



The Merchant's Wife by Boris Kustodiev, Russia - USSR

The Artist's Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian and Soviet painter and stage designer • Born in Astrakhan (1878 – 1927) • 1896 – 1903 attended Ilya Repin's studio at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St.Petersburg • The artist penetrated the complex world of human soul creating portraits • Illustrated books: Nikolai Gogol's <i>Dead Souls</i>, <i>The Overcoat</i>; Leo Tolstoy's <i>How the Devil Stole the Peasant's Hunk of Bread</i> and <i>The Candle</i>. • Designed stage scenery at the Moscow Art Theatre. • 1916 tuberculosis of the spine made him paraplegic. Colourful paintings and joyful genre disguised his physical suffering, giving the impression of a carefree and cheerful life.
The History of the Painting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His most famous picture <i>The Merchant's Wife</i> oil on canvas created in 1918 (exhibited in the State Russian Museum). • Art Nouveau style. • Continued to paint moving and colourful images even after illness had deprived him of the power to move independently. • According to the artist, he inhabited a magical kingdom of recollections, daydreams and nostalgic visions.
The Theme of the Painting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kustodiev's motifs and subjects symbolised a life that had disappeared irrevocably into the past, yet had still lost none of its tart aroma. • <i>The Merchant's Wife</i> is an excellent example of an artistic recollection of resplendent beauties, azure evenings, unhurried tea drinking ceremonies and a seemingly permanent way of life. • The sumptuous still-life on the table, the gleaming samovar, the bright watermelon, the marble shoulders of the heroine — the painterly beauty and expressiveness of every detail fill the canvas with light and colour. • The most striking image here is the merchant's wife drinking tea, her ample figure dominates the tea table and the surrounding area by her bulk and her self-satisfied expression. She is as round and as succulent as the fruit on the table.
Cultural Value of the Painting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most iconic paintings representing national Russian tea drinking culture. • The painting depicts the merchant class and adds a note of satire. • The artist used the bright reds and blues of Russian folk art. • Kustodiev delighted in painting merchants' plump wives during their leisure activities. • This work has an oriental richness of colour that Kustodiev saw as part of his Astrakhan heritage.