

PHILIP ANDREYEVICH MALIAVIN

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

A Peasant Girl in a Colourful Shawl

signed with initials (lower left); signed 'PhMaliavin' (lower right)
pencil and coloured crayons on paper
35 x 25 cm (13¾ x 9⅞ in)

THE OUTLINE OF THE SITTER'S FACE IN THIS exquisite work by Philip Andreyevich Maliavin is perfectly framed by the headscarf that sweeps around her head. Her features blend into the background, and her flowing scarf ripples out from her rounded face. Her gaze is serene and attentive and we are immediately struck by her bright, intense eyes, which reveal a joyful and energetic soul. This is complemented by the sudden flares of colour and patterning of her scarf, which seem to jump out, enlivening and electrifying her garment; the vibrancy and energy of which recall Maliavin's famed collection of works celebrating the colourful life of peasant women from his hometown of Kazanki (fig. 1).

On completing his studies at the Imperial Academy, St. Petersburg, Maliavin was assigned to study under the tutelage of Ilya Yefimovich Repin (see inventory). Repin undoubtedly exerted a considerable influence on Maliavin's development and it was during this time that the artist created some of his best early paintings, displaying a preference for portraits of peasants, a theme that would inspire him throughout his career.

Describing Maliavin's early peasant portraiture, created under Repin, in the monograph *Filip Maliavin*, Olimpiada Zhivova writes: 'In the works that Maliavin executed at this time, everyone saw the powerful declaration of the artist's absolutely mature expression and his immense natural talent. With freshness, innovative style, enormous force of expression, and significant, inherent relevance, he distinguishes each of his images of young peasants, the models for which were the artist's relatives and friends from his homeland.'¹

Although neither the date of the present work, nor the sitter's identity are known, her serenity suggests that she is comfortable in the artist's presence, perhaps indicating that she may indeed have been his friend or a relative. In the present work, one has a feel for the core of Maliavin's peasant works, which reached iconic status, and which led Alexandre Nikolayevich Benois (1870-1960) to describe the artist's work as a 'Bacchic feast of colour', the vibrant scarf in *A Peasant Girl in a Colourful Shawl* appearing to be a symbol of this young girl's lively character.

Born a peasant, Maliavin grew up in the village of Kazanki in the Samara province. His *oeuvre* was deeply rooted in genre and portraiture painting, and the depiction of traditional peasant life formed a key part of his subject matter. Maliavin drew on the colourful traditions and festivities of Kazanki, and his style was characterised by a skilful texturing of colours, a vibrant palette, and astute observation of human nature. Gifted with a precocious talent, Maliavin's



Philip Andreyevich
Maliavin,
*Peasant Girl Knitting a
Stocking*, 1895,
The Tretyakov Gallery,
Moscow
(Figure 1)

interest in art led him to train in the icon painting workshops of the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos, Greece, much against his parents' wishes. It was here that he came to the attention of the sculptor and professor Vladimir Alexandrovich Beklemishev (1861-1920), who was visiting Athos on a pilgrimage. Beklemishev encouraged Maliavin to return to Russia in 1891 and to study at the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg. Reforms to the Academy's scholastic structure in 1894 meant that students were assigned to the studios of specific masters on completing the Academy's curriculum. Maliavin was assigned to study under Repin, and 'although he [Maliavin] came from the school of Repin, he found his own unique voice'.²

From 1901 Maliavin began to hold exhibitions in Russia and abroad, including in Venice and Paris. His most celebrated period was from 1905 to 1907, when he focused on his 'peasant' canvases. *The Whirlwind* of 1906 is considered to be his greatest painting.

¹ Zhivova, O.A., *Filip Maliavin*, (Moscow, 1967), p.35.

² Makovsky, S., 'Maliavin' in *Jar Pritzka*, (1923), no.10, p.2.

