

KONSTANTIN EGOROVICH MAKOVSKY

(Moscow 1839 - St. Petersburg 1915)

A Study for 'A Street Scene in Cairo'

signed 'C. Makowsky' (lower right)
watercolour on paper
29.5 x 22 cm (11½ x 8¾ in)

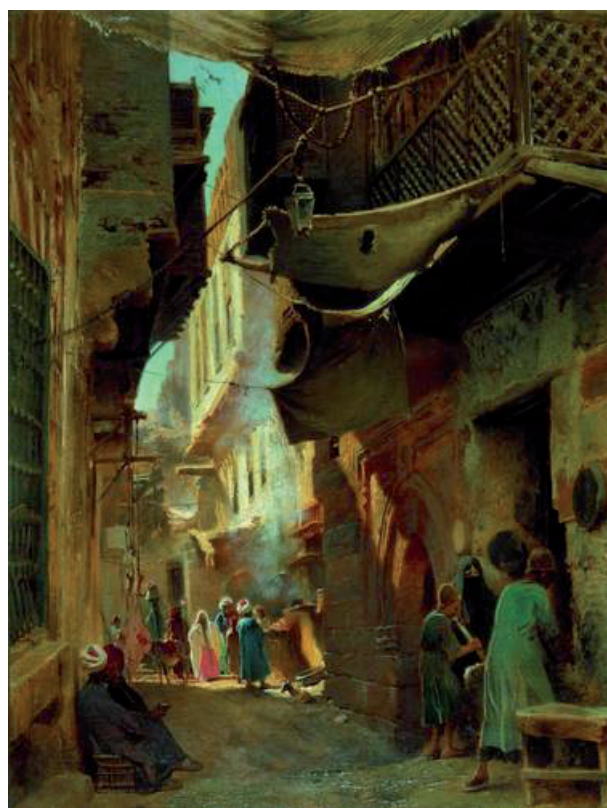
Provenance: Collection of the granddaughter of Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky.

THE PRESENT WATERCOLOUR IS A STUDY FOR Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky's *A Street in Cairo*, see figure 1, which hangs in the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. There is an enigmatic atmosphere in the narrow, shadowy backstreet in Cairo. A creeping haze of dense smoke rises in the background filling the surrounding air. Makovsky leads the viewer not only to witness the activity taking place, but also to imagine the sounds and smells that emanate from the dusty, cramped street. On the right-hand side, two ladies wearing blue *hijabs* stand by a doorway talking, while a donkey rests nearby. On the left, a seated man wearing a blue full-length shirt or *gallibaya* and turban wound around a *tarbush* (fez) watches the street activity.

In the background, the high ledge of a wooden kiosk is visible. It is possible that the booth represents a local food stall, and the smoke from the cooking taking place within and alongside. Two men wearing dark yellow *gallibaya* stand nearby wearing red *tarbush*. After adopting the *tarbush* in the 1820s, making it part of the military uniform, Egypt became a major manufacturer and distributor in the Middle East. However the wearing of a *tarbush* was banned in 1952, after the Egyptian Revolution, as a symbol of independence from Ottoman influences.

The tightly packed buildings on either side of the narrow street are linked by ropes holding squares of material, presumably to cast shade on the ground below. The intensity of the sun is evident in the striking contrast between the dark areas of shadow and direct sunlight that fall on pavement. On the right hand building, an ornate wooden balcony juts out from the first floor and small, repeated Arabesque designs are cut into the wood. Known as *Mashrafeya* these delicate and ornate screens are typical of Islamic architecture, and some of the best examples are found in Old Cairo. The small holes reduced the amount of light coming into the house, which not only kept the rooms cooler but also had a second, social function that allowed women to observe the activities in the street, whilst retaining complete privacy.

There are two major differences between the study and the Russian Museum's finished work. The first is the composition of figures on the right-hand side, where the donkey has been replaced by a man and a child. Secondly whereas the study is almost overwhelmingly bright, conveying the hot dusty atmosphere of Cairo, the oil makes a greater use of contrasts between light and shadow. This gives the work a slightly calmer feel, and is possibly not as atmospheric as Makovsky's study.



Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky, *A Street in Cairo*, 1873,
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg (Figure 1)

Makovsky trained at both the Moscow School of Painting from 1851 to 1858 and the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts from 1858 to 1863, but rejected the classical focus of these institutions in favour of representing real, human Russian culture in his works. He is known as one of the founding members of 'The Wanderers', or *Peredvizhniki* movement of artists, and was one of the most highly regarded contemporary Russian artists at the turn of the twentieth century, recognised for his talent as a painter of portraits and historical subjects.



(Actual Size)