The Pedagogy of Perspective:
How Aleksei Venetsianov Learned To Paint the Russian Countryside

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Why would the artist Aleksei Venetsianov—known for bucolic images of life on his country estate—decide it necessary to knock down a wall of his barn in order to properly paint it? And what might this anecdote tell us about the emergence of a national tradition of Russian painting in the early decades of the nineteenth century? In this talk, Molly Brunson considers the work of Russia’s first prolific painter of everyday rural life, Aleksei Venetsianov, asking how Russian artists learned to represent native space, picture the unruly and limitless countryside, and capture the lived experiences of peasants and serfs.

Known as much for his idealized representations of the country as for his influential training of a whole generation of St. Petersburg artists, Venetsianov theorized on the importance of drawing and perspective, emphasized the democratic reach of modern art pedagogy, and leveraged the fundamentals of both to rethink what Russian art could be. In the process, he explored the formal, social, and ideological potential of perspectival illusionism, constructing an edifice for picturing Russia that subsequent artists and writers would reimagine to often profound, sometimes stunning effect. This talk is also, then, about what it meant for Russian artists to adopt the perspectival methods of western Europe, and how it forever shaped the path of modern Russian culture.

Friday, March 1, 5:00 PM, 2134 GISB