

Title: World on Fire: Alexander Benois and the Bronze Horseman Series (1903-1922)
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Scholars have generally read Alexander Benois's iconic illustrations to Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* as a paean to early nineteenth-century St. Petersburg, tracing connections to the visual imagery of Pushkin-era engravers and lithographers of the imperial capital. Virtually every aspect of Benois's series indeed appears to attest to his unyielding preservationist and retrospective outlook, from the offprints prepared in the polytype style of the 1830s to the small size of the original drawings, intended to reproduce the pocket-size effect of the almanacs of the 1820s. This paper takes a different route, exploring the relationship between the Bronze Horseman illustrations and *contemporary* events. Shortly after the completion of the first commission for the Bronze Horseman illustrations, which were published in *Mir iskusstva* (1904), Benois witnessed the events of January 9, 1905 (Bloody Sunday) in St. Petersburg. In his memoirs, Benois describes the Revolution of 1905 as "gathering thunder" and "foul weather" (Benois 1980, 418). After 1905 Benois continued to work on new executions of the Bronze Horseman series, resulting in a second set of illustrations that were eventually published in 1923. This paper makes a comparative examination of the pre- and post-1905 Bronze Horseman sketches and illustrations in order to trace a growing response to the anxiety and violence of the "stormy weather" of 1905.

References:

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