

# Konstantin Makovsky

THE  
TSAR'S  
PAINTER

Opening  
February 13

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Images available upon request

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**With *A Boyar Wedding Feast* as the centerpiece, special exhibition brings to life the extravagance and exquisite detail of Russian boyar life as portrayed in Konstantin Makovsky's monumental paintings**

WASHINGTON—The rich and exotic detail of Konstantin Makovsky's monumental paintings are the focus of a special exhibition opening at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens this winter. *Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar's Painter*, on view at Hillwood from February 13 to June 12, 2016, will be the first exhibition in America to focus on one of the most ambitious paintings from Makovsky's renowned *boyar bride series* and the path it traveled from late imperial St. Petersburg, to Paris during the *Belle Époque*, to America during the Gilded Age.



Konstantin Makovsky was 44 years old and one of the highest paid artists in Russia in 1883 when he painted *A Boyar Wedding Feast*. He had achieved fame as a portraitist and salon painter and was living the life of a celebrity artist when the coronation of Alexander III continued a new national patriotism rooted in the history of the tsar's Romanov ancestors. This renewed engagement with national history included a fascination with the settings, characters, and customs of the *boyars*, the old Russian elite of the 1600s. In its intricate detail, *A Boyar Wedding Feast* created an intimate connection with the men and women of the boyar class and was celebrated for its magical ability to blur the line between the present and imagined past. In addition to this monumental painting as the centerpiece, *The Tsar's Painter* will bring focus to objects and details depicted in the work with groupings of 17<sup>th</sup>-century objects of boyar life, such as intricately embroidered garments, pearl-studded *kokoshniks*, and gleaming silver, enamel, and ivory objects from Hillwood's collection, supplemented with loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Walters Art Museum, and other lenders.

"Since entering the collection as a gift from Hillwood founder Marjorie Merriweather Post's friend and esteemed collector and philanthropist C. Michael Paul in 1968, *A Boyar Wedding Feast* has long been one of the most beloved pieces at Hillwood, but has never before been the centerpiece of in-depth scholarship," explained Hillwood's executive director Kate Markert. "By presenting this painting along

with related selections from our unparalleled collection of Russian art, we are able finally to dive more deeply into the story behind Makovsky's great works and his fascination with the Russian past." The exhibition is presented in concert with the publication, *Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar's Painter in America and Paris*, a research project that was originally conceived and undertaken by the late Anne Odom, former curator emerita at Hillwood, and taken up by her friend and colleague, Wendy Salmond.

*A Boyar Wedding Feast* was the first among Makovsky's three monumental canvases focusing on boyar wedding traditions. It was not meant to represent a specific moment in time, but rather to represent key moments of a boyar wedding feast, as understood from historical sources and with a theatrical *tableau vivant* as its model. The painting highlights a pivotal moment in the feast when a stuffed swan is presented to the wedding couple shortly before they leave. The scene is rich with embroidered costumes, an array of authentic boyar antiques, and the faces of some of Makovsky's friends and clients. Makovsky unveiled the picture in St. Petersburg in a carefully controlled public exhibition setting in which the picture appeared under gaslight at one end of a darkened room. For the next two years, the artist attempted to sell the work by organizing private exhibitions in St. Petersburg, Paris, and London. After it won the medal of honor at the Antwerp Universal Exhibition in 1885, it was purchased by New York jeweler Charles Schumann, whose novel promotion helped foster the painting's popularity and spark international enthusiasm for boyar culture.

"Though less widely recognized today, the work of Konstantin Makovsky had tremendous influence on the art and culture of his time," said Dr. Wilfried Zeisler, associate curator of 19<sup>th</sup>-century art at Hillwood and curator of the exhibition. "By putting *A Boyar Wedding Feast* at the center, this exhibition offers a new perspective into the art and cultural history of Russia both in the 1600s and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, while offering the first in-depth exploration of the socio-political context for Makovsky's work and its enthusiastic reception by American audiences in the Gilded Age."

### **Exhibition Highlights**

The special exhibition will be on display in the mansion, with both the [pavilion](#) and [dining room](#) transformed to bring Russian art and culture dramatically to life. In the pavilion, *A Boyar Wedding Feast* will take center stage.

Continuing the *tableau vivant* motif, details from the painting will be brought to life as the culture and traditions of Russian weddings and boyar life are explored through groupings of 17<sup>th</sup>-century objects. An intricately carved jewelry chest, reflecting a similar piece depicted in the painting, is evidence of the skilled use of walrus ivory that was popular for centuries in Russia. Many of the objects painted in Makovsky's works are precious silver objects adorned with enamel. Several pieces on display call attention to these exquisitely detailed works. Large tulips, poppies, and sunflowers enameled in bright yellow, red, and blue distinguish a silver gilt and enamel bowl crafted in the town of Solvychedgodsk, seat of the Stroganov family, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Painted enamels such as this were introduced to Russia from Western Europe during the 1600s. A buffet lined with silver and silver gilt beakers, cups, and vases mimics the display of similar objects that gleam from the top of *A Boyar Wedding Feast*. Makovsky had once painted a portrait of Count Sergei Stroganov and possibly used the occasion to study the family's silver collection, which comprise most of the buffet pieces represented in the painting.

Some pieces on display provide real-life examples of the costumes that were an important feature of Makovsky's re-creation of boyar life. Boyar costumes, rarely seen outside of Russia, on loan from a private collector, highlight the sumptuous brocades, silks, satins, pearls, and embroidery that helped to inspire Makovsky's great interest in the life of the boyars.

A Fabergé box with a boyar and a [kovsh](#) with a detail from *A Boyar Wedding Feast* illustrate both the influence that Makovsky's colorful historical genre scenes had on contemporary artists and the move toward a neo-Russian style—which drew on themes from history and peasant culture as well as the abstracted natural forms of the emerging *art nouveau*—that evolved at the end of the 1800s.

In the dining room, the tradition of tableau vivant that was the backdrop for *The Boyar Wedding Feast* is the inspiration for a lavish table display, including precious silver objects and even a replica of the dramatic and symbolic swan.

### **Publication**

A full-color, 144-page companion publication, titled *Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar's Painter in America and Paris* accompanies the exhibition. Co-published with D Giles, Ltd., the book explores new perspectives on the art and career of Makovsky and the wider 19th-century enthusiasm for medieval Russian culture and boyar life. Contributors to the book are Wendy Salmond, professor of art and art history, Chapman University; Wilfried Zeisler, associate curator of 19th-century art, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; and Russell E. Martin, professor of history, Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania.

### **Exhibition Programs and Events**

A selection of events and programs will offer additional opportunities to learn about and celebrate the work of Konstantin Makovsky. A special exhibition opening event, [Night of Decadence](#), will celebrate the lavish life of the boyars with decadent delights, cocktails, and an exclusive exhibition preview, from 7 to 11 p.m. on Thursday, February 11. Call (202) 243-3974 or go to [www.HillwoodMuseum.org/night-of-decadence](http://www.HillwoodMuseum.org/night-of-decadence) for more information.

[The Tsar's Painter lecture series](#) will present two lectures that explore themes of the special exhibition. *Konstantin Makovsky: The Boyar Series in Context*, by exhibition curator Wilfried Zeisler, will be presented on Tuesday, March 15. *Muscovite Cinderella: The Royal Weddings of Boyars and Tsars*, by Russell E. Martin, will be presented on Tuesday, March 22.

[The Birth of Russian Nationalistic Music](#), presented with Levine Music on Wednesday, April 27, will explore Russian Nationalistic composition, including live performances. In partnership with The Carmel Institute of Russian Culture and History at American University, a day-long [Tsar's Painter Symposium](#) allows a deeper exploration of the exhibition themes and the career of Konstantin Makovsky.

### **Sponsors**

The exhibition is supported by: The Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Bonhams, Ellen MacNeille Charles, Kyra Cheremeteff and Thomas W. Richardson, Mr. and Mrs. Dale Church, Mrs. Daniel P. Davison, Dr. Cyril and Mrs. Elke Geacintov, Mr. and Mrs. Scott Phares, and Susan and David Thoms.

Memorial gifts in honor of Anne Odom were made by: Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Mark Odom, Evelyn and Leonard Coburn, A. Kenneth and Nina Gradia, Angela and Bruce Meyer, and Liana Paredes.

All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program.

### **Hillwood Background**

When Post cereal heiress, art collector, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of [Russian imperial art](#) outside of Russia, an [exquisite 18<sup>th</sup>-century French decorative art collection](#), and 25 acres of serene landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and exquisite jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include the [Japanese-style Garden](#), [Rose Garden](#), [French Parterre](#), and working greenhouses full of exotic orchids.

### **General Information**

- Location: 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC  
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)
- Information/Tickets: (202) 686-5807 for information or [www.HillwoodMuseum.org](http://www.HillwoodMuseum.org)  
[Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum](https://Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum)
- Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays, most holidays, and for several weeks in late January.
- Café: The HILLWOOD Café serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Afternoon Tea is served on Sundays only from 11a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Express Dining, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages, is available Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am to 4 p.m.  
Call (202) 686-5807 for café reservations.
- Suggested Donation: \$18, \$15 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18.  
No donation is suggested for children under 6. Discounts for groups of 10 more apply.  
Hillwood members enter free. Visit [www.HillwoodMuseum/join](http://www.HillwoodMuseum/join) for more information.