

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



**Vladimir Egorovich Makovsky (Moscow 1846 - St. Petersburg 1920)**

## **A Ukrainian Peasant Girl**

signed and indistinctly inscribed in Cyrillic and dated '1902/14 Aug/...' (centre right)  
pencil, charcoal and watercolour on paper laid on board  
34.2 x 25.3 cm (13½ x 10 in)

This beautifully executed watercolour by Vladimir Egorovich Makovsky fits in thematically with the numerous sketches he drew of pastoral life during his summer holidays in Poltova in the Ukraine. Most of his work from Poltova, however, dates to the 1880s, and this particular work on paper was executed some years later in 1902, during a period in which Makovsky painted a series dedicated to workers of the Volga region. As with his work from Poltova, *A Ukrainian Peasant Girl* marks a focus on art of a traditional and real Russia. The portrait was executed during a time when artists were embracing the vibrancy of Russia's cultural heritage and its people. They were turning away from Western ideology, and focusing instead on the magnificence of Russian culture as found in the lives of peasants.

Though a far cry from his depictions of harsh social realities, such as *The Benefactor* (1874) and *The Released Prisoner* (1882), this superb watercolour by Makovsky remains true to his reputation as an observer of human life. Makovsky's *oeuvre* illustrate his extensive understanding of different social classes from dignitaries to the more humble, such as the figure portrayed here. Makovsky's apparent concern, revealed in *A Ukrainian Peasant Girl*, with the purity and beauty of the sitter draws great

similarities with the work of [Alexei Alekseevich Harlamoff](#). The soft lines in this watercolour, the detailing, and focus on the face of the sitter are also stylistically reminiscent of Harlamoff.

A painter of social injustices during Russia's rapid social change, Makovsky came from an artistic family. His two brothers, [Nikolai](#) and [Konstantin](#) and his son, Alexandr Vladimirovich (1869-1924), were all established painters in their own right and his father was a collector and founder of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. It was here that Makovsky studied from 1861 to 1866 under Sergey Zaryenko (1818-1871). He was one of the founding members of the Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions, the *Peredvizhniki* group, or 'The Wanderers': crucially his involvement in the group influenced and shaped his artistic career.

During the 1870s Makovsky's paintings tended to be genre scenes cleverly observing human nature, many humorous such as *Fruit-Preserving* (1876), *The Congratulator* (1878) and *The Grape-Juice Seller* (1879). He did not, however, solely depict the light hearted; the social current of the time and the interaction of the aristocracy with the poor were great influences on his work, for instance in *The Benefactor* (1874) and *The Convict* (1878). For his painting *The Fancies of Nightingales* in 1878 he was granted the title of Academician. Following Vasili Perov's (1834-1882) death, he taught at the Moscow School from 1882 until 1893, then at the Higher Art School of the Imperial Academy of Arts from 1894 to 1918, becoming Director in 1895. His students included Abram Arkhipov (1862-1930), Vasily Baksheev (1878-1971) and Yefim Cheptsov (1875-1950).

Some of Makovsky's greatest works were painted in the 1880s such as *The Released Prisoner* (1882), *The Collapse of the Bank* (1881) and *On the Boulevard* (1888), his subject matter becoming increasingly socially conscious. Between 1896 and 1905 he executed a series of paintings dedicated to workers of the Volga region and then turned to political themes, such as *January 9th, 1905 on the Vasilyev Island following the first Russian Revolution*, and *The Sacrifices on the Khodyn Field* (c.1905) in which Makovsky depicted the event when a thousand people lost their lives during a protest at the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II (1868-1918) in 1896. Makovsky died in St. Petersburg in 1920.

#### **Provenance:**

Acquired by the previous owner whilst working at the British Embassy, St. Petersburg, *circa* 1950.

#### **Artist description:**

Makovsky was the son of collector, Yegor Ivanovich Makovsky, who was one of the founders of the Moscow Art School. Vladimir had two brothers, Nikolai Makovsky and Konstantin Makovsky, and one sister, Alexandra Makovsky. All were famous painters themselves. Vladimir studied at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. He finished his studies in 1869 and from 1872 became one of the founding members of the Association of Travelling Art Exhibitions, the Wanderers, or Peredvizhniki, where his many years of prolific work brought him to a leading position.

Makovsky's work was defined by a perpetual humor as well as blatant irony and scorn. During the seventies his paintings dealt primarily with small-town folk. His pictures, *The Grape-juice Seller* (1879), *Fruit-Preserving* (1876) and *The Congratulator* (1878) depict various scenes where the mood is finely conceived and almost laughter-inducing. Other works of his, such as *The Benefactor* (1874) and *The Convict* (1878) are profoundly socially-conscious. In them, Makovsky either criticizes the false sympathy of the aristocracy towards the poor, or draws attention to the oppression and persecution of the tsarist gendarmes. In 1878, he became an academician.

In the eighties, during the time of Russian "democratic" painting, Makovsky produced some of his most revered works. In 1882, he was made professor at the Moscow Art School after the death of Vasili Perov. Some of Makovsky's greatest works of this period include *In the Ante-room of the Court of Conciliator* (1880), *The Released Prisoner* (1882), and *The Collapse of the Bank* (1881). From the end of the eighties, Makovsky began to produce more gloomy works. Quintessential works of this period include *You Shall Not Go* (1892), and *On the Boulevard* (1888).

In 1894, Makovsky became Rector of the Preparatory school of the Academy of Art. After the First Russian Revolution, he painted *January 9th, 1905, on the Vasilyev Island* in which he depicts the armed police firing at defenseless people. In another painting *The Sacrifices on the Khodyn Field* in which a thousand people lost their lives during the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II, he again stood uncompromisingly on the side of the oppressed people. After the October Revolution, Makovsky helped carry over the realist traditions to the early stages of Socialist Realism.

Makovsky also made a considerable contribution to the developing iconography of the Russian revolutionary movement. Combining truth to appearances with psychological insight, he painted the exalted members of a group of liberal intelligentsia in the picture of the *Evening Party*, (1875–97; Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery), a canvas on the subject of the *Interrogation of the Female Revolutionary*, (1904; Moscow, Central Museum Revolution).

### **Collections**

Makovskii is represented in the following collections: Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan; Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, amongst others.