

Describing a figurative painting from legion of honor essay

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"The Russian Bride's Attire" was painted in 1887 by Konstantin Makovsky. It is an enormous painting that is available for view at the de Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and also at the Legion of Honor Fine Arts Museum. From the opinions of art enthusiasts published online, it seems to cover an entire wall. A person touring the museum feels as if they can walk right into the painting and therefore back into time. It is breathtaking. It tells an elaborate story to which the viewer can add a different beginning and an ending every time they visit the museum. It tells so much about the physical details that completed this amazing work of art, the emotional state of the characters and the fashion of its time.

The colors that were used probably spanned hundreds of different varieties. More than likely, many colors were mixed together to create the life like skin of the characters with the cold paleness they each have. The wooden chair that the sad bride sits on looked as if it were polished. The way the clothing of each character was painted, it appears that the fabric is made from silk, satin and cotton. While wide brush strokes were likely used to complete the walls, a closer look at the walls reveals the obvious smaller brush strokes that would have made the uniform lines within the walls. There are various brush strokes that range from short to long, large and small. For instance, the woman kneeling and consoling the bride has a lot of beautiful flowers in her dress that would have required tiny strokes or perhaps hundreds of dabs of paint in one section at a time. The rug has white squares each made up of 4 little white squares. They are separated by short strokes of dark green and blue patterns. Although the rug is essentially dark red, a closer observation reveals an array of colors. Even in today's market, it is easy to imagine a rug

(made to look exactly like that of the painting) selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is an oil painting on canvas and may have a smooth palpable surface. However, the three dimensional images from the ceiling to the clothing make it possible to walk right into the scene and help brush the brides shiny, silky, dark hair. The three dimensional images within the paint has been created by the strategic placement of shadows throughout the painting. There are shadows in the beams that run across the ceiling and on the floor by the little boy's legs. Not to take credit away from the artist, but it is fun to credit the sun (attempting to push its rays of light through the curtains) with designing the shadows.

Even areas of innate darkness in the painting serve a relevant purpose. The biggest area would be on the left side of the painting. It is clearly a large piece of furniture like a cabinet. Diagonally across from it, there is an open door with a man attempting to enter. He was held back by one of the women so that he could not enter the room. All of the open space behind him is dark. It is like there is no light in the room from which he attempts to enter. It may be symbolic. If he is coming from a dark place, this could mean that it is indicative of his true intentions toward this bride. He doesn't look old enough to be her father, so it can be assumed that he is the groom. It is fun to imagine that this dark imagery is surrounding the groom and he is pretending to be concerned for the sadness that radiates from the bride. The other dark shadows come from the fluffiness and folds of the dresses on the characters. They are also provided by the light and angle of the sun, so brilliantly included by the artist. Contrary to the darkness of the painting, there is a great deal of brightness and light colors. Ironically, there are plenty

of white squares decorating the rug, yet it still maintains an overall dark hue. The most white and bright colors used in the painting are for the bride, her dress and the faces of her attending relatives. It seems as if the faces are almost like porcelain. If one could fling a bottle cap at one of the faces, it would crack into a million lines, and would not fall apart until blown slightly by a breeze. What makes them look even lighter in complexion is the fact that they all look so sad. Believe it or not, the sorrowful tone in the room adds to the darkness and intensifies the mood.

No woman should ever have to look or feel that way on their wedding day no matter what century or culture the event is planned for. Indeed, every cell of flesh in the picture looks painfully realistic. They have been painted to look pale, almost with the sickness that has often ravaged the people of that time period. Not all of the women in the photo look sad that this bride might be leaving after the wedding, or forced to marry against her will. There is a woman tucked away by the window with a sinister smile on her face.

Consistent with her smile is her position in the room, there is just something sneaky about it. The others are consoling, sympathetic and supportive.

Meanwhile, this one woman is off to the side with a hidden yet obvious smile.

Another key point to make is the woman whose back is turned to the audience. She is apparently consoling a woman whose head is bowed in an oncoming sob. Perhaps this is the woman who knows all too well, the subordinate mistreatment she will soon endure as a married woman to a controlling adulterous brute. Despite the few differences in the moods of the characters, they all seem to be painted the same way and dressed in the finest garments. It would be an understatement to simply say that

everything in the photo looks so realistic. One could practically hear the whispers and last minute conversations that must be going on in this room. This was a period of time when the women wore long, fluffy and dramatic dresses. They were mostly form fitting around the waist and bosom. The sleeves would be just as dramatic as the lower flare of the dress. Only after sitting down, the ladies can reveal their confining shoes and how hard it might be to breathe in their dress.

After studying and analyzing the physical beauty, character mood and clothing in this painting, many questions come to mind. The most burning question is why didn't the bride cheer up at the sound of the groom trying to come into the room? A few answers make sense. First, she might be weighed down by the sadness of having to marry a man she does not know or love. Or, she is just nervous knowing that after the night falls she will no longer be a virgin. She will no longer live in the safety of her mother's nearby hugs. No matter what, a free ticket to fly back into time is just a museum entrance away.

Reference:

Makovsky, K. (Artist). (1889). The Russian Bride's Attire [Web Photo].

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