

Visitor Center Label from “Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar’s Painter.” Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, 2016.

Note: This exhibition was on view in the mansion with special displays in the visitor center February 13-June 12, 2016. The below is an excerpt from the exhibition label text. As part of the exhibition, a monitor in the visitor center provided guided, close looking for guests to explore [A Boyar Wedding Feast](#) (51.79), on view in the pavilion.



A Boyar Wedding Feast
Konstantin Makovsky (1839-1915)
St. Petersburg, Russia, 1883
Oil on canvas
(51.79)

Visitor Center (Second Floor)

Tablet/Large Format Monitor Label Text

Close Looking | A Boyar Wedding Feast

The epic scale and visual clutter of Makovsky’s *A Boyar Wedding Feast* invites exploration and rewards viewers with insights into some of Russia’s cultural traditions as well as a window onto Makovsky’s own spectacular world.

Come. Click. Relish the rewards of your curiosity and close looking!

Marriage | Strategically arranged marriages have always allowed noble families to expand their power and influence. Traditionally, the bride and groom are young and likely hardly know one another before their wedding day.

Matchmaker | The old woman standing behind the blushing bride is the svakha (matchmaker), the most important person at wedding ceremonies. Generally, she was an elderly relative, whose role was to encourage the shy or reluctant bride, ensure that the wedding proceeded without any missteps, and keep

evil spirits at bay. Her presence was crucial for the young bride emerging from a totally sheltered life as women of boyar families were confined to the terem or the upper rooms of their palaces.

Bride | Makovsky's wife, Julia, served as the model for the bride

Boy | Makovsky's son, Sergei, served as the model for the boy

The Kiss | Here, Makovsky singles out the special moment during the wedding feast, sometimes known as the "wedding kiss," when guests toast the bridal couple with the traditional phrase "gorko, gorko," which means "bitter, bitter." To satisfy the guests, the couple must kiss to make the wine sweet again.

Old Man | Pavel Viazemsky, a diplomat and member of the Imperial Senate, served as the model for the old man

Swan | The roasted swan is the last dish served at the wedding feast. Swans mate for life and are considered a symbol of fidelity.

Enameled Bowl | Colorful enameled designs adorn this silver bowl. Enamel allowed silversmiths to decorate with bright, fade-proof colors that can be layered and worked to achieve very subtle and sophisticated visual effects.

Ivory Box | In the 1600s, Russians hunted walrus--valuable for their hide, blubber, and tusks--in the bountiful waters off the northern coast. The North emerged as a center for ivory carving, producing ornately-carved ivory luxury items like this box.

Bratina | These bulbous-shaped bowls--used for toasts at ceremonial dinners in the 1600s--fell out of fashion around 1700, when new drinking vessels such as goblets made of silver or glass replaced the bratina. The form has survived, however, and has become a distinctive emblem of Russian culture. Makovsky used a bratina from his own collection as the "model" for this detail.

Charka | One of the uniquely Russian drinking vessels in this painting is the charka. This flat porringer-shaped vessel with a flat handle was used for toasting and drinking strong beverages.

Textiles | Makovsky collected carpets and covers imported from Persia and Venice and, as with the others antiques that filled his studio, used them as props for his paintings.^{2 31}

Kokoshniks | The distinctive silhouettes of the kokoshnik, a headdress worn by women, are perhaps the ultimate symbols of old Russian culture. They vary in shape according to the wearer's marital status and place of origin but are all richly embellished with embroidery, pearls, and gemstones.

Buffets | Buffets laden with treasures like this one revealed the host's wealth and high rank when displayed at social events and ceremonies such as weddings. A year before Makovsky painted *A Boyar Wedding Feast*, he painted a portrait of Count Sergei Stroganov. While working in the Russian statesman's home, Makovsky possibly used the occasion to study the family's collection of antique silver and used the sketches he made as the foundation for the objects displayed on this buffet.

Kovsh | Originally made of wood, a kovsh was a vessel for drinking or ladling liquids and shaped somewhat like a boat. By the end of the 1600s, Russians began to make kovshs from precious metals and present them as awards for service.

Icons | In a Russian Orthodox home the center of devotional practice is the icon corner. Pairs of icons of Christ and the Mother of God were traditionally given as wedding presents to newly married couples.