

# KONSTANTIN IVANOVICH GORBATOV

(Stavropol 1876 - Berlin 1945)

## *Sailing Boats on the Volga*

signed in Cyrillic and dated 1910 (lower right)

oil on panel

24 x 33 cm (9 ½ x 13 in)

**Exhibited:** *Fresh Water / Água Doce*, Gaiás Centre Museum, Santiago de Compostela, March - September 2014.

**B**ATHED IN A CLEAR, WARM LIGHT, KONSTANTIN Ivanovich Gorbatov presents a rich and atmospheric painting of boats sailing on the river Volga, their sails catching the last of the evening sun. On the horizon a headland stretches out to sea upon which a whitewashed building stands. The river Volga is the largest in Europe and dissects its way through the western part of Russia. Situated along its course and tributaries are many of Russia's largest cities, including Moscow. It therefore has an important place in the cultural heritage of Russia and has been a popular subject for artists throughout history.

Gorbatov paints *Sailing Boats on the Volga* in an impressionistic manner; the painting has a fast and sketch-like quality. Rather than focus on individual details, Gorbatov aims to evoke the atmosphere of the scene through suggestive and dappled brushstrokes. This gives a subtle description of the boats and figures is given but their presence is nevertheless felt as they sail across the river.

A strong sense of movement is created in the painting through the large boat on the right, which sails across the picture space and leads the eye to the smaller boat ahead in the left of the painting. This strong diagonal also creates a sense of perspective, lending the painting depth and space which is heightened by the headland in the distance. The water moves calmly, quietly reflecting the sky and sailing boats, which Gorbatov renders through expressive dabs of paint that blend into a smoother plane as the detail and motion of the water is lost in the distance. Gorbatov's palette of warm blues and yellows, his delicate brushstrokes and compositional structure combine harmoniously to create a vivid, pleasing and atmospheric painting.

Gorbatov did not become a painter until unusually late in his career. He initially studied civil engineering before moving to St. Petersburg in 1904, where he studied at the Baron Stieglitz Central School for Technical Draftsmanship. However, he then turned his energies to painting, attracted by its freer form - a method that was to characterize his post-Impressionist style. He trained under Nikolay Nikanorovich Dubovskoy (1859-1918) and Alexei Kisselev (1838-1911), completing his studies at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts aged thirty-five.

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, Gorbatov left Russia permanently in 1922, first settling on the Italian island of Capri. In 1926 he moved to Berlin where he remained until his death. He became a member

of a Russian group of *émigrés* including artists such as the post-Impressionist painter Leonid Pasternak (1862-1945). During the 1930s Gorbatov travelled Europe extensively and visited Palestine and Syria in 1934 and 1935. As a Soviet citizen he was forbidden to leave Germany during World War II; he died in Berlin shortly thereafter.

While Gorbatov also painted landscapes and the occasional still-life, he was particularly seduced by river and coastal scenes of which he made many during his travels across Europe. In *View of Capri*, Gorbatov evokes the atmosphere of the scene through expressive brushstrokes, colour and a subtle, warm rendering of light (fig. 1). Such qualities, exemplified in *Sailing Boats on the Volga*, have earned him popular recognition. His works can be viewed in museums such as the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg and Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Konstantin Ivanovich Gorbatov, *View of Capri*,  
Private Collection (Figure 1)





K. Forster 1911