

# 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)

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

**T**HIS 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 (see inventory). 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 (1842, 1886) and Konstantin (see inventory for both) 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 9<sup>th</sup>, 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.



