

A ROYAL LINEAGE ACROSS A THOUSAND YEARS

CULTURAL DIALOGUE IN THE UAE

Art as a Line of Continuity. Heritage survives not through preservation alone, but through the conscious act of carrying it forward — a choice that transforms inheritance into responsibility.

In this deeply considered essay, Elen Levitt, cultural strategist, art curator World Arabia magazine, founder ArtLevel art management company UAE, reflects on a remarkable exhibition held in the UAE: a meeting point between the Russian Silver Age theatre, dynastic memory, and the question of what it means to sustain cultural identity beyond borders. Her account is both personal testimony and philosophical inquiry into the nature of legacy in a displaced world.



Heritage is not measured by what one inherits. It is defined by what a person chooses to take responsibility for — before the past and the future alike. It is not transmitted automatically: neither by bloodline, nor by birth, nor by the right of a name.

Heritage comes into being at the moment of conscious choice — to continue the line, to carry it through time, to safeguard its meaning, even when historical circumstances are unfavourable. For those who think in generational terms, continuity becomes a form of inner service — a commitment to culture as a living responsibility.

It was from this perspective that the concept of the visit of Prince Nikita Dmitrievich Lobanov-Rostovsky and his wife June to the United Arab Emirates was conceived — his first visit to the region in over forty years. From the very beginning, this was not envisaged as a protocol event or a private trip, but as a unified cultural statement in which personal destiny, family history, and artistic legacy converge into a single, uninterrupted line.

For me, it was essential to move beyond the boundaries of a single narrative of theatrical art. The exhibition was conceived as testimony to the preservation and continuation of the history of a great Russian lineage — through culture as a form of memory, through collecting as a form of responsibility, and through a conscious choice made despite exile, loss, and the ruptures of the twentieth century.

DIALOGUE OF COLLECTIONS AND CULTURAL MISSIONS

One of the conceptual pillars of the visit was a meeting at the Bassam Freiha Art Foundation in Abu Dhabi with His Excellency Bassam Said Freiha and his wife. This was neither a formal nor a representative encounter. It was a conversation between two collectors and two families for whom art is not a private interest, but a form of service to the cultures of their respective countries.

The discussion centred on the role of private foundations and collections in shaping institutional ecosystems; on the power of individual choice to influence a region's cultural landscape; and on the preservation of memory across long historical horizons. We spoke of dialogue between epochs and civilisations, and of the collection as a space where the past is not preserved as a relic, but continues to live and form new meanings. His Excellency Bassam Freiha stands as a figure who has consistently and systematically built the artistic infrastructure of the region. Prince Nikita Dmitrievich stands as a guardian and continuer of the traditions of Russian Silver Age theatre — preserved and passed forward despite dramatic historical ruptures, shifting borders, and the loss of homeland in a physical sense. It was a dialogue about memory that survives catastrophe. About culture as a form of resilience. About the collection as an act of trust in the future.

“It was a dialogue about memory that survives catastrophe. About culture as a form of resilience. About the collection as an act of trust in the future.”



⬆
Prince Nikita Dmitrievich
Lobanov-Rostovsky at BC Academy



The second part of the exhibition,
“A ROYAL LINEAGE ACROSS A
THOUSAND YEARS OF HISTORY,”
dedicated to the collection of Nikita
Dmitrievich



⬆
Prince Nikita Dmitrievich Lobanov-
Rostovsky and the exhibition's art
curator, Elen Levitt





⬅ Prince Nikita Dmitrievich Lobanov-Rostovsky with students and faculty of BC Academy, Dubai

➡ A book about the life and collection of Nikita Dmitrievich

⬇ From left to right: Dinar Nasyrov, H.E. Abdulla Ahmed Al Saleh, Nikita Dmitrievich Lobanov-Rostovsky, June Lobanova-Rostovskaya, Albina Nasyrova



“In a world where borders are increasingly fluid and identities layered, culture does not disappear when one’s address changes.”



All images are reproduced for editorial and educational purposes. No original artworks were exhibited.

“A ROYAL LINEAGE: ACROSS
A THOUSAND YEARS OF HISTORY”

An Exhibition as a Space of Meaning and Education

The following day, on 12th February, the exhibition “A Royal Lineage: Across a Thousand Years of History” opened at BC Academy in Dubai, combining a cultural event with an educational format for students, parents, and invited guests. At its centre was not only the Silver Age theatre as an artistic phenomenon, but a broader conversation — about heritage, continuity, and the role of art in transmitting cultural memory within a contemporary, multinational, and mobile world. As curator of the exhibition, I structured the display as a cohesive narrative — connecting ancestral memory, personal destiny, and culture. ArtLevel art management company acted as co-organiser of the exhibition, supporting it as both a cultural and educational statement. The central figure of the exhibition was Prince Nikita Dmitrievich Lobanov-Rostovsky, a descendant of the Rurikid dynasty, founded by Rurik — the originator of Russian statehood. His ancestors ruled Rus for over 700 years, followed by 350 years of Romanov rule. Today, he is one of the most significant collectors and custodians of Russian Silver Age theatrical art. His collection — the largest private collection of Russian theatrical modernism and avant-garde — is not the result of chance accumulation, but the outcome of a conscious mission: to preserve and transmit the cultural code shaped by Russian artists at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, despite exile, loss, and historical fractures. Today, the collection comprises over 1,100 works by 177 artists and ranks amongst the most important of its kind worldwide.

Editorial Note:

The images presented in this article are used for illustrative purposes only. All visual materials shown in the exhibition were reproductions and did not include original artworks. The exhibition was conceived as an educational and contextual project, intended to illustrate historical and cultural narratives rather than to display original works.

Works from the collection have been exhibited in leading international institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, confirming its global significance and institutional scale. A defining feature of the exhibition was its educational focus. It was conceived for young people growing up in the international environment of the UAE — a space where many families live outside their countries of origin and form identities at the intersection of cultures. The works were contextualised within artistic movements founded by Russian artists, allowing art history to be presented not as a closed chapter of the past, but as a living process open to personal interpretation. Yet beyond its educational mission lies a deeper meaning. In a world where borders are increasingly fluid and identities layered, culture does not disappear when one’s address changes. It continues through personal choice, through attentiveness to the past, and through responsibility for the future. Heritage is not a territory — it is an inner axis. It can be carried with dignity, without betraying oneself or one’s history. An important part of the programme was a lecture by Ekaterina Fyodorova, a Doctor of Cultural Studies and Professor at Lomonosov Moscow State University, followed by an open conversation with Prince Nikita Dmitrievich — a rare opportunity for thoughtful, personal dialogue about the fate of the collection, the mission of private collecting, and the ways cultural memory can be preserved and passed forward. The opening day welcomed over a hundred guests.

AFTERWORD

For me, this project reaffirmed one fundamental understanding: the true value of art lies not in its era, style, or material form. It lies in people — in their willingness to preserve, continue, and transmit a cultural line that transcends time, borders, and political contexts. If a lineage can exist beyond geography, then culture can exist beyond historical rupture. This is what I sought to articulate through this project — not only as a curator, but as a person who recognises responsibility for continuity as the highest form of cultural action.