

Kotelnichesky Bridge by Mikhail Alexandrovich Kaneev: painted 1976

Welcome to this audio guide, in which we'll be spending time with this painting.

First of all, let's consider the overall composition of this painting. Half close your eyes and look – see how you're better able to notice its most dominant features. What are these for you? Maybe the simple rectangular shapes; maybe the limited colour palette of blues, ochres and whites. Or maybe it's the individual details - the bridge, the boats, or the tall building in the background.

At its simplest, this bold composition is made up of blocks and stripes of colour. We can see a huge sky, sliced through by the horizontal shapes of the bridge. Below the bridge, the sky is underlined by a line of mainly light-coloured buildings and dramatically split in two by the towering presence of the central skyscraper.

Another block of colour at the base of the image, subtly divided into stripes of different tones, represents an expanse of water, probably a river.

Before we look at the elements of the painting in detail, let's understand first what scene the picture is showing us. The title tells us that we're in Moscow, looking at a very famous skyscraper called the Kotelnichesky Embankment Building. This is one of seven monumental Stalinist skyscrapers completed in 1952. It still exists today although the area around it, and the bridge too, have changed.

Now we know where we are, let's examine the details we can see in the painting. Look at the buildings on either side of the central skyscraper - you might be able to infer what type of structures they are. Although the painter's style is quite loose, and the colours of each building are similar, there are some clues. Look for windows, chimneys and other clues that could suggest houses or apartment blocks. On the left hand side of the painting, notice that there's a smudgy column of smoke rising up. Perhaps this is a clue as to the nature of the buildings on this side of the picture. Are there any other clues you can see?

Moving down to the water, the painter has shown four, perhaps five boats on the river. They appear to vary in size, but you might notice that it's hard to tell whereabouts they are on the water. They could all be equally close to us or they

could be dispersed across the river. And this gives an odd impression - the boat on the far right looks as if it could be on a collision course with the smaller white boat immediately to its left. Do you think the painter intended this?

The textures of the water are roughly sketched - would you judge the impression to be choppy or smooth? This might give a hint as to whether there's any wind. The clouds in the sky are quite vigorously drawn, and there could be a suggestion that they're being pushed along by a brisk breeze.

Notice all the colours used to paint the water. At first glance we might focus on the boats, but the river's surface itself is very varied. There's a reflection of the clouds, and a swathe of shade in the middle where perhaps the currents are different and there's a greater depth of water. At the point where the river bank meets the water, there's a dark band of colour to give the horizon line a bit of depth.

Let's turn our attention to the light across the scene. How would you describe it - Is it diffused, soft? Or sharp and clear? There are some sharp shadows on the buildings, and this suggests the day is bright and sunny, despite the clouds swirling in the sky. It's interesting that there are no clues at all as to the season, except that there's no snow and ice. What time of year would you guess it to be?

You might have already noticed the people, but if not, let's focus on them for a moment. High up on the bridge, there's a cluster of figures. Are they pedestrians on the bridge? Looking at the railing beside them, it seems unlikely that this is a pedestrian walkway for the public. The railing looks flimsy and open, not very safe. Also we can see that some of them seem to be wearing high visibility jackets, and is that red spot a safety helmet? Probably they're maintenance workers, conferring, planning, observing.

Now visualize yourself inside the picture. What do you think it might be like up there alongside these figures? Invigorating or alarming depending on whether you have a head for heights or not! Imagine yourself up there, seeing that view over the city and the river, smelling the air coming off the water, and maybe the sharp smell of the smoke from the far bank. Is there warmth on your face, a gentle breeze or a brisk wind? Maybe the wind is rushing through the bridge girders, and there could be

sounds of birds calling and traffic noises drifting across from the city. How does that guardrail feel beneath your hand?

What about if you were on one of the boats? How would that rocking motion be? How loud is the slapping of the water against the hull? Are you on board alone, or with friends? And as you chug slowly off this canvas where are you going and what will you do when you reach your destination?

We've come to the end of this audio guide now, although you're welcome to spend more time looking at the painting on your own.

Next, you might like reflecting on what you most enjoyed about this brief activity so scroll down to **Wrap up your painting** to have a go at this.