

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky (Moscow 1839 - St. Petersburg 1915)

A Cairo Street Scene

Circa: 1839-1915

signed 'C. Makovsky' (lower left)
watercolour on paper
35 x 49 cm (13 x 19 in)

A Cairo Street Scene takes the viewer into the heart of a local neighbourhood, where homes, market stalls and social activity all co-exist simultaneously. Woven baskets filled with various goods and stacked crates sit on the right-hand side of the street. Striped canopies intermittently shelter the open spaces from the bright sunlight; while underneath a wooden walkway connecting two dwellings several men find respite in the shadows.

In the left foreground, within a wooden market stall, a solitary vendor sells fabrics of varying colour and length, his merchandise hanging from the roof. The man appears to be sewing, suggesting that his wares are handmade. As the watercolour was executed in Cairo, the materials on sale may be the colourful wrapped headscarves commonly worn by Egyptian men. They are often found in North African and Middle Eastern countries to provide protection from sun exposure as well as from dust and sand.

The building to the right of the stall appears to be a workshop, perhaps a blacksmith's. The wall above the main doorway is singed with soot, and a fireplace can be spotted within. To the right of the doorway, a variety of items are propped up against the wall, awaiting attention. The roof is lined with wooden railings and it appears that the building is still under construction.

It seems likely that Makovsky painted the present scene during his trip to Egypt in the mid-1870s. There are a number of comparable watercolours from this period, and he later used these studies as the basis for fully worked up oil paintings. For example the alleyway depicted in *A Cairo Street Scene* features in the Nizhny Novgorod Art Museum's [Cairo](#). Makovsky has taken the exotic, ramshackle character of the watercolour and developed it, adding figures and detail to the building on the left-hand side. Thus the present watercolour provides a fascinating insight into Makovsky's working methods.

Born in Moscow in 1839, Makovsky attended both the Moscow School of Painting and Sculpture, from 1851 to 1858, and the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, from 1858 to 1863. In his final year at the Academy, alongside thirteen of his fellow students, he refused to complete the final examination piece believing the subject matter to be insufficiently representative of the essence of Russian culture. Leaving the Academy with the title of Artist of the Second Degree, Makovsky and some of the rebellious artists formed the St. Petersburg Artel of Artists group, a precursor to 'The Wanderers', or *Peredvizhniki* group.

Makovsky travelled to Egypt in the mid 1870s, and it is most probable that he carried out a series of studies capturing local culture, including the present work, during his visit to the country. Like the British Orientalist painters of the nineteenth century, Makovsky was lured by the exoticism and heady street-culture found in North Africa, and works such as *A Cairo Street Scene*, completed *in situ*, sought to convey the immediacy, impact and vibrancy of the location.

Artist description:

Konstantin Yegorovich Makovsky was an influential Russian painter, affiliated with the "Wanderers". Many of his historical paintings, such as *The Russian Bride's Attire* (1889), showed an idealized view of Russian life of prior centuries. He is often considered a representative of a Salon art.

Konstantin was born in Moscow as the older son of a Russian art figure and amateur painter, Yegor Ivanovich Makovsky. Yegor Makovsky was the founder of *Natural class* the art school that later became as the famous Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Among the friends of the family were Karl Briullov and Vasily Tropinin. All children of Yegor became notable painters, like his equally famous brother Vladimir. Later Konstantin wrote "For what I became I think I should thank not the Academy or Professors but only my father."

In 1851 Konstantin entered the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture where he became the top student, easily getting all the available awards. His teachers were Ć.M.I. Skotty, A.N. Mokritsky, S.K. Zaryanko, all of them pupils of Karl Brullov. Makovsky's inclinations to Romanticism and decorative effects can be explained by the influence of Briullov.

In 1858 Makovsky entered the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. From 1860 he participated in the exhibitions of Academia with paintings such as *Curing of the Blind* (1860) and *Agents of the False Dmitry kill the son of Boris Godunov* (1862). In 1863 Makovsky, together with the other 13 students eligible to participate in the competition for the Large Gold Medal of Academia, refused to paint on the set topic in Scandinavian mythology and instead left Academia without a formal diploma.

Makovsky became a member of a co-operative (artel) of artists led by Ivan Kramskoi, typically producing Wanderers paintings on everyday life (*Widow* 1865, *Herring-seller* 1867, etc.). From 1870 he was a founding member of the Society for Traveling Art Exhibitions and continued to work on paintings devoted to everyday life. He exhibited his works on both the Academia exhibitions and the Travelling Art Exhibitions of the Wanderers.

A significant change in his style occurred after traveling to Egypt and Serbia in the mid-1870s. His interests changed from social and psychological problems to the artistic problems of colors and shape.

In the 1880s he became a fashioned author of portraits and historical paintings. At the World's Fair of 1889 in Paris he received the Large Gold Medal for his paintings *Death of Ivan the Terrible*, *The Judgement of Paris* and *Demon and Tamara*. He was one of the most highly appreciated and highly paid Russian artists of the time. Many democratic critics considered him as a renegade of the Wanderers' ideals, producing (like Henryk Siemiradzki) striking but shallow works, while others see him as a forerunner of Russian Impressionism.

Makovsky became a victim of a road accident (his horse-driven carriage was hit by an electric tram) and died in 1915 in Saint Petersburg.

Collections

Makovsky is represented in the following collections: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Irkutsk Regional Art Museum, Russia; Joslyn Art Museum, Nebraska; National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan; Nizhni Novgorod Art Museum, Russia, amongst others.