

Museum will display art stolen during World War II

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (AP)— Eighty-nine art treasures looted by the victorious Red Army at the end of World War II went on display Tuesday at the Hermitage Museum.

“*This is an artistic event, not a political event.*”

Many of the drawings, lithographs and watercolors were believed lost in the war; the Hermitage only recently revealed that they had survived and had been hidden away in Russia for 50 years.

MIKHAIL PIOTROVSKY
Hermitage director

The show, entitled “Master Drawings Revisited: Treasures from Prewar German Collections,” includes works by such masters as Paul Cezanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Francisco Goya and Eugene Delacroix. It runs through March.

These trophies of war are at the heart of bitter disputes between Russia and countries like Germany, where special Soviet teams scooped up millions of art works, rare books and other precious objects.

The original owners, which range from museums and libraries to the families of private collectors, want their treasures back.

Russia has refused to return them, despite international prohibitions against looting. Some argue the booty is Russia’s rightful compensation for the immense damage it suffered to its own cultural treasures during the war.

Hermitage director Mikhail Piotrovsky tried to keep the focus Tuesday on the art, not the ownership dispute.

“This is an artistic event, not a political event,” he said, cutting a ribbon at the entrance to the ornate Nikolayevsky Hall. “We’ve fulfilled our duty, which is to display the art. The next step is for the lawyers to decide.”

Wolf-Dieter Dube, a Berlin museum director and member of a joint Russian-German commission on trophy art, said other former Soviet republics have returned wartime loot and Russia should follow suit. Otherwise, he warned, German public opinion could turn against Russia and jeopardize the aid Berlin has lavished on Moscow since the Soviet collapse in 1991.

Russia, he pointed out, has yet to reveal the full extent of its holdings of trophy art. That secrecy makes exhibitions like this one eagerly awaited events in the art world.

Joan Kahn, a tourist from Washington, D.C., timed her visit to Russia to coincide with the opening.

“They should just show the art,” she said. “Let the politicians take care of the other decisions.”



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

‘English Patient’ cures love deficiency

By GERRY BELTZ
Movie Critic

Break out the hankies, ladies and gentlemen. “The English Patient” is one of those epic, romantic films that could make a cement block shed a tear.

Granted, the film is over 2½-hours long and could have stood a trim here and there without losing anything in the storyline, but then it would have lost its appeal as an epic romance.

Forbidden romance is nothing new in the world of cinema, but bringing together the talent of Ralph Fiennes and Kristin Scott Thomas was a stroke of genius, and moves the film to a new level of subtlety and obsession.

The film also follows two different time lines, so get your munchies before the film starts.

It’s the time of World War II, and a plane is shot down over the desert. Only one person survives, but he closely resembles a victim from the latest “Texas Chainsaw Massacre” film.

Eventually, because of the excruciating pain from just being moved, he is left at an abandoned monastery with Hana (Juliette Binoche), a nurse who is recovering from some scars of her own.

Everything that has led up to that point is told through flashbacks, centering on the torrid romance between the injured cartographer Count Laszlo Almsy (Fiennes) and Katherine Clifton (Thomas), the wife of one of Almsy’s fellow map-makers.

The connection between the two is instantaneous, but is fought for some time by Almsy.

But do they eventually succumb to

temptation? Heck, yeah! Where do you think the ‘R’ rating came from?

Their romance, however, has doom following in its wake. People start dying left and right (the war doesn’t exactly help, either), but these two have an obsession for one another that knows no ends.

Back in real time, Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe) has arrived with a mysterious agenda involving our bed-ridden hero, and seems to know more about Almsy than he knows about himself.

Director-writer Anthony Minghella (“Truly, Madly, Deeply”) has come up with another masterpiece of cinema with “The English Patient,” but unfortunately does very little work with the war-torn Hana. He begins to develop the character, but eventually just leaves the character hanging with no place to

The Facts

Film: “The English Patient”
Stars: Ralph Fiennes, Kristin Scott Thomas, Willem Dafoe
Director: Anthony Minghella
Rating: R (nudity, violence, adult situations)
Grade: A-
Five Words: Intense forbidden romance spells doom

go.

The performances from Fiennes and Thomas are top notch, and hopefully the success of “The English Patient” will keep Kristin Scott Thomas appearing on American screens.

An overall excellent film, go see “The English Patient,” and take a friend too.

Lincoln libraries look to update strategic plans

By ANN STACK
Senior Reporter

Users of the Lincoln Public Libraries now have a voice in the services they’re offered by providing feedback on the new preliminary strategic plan.

Strategic plans are updated about every five years, said Barbara Hansen, administrative aid for Lincoln City Libraries. The libraries began the planning process, titled “Guide Us To The Future,” in December 1995.

Strategic plans act as a guide for all the decisions made concerning the libraries, Hansen said. For example, she said if the economy should take a turn for the worse, a strategic plan would help dictate what to cut and keep.

The main components of the preliminary planning process focused on community input and library staff.

“We did one-on-one interviews with 60-plus community leaders,” Hansen said. “We did 27 focus groups with people of all ages and asked what they thought the key roles and goals

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BARBARA HANSEN
administrative aid for Lincoln City Libraries

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Some goals identified by community response as outlined in the plan are improved service collection and better youth services, she said, as well as community outreach and collaboration.

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outreach programs with the community centers and with the public schools, and collaboration with departments like Lincoln Parks and Rec to present educational programs.”

Another task set forth for the libraries is keeping up with advancing technology and diversity issues.

Hansen said a goal was to hire a

more diverse and bilingual staff to better serve Lincoln’s growing ethnic communities. Another facet of this program would be to present programs in the various ethnic community centers, she said.

Community members are being asked to provide feedback on the preliminary plan by the Lincoln City Libraries. That can be done in one of four ways:

- Complete a Community Feedback Form available at any library by Dec. 23.

- Request that a member of the library’s Speaker’s Bureau attend a group meeting to review the plan by calling Evelyn at 441-8579.

- Send written comments to Lincoln City Libraries, 136 S. 14th St., Lincoln, Neb. 68508.

- Attend one of four public forums offered: 1:30 p.m. today at Gere Branch, 2400 S. 56th St.; 7 p.m. Thursday at Anderson Branch, 3635 Touzalin; 12 p.m. Dec. 10 at Bennett Martin Public Library, 136 S. 14th, 4th floor; and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 12 at Belmont Recreation Center, 1234 Judson, north room.