

PETR PETROVICH KOLCHIN

(Russian, 19th Century)

Noble Intentions

signed in Cyrillic , inscribed in Cyrillic and dated 'Tiflis 1880' (lower right)

oil on canvas

37.5 x 50 cm (14¾ x 19¾ in)

THERE IS A DELICATE, SAD POIGNANCY EVIDENT in *Noble Intentions* as a young girl begins to wash the hands of a seated male companion. The rusticity of the scene is immediately apparent by the presence of a thatched wooden hut, a horse grazing nearby and another domed dwelling beyond. Centrally placed in the composition, the girl pours water from a jug, but her thoughts are unmistakably elsewhere. Her eyes are cast away, and she does not engage with the man seated on her right. Her beautiful face blossoms with youth and her ruddy cheeks imply a life spent outdoors. Her long hair is plaited under a tight white and red patterned head scarf and she wears a striped skirt with a buttoned cardigan. Over her left arm an embroidered cloth is draped ready to dry his hands. To the right of the girl a pair of unusual stacked shoes rest on the floor. These are similar to the chopine style of platform shoes popular in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, which were worn to protect the feet and dress from staining by mud and dirt. The length of the girl's skirt could possibly necessitate the need for such a pair of shoes, or they could merely be traditional footwear for formal occasions.

The seated man gazes at her intently, as if with gratitude or expectance,



Petr Petrovich Kolchin, *A Painting Trip to the Caucasus*, 1888, Private Collection (Figure 1)



Dmitri Ivanovich
Yermakov,
Three Women
(Figure 2)

while she appears withdrawn. To the right of the pair a bearded man sits alongside a low wooden table laid with several vessels, a bottle grasped in his hands. Behind the girl, another bearded man faces the viewer directly while in the darkened background a woman, her head hidden behind a white veil, is seen peering from behind a doorway watching the activity.

Noble Intentions demonstrates a clear interest in the daily lives of the rural poor, a common theme in Petr Petrovich Kolchin's work, a further example being *A Painting Trip to the Caucasus* (fig. 1). In both works a close study of the dress and customs of the figures appears to be Kolchin's central concern. This ethnographic interest was also a central aspect of the work of Kolchin's friend and colleague, the photographer Dmitri Ivanovich Yermakov (1846-1916). Yermakov is considered one of the great chroniclers of the Caucasus, and his work shows a similar fascination with his subjects costume as can be seen in *Noble Intentions* (fig. 2).

Unfortunately little is known today of Kolchin's life. He is recorded as studying at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture from 1855, where he won an award for his portraiture. After graduating he lived first in Ljubljana and then, from the mid 1860s, in Tbilisi. It was here that he met Yermakov and together they founded a photographic studio. He taught in Tbilisi before going on to found his own school in 1889.

