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Vladimir Makovsky : the politics of nineteenth-century Russian realism

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ABSTRACT

VLADIMIR MAKOVSKY: THE POLITICS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN REALISM

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This thesis examines the political work produced by a little-known Russian Realist, Vladimir Makovsky (1846-1920), while he was a member of the nineteenth-century art collective *Peredvizhniki*. Increasingly recognized for subtle yet insistent opposition to the tsarist regime and the depiction of class distinctions, the work of the *Peredvizhniki* was for decades ignored by modernist art history as the result of an influential article, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” written by American art critic Clement Greenberg in 1939. In this article, Greenberg suggests the work of Ilya Repin, the most renowned member of the *Peredvizhniki*, should be regarded not as art, but as “kitsch”—the industrialized mass culture of an urban working class. Even now, scholars who study the *Peredvizhniki* concern themselves with the social history of the group as a whole, rather than with the merits of specific artworks. Taking a different approach to analyzing the significance of the *Peredvizhniki* and of Makovsky specifically this thesis harnesses the powerful methodologies devised in the 1970s by art historians T.J. Clark and Michael Fried, two scholars who are largely responsible for reopening the dialogue on the meaning and significance of Realism in the history of modern art.

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VLADIMIR MAKOVSKY: THE POLITICS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY
RUSSIAN REALISM

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Thesis Director:

Barbara Jaffee

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* GTG standard abbreviation for State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

INTRODUCTION

I have long been fascinated with the complexity of 18th and 19th century French history. Thus, when I began studying art history as an undergraduate student, I was excited to discover the relationship between the artworks and the politics of the era, including Realism, with its focus on class distinctions. Not surprisingly, I entered graduate school under the assumption that I would conduct research and write a thesis on a topic in 19th century French Realism. However, while exploring the historiography of 19th century painting as a whole, I stumbled upon the work of the Russian artist, Ilya Repin in Richard Muther's *The History of Modern Painting* (1907).¹ Before that, I had neither heard his name nor seen his works. Upon further exploration, I became fascinated with the Russian artistic group, the *Peredvizhniki*, of which Repin was a part. This group of artists subtly opposed the tsarist regime in their work and often depicted class distinctions. Though Repin was the most renowned of the group in his day, it is the works of a fellow *Peredvizhnik*, Vladimir Makovsky that, intrigue me most. Of the numerous *Peredvizhniki*, Makovsky was one of the few (another being Repin) who depicted explicitly political scenes. Yet, after Muther's little known account of Modern painting written at the very beginning of the twentieth century, Repin, and thus the rest of the *Peredvizhniki*, fade almost completely from the canon of Modern art.

¹ Richard Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*. Vol. I-IV (London: J. M. Dent and CO. 1907).

This was, in part, due to the revolutionary events of 1917, when the Bolshevik party tore down the tsarist regime eventually establishing the Soviet Union in 1922.² With this dramatic change in leadership, the context in which Repin's work was understood was transformed. In fact, Josef Stalin, the dominant figure in the Soviet regime following the death of his predecessor, Vladimir Lenin, greatly appreciated the work of Repin.³ Stalin feared what he saw as individualistic art movements that did not directly celebrate the achievements of the Soviet Union in a visual language readily legible to the masses, particularly the avant-garde movement, Constructivism. Thus, in order to ensure the suppression of subjective art, Stalin outlawed all individual art movements and promoted only the state-supported movement Social Realism. At the same time, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York embraced Constructivism as a progressive art movement, largely ignoring the *Peredvizhniki* and Repin. However, it was American art critic Clement Greenberg's decidedly negative pronouncements on Repin's Realism in his 1939 article "Avant-garde and Kitsch" (explored further in Chapter One) that ensured *Peredvizhniki*'s long exile from the Modernist canon.

Despite this neglect, I believe the *Peredvizhniki* belong within the modern art canon. In 1985, Patricia Mainardi wrote an essay, "The Political Origins of Modernism" for *Art Journal*, which helped bring what Greenberg called *kitsch* back into the history of modernism. In the essay, Mainardi contests the formalist approach to modern art history, the origins of which she traces to a depoliticization of art during the Second Empire of Napoleon III of

² J. N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812-1917* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 241-276.

³ Helen Rappaport, *Joseph Stalin: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara: American Bibliographic Company, 1999), 7.

France.⁴ Mainardi argues that, if formal aspects were to be set aside and political aspects considered foremost, then Romanticism and its best known exponent, Eugene Delacroix represent the beginning of modernism as the first movement to oppose the state-sponsored Academy. If one follows the logic of Mainardi's argument, that modern art begins with works that engage politically revolutionary tendencies, then Repin and Makovsky are also part of the beginning of modernism.

Generations of scholars, including Mainardi, have repaired the rift that Greenberg opened between avant-garde (modernism, really) and kitsch, but also between abstraction and Realism as representative of these polarities. Historians as divergent in their allegiances as T.J. Clark and Michael Fried each have managed to reconcile French Realism with a history of modernist avant-gardism. Yet Russian Realism remains of greater interest to social or cultural historians than to historians of modern art. This thesis will apply pressure to that convention in order to discover what there is of value in the work of *Peredvizhniki* artist Vladimir Makovsky to add to our understanding of modernist art history.

Vladimir Egorovich Makovsky (Влади́мир Егóрович Мако́вский) was born in Moscow in 1846.⁵ Unlike a majority of his future artist colleagues, his family was of noble stock. Yet, despite this nobility, the family was not enormously wealthy; his father, Egor Makovsky, was a civil servant in the Moscow court office. Throughout Vladimir's childhood, his family surrounded him with art and creativity. His father was an art collector, his mother

⁴ Patricia Mainardi, "The Political Origins of Modernism" *Art Journal* Vol. 45, No. 1 (1985): 13.

⁵ Rosalind P. Blakesley and Margaret Samu, eds., *From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture*. (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2014), 25.

was known for her beautiful singing voice, and his brother, Konstantin, seven years his elder, was a painter. Because of their love of the arts, the Mokovsky family often entertained the Moscow artistic elite, musicians and artists alike. When he was twelve, Vladimir followed Konstantin's footsteps and attended the private Moscow School of Painting and Sculpture. This was a school which Egor Makovsky had helped found. Vladimir graduated in 1866. However, unlike Konstantin, who continued his art education at the government institution in St. Petersburg, the Academy of Arts, Vladimir remained in Moscow.⁶ His decision to not attend the Academy was undoubtedly influenced by the recent proceedings at the Academy, in which fourteen daring artists withdrew from the government institution.

Under the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), Russian artists adopted the practices of the European academy and thus abandoned their long tradition of making religious icons. In 1764, Catherine the Great opened the first Imperial Academy of Arts. Russia's Academy established a hierarchy of genres based on European practice. History painting was the most prestigious category and genre painting the least. The state provided all funds for the Academy and, as a consequence, closely controlled the subject matter of the paintings produced. Thus, the traditional and neoclassical style of the Academy flourished, suppressing the realism of genre painting.⁷ Although murmurs of discontent from artists echoed throughout the 18th and the first half of the 19th century, it was not until the 1860s that artists thought to defy the authority of the Academy.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ David Jackson, *The Wanders and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 9-12.

In 1863, fourteen artists withdrew from the Imperial Academy in protest against the prescriptions on subject matter. In order to make the greatest impact, they did so one month before the prestigious award, the Grand Gold Medal, was to be announced. Their goal in withdrawing from the Academy was to gain artistic freedom, not an act of revolution against the state. Vladimir's brother, Konstantin Makovsky, was among the original fourteen artists, though he did not remain with the group for long. The remaining thirteen went on to form an artists' *Artel*, or cooperative. They carried out their intent to make paintings free from the censorship of the government. Despite their ardent claim that they were not attempting to make a political statement, the government viewed them with suspicion. This was in part due to the fact that, a year prior to their secession, the socialist, Nikolay Chernyshevsky was arrested for revolutionary activity. As a precaution, the government placed the *Artel* under police surveillance.⁸

When Vladimir Makovsky graduated from the Moscow School of Painting and Sculpture three years after this secession, he chose not to submit himself to the control of the Academy. In 1871 the *Artel* founded the *Peredvizhniki*, or Society of Travelling Art Exhibits (often translated as the *Itinerants* or *Wanderers*). Vladimir Makovsky joined the group the following year. *The Peredvizhniki* created works depicting the everyday lives of Russian peasants, nationalist landscapes, and scenes intended to capture the epitome of "Russianness" or "Russian Spirit." In order to distance themselves from the West, they deliberately rejected the academic traditions of Europe.⁹

⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁹ Ibid., 21.

The *Peredvizhniki* often worked on similar subject matter with similar goals. In the 1870s, the focus was on the people or the *narod*. It was a popular idea to believe that the potential for social reform rested in the *narod*. Thus, many of the *Peredvizhnik* works fall in line with this populist idea, depicting the lives of the *narod* in simplistic and nostalgic terms. This vision was short lived. In 1861, the reformist tsar, Alexander II emancipated the 80% of the Russian people whose feudal serfdom had bound them to aristocratic landlords.¹⁰ Unfortunately, emancipation created a whole new set of problems, as Alexander did not have a plan in place to integrate the newly emancipated serfs into society. Former serfs faced famine, illnesses, and high infant mortality--a slow downward cycle of lack of education and poverty. Often, in desperation, the peasants turned to drink.¹¹ Many revolutionaries abandoned the idea of the *narod* reforming the nation.

In the 1880s, populist ideology had shifted to Neo-Slavism: the belief that Russia needed to return to the pre-Westernized days of Peter the Great.¹² The *Peredvizhniki* began to create works depicting Russians in traditional garb, something Peter the Great had banned for the upper classes (only rural peasants had continued to wear their traditional clothing). In this way, the *Peredvizhniki* artists kept their works subtle and benign, avoiding political statements while embodying complex political ideas.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Valkenier, ed., *The Wanderers: Masters of 19th – Century Russian Painting*. (Dallas: University of Texas Press, 1990), 1.

¹¹ Cathy A. Ferierson. *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late 19th Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 126-127.

¹² Elizabeth Valkenier, *The Wanderers: Masters of 19th – Century Russian Painting*. 7-8.

Vladimir Makovsky certainly participated in these trends in *Peredvizhniki* representation. His paintings *Knuckles* (1870), *Farmers Market in Moscow* (1875), and *At Noon* (1879), amongst others, depict the simple lives of the *narod*. Paintings including *Zaporizhzhya Cossack* (1884), *Mother and Daughter* (1886), and *Easter Mass* (1887), depict traditional Russian dress. However, he was among the few who also addressed contemporary politics and political issues overtly. One theme that appears in his work again and again are the distinctions of class: *Fans of Nightingales* (1872-73) *Visiting the Poor* (1874), *Hiring of a Maid* (1891-92), *Two Mothers* (1906), among others. My focus is on three works by Makovsky that explicitly address political subject matter: *Waiting outside the Prison* (1875), *The Condemned* (1879), and *Verdict "Not Guilty"* (1882).

The thesis begins in Chapter One with a discussion of the circumstances under which the *Peredvizhniki* were largely excluded from the Western canon of modern art, including the modernist art critic Clement Greenberg's use of the movement in general – and *Peredvizhniki* artist Ilya Repin specifically – as examples of *kitsch*. The chapter also traces the newly expanding literature on the *Peredvizhniki*, which has grown as the result of postmodern repudiations of Greenberg's polemic. Much of this literature focuses on the social dynamic of the artist-group, rather than on the formal or iconographic qualities of individual works; the fact that these studies are produced more often by historians than by art historians suggests that the ghost of formalism still lurks in the assessment of Russian realism. Chapter Two seeks a model for reevaluating the relevancy of individual *Peredvizhniki* works in light of the renewed interest in French Realism pioneered several decades ago by the Marxist art historian T.J. Clark. The focus of this chapter is on consideration of the possibilities for interpretation

offered by the methodological approaches of Clark and also of the more conventionally Greenbergian historian Michael Fried.

Finally, Chapter Three address Makovsky's three works, *Waiting outside the Prison* (figure 1), *The Condemned* (figure 2), and *Verdict "Not Guilty"* (figure 3), each of which deals directly with the outcome of a criminal trial. Here I look at political unrest leading up to and during the time Makovsky created these works. While the works are not illustrations of specific court cases, they do deal with issues in general which were prevalent in Makovsky's day. Thus, I look at certain notorious court cases that drew the attention of the public in order to understand the full implications of Makovsky's work and whether or how he is commenting on flaws in the government. The overarching logic of the chapter, however, is to apply the insights of Clark's and of Fried's treatments of French Realism to the work of a largely overlooked Russian contemporary.



Figure 1: Vladimir Makovsky, *Waiting outside the Prison*, 1875, 32.68 x 48.03 in, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 2: Vladimir Makovsky, *The Condemned*, 1879, 30.11 x 44.48 in, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 3: Vladimir Makovsky, *The Verdict "Not Guilty,"* 1882, 31.1 x 41.33 in, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

CHAPTER 1
GREENBERG AND THE PEREDVIZHNIKI:
THE STATE OF A FIELD

Before delving into the intricacies of the works of Vladimir Makovsky, the *Peredvizhniki* as a whole, or moreover the complexity of the historical context of 19th century Russia, I believe it is necessary to survey the history and development of the field of the *Peredvizhniki* as a historical subject. In doing so, I hope to strengthen the foundation of the arguments I make later on in this thesis. In addition, I hope to provide a better understanding as to why Russian Realism has had such a low profile in the art historical literature on Modernism in the West. Why the *Peredvizhniki* are so often left outside the “official” art canon, I will argue, is no mere oversight. We must recognize, that, despite the *Peredvizhniki*’s relative absence from the canon of art history, there is one prominent exception, the *Peredvizhniki* artist Ilya Repin. Art historians working more recently within field of Russian Realism have chosen to focus on the *Peredvizhniki* group as whole rather than on individual artists. I think it is critical, in my research, to recognize why this is the case.

The answers to these questions are interconnected and lead back to a single root. In 1939, Clement Greenberg published an article, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” which greatly influenced the formation of modern art history. Greenberg was arguably the most influential art critic of the 20th century. Perhaps he is best remembered for his support of Jackson Pollock and Abstract Expressionism in general. I believe his article “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” is

responsible, at least in part, for the diminished importance of Russian Realism from the scope of mainstream modernist art history. In the article, Greenberg suggests that, at the end of the 19th century, early 20th century, visual culture took two different paths: one is that of the *avant-garde* and the other is *kitsch*. He seeks to explain the divergent ideologies of these two paths. While the rest of society was deteriorating due to industrialization and capitalism, the *avant-garde* removed themselves from the sway of society and politics.¹³ The *avant-garde* was born with the high calling to pursue excellence in aesthetics. They sought “aesthetic validity” and in this way *avant-garde* artists left subject matter behind, devoting themselves to creating “art for art’s sake.”¹⁴ *Avant-garde* art was about the medium itself.¹⁵ As such, rather than being concerned with what is expressed, the *avant-garde* sought to portray the actual act of expression.¹⁶ In Greenberg’s eyes, this was the paramount of art.

Kitsch, on the other hand, was all that *avant-garde* was not. Rather than pursuing aesthetics at its highest calling, removed from the masses, *kitsch* pursued that which was popular among the masses. According to Greenberg, *kitsch* is the result of industrialization and urbanization. The newly literate masses of the proletariat required new forms of amusement. Although they could now read, according to Greenberg, they were “insensible to the values of genuine culture.”¹⁷ Thus *kitsch* was born: commercial ads, magazine covers, illustrations, and more. To say Greenberg depicts *kitsch* in a negative light would be gracious.

¹³ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review*, (1939): 1-2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

He states, “Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.”¹⁸ Why then has kitsch become ubiquitous? Greenberg believes it is because kitsch is recognizable. There is no cognitive effort required of the viewer in order to understand the meaning of the work.¹⁹ It is that which makes kitsch irresistible to the peasant and so detestable to “the cultivated.”

In order to drive home this point, Greenberg describes a scenario in which a Russian peasant is faced with two works. One is a Picasso, the other a Repin. Although the work of Picasso should remind the peasant of traditional folk icons of his culture, ultimately he will be drawn to Repin. This is because the work of Repin is a depiction of the world he knows: “it tells a story.”²⁰ Here, Greenberg blatantly states, “Repin predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art.”²¹ Therefore, on the other hand, someone who is cultivated will appreciate Picasso more (and rightly so, according to Greenberg). The cultivated person appreciates the fact he has to exert himself and search for the values within the work.²² Values are not simply laid out for consumption, as in Repin’s work. Thus, according to Greenberg, Repin is nothing more than kitsch. He does not rise to the challenge of the upholding aesthetics standards. Instead, Repin wallows in the mire with the masses.

Without doubt, the history of the movement Realism in Russia, and indeed the entire West, suffered neglect as a result of Greenberg’s stance. Although the names of French realists, such as Gustave Courbet, are now incorporated into the canonical history of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 9.

²² Ibid., 9.

modernism, this only occurred after many years. In the 1970s T. J. Clark began to publish his research on French Realism. Since then the field has exponentially expanded but Western prejudice against 19th-century Russian art lingers. For Russia, the repercussions of Greenberg's article still linger. Unfortunately, Greenberg had a lasting effect on the way art historians viewed Repin and the *Peredvizhniki* and thus ultimately they were ignored. In broadcasting his negative assessment of Repin, Greenberg ensured that a negative attitude toward Repin in particular and his fellow Russian realist artists in general would take hold. Nevertheless, in using Repin's work as an example, Greenberg gave Repin's name a certain status. Thus, as historians return to the *Peredvizhniki*, Repin is now the most studied and well-known artist amongst the group. Ironically given his reception by Greenberg, Repin now holds a dissonant, star-like-status and is the most renowned of the *Peredvizhniki*. Consequently, Repin has the most literature dedicated to him of anyone in the group. This focus on Repin infers a misconception regarding the *Peredvizhniki* as a whole. There is an overall misconstrued notion that every work of the *Peredvizhniki* is exactly like those of Repin, with the same peasant subject matter and the same ideologies. Yet recent scholars have uncovered a richer and deeper history of the *Peredvizhniki* beyond that of Repin.

In an effort to recover a more complete history of the *Peredvizhniki* and to dispel the negative connotations of Greenberg, scholars began by considering the group as a collective. Thus the process of close readings of individual artists and specific artworks took back stage, as scholars reestablished our understanding of the time and art movement. It was seen as necessary to build a strong foundation for understanding the misunderstood historical context and the group dynamic. As a result, a majority of literature in this field discusses the

Peredvizhniki as a whole. This answers the third question I posed at the beginning, as to why it is that most historians in the field address the group. Elizabeth Valkenier, Rosalind P. Gray, and David Jackson are among the few scholars that have published books on 19th Century Russian Realism. I briefly summarize each of their scholarly works in order to establish what previous scholars have accomplished and to identify gaps in the literature where I hope to explore further.

Valkenier was among the first scholars to revive interest in the *Peredvizhniki*.

Valkenier, although born in Poland, came to the U.S. while she was still young in 1941. While getting her M.A. in History at Yale, Valkenier discovered her love of Russian history. In the 1970s, she spent time in Russia conducting research on the *Peredvizhniki*. The result of this endeavor was her book *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition*, which was published in 1977. However, on further examination, Valkenier realized that some information that she had received had been biased. This was during a time of rediscovering of factual history and not the official, state-sponsored history. She conducted a more thorough investigation and republished her work in 1989.

Valkenier's goal is to document the history of the *Peredvizhniki* in addition to exploring the historiography. She states that she came to the investigation naively thinking that all of the *Peredvizhniki* fell in line with the socialist ideologies and political beliefs of the political criminal Chernyshevsky. He was a socialist who, through his writing, heavily influenced revolutionary activity in 19th and 20th Century Russia. This assumption was based on early, surface-level research conducted in Russian in the 70s from the history written in the early 20th century. This view was highly encouraged by those in the Soviet government.

However, Valkenier discovered a more complex and layered history of the *Peredvizhniki*, a hidden history, not told in the Soviet-approved literature.²³ The real story was not as simple as all the *Peredvizhniki* falling in line with Chernyshevsky's politics. Valkenier is interested in recovering this forgotten history while exploring the relationships between the visual expression of the *Peredvizhniki*, politics, and society. Although Valkenier addresses the entire movement of the *Peredvizhniki* from 1863-1923, she focuses a large portion of her book on the first generation and the meaning of their works. She investigates the connection between the *Peredvizhniki* and the intelligentsia and how they questioned state authority.²⁴ In another portion of the book, Valkenier explores the reasons why members of the *Peredvizhniki* joined the Academy in the first place if they were already full of political dissent. The last few chapters cover the deterioration of the *Peredvizhniki* and eventually the rise of Socialist Realism. In tracing the *Peredvizhniki*'s history beyond their climax, Valkenier hopes to understand the historiography of this group.²⁵ It was the Soviet that largely shaped the history of the *Peredvizhniki*. Thus, the true, complex history was forgotten. It is Valkenier's desire to uncover this lost history.

In her first chapter, Valkenier tells the story of the Russian art Academy beginning with its foundation under Catherine the Great up to Nicholas I and his overzealous hand in running the academy. She unwraps the issues which led the *Peredvizhniki* to abandon the academy. She presents her readers with artists who began testing the boundaries of the

²³ Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xiii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

academy rule through their depictions of everyday life. Soon artists went from creating gentle satirical works of the lower ruling class to works clearly expressing critical realism.²⁶ She gives Vasily Perov's *The Arrival of the Rural Police Inspector* as an example. In this work, the officer, who clearly is drunk, prepares to oversee the flogging of a peasant. With this work, Perov steps over the line of satire and makes an unambiguous statement regarding serfdom and the abuse of power and authority. Throughout this chapter, Valkenier connects artists and their works with published writings of their time that dealt with similar issues.²⁷ Yet rather than having a large political climax which led to the formation of the *Peredvizhniki*, Valkenier shows that the main factor was the artists did not want to always paint what was prescribed for them. They desired artistic freedom.²⁸ Beyond this longing, the 14 artists had no grandiose agenda or objective. It was not until the 1880s that the growing *Peredvizhniki* group sought to capture a specific national style.²⁹

The *Peredvizhniki* are often reduced in art history as a group of rebel painters who broke faith with the Academy in order to paint politically-charged genre scenes of peasants. As it is often the case the *Peredvizhniki* are portrayed as only depicting critical realism: Valkenier uses her fourth chapter to uncover the extensive range of subject matter and messages regarding socio-political themes. In the Academy, landscape, as a legitimate subject matter itself, was never recognized.³⁰ The *Peredvizhniki* indulged in depicting the variety of magnificent terrains of Russia. These sorts of works were popular among the people.

²⁶ Ibid., 19.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁰ Ibid., 76.

Portraits, too, were part of the *Peredvizhniki*'s repertoire. The *Peredvizhniki* did not merely paint portraits for commission, but painted many peasants. Valkenier points out that the *Peredvizhniki* did not entirely abandon the Academy's most esteemed form of art, history painting. They did, however, adapt it. Instead of depicting myths, ancient history or Biblical narratives, they represented the history of Russia.³¹ Perhaps the most noted genre of the *Peredvizhniki*, was their depictions of peasants and the lower class, enthralled in everyday occurrences. They often portrayed the distinct personalities of these lowly figures. Yet each *Peredvizhniki* artist had his own message to convey. Indeed, some were obvious critiques of society but others were less so.³² In the beginning, the *Peredvizhniki* avoided depicting blatant revolutionary themes, even though, as they matured, certain artists chose to depict prisoners and "political crime."³³ The latter half of Valkenier's book discusses the waning of the *Peredvizhniki* into the 20th century.

Whereas other books covering genre painting of the Russian 19th century tend to focus on the "Russianness" of the paintings, Rosalind P. Gray (now Blakesley), in *Russian Genre Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (2000), addresses the Western connection and influence. In addition, while the bulk of other research in this field is devoted to post-1863, when the 14 artists seceded from the art academy, Gray discusses genre paintings from 1820-1870. Gray addresses many genre paintings which artists completed while still within the academy. As the Russian Academy closely followed the blueprint of the French Academy,

³¹ Ibid., 82.

³² Ibid., 86.

³³ Ibid., 91.

genre painting was considered the lowest form of painting.³⁴ Her goal is to discover the role these kinds of paintings played in the larger scheme of Russian politics, society, and intellectual life.

Although David Jackson and Elizabeth Valkenier certainly recognize the Western impact of the Academy, after acknowledging it they move on to discuss Russian art. Gray, on the other hand, explores the influence further by tracing the Russian patronage of Western art.³⁵ In fact, the entire first chapter of Gray's book is dedicated to cataloging Western purchases of the Imperial family and upper class of the 18th century. Throughout the century, Russia bought works of Raphael, Rembrandt, Rubens and others. Gray believes it is important to note that the Russian artists in the Academy were exposed to canonical works of Western art.³⁶ In her second chapter, Gray examines the intellectual debates that took place during this time among the intelligentsia and traces the literary discourse. She then connects these practices and debates back to the visual arts.

Whereas the first two chapters focus on the context of the culture, in the latter half of her book she turns to discussing the actual subject matter of these genre scenes and the artists themselves. Chapter three addresses peasants in particular.³⁷ Gray searches for the origin of peasants in art. In doing so, she depicts the evolution of this sort of "realism." It is not as though the peasant suddenly sprung into art from nowhere. In fact, the ordinary lives of the peasantry had often been depicted in cheap prints in popular demand, called *lubok* since the

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 12-44.

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

³⁷ Ibid., Chapter 3.

17th century.³⁸ From the first *lubok*, Gray traces the peasant in art through the next few centuries and, true to her objective, continually points out contact and connections with Western, particularly 17th-century Dutch paintings as well as French. Gray also delves into the art of Aleksei Venetsianov. He was born in 1780, and depicted many peasants in his work at the Academy.³⁹ Early on, depictions of the Russian peasant were romanticized. In that way the works reflected the classical practice of idealization at the Academy.⁴⁰

In her fourth chapter, Gray investigates the foreign travel of artists in the Academy.⁴¹ She focuses on two artists specifically, Karl Bryullov and Aleksandr Ivanov. She spends a great deal of time recounting their lives and the works they created. Their artisanal practices and interests are always tied to the Western influence, in addition to how their work embodied a national ideal. Gray focuses the fifth chapter on paintings depicting the middle class. Often these paintings are represented in the interior of their homes.⁴² Gray uses the life work of Pavel Fedotov as an example. In the sixth and final chapter, Gray unwraps the work of Vasily Perov in order to address the subject matter of the “downtrodden and destitute.” So while Gray certainly devotes pages of her book to individual artists, her overall goal is to capture the essence of these Russian realist artists as a whole.

Likewise, David Jackson discusses Russian Realist artists as a group. Jackson’s purpose in *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting*

³⁸ Ibid., 71.

³⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁴¹ Ibid., 98.

⁴² Ibid., 125.

(2006) is to explore the society of the *Peredvizhniki*. He wishes to bring to light the often neglected yet fascinating and historically important popular art movement of the mid-19th-century Russia. In the past, the art of the *Peredvizhniki* may have been deemed second-rate to the art of the Academy. Yet Jackson assures his readers that he does not deal in terms of “good” or “bad,” but rather it is his goal to place these works within a historical, social, and political context.⁴³ Thus, Jackson organized his book to construct the big picture of this group of artists. He devotes a chapter to each major theme of these painters. In terms of methodologies used, Jackson begins with societal and political issues and moves to how this helped form the visual aspects of culture. This does not leave much room for visual analysis of specific works, though he does not entirely abandon this method. There are many methodologies Jackson only briefly explores, such as the aspects of class, race, and gender. Yet he acknowledges that he does not utilize these three methods to their full potential. He states that exploring these methodologies further would provide many interesting insights into the art society as a whole as well as individual artists and works.⁴⁴ Overall, Jackson seeks to uncover the “Russianness” of the group. The *Peredvizhniki* sought to depict things that reminded the viewers of Old Russian, before Peter the Great Westernized their culture. This mostly revolved around peasants and their traditional dress and religion.

In Jackson’s first chapter, he explores the history of Russian art since 988, when Russia officially converted to Christianity and artists were consumed with icons. From that point, Russia scarcely strayed from the Byzantine tradition until Peter the Great (1662-1725).

⁴³ David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

The majority of the chapter is specifically focused on the Russian Art Academy. He addresses how the academy and artists fit and functioned within Russian society. Within the Academy, genre painting became more customary, yet was still regarded as a lesser art form. Jackson gives numerous examples of genre paintings accomplished by artists in the Academy. He determines that these kinds of works certainly influenced the artists who were to become the “Wanderers.” Finally, Jackson addresses the low social status of the Russian artist during this time.⁴⁵ He points out that most artists of the *Peredvizhniki* came from peasant backgrounds and discusses the possible implications of their origins.⁴⁶

Jackson’s second chapter traces the formation of the *Peredvizhniki*. He introduces the similarities and possible influences from the literary intelligentsia. The central goal of this group was to “define or recapture a national identity which Peter the Great’s ‘Westernisation’ of Russia had effectively eradicated”.⁴⁷ Throughout the chapter, Jackson mentions specific artists or works as examples. But, for the sake of overview, he leaves out in-depth analysis of individual works.

Jackson divides the rest of the chapters into themes in the works of the *Peredvizhniki*: the third chapter explores the theme of peasantry; the fourth deals with political themes; the fifth examines portraiture, the sixth, history paintings; the seventh, landscapes. Throughout these chapters, Jackson briefly analyzes specific works in order to paint a picture of the *Peredvizhniki* as a whole. Throughout, Jackson continually connects the works to the social

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 21.

and political aspects. As a result, it becomes clear that the message of the individual artists of the *Peredvizhniki* is not a unified one. Rather, the works from this group are complex; they address different issues. Although the group, for the most part, shares similar views, the issues they address in their works are different and they shift over time.

Finally, the last two chapters are different in that the focus here is on the cultural and political shifts in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Jackson's eighth chapter inspects the Slavic Revival and how it affected the works of the *Peredvizhniki*. In the ninth and final chapter, Jackson tries to understand the struggle to find a national identity, and the role played in the *Peredvizhniki* in this search. Jackson's book sets up the historical context of the *Peredvizhniki* well. It provides an excellent knowledge base for the research and analysis I wish to conduct on Vladimir Makovsky.

In addition to these three major sources, I have discovered a few other helpful sources I wish to survey here. Some are catalogues from various exhibitions that contain insightful essays. Others are simply collections of essays compiled in a book, three of which are edited by the authors just explored. *The Itinerants* by A. Lebedev (1974) consists of three parts, each of which is presented in four languages: English, French, German and Russian. The first part is an introductory essay, in which Lebedev summarizes the history of the *Peredvizhniki*. The second is a catalog of full-page prints of 70 paintings by *Peredvizhniki*. Finally, the appendix holds a list of artists from the group, complete with a portrait of each artist and a biographical paragraph. As this book was published in 1974, Lebedev makes some general sweeping comments about the society. He states that the society was "a major democratic association of

realist artists and united the most progressive personalities in the field of Russian culture.”⁴⁸ Lebedev claims that, as a whole, the association strove for social progress.⁴⁹ This is true in some cases, but, as the more recent works of Jackson and Valkenier demonstrate, not every artist of the society was making the same declarations. In fact, within this society there are a variety of complex ideas that shift and grow throughout the years during which the *Peredvizhniki* was in existence. The message of the group cannot be simplified solely to a protest against serfdom, nor are they all simply representing life as it was in order to critique the form of Russian society. Certainly, there are works that do just that, but to over-simplify the entire group to this explanation would be a distortion. There are many more layers that need to be explored. This early way of reading the *Peredvizhniki* is, on the one hand, a result of Greenberg’s belittling of Repin’s acts of social criticism. Greenberg’s work secured the idea that all the *Peredvizhniki*’s work dealt with social criticism. Thus, early scholars approached the *Peredvizhniki* with this preconceived notion. In addition, this is the view the Russian government promoted in the first half of the 20th century. Yet despite Lebedev’s somewhat out-of-date interpretation of the *Peredvizhniki*, I think it is helpful to understand the historiography. In addition, Lebedev’s appendix is helpful for its synopsis of each artists’ life.

In 1978, the University of Minnesota held an exhibition “The Art of Russia 1800 – 1850,” which included a lecture series and a symposium. One result of this activity was the book, *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (1983), edited by Theofanis George Stavrou. The first four essays of the collection are committed to a discussion of Russian

⁴⁸ Lebedev, A. comp. *The Itinerants*. Aurora Art Publishers (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1974), 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

culture, including the intelligentsia, cultural symbols, and the 19th-century Russian novel and music. The latter nine essays are dedicated to visual art, including architecture, sculpture, decorative arts, graphic arts, and folk art.

In 1991, Valkenier edited an exhibition catalog of the first exhibit in the United States exclusively dedicated to the works of the *Peredvizhniki*.⁵⁰ In the catalogue are five essays by scholars from both Russia and the United States. As stated in the preface, the goal of the exhibit was to approach the *Peredvizhniki* not as a single force, but rather to view them as individuals and consider the inconsistencies within the group.⁵¹ Valkenier's essay is a broad overview of the *Peredvizhniki*, in addition to a summary of the socio-political issues of their time. Dmitrii Sarabianov traces the works and themes of the *Peredvizhniki*, discussing various examples from the exhibition. Richard R. Brettell, too, looks at the *Peredvizhniki* as a whole, but in the light of the European Avant Garde. He argues that the works of the *Peredvizhniki* are closely related to French Realism. Unlike Greenberg, Brettell proposes that Russian Realism is in fact Avant-Garde. He refers to Renato Poggioli, an Italian critic who published a study of avant-gardism in 1962. Poggioli claimed that to be considered Avant-Garde, a group must "conceive of itself as being literally in advance of the host society ... it serves to invigorate by promoting change within that society's structure."⁵² By that definition, the *Peredvizhniki* are certainly an Avant-Garde group. In the last essay, Galina Sergeevna Churak addresses private art collecting practices in 19th century Russia, and, in turn, how this affects

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, ed. *The Wanderers Masters of 19th-Century Russian Painting: An Exhibition from the Soviet Union* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1991), vi.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 53.

the art of the *Peredvizhniki*. The next portion of the book contains catalogue entries with a brief synopsis of each work, followed by short artist biographies for each artist featured in the exhibition. Finally, Irina Shuvalova discusses “Russian Art Criticism of Ideological Realism” in the last essay of the book. She offers a short introduction to the fact that a new form of art criticism arose at the same time as the *Peredvizhniki* and provides extensive examples of this new form. The criticism is highly argumentative.⁵³

The Peredvizhniki: Pioneers of Russian Painting is an exhibition catalogue of the first time the group was exhibited in Sweden. David Jackson and Per Hedström edited the collection of six essays. Jackson again provided an overview of the *Peredvizhniki* and their work, while Hedström takes a new approach and explores the relationship of the *Peredvizhniki* to the rest of European realism.⁵⁴ Although he draws many connections with French realism, Hedström understandably is particularly interested in similarities with Nordic Realism. He concludes that, although the style of these realisms are all the same, the content is different in that the work of the Russians contains political content.⁵⁵ Jackson contributes a second essay as well, devoted entirely to an in-depth examination of Ilya Repin’s *Barge-haulers on the Volga*.⁵⁶ Once again, Repin is singled out, providing yet another instance in which Greenberg still influences the history of modernist art. In the remaining essays, Sergei Krivondenchenkov looks at how the *Peredvizhniki* were born out of the artistic traditions of

⁵³ Ibid., 183-201.

⁵⁴ David Jackson and Per Hedström eds. *The Peredvizhniki: Pioneers of Russian Painting* (Stockholm: National museum and Elanders Falth & Hassler, Varnamo 2011), 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 40-53.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 56-71.

St. Petersburg,⁵⁷ Galina Churak considers the impact of Pavel Tretyakov on the *Peredvizhniki* (Tretyakov was a merchant as well as an art collector and bought several works of the *Peredvizhniki*⁵⁸), and Vladimir Lenyashin discusses the *Peredvizhniki*'s depictions of true life, looking at their work as hyper-realistic.⁵⁹

From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture is a collection of 13 essays edited by Rosalind P. Blakesley (formally Gray) and Margaret Samu and published in 2014. The authors of these essays utilize various methodologies. While some focus on a few artists in particular, with in-depth readings of individual works, a majority concentrate on larger contextual themes. These include: tracing the development of cultural institutions, the early stages in Russia of aesthetic discourse, the Russian press, and art criticism, among others. This collaborative effort has not been limited to simply those in the field of art history. Scholars from neighboring fields such as Russian studies and cultural history have joined this project to make it fruitful and comprehensive.⁶⁰

As a whole, the authors of the literature I have surveyed here seek to reestablish the history of 19th century Russian art and the *Peredvizhniki* in particular as a result of Greenberg's slur against Repin in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." With all the literature focused on the group dynamics of the *Peredvizhniki*, a strong foundation has been laid for future, more in-depth explorations in this field. In the most recent publications in the field, scholars have

⁵⁷ Ibid., 274-281.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 284-293.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 296-302.

⁶⁰ Rosalind P. Blakesley and Margaret Samu, eds. *From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2014), Cover flap.

begun to venture into fuller analysis of individual artists and their works. However, there are still large gaps in the research concerning individual artists and there is room for exponential growth. It is my goal, in this thesis, to conduct an in-depth analysis of several individual works of Vladimir Makovsky. In the following chapter, I examine the methods T.J. Clark and Michael Fried in order to understand how they justified including Realism in the canon of modernism. I hope these scholars will provide a model for my own analysis of the works Makovsky. Ultimately, I agree with Clark's approach. Like Clark, I will analyze the work within the context of the complexity of the time. I will look at how the larger historical context of 19th century Russia gives meaning to Makovsky's work. In doing so, I seek to establish Makovsky's intended message.

CHAPTER 2

RECONSIDERING REALISM:

T.J. CLARK AND MICHAEL FRIED AFTER GREENBERG

While it is not the goal of this thesis to prove Greenberg was “wrong” about Realism or the *Peredvizhniki*, I do wish to validate my examination of the works of *Peredvizhniki* artist Makovsky as relevant to modern art history. This, then, requires a slight detour: investigating the fundamental premise by which Greenberg based his avant-garde and kitsch argument. Why is it that he created this distinction in modern art? It is not enough to recognize that Greenberg’s writings were influential in producing these two categories, avant-garde and kitsch. Nor is it enough to observe that his arguments resulted in the exclusion of the *Peredvizhniki* or the art movement Realism from the canon of modern art. Because Greenberg played such an essential role in constructing the lens through which modernism was originally viewed, it is paramount that art historians address Greenberg’s philosophy behind his theory. Two art critics and historians, T.J. Clark and Michael Fried have tried to do just that. Both Clark and Fried analyze Greenberg’s theories and methodologies in ways that explain why Greenberg addresses modern art in such a reductive manner. Not coincidentally, these two historians, Clark and Fried also are responsible for reopening the dialogue on the meaning and significance of Realism in the history of modern art.

Clark and Fried both have wrestled with Greenberg’s theories, which they discuss in relationship to their own principles in a series of essays published in the early 1980s in the

journal *Critical Inquiry*. There, they react to Greenberg's writings on modernism differently. While Fried for the most part links himself closely with Greenberg, Clark deviates from him. Their divergent interpretations of Greenberg ultimately influence their own methodological approaches to analyzing and interpreting modernist works. They both discuss the Realist works of Gustave Courbet, among other artists. Seeing how they engage with Greenberg's concepts and how this process affects their own methodological approaches, such as when addressing the works of Courbet, has influenced my own thoughts on Greenberg and, ultimately, my own approach to a discussion of Makovsky.

Clark looks at Greenberg's argument from a Marxist point of view. In his article, entitled "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," Clark explains Greenberg's argument in relationship to contextual history and economics. Through this logic, Clark claims to be in agreement with Greenberg. He understands and supports Greenberg's historical and economical reasoning behind the development of avant-garde art.⁶¹ But, as Fried points out, Clark is not in full agreement. It is true Greenberg believes sociopolitical factors are in part responsible for the start of modernism. However, once Greenberg explains the beginning of avant-garde art, he leaves the sociopolitical aspects out of the discussion. Instead, Greenberg believes that art becomes an "independent source of value."⁶² Yet, for Clark, the historical, political and economic contexts do not simply explain the beginning of the movement. Clark takes this idea a step further. Clark believes that sociopolitical issues are intertwined within modernist art. Clark sees the art of modernism as a "reflection of the incoherence and

⁶¹ T.J. Clark. "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, The Politics of Interpretation (Sep., 1982).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 149.

contradictoriness of modern capitalist society.”⁶³ Thus Clark’s entire analysis and readings of modern works are based upon his Marxist worldview. This is due in part to his admiration for the work of Marxist scholar, Meyer Schapiro. I will explore Schapiro’s ideologies later in this chapter; first it will be useful to summarize in brief Fried’s critique of Clark.

In “How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark,” Fried suggests that Clark misses the point. Fried, like Greenberg, operates under the premise that one can intrinsically know which works of modernism simply are “good.”⁶⁴ Fried shares Greenberg’s idea that the ability to decide what is “good art” lies not in the realm of logic but in that of experience.⁶⁵ Clark, according to Fried, lacks this intuition. Thus, Fried believes Clark is erroneously preoccupied with the sociopolitical factors and ignores the more important approach of intuitive judgment based upon an instantaneous reaction to an art work.⁶⁶ Clark does not have intuition, and so cannot be held entirely responsible for his Marxist-inspired focus on the pessimistic essence of capitalist society.⁶⁷ According to Fried, Clark perceives all modernist art as a practice of negation.⁶⁸ While Fried may agree that, on occasion, artists and movements within modernism such as Duchamp and Dada are driven by negativity, he does not believe it governs all modernism.

⁶³ Michael Fried. “How Modernism Works.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, The Politics of Interpretation (Sep., 1982): 225.

⁶⁴ Michael Fried. “How Modernism Works.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, The Politics of Interpretation (Sep., 1982): 233-34.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Harris. *Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried, and Clark* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). 29-30.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁸ Fried. “How Modernism Works.” 217.

Here I think it is necessary to visit momentarily the reputable stance of Meyer Schapiro, because Clark draws much of his methodology from him. Schapiro is interested in “the dynamic interplay of engaged opposites.” He believes that there are inconsistencies in everything; whether you are dealing with society, ideas, or art, contradictions coexist.⁶⁹ Accordingly, when Schapiro approaches a work of art, he begins with what he claims to be an unbiased description. He identifies the contradictions and their relationship. As Donald B. Kuspit states in his article, “Dialectical Reasoning in Meyer Schapiro,” “it is the relationship that ‘explains’ the details rather than vice versa.”⁷⁰ Thus, the contradictions in a work of art interact with one another, creating a dialogue. It is this interaction that ultimately produces meaning.⁷¹

T.J. Clark takes a similar approach to Schapiro’s. Clark’s argument relies heavily on the concept of ideology. Ideology is a system of beliefs which often presents itself in politics but it also is carried in ideas, cultural practices, and even paintings. As a result, paintings matter as much as politics when it comes to carrying ideology. Clark believes ideology is ever-shifting and unattainable. Consequently, it cannot be simplistically expressed in any form, not even in a painting. Yet, this is not to say he believes paintings are void of ideology. On the contrary, he believes paintings are full of ideologies, but differing ideologies are often intertwined with one another within a single painting. In recognizing the contradiction of these ideologies, one begins to understand the meaning of the work. Clark or Schapiro,

⁷⁰ Donald B. Kuspit. “Dialectical Reasoning in Meyer Schapiro” *Social Research*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring 1978): 100.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

believe art is not made to resolve the tension. Instead, art portrays the struggle. It is the Marxist approach to give expression to these contradictions.

There is truth in the idea that the tension within a painting is what creates meaning. This notion of shifting, contradicting ideologies is also revealed in visual counterparts. In my third chapter, I address the works of Makovsky and I look at contrasting details and find that it is the contrasts that generate dialogue. For example, Makovsky's work often includes members from different social classes. This distinction is displayed through the contrasting clothing and postures. These kinds of intentional contrasts or counterparts are a prompt for discussing the various ideologies. Likewise, Makovsky repeatedly fashions emotional tension between figures, depicting the antagonism between prisoners and police, strangers on the street, and even family members. These relationships generate certain ideologies.

Although figural contrasts certainly provide philosophical insight, so too does the contrast of formal qualities in the works. Shifts in colors, shapes, and angles, among other formal qualities, equally express ideology. The artist, in this case Makovsky, deliberately makes formal choices, and therefore these deliberate choices reflect certain ideologies. Thus, it makes sense to take a similar approach to Makovsky's work as Clark has to a comparable artist, Gustave Courbet. Clark begins with an unbiased description, pointing out the details that create the oppositions. This leads to a deep visual analysis of the details that create a thought-provoking dialogue, which, in turn, provides insight into various ways of thinking during the time the artist made the work. Like Clark, I focus on importance of the historical,

social, political, and economic contexts. These contexts inform the visual analysis of each work, as I will demonstrate in Chapter three.

For the most part, I agree with Clark and Schapiro in that I do not believe ideology can ever be clearly or comprehensively depicted in a work of art. Indeed, a work of art may consist of numerous ideologies, none of which are fully comprehensible. However, I do believe ideologies are embedded in works of art – that artists have agendas. An artist may not perfectly convey his or her ideology, but there are certainly aspects of artworks that effectively convey these meanings. It is the historical, social, political, and economic contexts which aid in understanding the artists intended meaning.

As he believes meaning is found in contradictions, Clark does not try to solve the incongruity of ideologies within his writing. In his book, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Clark writes, “I am not interested in the notion of works of art ‘reflecting’ ideologies, social relations, or history. Equally, I do not want to talk about history as ‘background’ to the work of art – as something which is essentially absent from the work of art and its production, but which occasionally puts in an appearance.”⁷² He argues it is all too easy to express which methods one should avoid but it is far trickier to define what methods one will employ. In fact, it is somewhat dangerous to isolate any one specific method as this leads to excluding other important factors.⁷³ Clark believes there is something far more complex at work and he seeks to unravel these intertwined complexities. He states, “I have

⁷² T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 10.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 11.

spent a lot of time since 1970 trying to describe pictures more convincingly, and attempting a fiercer and more complete dialectic between description and history.”⁷⁴ Again, I believe it is worth quoting directly when Clark writes, “I want to discover what concrete transactions are hidden behind the mechanical image of ‘reflection,’ to know *how* ‘background’ becomes ‘foreground’; instead of analogy between form and content, to discover the network of real, complex relations between the two.”⁷⁵ Art is woven into the fabric of history; it is not a mere product of history. Thus, Clark believes we need to analyze it as such.

This is the approach Clark utilizes throughout his book on Courbet, *Image of the People*. He places Courbet into the fabric of the historical context. He does not consider the history as background, but as though it is actually bound up in the work of Courbet. Before this book was published, Clark wrote an article entitled, “A Bourgeois Dance of Death: Max Buchon on Courbet-I,” where he focuses on Courbet’s politics. Clark argues that, although most scholars claim Courbet’s art is political, the assertion is often vague.⁷⁶ This is because not much evidence exists of Courbet’s political views. Clark’s goal for this essay is to discover Courbet’s political alignment and thus restore the historical and political aspects that are embedded within the work, not merely “background.” In order to do so, Clark looks at an *annonce*, or pamphlet written by Courbet’s friend, Max Buchon. Clark believes this is necessary because past explanations of Courbet’s politics and art still leave many questions.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁶ T. J. Clark, “A Bourgeois Dance of Death: Max Buchon on Courbet-I”, *Burlington Magazine*, CXI, (April 1969): 208-213. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/875972> . (accessed: February 18, 2014).

The rest of the article is devoted to dissecting the pamphlet and how Clark believes this proves the political agenda of Courbet's work.

On the other hand, Fried follows Greenberg more closely. He adheres to the notion of *experience*, this idea of "at-once recognition of value."⁷⁷ Clark addresses this philosophy in his response to Fried's critique, "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried."⁷⁸ Clark suggests that this *experience* Fried talks about cannot be solely contained within a work of art. In reality, it is tied to Fried's own desires. When he stands in front of a work of art, Fried produces the experience according to his own wishes. Despite the fact that Fried claims good judgment comes from an "intuition of rightness," Clark proposes that in actuality we are conditioned to have a certain experience and set of values. But while Clark may think the idea of experience is irrational, it plays a key role in how Fried and Greenberg approach art works.

While Clark's analysis is pessimistic, Fried is rather optimistic and even idealistic in his views on modern art. This is because Fried is not reading works from a Marxist point of view. Fried does address historical context, but he uses it precisely the way Clark intentionally avoided--as background. Clark looks at how the historical context and art are intertwined, and how art is not simply the "foreground."⁷⁹ Fried wrote a trilogy on realist artists: *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration* (which addresses the works of Thomas Eakins); *Courbet's Realism*; and *Menzel's Realism*. Generally, Fried offers a brief introduction to the artist's life, including only the foremost facts that are seemingly relevant to the analysis of

⁷⁷ Harris. *Writing Back to Modern Art*, 31.

⁷⁸ T.J. Clark. "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried."

⁷⁹ Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, 12.

their art. While Fried believes the personal life and historical context of the artist certainly is important, he discusses these contexts as they come up in his discussion of specific works. Fried often discusses the artists' connection with the time and their peers. But all of this is background information. Fried is much more concerned with a formal analysis of artworks and most of his time is devoted to methodically describing every last detail of the painting and the possible meanings of each detail.

In the opening chapter of his *Courbet's Realism*, Fried suggests that the works within the movement Realism are often seen and interpreted as depictions of exact reality. As a result, details of paintings are disregarded. His example is Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*. While there is a great deal of scholarship devoted to analyzing this work, much of the detail has been overlooked as the rendering of factual and thus inconsequential detail. Fried says there has been no "mention either of the open grave's oblique orientation relative to the picture plane or of the small collision that has just taken place between the young boy holding a candle and one of the coffin bearers."⁸⁰ These small details are lost when seen only as a part of the actual scene and not the conscious choice of the artist. Fried also emphasizes the importance of recognizing formal connections within a work. He points out how, in Courbet's *Painter's Studio*, the shape of the drapery that the model is holding, and her dress pooled on the floor, echoes the shape of the waterfall on the painter's canvas. Fried believes that in this connection there is metaphor or allegory.

⁸⁰ Michael Fried. *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 4.

Fried begins his analysis of a painting with a detailed description of the work, often focused on the formal qualities. He notes the orientation and size of the canvas but, more importantly, he repaints the painting in words for his reader. He describes the composition, listing each figure, what they are doing, and where they rest on the canvas. For example, in his chapter “Real Allegories of Realism,” he explores the painting, *The Wheat Sifters*, among others. In this painting, there are three figures: two women and a young boy. Rather than understanding this image as Courbet depicting an actual scene he passed on the street, which he faithfully transferred to the canvas (as numerous commentators of the past have done), Fried understands it as an allegory.⁸¹ The three figures get progressively younger from left to right. Each figure is engaged in the process of sifting wheat. After describing these figures in full detail, Fried adds, as a side note, that Courbet’s sister and nephew modeled for this painting. Clearly, Courbet has manipulated this scene. He has consciously composed the image.⁸²

Fried then reviews previous readings of this work. Helen Toussaint claims that the formal qualities, figural position, and composition suggest an interest in Japanese prints. Linda Nochlin suggests the three figures and the corresponding technology represent stages of progress in agricultural work. This indicates that the image is an allegory of progress. Fried entertains this idea as a possibility. But, while Nochlin compares Courbet’s agricultural women to those of Jean Millet and Käthe Kollwitz, Fried compares *The Wheat Sifters* to other works by Courbet himself, including *The Stonebreakers* and *After Dinner*. Ultimately Fried

⁸¹ Ibid., 3-4.

⁸² Ibid., 149.

fleshes out his own understanding, spending the next several pages making formal visual connections between these works. It is important to note that Fried does not treat Courbet's Realist work much differently than he does non-objective art.

In fact, towards the end of his argument, Fried discusses the qualities of Courbet's paint application. He especially notices the way Courbet rendered the flecks of grain that have fallen on the cloth that covers the ground in the image. Fried says the grain "actually looks *sticky*."⁸³ From here, he wonders if Courbet was exploring the process of applying paint. Fried makes a connection from the depicted process of the grain falling on the cloth and process of Courbet placing paint on the canvas. Fried admits this allegory may be a bit far-fetched. Nevertheless, he finds the idea appealing, given that a century later the likes of Jackson Pollock and Morris Louis, among others, explore this idea.⁸⁴

In his formal analysis, however, Fried does include historical context to some extent, as we have seen. In Fried's work on Menzel he deals much more with historical context than in his previous works. Because his earlier books addressed familiar artists, operating within the well-known and often-discussed historical context of Paris, Fried may not have felt the need to expound much on contextual information. His book on Menzel, however, examines the work of an artist who is little-known outside his country of origin, Germany. Therefore, Fried deems it necessary to contribute more contextual information as background to his formal analyses. He states, "In this book, description and contextualization are two poles of a single dialectical operation that tracks continually back and forth between the close scrutiny

⁸³ Ibid.. 153.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

of individual works and the establishing of force-fields of potential intelligibility, which *sets the stage* for further acts of intensive looking” (my italics added).⁸⁵ Note his attentive use of language. Contextualization merely *sets the stage*. While Fried operates under the premise that “description and contextualization” are two distinct sides of the discourse, Clark insists that they are necessarily intertwined within the works and should not be viewed separately.

Thus, in certain chapters of *Menzel’s Realism*, Fried solely focuses on individual sketches and paintings, scrutinizing every aspect. These portions of the book are followed by chapters in which Fried explores different political and philosophical ideas circulating during Menzel’s time. Throughout the book, Fried alternates chapters on contextual analysis with visual. During Menzel’s lifetime, aesthetic philosophy infiltrated many works of philosophers such as Robert Vischer, Heinrich Wölfflin, and August Schmarsow.⁸⁶ However, Fried articulates that he is claiming neither that Menzel was influenced by these writings nor that Menzel influenced these philosophers. Rather, Fried points out this context in order to understand the common contemporary understanding of art and certainly not to suggest the philosophy is tied up in Menzel’s work, as Clark might. Thus, this aesthetic philosophy context justifies many of Fried’s interpretations.

Fried’s analyses are based on Greenberg idea of an *experience* the viewer has in front of an artwork – that intuitive judgment and the “at-once recognition of value” create a foundation on which to analyze works of art visually.⁸⁷ Sociopolitical interconnections,

⁸⁵ Michael Fried, *Menzel’s Realism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002) 13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁷ Harris. *Writing Back to Modern Art*, 31.

which are foundational for Clark, are mere distractions for Fried from the true value of the work. So where do I go from here? I agree with certain aspects of Fried. I see the importance of conducting a deep visual analysis of works. I believe there is value in pointing out visual motifs throughout an artist's works. However, I do not understand contextualization as mere background. Like Clark, I believe context is essentially intertwined within a work of art. Thus, my approach to the works of Makovsky falls more closely in line with Clark. I believe art reflects the messy, tangled ideologies of the time in which it was created. I believe the artist can use art to process these ideologies. Art may not deliver an answer or solve a problem. But it does present the contradictions. Understanding the social, political and historical time in which an artwork is created is essential to understanding fully the meaning of the work. And, in turn, the work can aid us in understanding the time of the artist. So, while I will describe the visual qualities of individual paintings by Makovsky and, to a certain extent conduct a limited formal analysis, I will, for the most part, take on the challenge of Clark's Marxist-inspired approach, and demonstrate how Makovsky's work grapples with the complexity of its times.

CHAPTER 3

VLADIMIR MAKOVSKY:

AN ANALYSIS OF HIS POLITICAL WORK

In this chapter, I focus on three works by Vladimir Makovsky: *Waiting Outside the Prison* (1875), *The Condemned* (1879), and *The Verdict “Not Guilty”* (1882). In these works, it certainly seems that Makovsky is making a claim that the reformist government of Tsar Alexander II (who ruled from 1855 until his assassination in 1881) and its institutions are corrupt. While many of his fellow *Peredvizhniki* chose not to portray political subject matter, Makovsky does. In doing so, he seems to align himself with the Utopian socialist Nikolai Chernyshevsky and the intelligentsia, along with their belief that there is hope for society. But his hope is not placed in those high in society who have power. Ultimately, Makovsky believes it is the *Narod*, the Russian people, who will reform society. In looking at Makovsky’s life’s works, one can see that the *narod* are always positively depicted. He often portrays the Russian peasants in their traditional dress. Prior to Peter the Great every Russian wore this clothing but he had outlawed it in the cities. After that point it was really only the peasants wore it. Thus, the traditional clothing style became a manifestation of the Old Russian or pre-Petrine ideology. Thus, in depicting their traditional dress, Makovsky is praising the “Russianness” of the peasants and promoting Old Russian ideologies. This was intentionally in contrast to Peter the Great’s Westernized version of Russia. Makovsky depicts the peasants not in a way that romanticizes their way of life, but in order to portray this idea

of the Narodnik, or populist movement. He depicts them as peasants who are not corrupted by power. The peasants are the epitome of innocence and “Russianness.” That is why hope relies on returning Russia to its pre-Westernized state.

Prior to the formation of the *Peredvizhniki*, there was much political unrest in Russia. This was in part due to the conflict between the dictatorship of the Tsars and the revolutionary aspirations of the educated middle class. Nikolai Chernyshevsky instigated much of it with his goal to educate the *narod* politically, in hopes of leading Russia directly into a Socialist system and, evading the contradictions of capitalism.⁸⁸ Chernyshevsky believed that art was the perfect vehicle to spread the message of socialism, and he focused his attention on the works produced by members of the newly formed *Artel*, a group that had seceded from the Academy in 1863. However, despite the fact that many of its members were populists (and that the government, which saw their act of secession as a political statement, placed them under police surveillance), the *Artel* did not desire to be part of Chernyshevsky’s political revolution; they simply desired artistic freedom. Chernyshevsky and the intelligentsia encouraged the artists of the *Artel* and, later on, of *Peredvizhniki* to engage with bold political statements, but this was not the ultimate goal of these artists groups.

The same year the fourteen artists broke away from the Academy (1863), Chernyshevsky was arrested for promoting revolutionary thought. He had voiced his socialist opinions in the political magazine *The Contemporary*, and in his novel *What is to be Done?*⁸⁹

⁸⁸ J. N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812 – 1971* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 110.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

Through these publications, Chernyshevsky became powerfully influential over the middle-class, educated Russian youth. However, the youth were often naive to the consequences of revolution.⁹⁰ In 1864, Chernyshevsky was sentenced to ‘civil execution’ in which he was stripped of his civil rights in a formal procedure.⁹¹ The mock execution ended with exile to Siberia. Fellow intellectual, Aleksander Herzen, who had just returned from exile for his own socialist agenda,⁹² asked the *Artel* to depict the civil execution of Chernyshevsky; not one of them chose to depict the scene.⁹³ The *Artel* artists did not desire to be front-line revolutionaries. While some may have agreed with Chernyshevsky’s socialist ideals, not all were close disciples of socialism.⁹⁴ None were prepared to align themselves publicly with the political criminal for fear of committing a political crime also and suffering a similar punishment.

Certain artists, i.e., those, including Makovsky, who ultimately became the *Peredvizhniki* in 1871, eventually did align themselves with the intelligentsia and depicted scenes of a political nature (though nothing as drastic as Chernyshevsky’s civil execution).⁹⁵ A majority of the *Peredvizhniki* chose to depict scenes with ambiguous political content. , They disguised their political stance and claimed simply to narrate life visually in contemporary Russia. Yet a few artists chose to be less conspicuous. Valery Yakobi, one of the founding members of the *Peredvizhniki*, was a pioneer in more open political subject

⁹⁰ Ibid., 111.

⁹¹ Valkenier, *The Wanderers*, 4.

⁹² Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, 61

⁹³ Valkenier, *The Wanderers*, 4.

⁹⁴ Valkenier. *Russian Realist Art*, xiii.

⁹⁵ Valkenier, *The Wanderers*, 4.

matter. Before the secession, he painted *The Prisoners' Halt* (1862).⁹⁶ The image depicts entire families suffering on the long trek to Siberia, and caused a great stir in the Academy. Nikolai Yaroshenko's *The Prisoner* (1878) depicts a lone prisoner in his cell, gazing up at the window. Although there is no indication of what this man's crime was, it is likely that contemporary viewers would make the connection with politics.⁹⁷ Ilya Repin was perhaps the most active artist working this theme. His *Under Guard* (1876) portrays a prisoner between two guards, being driven into exile.⁹⁸ In *Arrest of a Propagandistic* (1880 – 92), Repin depicts a common occurrence: arrest on political grounds. Also, Repin's *They Did Not Expect Him* (1884; 1888) captures the return of an exile and the cost of exile on a family.

While Makovsky depicted several explicitly political scenes, the majority of his work captures the daily lives of the *narod*, the Russianness of the peasants, or the divide in the Russian class system. However, Makovsky's three works: *Waiting Outside the Prison* (1875), *The Condemned* (1879), and *The Verdict "Not Guilty"* (1882), though not an exhaustive list, clearly are political scenes. He also painted *Bank Crash* (1881), *The Prisoner* (1882), and *Evening Company*, *Death in the Snow* (1905), among others. These sorts of scenes were common occurrences among the lower class. Thus, the Russian government is unable to accuse Makovsky of making a bold political statement because it appears as though he is simply making a subtle commentary on contemporary Russia, much like the majority of

⁹⁶ Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical realism*, 25.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

Peredvizhniki works. However, I believe upon further examination, these three works of Makovsky contain a strong political statement than first glance.

In 1864, in order to stop the abuse of bureaucratic power and those in petty authority, Alexander II required that every crime, even political ones, must be tried in a public court of law. In addition, the trial must be recorded and published in the *Government Messenger*. Prior to this regulation, 290,000 people were stripped of civil rights and sentenced to exile in Siberia, often upon pure speculation without a trial.⁹⁹ While the intentions of Alexander II's new law may have been noble, the system was still flawed. Often juries lacked knowledge of the law and based their verdicts on pure emotion. Moreover, those accused of political crime soon viewed the courtroom as their soapbox. They frequently took advantage of the new mandate. Knowing that a crowd would hear and eventually the public would read the court proceedings, they abandoned their own defense and delivered impassioned political speeches.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, the outcomes of the trials were unpredictable. It was altogether an untrustworthy system and the cause of much grief.

This background gives us insight into how ordinary Russians in Makovsky's day may have understood his works. Although Makovsky does not explicitly make a statement regarding the government and its institutions in his works, people would have recognized the deep social issues at hand. In depicting these everyday scenes of social injustice, I do not believe Makovsky had some idealized hope of informing the middle and upper classes of the problem and thereby bringing about social reform. Rather than suggesting an answer for

⁹⁹ Richard Pipes. *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 295.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

reform, I believe his work narrates the everyday lives of the *narod* and what Russia was living through. This, however, is not to say that these works of Makovsky are void of worldview. It is clear he is making a statement. He evidently views these as injustices. However, he keeps his works ambiguous so as not to be accused of political crime himself.

Waiting Outside the Prison (figure 1) is perhaps the most ambiguous scene of Makovsky's political works. Yet, the ambiguity fades upon close examination. There are a dozen or so people gathered on the snow-covered street, outside a stone-wall. The vantage point of the viewer of the painting is the eye-level of the figures in the work--just lower than the top of the wall. So we, like the figures depicted in the scene, are unable to view what is taking place beyond the wall. Across the gate, there is an arched lintel with an inscription in Russian, informing the viewer that this complex is a prison. Each figure is bundled up in layers of shawls, scarves, *babushkas*, *ushankas* and coats. It would seem this group of figures is waiting, but for what? It certainly is not a joyous occasion, which rules out the idea that they await the prisoners' release. Perhaps these groups are waiting to say goodbye to their convicted family members. The man in front holds a brown package under his right arm; others hold bags and bundles. It is likely that these contain goods for the condemned prisoners, perhaps clothing among other things, for their long journey and stay in Siberia. Based on the elevated number of political crime during this time, I think this is the most likely scenario. Those convicted of political crime, like Chernyshevsky, were often exiled to Siberia. This was a pressing issue of concern for the people in Russia.

Most figures are huddled into groups of two or three. One group stands clustered, peering into an opening in the gate, which is obscured to the onlookers. This ambiguity of what is taking place behind the walls, teases the viewer. There are two men who stand alone. The man to the far left of the composition with the large overcoat with the fur collar stands guard, holding a bayonet rifle. His appearance seems merely to reaffirm the fact his complex is a prison and stands as a reminder of the authority of the state. This guard represents the petty authority, ready to enforce his power over the people should they give him any reason for doing so.

The other solitary man stands in the center of the composition. He is facing the viewer, with his back to the prison, insuring no interaction with the rest of the group. His coat and *ushanka* (fur cap) seem to be the finest out of this group. While the other figures look slightly disheveled and mismatched, his coat fits him well. This seems to suggest he is of a higher class and other indicators confirm this suspicion. With his right hand, he carries a cane. Like the rest of Europe at this time, wielding a cane spoke to one's higher social class. The cane, however, is not the only signifier that indicates this individual possesses a higher rank in society. His footwear also suggests this.

The other men in the image (at least the two that are visible) wear the traditional peasant footwear. This includes stockings made of soft leather called *nogavits*, typically knee-high. Over these stockings, they are wearing the traditional Russian *lapti* or sandals woven from bast (birch bark). Finally, a leather strap, or an *onuchi*, is wound around the outside, securing the boot to the wearer's calf. Usually, the wearer tucked his trousers into the

boots.¹⁰¹ This sort of footwear dates back to the 15th century and was traditionally worn by field workers. Each region had their own unique weaving patterns of the *lapti*; consequently, the style of the *lapti* told the wearer's story. In addition, the *lapti* were homemade and so inexpensive. Thus, only the lowliest of peasants ever wore them. Those higher in the social class could afford stiff leather boots made by a cobbler. Thus, footwear often distinguished to which social class one belonged. The old-fashioned *lapti* style continued to be worn into the 19th and 20th centuries. The *lapti* are clearly seen on the man framed within the gate, and it would seem the man sitting in the right portion of the canvas also wears similar, working-class footwear. However, it is clear that the man in the center is not wearing *lapti*. Rather, his feet are adorned in hard black boots. This footwear is comparable to a Western, or modern style and, again, speaks to his distinction from the surrounding lower class.

Indeed, even the posture of people points to the societal distinction. The heads of the other figures are downcast; their faces reflect inner turmoil. Clearly, this group is anxious about what is happening beyond the stone wall of the prison. With slumped shoulders, they stand with their loved ones. The center man, however, holds his chin high. He stares vacantly beyond the picture plane. Even so, he looks as though he is carrying heavy emotional weight. Yet, despite this, he maintains his dignity. Why the class distinction? Why does he stand apart? In these revolutionary times, it was quite often the case that educated socialists from the middle-class stirred the *narod* into taking political action. These educated youths were seen as ringleaders. Possibly, the son of this upper-class man was the ringleader of a

¹⁰¹ Raisa Kirsanova, *Russia: History of Dress: An entry from Charles Scribner's Sons' Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*,
http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001S5928W/ref=oh_aui_d_detailpage_o02_?ie=UTF8&psc=1

revolutionary group. As was often the case, revolutionary groups were tried and charged as a whole. It would then make sense that the family members would not interact.

The color palette Makovsky utilizes in this painting is dull. The entire work is comprised of gloomy tans, browns and blacks, with the exception to the sky and snow, but even those are tainted by murk. These colors add to the disheartened atmosphere of the group. Likewise, the composition adds to the general melancholy. Nearly every line in the work is parallel with the sides of canvas. This lack of diagonal lines also is responsible in part for a lack of dynamic energy. These formal qualities help convey this idea of waiting. This group of people stands shivering in the bleak street with miserable anticipation. They stand silent in the cold, waiting for the inevitable farewell. After this close analysis, it is clear Makovsky is commenting on the social injustices under the tsarist administration.

Four years later, Makovsky painted an image dealing with a similar subject, *The Condemned* (figure 2). Again, this image depicts a dozen figures gathered. In the center of the canvas, a young man stands slightly elevated on a step. With both hands, he nervously fiddles with his hat. His stockings unevenly sag. Instead of wearing *lapti* shoes, like the man to the far left, he wears stiff leather half boots, or *polusapozhki*. These are worn by city-dwellers. Yet the rest of his apparel does not speak to great wealth. His overcoat appears untidy and ill-fitting. Clearly he is the condemned man of whom the title speaks. He has just exited the court, as identified by the plaque on the wall. In the dark shadows to the left, two men stand in suits – typical apparel for employees of the court. Two guards stand on either side of the doorway. They, too, are armed, and rest their rifles on their shoulders.

Additionally, a policeman follows close behind the condemned and another stands in front. Both of their swords are drawn and shouldered. This bearing of arms certainly adds to the overall tension of this scene. These policemen with the drawn swords are similar to those who appeared in Ilya Repin's *Under the Guard* (1876), three years prior. In Repin's work, there is a condemned man likewise sandwiched between guards. The guards are escorting the criminal to his Siberian exile, due to the political crime he committed. Like Repin, Makovsky, apart from evoking sympathy with the prisoner, avoids making a transparent statement in regards to his position concerning these court rulings.¹⁰² It is only through contextualizing Makovsky's work that we understand the extent of Makovsky's political stance.

To the right of the composition are two peasants. An elderly woman wearing a long overcoat and babushka approaches the condemned. Her arms are raised, hands folded, and she desperately begs on his behalf. The position is reminiscent of Mary, the mother of Christ, mourning at the base of the crucifixion. Makovsky's use of the iconography of this pose leads the viewer to understand she is the mother of the condemned. However, this is where the similarity to Christian iconography ends. Makovsky merely uses the posture of woman to convey maternal compassion. On the other side, three more peasants observe the scene. They too, express concern, though not to the heightened level of the mother. Finally, a man stands at the mother's side, presumably her husband and the father of the condemned. He gently tugs at her coat with his right hand, as if to restrain her and keep her from acting in foolish desperation. However, he, too, is conflicted. Although not quite as hysterical, he grieves for

¹⁰² Jackson, *The Wanderers and critical realism*, 62.

the convict. We see this as his left hand is raised, wiping his eyes. Again, from his coat and his *lapti*, it is clear these peasants are from the country and they are the poorest of poor. In 1894, a fellow *Peredvizhniki* artist, Klavdii Lebedev, painted an image entitled, *Visiting Their Son*. The scene depicts peasant parents from the country talking to their son in the city. Elizabeth Valkenier uses the term “citified” to describe the son.¹⁰³ This sort of incident was a common occurrence in this time. Since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, and the rise of industrialism, many young people left their childhood homes in the country for jobs in the city.¹⁰⁴ As a result, often there was this alienation between the parents and their “citified” children.

In contrast to the poorly dressed peasants, the officers stand proudly in their elegant uniforms and shiny black boots. While the guard to the left of the door stares ahead, showing no emotion, the soldier to the right turns to the agitated woman. His arm is outstretched, warning her not to come any further. His brow is furrowed and his eyes are wide open, glaring at her. It conveys the message that should she make any effort to approach or embrace the condemned, he will administer serious consequences. This interaction increases the tension of the work. Furthermore, the facial expression of the condemned toward his mother brings confusion and heightens the drama. The look does not emulate sorrow, compassion, or love toward his mother. Does his face reveal hostility? Or is he merely attempting to keep his dignity and composure?

¹⁰³ Jackson, *The Wanderers and critical realism*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

The human interactions and facial expressions, however, are not the only components that create tension and drama. Makovsky utilizes many formal elements to underscore the dramatic effect. To the left of the composition, there is a dark hallway. In stark contrast to this darkness, the wall and the main figures are brightly lit. The effect is that of a spotlight shining on the actors in a theater. It creates chiaroscuro. This dramatic lighting, evocative of the work of the well-known 16th century artist of the Italian Counter-Reformation, Caravaggio, intensifies the suspense. In addition, the weapons not only literally threaten the condemned, but they do also on a formal level. The guns create two diagonal lines. This not only leads the viewer's eye back to the condemned, it adds energy to the composition and produces threatening tension.

Despite all this heightened drama and emotion, Makovsky is still purposefully makes the viewer work to see the political statement. To a certain extent it seems as though, Makovsky is visually reporting what frequently occurs in the courts. Yet, if we understand it within the political context, the hidden meaning become clearer. In 1878, a year prior to the completion of *The Condemned*, the civil *Narodnik* movement had failed. Radicals realized that reform was not going to come from the *narod* after all. In despair, many radicals turned violent. From 1878-1881, there were outbursts of terrorism, including bombings, assassinations, and suicidal acts.¹⁰⁵ In reaction, the government did a pendulum swing. Those who assaulted government officials were denied public trials and instead were tried in court martial. Also, the police were allowed to detain anyone they suspected of criminal activity of

¹⁰⁵ Pipes. *Russia under the Old Regime*, 298.

a political nature. As such, there was much abuse of power by those in petty authority. This also opened up the real possibility of exile for those merely suspected of political crime (before the terror, exile was reserved for those with hard evidence of an actual crime).¹⁰⁶ As a result, there were numerous injustices taking place every day.

Knowing that Russia was in the middle of political upheaval and confusion deepens our understanding of Makovsky's *The Condemned*; it also inspires new questions. Is the man in *The Condemned* truly guilty? Was he one of the many terrorists? Or was he innocent and unjustly bound for Siberia? Although Makovsky's ambiguity gives us no definite answer, the latter seems more likely, given the political context. Makovsky seems to be playing with the viewers' emotions--drawing on our sympathy. We sympathize, if not with the victim, then certainly with his family. In doing so, Makovsky is commenting on this new abuse of authority and the resulting injustices.

The terror actions and repressions that began in 1878 culminated with the assassination of Alexander II and the installation of his much more conservative son, Tsar Alexander III in 1881. It was subsequent to this transformation that Makovsky painted *The Verdict "Not Guilty"* (figure 3). Like *Waiting Outside the Prison* and *The Condemned*, this painting depicts the outcome of trial. As such there are similarities between this painting and the others. For example, the composition resembles the other two, consisting of a group of figures centered on the canvas. As in the others, the family is gathered and full of emotion. However, there are also striking anomalies. Perhaps the most obvious difference is the mood

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 299.

of the painting. Makovsky once more creates a deep sense of emotion. Instead of dread, fear, and sorrow, however, the mood is one of intense relief. Makovsky captures a profound psychological state in the face of the main woman. Her eyes are wide open as if in terror, yet they have begun to soften with a smile, as she realizes the blissful reality of the verdict. She holds close a young child who desperately clings to her. Her family looks on with quiet joy. In addition, the socio-economic class of this group is clearly higher than that of the previous figures.

Behind the group is an ominous-looking police official framed in the dark doorway that leads to a courtroom. His hand is on the hilt of a sword, as if he has just sheathed it. He no longer has a prisoner to guard. In between the group and him there is a gate that is slightly open, which suggests someone has just passed through it. Where is the prisoner? Has he been cleared, released, and passed through the gate? It is this young woman who has just been acquitted. The guard looks back over his shoulder one last time before disappearing into darkness. He does not look pleased. His gaze still conveys suspicion. Perhaps he is not convinced of her innocence.

The fact that it is a woman who was on trial is perhaps a bit surprising. Yet, it is important to know that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a growing number of women participated in revolutionary thought and action. In the 1870s alone, 95 women were convicted of political crimes in Russia.¹⁰⁷ Families often joined convicts in exile. In the case of political crimes, any children born in exile were considered to be of peasant status

¹⁰⁷ Natalia Pushkareva. Eve Levin (translated). *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 205.

regardless of the previous status of the parents.¹⁰⁸ Had the mother in Makovsky's image been found guilty, there is the question of the fate of her son. Would he have joined his mother and thus lost his upper-class status? Or might he have stayed with his grandparents and ultimately become estranged from his mother, being nearly grown when she returned? Ilya Repin's well-known image, *They Did Not Expect Him*, depicts such a scene. The father of a family suddenly arrives unannounced and the youngest child looks uneasy. Clearly she does not recognize him. Had the verdict been different for the family in Makovsky's painting, they may have had a similar fate. In fact, Repin's original studies depicted the returning exile as a woman, the mother.¹⁰⁹ This speaks to the familiarity of the issue in nineteenth-century Russia of women revolutionaries.

Women played a large role during the years in which revolutionaries committed acts of terror. In fact it was the act of one woman, Vera Zasulich, which began the terrorism. Zasulich shot and killed the governor of St. Petersburg, Fedor Trepov, in 1878.¹¹⁰ However, the jury acquitted her. Her infamous trial proves how flawed was Alexander II's new mandate. Juries' legal knowledge was sorely lacking and they were easily swayed. Thus, the outcomes of these trials were unpredictable. So, while Makovsky did not create his work, *The Verdict "Not Guilty"* based on one specific trial, he was illustrating these sorts of stories in general. In some cases, people like Zasulich, who clearly committed a crime by assassinating a governor, walked free; in other cases, like the mother in Makovsky's work, who, as David

¹⁰⁸ Sidney Monas. *The Third Section: Police and Society in Russia under Nicholas I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), 76.

¹⁰⁹ Jackson. *The Russian Vision of Ilya Repin*. 150.

¹¹⁰ Natalia Pushkareva. *Women in Russian History*. 206.

Jackson says, is “clearly not a dangerous terrorist,”¹¹¹ is falsely accused in the first place. In depicting such a scene, Makovsky is again observing the flaws in Alexander II’s new legal system. Makovsky adopts ambiguity, to avoid taking a specific political stance, and thus escape the possibility of being charged himself with a political crime. However, by closely examining the detail of the works itself and reading it within the political context, it becomes clear that Makovsky speaking out against social injustices imposed by the tsarist regime.

¹¹¹ Jackson. *The Wanderers and critical realism*. 71.

CONCLUSION

Following almost 100 years of near total neglect, the literature concerning the *Peredvizhniki* has expanded exponentially in recent years. Scholars such as Elizabeth Valkenier, Rosalind P. Gray, and David Jackson have contributed significantly to our understanding of 19th Century Russian Realism and of the *Peredvizhniki* in particular. Each of these authors has focused on the identity of the *Peredvizhniki* as a collective, addressing how the works of the entire group fit into the historical context of 19th Century tsarist Russia. They have also considered how the artists interacted with the political, social, and economic issues of their day. In addition, special attention has been paid to individual works by Ilya Repin, the most active artist of the group. Other than that, however, there has been little scholarship devoted to individual artists within the *Peredvizhniki* group.

As I argued in Chapter One, a major contributing factor to the neglect of the *Peredvizhniki* was Clement Greenberg's belittling of Repin's work as kitsch in his 1939 article, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Greenberg's adverse judgment affected the ways in which art historians viewed the modernist canon, as in the works of T.J. Clark and Michael Fried. Both scholars have grappled with the precedent set by Greenberg, and, as a result, with formulating their own theories and methods of engagement with the history and meaning of Realist works of art. As discussed in Chapter Two, for the materialist Clark, historical context provides the tools with which to interpret form, while the idealist Fried looks to his own experience for explanatory data. Even though Greenberg dismissed Realism as kitsch, both

Clark and Fried have demonstrated through their scholarship that the analysis of Realist works, such as those of the French artist Gustave Courbet, adds complexity and nuance to our understanding of the history of modernist avant-gardism: Clark sees Courbet as politically radical, while for Fried, Courbet is innovative in his technique.

My question at the outset of this thesis was whether or not the renewed relevancy of 19th century French Realism to modernist art history generated by the distinct yet related work of Clark and of Fried could provide a model for (re)evaluating individual works by members of the *Peredvizhniki* group. Although neither of these scholars addresses the *Peredvizhniki* and certainly not Makovsky, I was convinced that close visual analyses of Makovsky's work, using the methods pioneered by Clark and by Fried, would yield valuable results.

Previous discussion of Makovsky and the rest of the *Peredvizhniki* have focused on social dynamics rather than on the art itself. As a result, many details have been overlooked. For example, in his chapter "The revolutionary's tale: political themes," David Jackson addresses the overall theme of politics and provides examples of *Peredvizhniki* work that illustrate the theme.¹¹² However, I believe it is important to conduct a detailed analysis of the work itself in order to begin to understand its full meaning.

As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, the historical and political contexts play an important role in Makovsky's works and do not function simply as background as Fried suggests. Because the historical and political contexts are intertwined in Makovsky's works and therefore essential to our understanding of them, I relied heavily on Clark's methods of

¹¹² Jackson, *The Wanderers and critical realism*, 61.

analysis. Without the political context, Makovsky's works would be little more than illustrations of everyday Russian life. Yet the historical and political contexts animate the seemingly benign imagery and allow us to understand the complex questions with which Makovsky was grappling. In conducting a close visual analysis of Makovsky's works, I have unlocked the revolutionary potential of his seemingly innocuous works. As I observed in my introduction, Patricia Mainardi calls avant-garde those early 19th century movements such as Romanticism and Realism that opposed the authority of the State.¹¹³ According to Mainardi, these movements are the foundation of modernist art because of their radical politics and questioning of the hegemony of the Academy and the State. In using T.J. Clark's methods to analyze Makovsky's works, I believe I have proved that Makovsky truly was an avant-garde and that he has earned his place in the history of modern art.

¹¹³ Mainardi, "The Political Origins of Modernism."

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