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Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe

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Vasilij Ivanovič Surikov (1848-1916) was born in Krasnojarsk (Siberia) into a Cossack family, and between 1869 and 1875 studied painting at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. He then moved to Moscow and joined the movement of the "Wanderers" (*peredvižniki*), with whom he frequently exhibited his paintings after 1881. Surikov quickly rose to fame for his historical paintings. His achievements were acknowledged by a full membership in the Academy of Arts in 1893.

Some of Surikov's pictures celebrated the feats of national heroes like *Cossack Ermak conquering Siberia* (1895) or *Marshal Suvorov's troops crossing the Alps* (1899, on the centenary of his famous 1799 retreat during the Italian campaign). More famously, others dealt with the struggle of antagonistic forces in Russian history and depicted the fate of the defeated. Examples are Peter the Great's revenge on the riflemen that had support the Naryshkin clan with the *Morning of the Streltsy's Execution* (1881), the fate of the exiled former right hand of Peter with *Menšikov in Berezov*, the dissidence of the Old Believers with *Borjanina Morozova* (1887) or the peasant wars with *Stepan Razin* (1910). He also painted popular pastimes like *Conquest of the snow fortress* (1891).

Russian contemporary critics emphasized the active role that Surikov ascribed to common people and his ability to portray what they saw as expressions of a truly national character.

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