

PHILIP ANDREYEVICH MALIAVIN

(Kazanki, Samara Province 1869 - Nice, France 1940)

Head and Torso of a Woman in Russian Dress

signed 'PhMaliavin' (centre right)
pencil and coloured chalk on paper
46 x 32.4 cm (18 x 12¾ in)

Provenance: Studio of the Artist;
Zoia Bounatian, daughter of the artist;
purchased from the above by the father of the present owner.

THE VIVID, ALMOST FLUORESCENT COLOURS ARE the first elements of this drawing to strike the eye. Philip Andreyevich Maliavin uses them to highlight his model's costume with bold, rough sketching. In contrast with the audacious feast of colour in her dress, this Russian peasant woman, whose features are picked out by delicate pencil shading and a few precise contours, bears an expression of slight anxiety or reticence. A hint of stubbornness can be detected in her direct gaze, which despite her unease, still conveys a challenge to the viewer. These contrasting emotions, visible within the woman's face, are illustrated throughout the image by the contrast in colours and treatment between her features and her attire.

Maliavin was himself born a peasant in Kazanki, a large village in the Samara Province, (the modern-day Totsk District in Orenburg Region). He manifested an exceptional artistic talent at an early age and despite his parents' objections, left home at the age of sixteen to study icon painting at the monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece. To his intense disappointment, Maliavin discovered that the workshops there merely produced copies after Russian models, and no original icons. However, since he could not afford the journey home, he entered the monastery as a novice and learnt the art of painting murals and icons.

In 1891, Vladimir Alexandrovich Beklemishev (1861-1920), a sculptor and professor at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg,

visited Mount Athos and immediately recognized Maliavin's artistic skill. He took the young novice as his protégé, and sponsored his entrance into the Academy in 1892. There Maliavin studied under the celebrated Ilya Yefimovich Repin (see inventory). Repin exerted a profound influence on the development of Maliavin's career as a painter. It was during this period that Maliavin executed his best early works, where his liking for the colour red is expressed through its extensive use.

Maliavin subsequently enjoyed great fame as an artist: Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov (1832-1898), a wealthy collector and founder of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, bought two of his paintings. Maliavin exhibited at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris and in 1901 one of his works was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in Venice. In 1906 he received the title of 'Academician'. After the Revolution, Maliavin was summoned to the Kremlin in 1918 to draw portraits of Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) and Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky (1875-1933). However, he fled Russia in 1922 and lived the rest of his life in exile in Nice. He continued exhibiting throughout Europe, but gradually lost all his patrons and died in obscurity in 1940.

Maliavin's extremely personal style, particularly recognizable through his unconventional use of colour, finds an accurate illustration in this picture. *Head and Torso of a Woman in Russian Dress* is indeed a fine example of Maliavin's greatest inspiration, the peasant life of his childhood.



Pholla Liavine