

SOVIET SOCIALIST REALISM

ARTIST: Mikhail A. Kostin (1918—unknown) Moscow

TITLE: *In the Stalin Factory* 1949

MEDIA: oil on canvas

SIZE: 52" x 68"

Courtesy of a private collector

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Mikhail A. Kostin, born in 1918, studied art at the Moscow State Art Institute. He graduated from the Institute during the Great Patriotic War, and by the end of the 1940s, he was teaching at the Valdivostok Art College where he was chairman of the local art union. He returned to Moscow in the 1950s, where he lived and worked until his death.

Kostin's work is part of the Social Realism movement in Soviet Russia. This movement was influenced by the preference of Communist leaders such as V. I. Lenin and Joseph Stalin for conservative Realistic paintings. Vern Swanson, in [Hidden Treasures: Russian and Soviet Impressionism](#), quotes Alan Bird, who states that "there is ample proof that Social Realism originated among the older intelligentsia with socialist sympathies and that it was a natural and logical evolution of the Proletarian articles of faith."

Mikhail Kostin's work, such as *In the Stalin Factory* (1949), is an excellent example of a "big theme" Soviet painting that "effectively blend[s] sound draftsmanship with 'two-fisted Impressionism,' a style which was developed intuitively in response to the artists' focus on portraying peasants working in factories or in the fields.

The painting is now in a private collection.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING: (History, Criticism, Aesthetics)

Can you tell from the painting what country this factory is in? The time period? What clues do the dress of the workers give you?

What mood is created by the painting? How do the colors and the values of the colors used contribute to this mood or detract from it?

How does the artist use light in this painting? What movement is suggested in this work? What elements lead your eye through the painting?

Many people consider something to be art only if it portrays some lofty ideal or setting. Can a work set in a factory be considered great art? What makes an art work great?

ACTIVITIES

Art—Expressing

Objectives: Students will be able to express their understanding of Classicism and Impressionism by comparing the Russian artists with French and American impressionists and explaining the similarities and differences.

Introduce Classicism and Impressionism to your students, identifying the defining stylistic characteristics of each. Examples of these different styles should be available in all good art history texts.

Vern Swanson, in HIDDEN TREASURES: RUSSIAN AND SOVIET IMPRESSIONISM, 1930 - 1970 describes how a "Social Realist balance between Classicism and Impressionism was hesitantly struck by the official and ceremonious propaganda painters." Mikhail Kostin's *In the Stalin Factory* is one of several works Swanson describes as a "blend of sound draftsmanship with 'two-fisted Impressionism.'" Discuss this blended style peculiar to Soviet art and ask students to identify how it compares with and differs from classicism and impressionism, as defined earlier.

Extension: Have the students find other works of Russian and Soviet painters and categorize the paintings by style, explaining why the work fits with the particular style or why and how it is a blend of styles. (See other artworks in this packet)

Art—Contextualizing

Objectives: Students will be able to contextualize Russian and Soviet art as exemplified by Mikhail Kostin's *In the Stalin Factory*, by comparing the Soviet art with works of American artists Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, or John Stewart Curry.

Discuss with students the characteristics of the Russian art under the Soviet government as discussed in HIDDEN TREASURES: RUSSIAN AND SOVIET IMPRESSIONISM: 1930—1970, by Vern Swanson.

Swanson states that the "sense of zeitgeist animated the Russian artist's need to portray the farm and the factory—they were participants in creating a new society. This was somewhat like the spirit of social conscience that moved the American Great Depression artists such as Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Stewart Curry to paint along similar lines."

Introduce students to the American artists Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and/or John Stewart Curry. In a class discussion, ask students to compare the works of these American artists to the works of the Soviet artist, Mikhail Kostin, describing the similarities and differences. Have students discuss their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about these works and describe what the artists' intentions may have been at the time the works were created.

The following is a list of art works available through the BYU library that may be used for this exercise:

Section of New School Mural by Thomas Hart Benton from Maverick with a Paint Brush by Thomas Hart Benton.

Open Hearth, Blast Furnace, and Loading by Thomas Hart Benton from An Artist in America by Thomas Hart Benton.

Seed Time and Harvest and Tree Planting Group by Grant Wood, *Our Good Earth* and *The Tornado* by John Stewart Curry from John Stewart Curry and Grant Wood: A Portrait of Rural America by Joseph S. Czestochowski.

Bootleggers by Thomas Hart Benton from American Originals: Selections from Reynolda House, Museum of American Art published by Abbeville Press and The American Federation of Arts.

Steel Worker Reading Pravda by Oleg Leonidovich Lomakin, *Construction of Refinery: Industrial Scene* by Vladimir Mitrophanovich Petrov, and *Steel Worker Looking into a Furnace* by Isaak Iosiphovich Tartakovski from HIDDEN TREASURES: RUSSIAN AND SOVIET IMPRESSIONISM: 1930 - 1970s by Vern Swanson.

Library Media

Objectives: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of how to select and

use numerous literary and other information sources by compiling a bibliography of reference materials relating to a topic suggested by the painting, *In the Stalin Factory*, by Mikhail A. Kostin.

Have the students study the slide of the painting and select a topic the painting suggests to them. Any topic dealing with factory work, Russian life style, or the art of Russia would be suitable. You also may want to include other artworks as possible sources of ideas. One alternate approach is to use art that relates in some way to another area of your curriculum such as history or science.

Students will compile a bibliography of materials that relate to the chosen topic using the correct bibliographic format for each type of material cited. The bibliography should include a variety of sources such as books, magazine articles, art works, video material, encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, internet reference or any others relevant to the topic.

Variation—computer search: As practice in using computers to research topics, you can assign the students to include or substitute a computer search for the library search.

Social Studies

Objectives: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of economic models by describing the characteristics of a planned economy, traditional economy, and market economy.

Divide the students into groups and assign each group one of the above models to study. Each group should investigate all aspects of the model and how it has been put into practice in various countries. For example, the Soviet economy as suggested in the painting, *In the Stalin Factory* by Mikhail Kostin, differs from the Chinese economy using the same model. Students should explore this and note the similarities and differences of the models and how the same models are implemented differently. Each group will present an oral report of their findings to the class.

This assignment can be done in conjunction with the library media assignment above.

Extension: The groups could look at how each of the economic models responds during various economic conditions such as prosperity, depression, and recession. The impact of the model on government policies could be covered along with any other relevant topics.

Language Arts

Objectives: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the how to communicate meaning through gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice by analyzing the gestures and facial expressions in a painting and theorizing what the tone of voice used would be.

Discuss with students how meaning is communicated by nonverbal means such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Using the painting *In the Stalin Factory* by Mikhail A. Kostin, ask students what is being conveyed by the workers through their gestures and facial expressions. Ask students to theorize what tone of voice the workers would be using. Use a variety of other paintings to show other examples of nonverbal communication.

Extension: Have students work in groups to create a story dramatization based on one of the paintings reviewed. They should concentrate on using nonverbal clues as much as possible rather than just using words to communicate meaning to the audience. The final product will be presented to the entire class. The class can discuss how successful the use of nonverbal communication was in the context of the dramatization.

Social Studies, Language Arts, Music, Healthy Life Styles

Objectives: Students will be exposed to another culture by looking at various aspects of Russian life.

Have a Russian day in your classroom. Center all lessons around some aspect of Russian life focusing on the workers and the peasants who were the subjects of many of the Russian and Soviet Impressionist paintings shown in this packet including Kostin's *In the Soviet Factory*. This can be as simple or as complex as you wish to make it.

Activities can include but need not be limited to the following:

1. Learn the Russian alphabet. (See Miscellaneous Activities) Another good source is Barron's Russian Grammar by Natalia Lusin (published by Barron's Educational Series, Inc., Hauppauge, New York, 1992). Also included in the same source are several words and phrases for the students to learn. Audio cassette packages are available in most bookstores to help with pronunciation.
2. By studying maps and travel guides, have the students plan their own trip to Russia. Several travel books on Russia exist including The Baltics and Russia, 1997, by Rick Steves; Fodor's Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev; and Russia and the Commonwealth, A to Z, by Andrew Wilson and Nina Bachkatov. This last contains encyclopedia-type entries covering a wide variety of topics.
3. Read plays by Russian writers such as Chekov.
4. Bring Russian music to play in class. Some examples are "Songs of a Russian Gypsy" by Theodore Bikel, "Songs of Old Russia" by the Osipov Balalaika Orchestra, "Russian Church Music" by the Slavayonka Men's Choir, "Evening Star: The Rachmaninoff Vespers" by the St. Petersburg Chamber Choir, and "Rachmaninoff Plays Rachmaninoff: The 4 Piano Concertos." All of these are available on CD. Other composers you can include are Sergey Prokofiev, Dimitry Shostakovich, and Igor Stravinsky.

5. Read Russian folk stories such as “Baba Yaga & the Little Girl” in class. North-South Books published a version of this story retold and illustrated by Katya Arnold in 1994. Best-Loved Folktales of the World selected by Joanna Cole contains eight folktales from Russia including “The Fool of the World” and “The Flying Ship,” “ The Baba Yaga,” “The Story of King Frost,” “ Prince Hedgehog,” “ The Treasure,” and others.

Students can make an illustration of a favorite scene from one of these stories.

6. Have the students study the slides included in this packet, and encourage them to come to school that day dressed as a Russian worker or peasant. The dress need not be elaborate and may include only a head scarf for the girls and a hat for the boys. Discuss the differences between Russian dress and American dress.

7. If possible, have a typical Russian meal for lunch. (Or have one item such as piroghi) A good source for traditional Russian recipes is The Art of Russian Cuisine by Anne Volokh with Mavis Manus (published by Macmillan, New York, 1983). Many recipes are available on the internet—see suggested sites, Miscellaneous Activities. Have students create a day's menu that fits with the USDA guidelines using typical Russian foods.

These suggestions are just a start. Include any other activities that are appropriate. Any of the activities suggested above can be either kicked off or concluded on your Russian day.