

# ARCHITECTURE OF RUSSIAN EXHIBITION PAVILIONS AT INTERNATIONAL NORDIC EXHIBITIONS IN THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> – EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** In the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russia actively participated in world's and international exhibitions in Europe and the USA. **Purpose of the study:** We aim to study the typology of Russian expo construction abroad consisting of three branches: construction of model facilities, construction of official ceremonial buildings and facades, and, finally, construction of exposition pavilions. **Methods:** Despite the inevitable demolition of the facilities, Russian exposition pavilions built abroad always strived for high quality of architecture, which is quite important. **Results:** A peculiar type of buildings — the Russian national exhibition pavilion — formed, which is traditionally styled after old Russian architecture but, at the same time, meets the new exposition and functional requirements.

## Keywords

World's and international exhibitions, architecture of Russian national exhibition pavilions, Russian style of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Introduction

World and international expos were the brightest manifestations of social life in Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Russia took an active part in these exhibitions starting with the first 1851 world's fair in London. It was there where foreigners learned about Russian industrial, agricultural, and artisan items, visual arts, and architecture. Participation in these fairs not only helped Russia to strengthen its trade ties with the West and accelerate its engagement in the global capitalist system but also brought to life a completely new type of buildings — the Russian national exhibition pavilion.

A feature of the world's and international expos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was that the countries that organized these fairs built huge expo buildings (general and themed) where the exhibitions of all the participating states were demonstrated. This preconditioned the nature of the artistic finish of Russian sections in the form of national facades or decorations inside the expo buildings. These structures played primarily an advertising role and were particularly styled. The Russian style was represented by a folkloric line of development of Russian wooden architecture in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Nikitin, 2014a).

The organizers of the Paris World's Fair in 1878 made a provision that the participating states should build pavilions in their national style that would become sort of a street of nations at the Champ de Mars. These facade pavilions acted as grand entrances to the galleries of a huge expo palace with the expositions of the participating countries.

The Russian pavilion was the centerpiece of all structures built on the street of nations. It was a two-story wooden structure (40 x 5 m) consisting of towers and turrets decorated with multiple carvings of bright colors and combined with a gallery. Probably, the wooden palace in the Kolomenskoye village was the prototype of this structure. Even foreign researchers noted the stylistic closeness of these buildings (Lamarre and Leger, 1878).

Russian structures at the World's Fairs of 1867 in Paris and 1873 in Vienna also attracted the attention of the public and the critics, but the real triumph of Russian architecture was in 1878. The author of the building, Ivan Ropet (the real name — Ivan Petrov), already known due to the Moscow Polytechnic Exhibition of 1872, became very popular in Paris and made a sensation. His structure prompted a great response both in the foreign and national press.

The stylistic characteristics of Russian structures at the 1878 World's Fair in Paris were associated with a strong architectural movement existing in Russia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and taking its cue from the old Russian architecture. Representatives of this movement — students and followers of Professor A. M. Gornostayev — in trying to give their structures not only national but also folk character were inspired by specimens of peasant architecture and applied arts. They understood the task of giving architecture the folk character as the task of decorating their structures with details borrowed from folk art, and not only from wooden architecture but also from folk embroidery. This style,

in contrast to the official “Russian style” of K. Thon, was supported by the democratic public. In this regard, *Motifs of Russian architecture* lithographic albums published in the mid-1870s by A. Rheinbott are quite interesting. These albums included designs by Bogomolov, Walberg, Hartmann, Gun, Kuzmin, Monighetti, Ropet, Kharlamov, etc. (Rheinbott; 1874–1880). This was a sort of manifest of Russian national architecture that revealed the artistic motto of representatives of this architecture movement.

I. Ropet had a complicated task: to create a distinguished image of the Russian national pavilion, original grand propylaea leading to the Russian exposition at the World’s Fair. It was not an exhibition pavilion in the truest sense of the word because it included not only the exposition but also the administration of the Russian section headed by the Commissioner-General, Mr. G. Butovsky. At the same time, the “facade” was also a showpiece. It was an advertising, “representational” structure that laid the foundation for a whole range of architectural patterns stylized after the old Russian architecture. This special purpose of the Russian exhibition pavilion, in some way, preconditioned the entertaining and advertising nature of its architecture (Nikitin, 2007). It should be noted that public opinion on the capability of the Russian national style to “decently represent Russia and ‘Russian character’ abroad” was already shaped by the late 1870s (Lisovsky, 2000).

Russia had to prove to the West that it had a style, authentic and self-sufficing. That goal was reached. Ropet’s “facade” that became somewhat of a trademark of Russia at the fair, the dazzling success of the artistic section made the West talk about the Russian national school of art (Imperial Academy of Arts, 1879; Matushinsky, 1879). According to A. M. Matushinsky, a reporter from the *Golos* newspaper, “for the first time, Europe saw first hand the Russian art developing authentically and independently” (Borisova and Kazhdan, 1971, Kondratov, 2006).

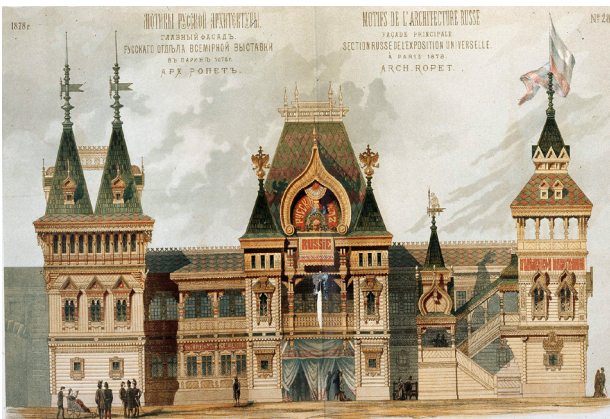


Figure 1. Main facade of the Russian section at the Paris World’s Fair of 1879. Design. Architect: I. Ropet. *Motifs of Russian architecture*. 1878. No. 28

The assessment of the exhibition structures of I. Ropet by experts of that time varied: from the enthusiastic review of V. V. Stasov to derogatory names such as “ropetovshshina”, “cockish style”, “highly refined mishmash”, etc. In the history of Russian architecture, the Paris “facade” made by I. Ropet became a classic example of no sense of proportion in decorations and irrationalism, and for some researchers — an example of the “pseudo-Russian style” (B. M., 1909). Was it the Russian style? Was the Ropet’s creative work an example of national art for his fellow men? This question was raised many times, and no unambiguous answer was found. The author of the obituary published in the *Zodchiy* journal after Ropet’s death answered this question in the following manner: “This is, of course, an open question: it was something new, original, with a peculiar taste — something quite understandable by the masses. This was ‘ropetovshchina’, and it took its place in the history of Russian architecture” (Russian State Historical Archive, Fund 20, List 1). Such an assessment of Ropet’s creative work by his fellow man is interesting because for the first time it raised the question of architecture as a popular art.

#### Subject, tasks, and methods

The Russian facade at the 1878 Paris World’s Fair laid the foundation for a whole range of architectural patterns, stylized after the old Russian architecture,

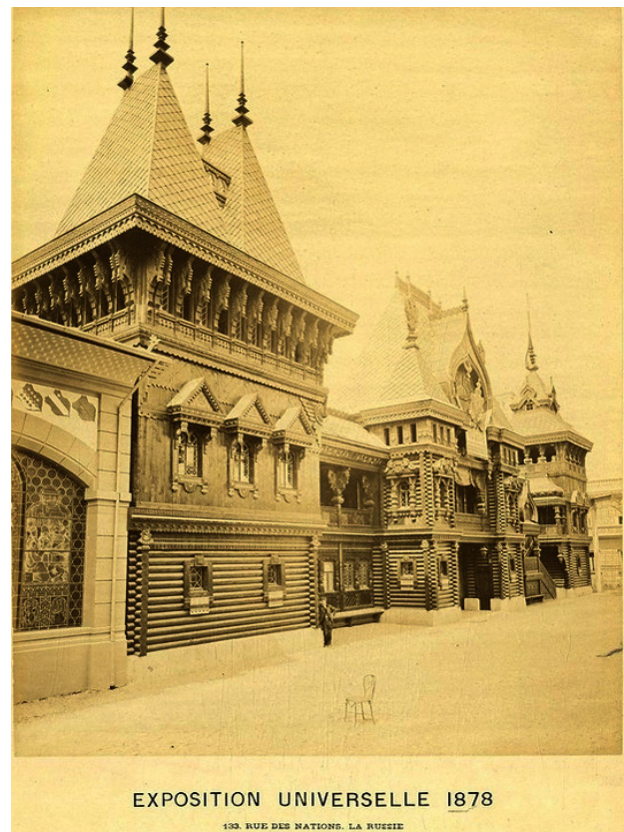


Figure 2. Entrance pavilion of the Russian section at the Paris World’s Fair of 1878. Architect: I. Ropet. Rare photo. 1878



that did not perform the expo functions. This special purpose of the Russian exhibition pavilion, in some way, preconditioned the entertaining and advertising nature of its architecture. A similar technique of decorating the entrance to the Russian section was used at the World's Fairs of 1888 in Copenhagen and 1897 in Stockholm. It is interesting that I. Ropet earned high distinction in France and Denmark and was awarded the Legion of Honor and the Knight's Cross of the Order of the Dannebrog (Russian State Historical Archive, Fund 40, List 1).

The exhibition of industry, agriculture, and art was held in the very center of Copenhagen — in Tivoli Gardens — in 1888. The Russian section was in the grand main pavilion between the French and British sections. The wooden entrance pavilion of Russia was built by a design of I. Ropet and resembled a gatehouse church highly decorated with carving.

It is interesting that, sometimes, Russia resorted to the help of foreign designers and developers during the arrangement of its sections at foreign expos. For instance, at the 1867 Paris World's Fair, the Russian stabling was built by the French: "at the instructions of the Commission, French architects Benard and Cambreling made designs and estimates on site" (Hoppe, 1889). Russia did not participate in the 1889 Paris World's Fair officially since the exhibition was timed to the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution of 1789. However, some items from Russia participated in the exhibition, and Russian architecture was represented by the French. At Quai d'Orsay, architect J.-L.-C. Garnier made a retrospective exhibition of human housing where



Figure 3. Entrance pavilion of the Russian section at the international exhibition of industry, agriculture, and art of 1888 in Copenhagen. Architect: I. Ropet

one of the structures was mimicking a Russian boyar house (Grin, 1897). This construction practice was also used at the expos in Sweden.

From May till September 1897, the General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm was held, which was called Nordic. It was held in association with the 25th anniversary of the reign of King Oscar II. The fairgrounds were located on Djurgården Island occupying an area of 21 ha near the Skansen, the oldest open-air ethnographic museum. Ferdinand Boberg was the chief architect of the expo. The main themed pavilions were made according to his designs. The largest pavilion was the Palace of Industry that included the expositions of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. A large dome with a crown-like open-work structure at the top was a structural accent of the building. Four minarets were adjacent to the dome. Their tops were connected to the top of the dome with bridges. An observation deck was also made, which could be accessed by elevators. The main pavilion made of wood was a peculiar high-rise centerpiece of the expo with a height of almost 100 m. The erection of such a large wooden building was a very complicated task, and, according to the reporter, it was "a trick that set experts in engineering wondering" (Report of the Commissioner-General at the Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897).

The Russian section was located in a low semi-circle annex to the grandiose Palace of Industry. It had a framed structural layout, a sloping conic glass roofing, and occupied 1540 sq. m. Presumably, the building was built to the design of Swedish architect F. Boberg. He also participated in making the interior decoration of the Russian section (Report of the Commissioner-General at the Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897).

The architecture of the pavilion built by the Swedes received criticisms from the organizers of the Russian section. "The interior had a low glass roof looking like a curve and many thin quadrilateral columns supporting the roof. They completed the appearance of this inconspicuous building. The pavilion of the Russian section made a hard impression as compared to the adjacent section of industry (where the Danish, and then the Swedish and Norwegian pavilions were located), which was full of light, air, had a beautiful outlook, and was very tall", P. Miller, the Commissioner-General of the Russian department, wrote (Report of the Commissioner-General at the Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897).

To remedy this situation and give the Russian section a smart appearance, it was decided to add an entrance pavilion to the existing building. The design of the entrance pavilion was made according to the sketches of St. Petersburg artist B. Nikolayev and approved by the Minister of Finance, S. Witte, on 17 February 1897, i.e. as recently as three months

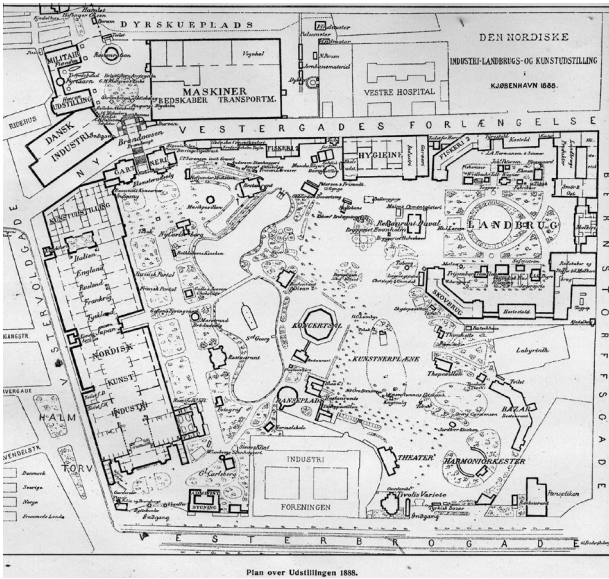


Figure 4. Exhibition of industry, agriculture, and art of 1888 in Copenhagen. General layout



Figure 5. Exhibition of industry, agriculture, and art of 1888 in Copenhagen. General view of the exhibition area and the entrance pavilion of the Russian section



Figure 6. General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897. Panorama sketch of the exposition

before the opening of the exposition (Report of the Commissioner-General at the Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897). The entrance pavilion was built by S. A. Olsson, a Swedish firm. It cost 6000 kroner, which corresponded to as little as 3130 rubles.

The entrance pavilion was made in the spirit of wooden church structures of the Russian North of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A large keeled bochka roof of the entrance portal was cut into a high tent-shaped roof whose crown had an inscription “Russia” in the spirit of the handwritten ornamental design of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The structure was also influenced by the Nordic wooden architecture. This was manifested in the details of the windows, balustrade, and decorations of the roof ridges.

The Russian section was very popular among the visitors of the fair. It demonstrated the high quality of Russian national products. In total, 305 Russian exhibit items were shown at the expo; 149 of them received awards, 43 of them received gold medals, 57 — silver medals, 35 — bronze medals; 14 exhibit items received honorable mentions, and 9 companies were given the title of “the suppliers of the Kings of Sweden and Norway” (Russian State Historical Archive, Fund 387, List 15).

More than 2,000,000 people visited the Nordic Fair. About 20,000 of them were from Russia. Many members of the Imperial family and the Minister of Agriculture and State Property, A. S. Yermolov, also visited the fair.

The Russian section at the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö was built by the Russian Chamber of Commerce. It used the “business” principle as opposed to the usual, so to say, “representational” principle. The organizers of the section, representing the state and commercial interests of the exhibitors, tried to show that Russia could act as an exporting country at the Nordic market. This was the “state and public task to be fulfilled by the Russian section at the Baltic Exhibition” (Ahlström,



Figure 7. General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897. Industrial pavilion. Architect: F. Boberg



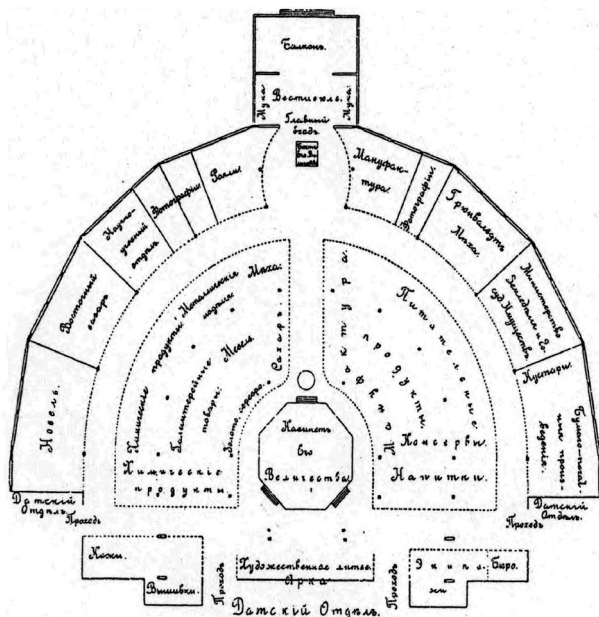
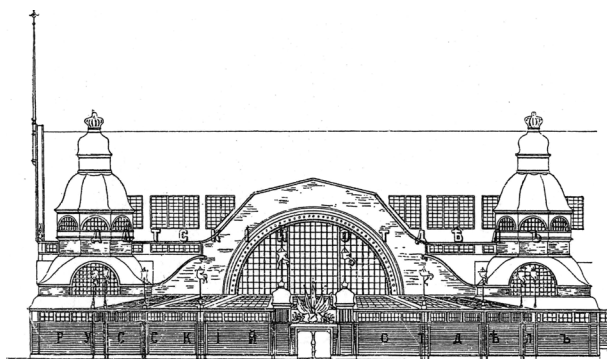


Figure 8. General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897. Layout of the Russian section.



Figure 10. General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897. Entrance pavilion of the Russian section.  
 Artist: B. A. Nikolayev



Русский Отдѣль до постройки входнаго павильона.

Figure 9. General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm of 1897. Facade of the Russian section before the entrance pavilion was built.



Figure 11. Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914.  
 Poster of the exhibition

1915–1919). The Russian participants were provided benefits for the transportation of exhibit items and fee-free permits to return to Russia.

The exhibition was held under the auspice of Swedish King Gustav V and was honorably chaired by Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf from 15 May till 4 October 1914. It was held in a large territory of 49 ha in the picturesque Pildammsparken. Exhibit items of

four countries — Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Russia — were demonstrated at the exhibition. The Finnish exposition was part of the Russian section. All member states built their national pavilions. Sweden had the largest exposition that was placed in several themed pavilions. Various musical and sports events were held at the time of the exhibition. More than 800,000 people visited the expo.

Планъ Русскаго Отдѣла Балтійской Выставки въ Мальмѣ.

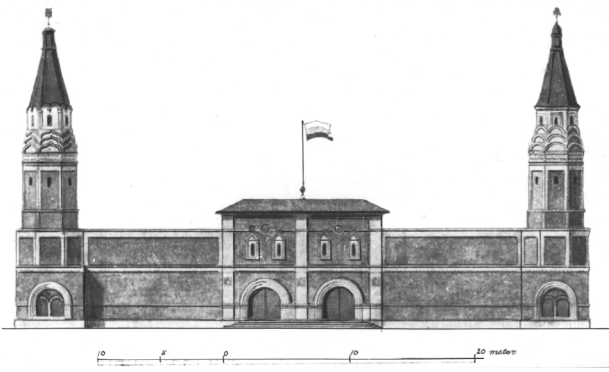


Figure 12. Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914. Facade of the Russian pavilion. First sketch. Architect: F. Boberg

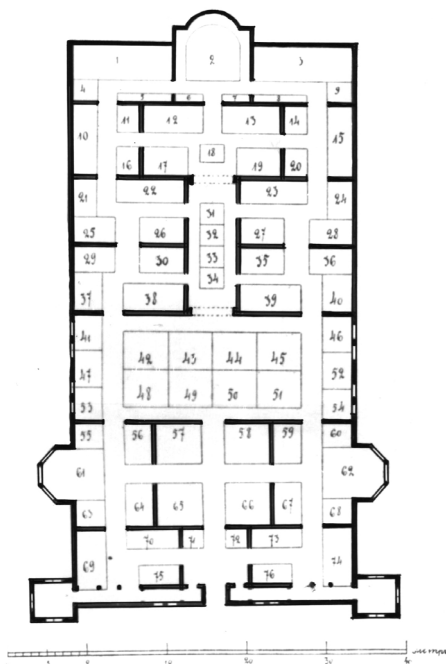


Figure 13. Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914. Russian pavilion. Layout

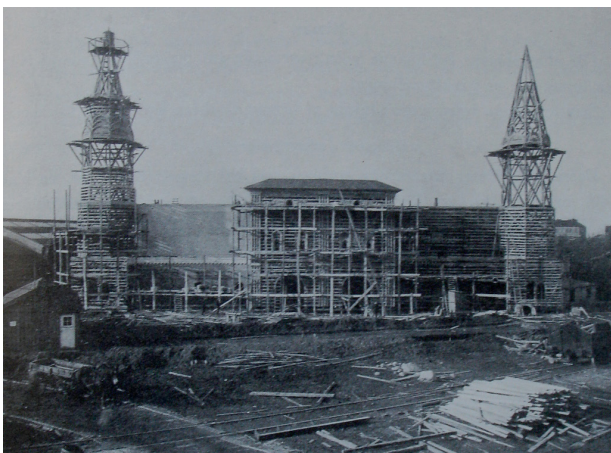


Figure 14. Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914. Russian pavilion. View of the construction activities

The Russian pavilion followed the old Russian style and was built using a traditional showcase design. It represented a wooden frame with plastered external walls. It occupied the area of 2300 sq. m. Two tent-shaped bell towers of a traditional design (octagon placed on quadrangle) towered at the corners of the main facade of the slightly gloomy building with almost lacking side windows. A clear symmetrical layout was based on a combination of small and large transversal halls connected functionally into a single suite. The unique pass-through layout and overhead lights indicate a rather mature type of exhibition building. It should be noted that administrative premises of the Russian section and a Russian restaurant were also placed in the pavilion.

For a long time, the authorship of this unique building was unclear. Recently, this information has been found in the Malmö City Archive. The Russian pavilion was built according to the design of Chief Architect Ferdinand Boberg who also participated in the erection of the Russian section at the Stockholm expo of 1897. However, these data require clarification since, as it happens, a renowned St. Petersburg architect, M. Peretyatkovich, participated in designing the pavilion.

An agreement was reached between the Russian Chamber of Commerce and the administration of the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö. Under the agreement conditions, the designer of the expo, F. Boberg, prepared the design of the Russian pavilion during the summer of 1913 (Ahlström, 1915–1919). When F. Boberg presented his design to the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, he reported that the design was not final and that he would be happy if a Russian architect could look through it and express his opinion. The Chamber of Commerce presented the design to M. Peretyatkovich who, after carefully studying it, made some changes to give the building a historical appearance and then delivered it back to the Chamber of Commerce. The design edited by M. Peretyatkovich was accepted by the steering committee of the Baltic Exhibition (Nikitin, 2014b).

After the start of the erection works, a new difficulty arose. It threatened, while not making the construction impossible, to significantly delay it. In the *Vecherneye Vremya* newspaper for December 1913 and, later, in a number of Swedish newspapers, an article was published where Russian architect Kravchenko sharply criticized the appearance of the Russian pavilion and judged that the design was by a Swedish architect, rather than a Russian one. A scandal arose. Architect F. Boberg whose sketches were the basis for the Russian pavilion design was deeply wounded by these sharp accusations since his sketches were processed by Russian architect M. Peretyatkovich through the Russian Chamber of Commerce. F. Boberg was





Figure 15. Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914.  
Russian pavilion. Interior of one of the halls



Figure 16. Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914.  
Russian pavilion. Photo of 1914

going to refuse to participate in the construction of the pavilion and suggested that the steering committee of the Baltic Exhibition should choose a Russian architect who would undertake the finishing design of the Russian pavilion in order to transfer this obligation to the Russian party. After intense correspondence between the organizers of the exhibition and the Russian Chamber of Commerce, the scandal ended. The construction works continued, and the Russian pavilion was absolutely complete both on the inside and the outside by the opening day.

World War I led to the early closing of the Russian and German sections, urgent export of the Russian exhibit items, and the departure of the participants back home. However, the collection of the Russian artistic section consisting of 56 pieces of pictorial and graphical art remained in Sweden. Russian art was represented by such renowned artists as A. N. Benois, I. Ya. Bilibin, A. M. Vasnetsov, V. V. Vereshchagin, A. Ya. Golovin, K. A. Korovin, B. M. Kustodiev, I. I. Levitan, V. Ye. Makovsky, K. S. Petrov-Vodkin, V. D. Polenov, M. S. Saryan, Z. Ye. Serebryakova, V. A. Serov, V. I. Surikov, I. I. Shishkin, and others (25 artists in total). This unique collection of Russian art is still at the museum of fine arts in Malmö. It is interesting that Malmö grandly celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Baltic Exhibition in 2014. Scientific conferences, themed exhibitions, and advertising events were organized. In October 2014, an exhibition of Russian art (opened for the general public at the Russian section at the Baltic Fair of 1914) from the funds of the Malmö museum of arts was held.

### Results and discussion

Russian exhibition structures, having original artistic solutions, each time were one of the most remarkable national structures. On the one hand, they reflected the main trends in the development

of architecture in Russia and, on the other hand, they resulted from the certain points of view of the organizers of the world's fairs on the architecture of a new type, the national exhibition pavilion. The specifics of the architecture of these buildings required obligatory stylization, return to the authentic forms of the past, which made it possible to give to the public the ultimate expression of a national style and distinguish the buildings from the pavilions of other participating countries. A prominent national tinge of Russian exhibition structures was not an exception. It was in line with the general architectural practice of the countries that participated in world's fairs (Lukomsky, 1911).

### Conclusions

Starting with the first structures at the Paris World's Fair of 1867, Russia brought the old Russian architecture to all the subsequent expos. The Russian pavilions at the fairs of 1911 in Rome and Turin, built using designs of architect V. A. Shchuko and stylized as the Russian classical architecture, were a rare exception from this rule (Lukomsky, 1911).

The practice of Russian expo construction abroad consisted of three branches: construction of model facilities, construction of official ceremonial buildings and facades, and, finally, construction of exposition pavilions. A peculiar type of buildings — the Russian national exhibition pavilion — formed, which is traditionally styled after old Russian architecture but, at the same time, meets the new exposition and functional requirements. Despite the inevitable demolition of the facilities, Russian exposition pavilions built abroad always strained after high quality of architecture, which is quite important. Russian architects tried to create an original image of the Russian national exhibition pavilion. That is why using old Russian architecture was understandable. The Russian path at world's and international expos was not accidental. It was a path of affirmation of the Russian national culture in the West.

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# АРХИТЕКТУРА ВЫСТАВОЧНЫХ ПАВИЛЬОНОВ РОССИИ НА МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ВЫСТАВКАХ В СКАНДИНАВИИ В КОНЦЕ XIX—НАЧАЛЕ XX ВЕКА (РОССИЯ)

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## **Аннотация**

Россия активно участвовала во всемирных и международных выставках в Европе и Америке в XIX — начале XX века. **Цель исследования:** Изучение типологии выставочного строительства России за рубежом, которое осуществлялось в трех основных направлениях: сооружение образцовых построек; официальных, «представительских» зданий или фасадов; и, наконец, экспозиционных павильонов. **Методы:** Важнейшей особенностью выставочного строительства России за рубежом было постоянное стремление к высокому качеству архитектуры, несмотря на неминуемый снос этих сооружений. **Результаты:** Сформировался специфический тип здания — национальный выставочный павильон России, традиционно выдержанный в формах древне-русского зодчества, но при этом отвечающий новым экспозиционным и функциональным требованиям.

## **Ключевые слова**

Всемирные и международные выставки, архитектура национальных выставочных павильонов России, русский стиль второй половины XIX века.