

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky (Moscow 1839 - St. Petersburg 1915)

Unloading Boats on the Bosphorus

watercolour on paper laid down on board
17.2 x 23.2 cm (6¾ x 9⅝ in)

Unloading boats on the Bosphorus provides a momentary glimpse into the dockside activities in nineteenth century Istanbul. The left foreground is dominated by a brightly sunlit jetty packed with people working, resting and unloading small vessels. A rowboat filled with colourful wares, ready for unloading, waits in front of the jetty whilst two men engage in conversation between the boat and dock. The mast of a larger boat is seen looming behind the lively quay, though Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky has insinuated its presence by merely leaving the area unpainted, suggesting the shape of rigging.

Behind the jetty, the magnificent silhouette of the Hagia Sophia mosque dominates the background, her four minarets piercing the bright sky above. Makovsky evocatively depicts the illuminated sky with bursts of hazy light flowing down towards the shadow-veiled city below, whilst the still water glistens with the long rays that glide across the surface. The Bosphorus appears unusually devoid of maritime activity and along the shoreline one can see the contours of several large ships at anchor. The palette used by Makovsky is highly contrasted, with the quay activities depicted using vibrant reds, blues and yellows, and Istanbul shrouded in a pale shadowy blue. This differing use of colour and tone by Makovsky heightens the mystic aura of the Byzantine city, and accentuates the sunbathed skyline as well as the vibrant day-to-day activities at the dockside.

Makovsky was part of an influential Russian dynasty of painters. His father, Yegor Ivanovich Makovsky (1800-1886), was an amateur artist and founder of Art Classes, which later become incorporated into the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. His father's important artistic connections meant that renowned contemporary Russian painters such as [Karl Pavlovich Bryullov](#) and Vasily Tropinin (1776-1857) were counted as friends of the family. All of Yegor Ivanovich Makovsky's children were to become artists, and Konstantin's brother [Vladimir](#) is equally regarded for his artistic abilities. Later on in his life Konstantin mused that, 'for what I became I think I should thank not the Academy or Professors but only my father.'

Makovsky studied first at the Moscow School of Painting and Sculpture from 1851 until 1858 under Mikhail Ivanovich Skotti (1814-61) and Sergey Konstantinovich Zaryanko (1818-1871), both of whom were pupils of Bryullov. From 1858 to 1863 he continued his studies at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, exhibiting paintings such as *The Curing of the Blind* (1860) and *Agents of the False Dmitry Kill the Son of Boris Godunov* (1862). In 1862 he was awarded a Minor Gold Medal, but the following year, together with thirteen other students, Makovsky rebelled against the theme set for the Grand Gold Medal competition and left the Academy with the title of Artist of the Second Degree.

These dissenting students, headed by Ivan Kramskoy (1837-1887), broke away from the Academy in protest against its traditional style and subject-matter, wanting instead to focus on Russian culture and subsequently forming the Petersburg Artel of Artists in 1863. This group would later become the Society for Travelling Art Exhibitions, commonly known as 'The Wanderers'. As a member of the Wanderers, Makovsky was most notable for his focus on new subject-matter, namely the common people. However, he split with the society in 1883 and by 1891 had become a member of the newly established and more Salon-orientated St. Petersburg Society of Artists, of which he later became president. He is often considered a representative of Salon art, and his inclination towards Romanticism is attributed to the influence of Bryullov in his formative years.

Makovsky travelled to Egypt and Serbia in the mid-1870s, and at that time there occurred a noticeable shift in his interests, from social and psychological subject-matter to the artistic problems of colours and shape. It is highly probable that Makovsky conceived *Unloading Boats on the Bosphorus* either during or after this period of travel.

Provenance:

Collection of the granddaughter of the artist;
anonymous sale, Sotheby's, London, 20th November, 2001, lot 22.

Artist description:

Konstantin Yegorovich Makovsky was an influential Russian painter, affiliated with the "Wanderers". Many of his historical paintings, such as *The Russian Bride's Attire* (1889), showed an idealized view of Russian life of prior centuries. He is often considered a representative of a Salon art.

Konstantin was born in Moscow as the older son of a Russian art figure and amateur painter, Yegor Ivanovich Makovsky. Yegor Makovsky was the founder of *Natural class* the art school that later became as the famous Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Among the friends of the family were Karl Briullov and Vasily Tropinin. All children of Yegor became notable painters, like his equally famous brother Vladimir. Later Konstantin wrote "For what I became I think I should thank not the Academy or Professors but only my father."

In 1851 Konstantin entered the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture where he became the top student, easily getting all the available awards. His teachers were ħ.M.I. Skotty, A.N. Mokritsky, S.K. Zaryanko, all of them pupils of Karl Brullov. Makovsky's inclinations to Romanticism and decorative effects can be explained by the influence of Briullov.

In 1858 Makovsky entered the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. From 1860 he participated in the exhibitions of Academia with paintings such as *Curing of the Blind* (1860) and *Agents of the False Dmitry kill the son of Boris Godunov*(1862). In 1863 Makovsky, together with the other 13 students eligible to participate in the competition for the Large Gold Medal of Academia, refused to paint on the set topic in Scandinavian mythology and instead left Academia without a formal diploma.

Makovsky became a member of a co-operative (artel) of artists led by Ivan Kramskoi, typically producing Wanderers paintings on everyday life (*Widow*1865, *Herring-seller* 1867, etc.). From 1870 he was a founding member of the Society for Traveling Art Exhibitions and continued to work on paintings devoted to everyday life. He exhibited his works on both the Academia exhibitions and the Travelling Art Exhibitions of the Wanderers.

A significant change in his style occurred after traveling to Egypt and Serbia in the mid-1870s. His interests changed from social and psychological problems to the artistic problems of colors and shape.

In the 1880s he became a fashionable author of portraits and historical paintings. At the World's Fair of 1889 in Paris he received the Large Gold Medal for his paintings *Death of Ivan the Terrible*, *The Judgement of Paris* and *Demon and Tamara*. He was one of the most highly appreciated and highly paid Russian artists of the time. Many democratic critics considered him as a renegade of the Wanderers' ideals, producing (like Henryk Siemiradzki) striking but shallow works, while others see him as a forerunner of Russian Impressionism.

Makovsky became a victim of a road accident (his horse-driven carriage was hit by an electric tram) and died in 1915 in Saint Petersburg.

Collections

Makovsky is represented in the following collections: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Irkutsk Regional Art Museum, Russia; Joslyn Art Museum, Nebraska; National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan; Nizhni Novgorod Art Museum, Russia, amongst others.