

Joslyn Art Museum Comprehensive Study Lesson Plan

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RUSSIAN PORTRAITURE

Focus: Konstantin Makovsky, *Russian Beauty and Cat*

Objectives – Students will:

- Create a portrait after contemplating what future fashion and architecture will look like.
- Respond to artists' rebellions from the Academies.
- Present theories regarding why cats are popular subjects in art and how they are a phenomenon on the Internet.
- Connect with Russian culture using Makovsky's artworks.

Suggested Materials: Konstantin Makovsky teaching poster, drawing media and tools, Venn diagrams, computers/iPads for research

Vocabulary: Academy, aristocrat, beauty, culture, customs, national costume, patriarchal society, portrait, rebel/rebellion, Russian architecture terms, social status

Procedure:

- **Engage:** Clothes as a gateway to culture. Have students examine what they are wearing. Ask what they tell us about our culture.
- **Art Talk 1:** Russian Culture through Art. Using Makovsky's *Russian Beauty and Cat*, students can learn much about Russian culture during that time. Refer to the gallery experience at April Thursdays for Teachers and lesson plan create by Dr. Tatyana Novikov. <http://goo.gl/vGm2IH>
- **Art Talk 2:** *The Wanders*. Discuss this group, who rebelled against the Academy, and their important mission. Compare with another significant Academy rebellion (the Impressionists). Refer to the teaching poster for additional information.
- **History:** Who was Konstantin Makovsky? Refer to resources in the **Teacher Support Materials** for additional information. <http://goo.gl/vGm2IH>
- **Aesthetics:** Cats in Art. Have students research how artists have portrayed felines over time. What is the fascination with them? Why are they so popular online? Have students present their theories. (see Twitter handle @CuratorialCats and Walker Art Center's Internet Cat Video Festival)
- **Production:** Fashion & Architecture in 2035. Have students think about what will be worn 20 years from now. Think about what contemporary architecture will be like, too. Have them create a portrait similar to *Russian Beauty and Cat* only set in 2035. (potential *Hunger Games* tie-in for older students).



Konstantin Makovsky, (Russian, 1839–1915), *Russian Beauty and Cat*, 1865, oil on canvas, 45 1/4 x 36 1/2 in., Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Martin, 1954.172

- **Close:** Ask students if they could be friends with *Russian Beauty*. Use a Venn diagram to organize their thoughts and information.

Extensions:

- **Cultural Connections:** Study rebellions in American cultural history. Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast with Russian artists "The Wanderers" rebellion against the Academy.
- **Fine Arts:** Selfies. Ask students to take a series of selfies with the goal to capture their personality through the image. As they study them, have them think about the clues included in the photos?
- **Language Arts:** Tell the Story. Who is the *Russian Beauty*, and why is she gazing out the window? Write a story about what her expectations may be. What evidence is present in the painting help craft this story?
- **Math:** History of Math. Russia was a dominant force in mathematics during that era with Moscow University as the most prestigious place to study in the world. Study Nikolai Lobachevsky non-euclidean shapes/spaces. Share that Moscow only cancelled school if it was -30 degrees F below zero. Students attended school in coats and mittens to keep their hands warm during math class. These were the extremes of Russia during this time period.
- **Science:** Show students how *Russian Beauty's* eyes seem to follow the viewer. Have students research this phenomenon that has to do with how the artists used light and shadow in their paintings. Discuss how popular culture uses it (think, Scooby-Doo mysteries). Here is a study in Ohio State's *Research News* to get you started <http://goo.gl/8WlUQu>

Academic Standards & additional resources:

Available on online version at www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/thursdays-for-teachers
[select Lesson Plans, then European]

About the Artwork:

Best known as a painter of peasant scenes and founding member of the revolutionary movement known as the "Wanderers," Makovsky established himself early on as a champion of Russian subject matter. Entering the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg — the only avenue for aspiring artists in the tightly controlled Czarist state — in 1858, Makovsky took an active part in an unprecedented rebellion against the authorities in 1863 and, with thirteen other students, formed the *Artel' Khudozhnikov*, an independent artists' cooperative. The *Artel'* advocated freedom from Academic rules and subject matter and saw themselves as part of a new moral and rational order.

Russian Beauty and Cat perfectly embodies the modified realism and dawning nationalism of mid-century Russian artists. A carefully painted Tartar woman leans out an ornately carved window frame. The elaborate jewelry of her adornments contrasts with the softness of her face and bare shoulders —slightly sensual note accentuated by the contented, purring cat that she strokes.

IMAGE: Konstantin Makovsky, (Russian, 1839–1915), *Russian Beauty and Cat*, 1865, oil on canvas, 45 1/4 x 36 1/2 in., Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Martin, 1954.172