

The Steel Workers, Ca. 1950 Original Oil On Canvas 56” x 83.75”

The painting The Steel Workers was a special award that was given to the workers and workers and owners of the “First Of May” Factory near Kiev, Ukraine over 50 years ago.

The factory is 150 years old, and was named the Mentsel Factory before the Revolution in 1917. It was a giant factory in the extensive branch of agricultural machine-building in the USSR, and it received The Steel Workers as a gift in recognition of their accomplishments in volume of output and quality of product.

The founders of the factory along with many workers were presented the painting by a Soviet official in honor of a Communist holiday, perhaps ‘The Seventh of November’ or ‘The First Of May’ or ‘Founders Day.’ Customarily, the High Governors of Moscow or Kiev came to large factories for such holidays and brought awards such as distinguished work medals, busts of political leaders, paintings, and so on. This is how the factory workers and founders shared the honor for exceeding their goals, for winning high scores in Soviet competition, and for setting high industry standards.

The Steel Workers hung in the large dining room of the factory complex. It was situated next to landscapes and genre paintings for all the workers to enjoy as they had their meals every day. This large room was also used as the meeting place for factory-wide discussions and business meetings as well as motivational talks and various political speeches.

When the factory itself was sold, the new owners removed the painting, and sold it to a renowned international art dealer.

The Steel Workers is not signed. One reason is that it was commissioned by the government to be a gift and was not intended to be sold or traded. The artists and workers were paid by the government, so emphasis was put on the artwork, not the artist. As was the case with Renoir, Monet and other French artists, Soviet Era artists did not sign many of their paintings.

Although others could be discussed and considered as the artist, The Steel Workers has been continuously attributed to E. I. Danilevsky by art restorers and collectors alike. Danilevsky worked mainly in Kiev, Ukraine and in Moscow, Russia, and the painting also resembles other artworks which are known to have been painted by Danilevsky.

The book *History of Soviet Fine Art* (1968) sites other artists in the steel factory genre: M. P. Trufanov, *The Blast Furnace Workers*, 1957; I.I. Simonov, *Foundry Men* (1958-1959). It has already been noted, for example, that Trufanov's painting does not at all resemble the style and execution of *The Steel Workers*.

Other famous steel factory paintings are *Azov Steel* by Konstantin Shurupov, and of course, *In the Stalin Factory* by Mikhail Kostin. There were many more artists who portrayed this theme.

In any case, this artwork was commissioned by the Soviet Government as a gift of appreciation to this factory and known master painters were always used for such major paintings and special commemorative gifts. The masterful use of colors and the stunning expressions on the men's faces along with excellent composition and feel for the subject aid us in realizing that this masterwork deserves a place of honor in a major collection of art.

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