

STEPAN FEODOROVICH KOLESNIKOV

(Adrianopol 1879 - Belgrade 1955)

In the Fields

signed in Cyrillic and dated '1919/ I/10' (lower left)

gouache on board

14.2 x 27.9 cm (5 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 11 in)

Provenance: with Vose Galleries, Boston, 1986 (inventory no. 28312);
acquired from the above by the previous private collector.

IN THIS WORK STEPAN FEODOROVICH KOLESNIKOV depicts the harsh realities of Russian rural life. Three peasants have been trying to plough the boggy field but it seems that the plough itself has broken. One of the women is attempting to repair the axle while the big muscular horse waits patiently nearby. The landscape is painted in a dreary and muted palette leaving no optimistic sense that there will be a bountiful end product to the workers' labour. The black soil and stark trees emphasise the infertile nature of the landscape and the struggle of the figures. The figures are anonymous for Kolesnikov has painted a scene that reflects the unusual hardships of agricultural life in Russia and the conditions that all other farmers must contend with.

Similar themes are explored by Kolesnikov in *The Potato Harvest in Belorussia* (fig. 1). A group of peasant women labour in the sun to harvest the potato crop, while a male figure watches them work, in a comparable manner to *In the Fields*. The women are bent double, which highlights the backbreaking hardship of their work and again their faces are hidden, so



Stepan Feodorovich Kolesnikov, *The Potato Harvest in Belorussia*, Private Collection (Figure 1)



Ilya Yefimovich Repin, *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, 1870-1873, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg (Figure 2)

that they represent their kind as a whole. In neither work is the landscape idealised. Rather it represents a barren place where one must toil to reap any sort of reward. In stylistic terms both works display a muted palette and the broad brush strokes which Kolesnikov favoured.

Kolesnikov was born in the Ukraine and after studying at the Odessa Art School, he entered the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg in 1903 without having to pass exams, such was his talent. Here he was taught by Ilya Yefimovich Repin and Vladimir Egorovich Makovsky. The influence of the Russian Realist tradition established by these artists is visible in the present work. Repin's masterpiece *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, for instance, also portrays the everyday struggles and hardships of the poor (fig. 2). Kolesnikov won praise from his teachers and the public alike and was one of the favourite artists of Tsar Nicolas II (1868-1918), who once gave the painter an engraved cigarette-case as a personal gift. After the Russian revolution in 1917, he moved to Yugoslavia though he continued to paint and exhibit throughout Europe.

Kolesnikov was gifted with a bright individual style, standing out among the most prominent artists of his time. He left a rich and diverse legacy and was equally skilled in genre and landscape painting, as well as in graphic techniques. After emigrating, he remained faithful to his Russian subjects, with bright winter landscapes and colourful church festivities among his favourite themes.

