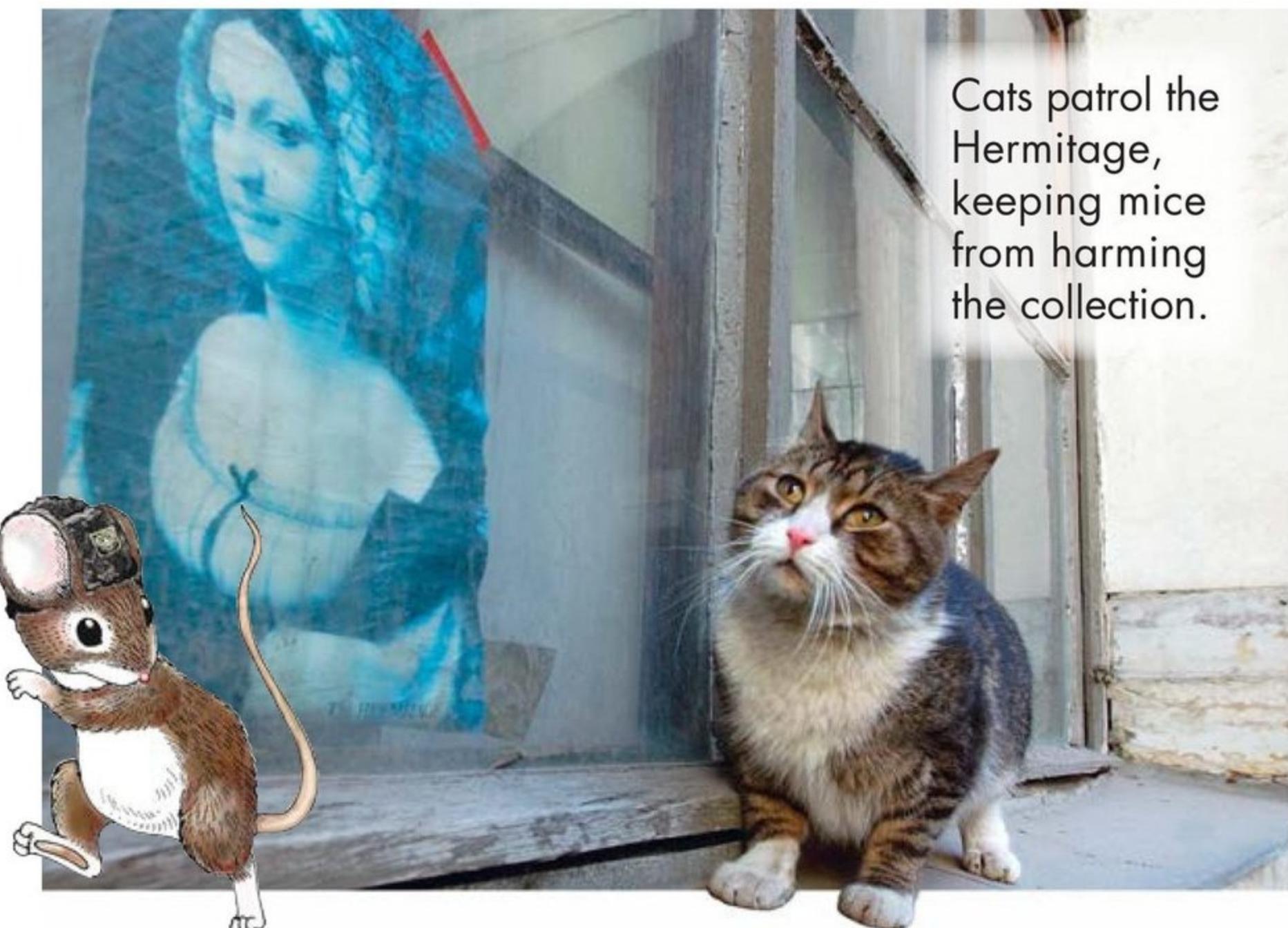
By October 1917, the ruling government lost its power. A second new government brought back the art and made the Winter Palace and New Hermitage a state museum.



Many sculptures were buried in sand in the Hermitage's basement to protect them during the war.

My mother survived the third disaster in 1941. German troops attacked, and Russia was drawn into the Second World War. Over a million works of art were saved from the battle. Two

special trains filled with art were sent to a remote part of Russia in the Ural Mountains. The Germans cut off St. Petersburg (then called Leningrad) for 900 days. Hundreds of thousands of people, including Hermitage workers, died during the siege.



Cats patrol the Hermitage, keeping mice from harming the collection.

## Conclusion

The Hermitage's collection **endured**. It began as a small collection of paintings loved by one Russian empress. It survived several disasters. It has grown to become one of the oldest, largest, and most impressive collections of art enjoyed by the world. I live in the Hermitage as my great-grandmother's grandmother did before me. Now you too can see why the Hermitage is the world's greatest museum and place to live.

## Glossary

<b>characteristics</b> <i>(n.)</i>	physical features that help identify someone or something (p. 4)
<b>collection</b> <i>(n.)</i>	similar items that someone chooses to save (p. 7)
<b>disaster</b> <i>(n.)</i>	a sudden, terrible event (p. 12)
<b>elaborately</b> <i>(adv.)</i>	in a way that shows lots of parts and details (p. 11)
<b>endured</b> <i>(v.)</i>	lived through something challenging (p. 15)
<b>impressive</b> <i>(adj.)</i>	having a positive or lasting effect on someone (p. 8)
<b>precious</b> <i>(adj.)</i>	very valuable; greatly loved (p. 13)
<b>revolution</b> <i>(n.)</i>	removing a government from power by force and replacing it with another (p. 13)
<b>siege</b> <i>(n.)</i>	surrounding and often attacking an enemy for a long time while preventing them from getting food and other supplies (p. 14)

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## Visit the Museum Virtually

You can see masterpieces from the art collection. You can visit each of the 353 rooms. You can even read first-person stories from brave people who helped save the Hermitage from disaster. All of this can be done from your home or school by visiting the website: [www.hermitagemuseum.org](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org).

The State Hermitage:  
Russia's Amazing Museum  
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