

The Museum of Russian Art Hosts Exhibition of Russian Lacquer Boxes

Sept. 20 – Oct. 10, 2004

'Legends in Lacquer' is an Exhibition of Russian Artistry in Painted Miniature Boxes



"Aleksi Mikhailovich Romanov," 2001, was commissioned by collector David Christensen from artist Yelena Baranoff-Meznikova. A portrait is painted on the inside cover of the casket-style black lacquer box. 4 3/4 x 4 3/4 x 2 3/4 inches

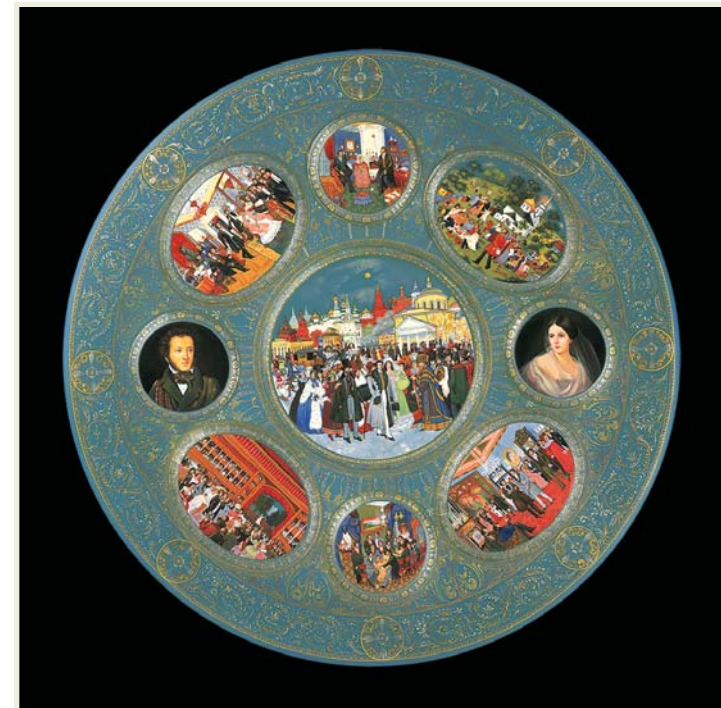
Such is the mystery and mythical quality of a selection of Russia's famed black lacquer boxes that will be displayed at The Museum of Russian Art Sept. 20-Oct. 10.

Painted with the help of special magnifying glasses, the boxes range in size from a mini casket of "Tsar Sultan," measuring 2 3/4 x 2 x 2 inches, to a Persian casket depicting scenes from the life of a Palekh artist, 11 x 8 1/4 x 10 1/4 inches. The centerpiece of the collection is a 13 3/4 inch diameter plate with eight vignettes from the life of Aleksander Pushkin. The back of the plate bears the story of each scene, hand lettered in gold Cyrillic.

This exhibition of miniature boxes, plates and plaques painted by artisans in the heart of Central Russia, is the first to be hosted by the museum in Bloomington that has presented five exhibitions of Russian Impressionist paintings of the Soviet

period since opening in September 2002. "The artistry of these painters is another form of art, an extension of Russian fine art and folk culture which evolved over generations," said Bradford Shinkle, IV, the museum's president.

The art of painting exquisite designs from fairy tales and folklore was born of necessity. Its roots were in the painting of religious icons, a tradition that dates back more than 500 years, in the tiny village of Palekh (pronounced PAW'-lek), one of four villages acclaimed for producing this art. After the overthrow of Nicolas II in 1917 and the establishment of Communism, the painting of icons was no longer allowed. Artists whose families for generations had painted the religious figures so identified with the Russian Orthodox Church turned to painting boxes



"Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin, Life of a Literary Genius," 2002, was painted by Yelena Baranoff-Meznikova as a commission for David Christensen for his collection. The plate measures 13 3/4 inches in diameter.

made of papier mache, the surface the artists prefer for its ability to withstand changes in atmospheric pressure and avoid cracking. Extremely well crafted through a labor-intensive process, the boxes from Palekh vary in size and can last for generations, maintaining their luster and vivid color.

Located far from the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, Palekh is a quiet place of diligent artisans who study for five years and complete a rigid training regimen. Then, operating as independent business people, they sell their work to the cooperative and individual collectors.

Painting their heritage in legends, folklore and fairy tale scenes on these miniature boxes called "small miracles" by collectors, the artists reflect in their work brilliant colors and gold relief in three dimensions.

Styles, techniques, colors and materials used in painting lacquer boxes vary greatly within the four-village cooperative. The artists of Palekh, Fedoskino, Kholui and Mstera have all contributed to the development of their villages' respective and distinctive artistic styles. For example, while the artists of Palekh, Kholui and Mstera use egg tempera, Fedoskino artists apply layer upon layer of thinly diluted oil tempera. Fedoskino artists' style is more realistic because, unlike the other three schools, its roots are not in iconography. Kholui artists, too, paint figures in



"Scheherezade," 1994, was painted by Fedoskino artist Yevgeny Starykh. 10 1/4 x 8 x 2 3/4 inches. From the David Christensen Collection.

Special Events Saturday, October 9

1:00 p.m.

Seminar by
Maxim Stoulov, Artists' Representative
Black Lacquer Cooperative
Palekh, Russia

3:00 p.m.

Seminar by
David Christensen
Collector of Russian Lacquer Boxes
Roseville, Minnesota

more realistic proportions than do the artists of Palekh. Fedoskino is the only village to use mother-of-pearl inlays. In contrast to works by the other villages' artists, Mstera miniatures are characteristically rendered in pale tones, usually on an ivory background.

Other intricate applications of three-dimensional fine art are found in the Russian tradition of jewelry making and the art of goldsmiths, best represented by the fabled Faberge eggs.

As part of the educational mission of The Museum of Russian Art, two seminars will be presented Saturday, Oct. 9. At 1:00 p.m., Maxim Stoulov, who represents the artists' cooperative in Palekh, will discuss the history of the art, various styles of boxes, techniques employed by the artists and the growing popularity of lacquer art. At 3:00 p.m., David Christensen, whose impressive collection includes what may be one of the world's finest examples of the art, will relate the collector's journey from his introduction to lacquer boxes to his quest for elegant, elaborately painted masterpieces.

While reservations are not required, pre-registration is encouraged. There is no admission charge for the exhibition or the seminars, however a donation of \$3.00 is suggested.

None of the exhibition pieces are available for sale. However, collectors will have an opportunity to purchase boxes by some of the same artists in the Palekh cooperative from Oct. 5 – 10 at the museum from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 5 through Saturday, Oct. 9. On Sunday, Oct. 10, hours are 12 Noon to 6 p.m. Prices range from \$80 to \$4,000. A portion of the proceeds will be contributed to the museum. To view examples of the miniature boxes for purchase, visit the Black Lacquer Cooperative web site: www.palekh.net

For more information and a preview of boxes in the exhibition, visit the museum's web site: www.tmora.org or call 612-914-0200.

Addendum: Since publishing the VIEW, we have learned that the artist identified as Yelena Barinoff-Meznikova prefers that she be referred to as Elena Barinoff. An internationally renowned artist formerly of Palekh, Ms. Barinoff resides and works in the United States. She is an independent artist and is not connected with the Black Lacquer Cooperative or any other cooperative. Her plate, "Alexander Sergeevich Pushin, Life of a Literary Genius," was completed in 2004.

Opportunity to Purchase Lacquer Boxes from the Black Lacquer Cooperative

Tuesday, October 5 through Saturday, October 9
10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Sunday, October 10 | 12 Noon to 6 p.m.

The miniature boxes shown are examples of styles that will be available for purchase during the "Legends in Lacquer" exhibition at TMORA Oct. 5-10. They are hand-crafted by artists of the Black Lacquer Cooperative in Palekh and Fedoskino, Russia. To see more examples, visit www.palekh.net.



"Emperor Peter I" lacquer box. 9 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches



"The Curved Seashore" lacquer box. 9 3/8 x 7 x 2 inches



"The Cock" egg-shaped chest. 2 3/8 x 2 x 1 1/2 inches



"Tsar Sultan" 9-sided Persian chest. 3 1/4 x 2 1/2 x 4 3/4 inches

FROM THE LIBRARY



New Catalog!

"The Power of Message in Russian Art" was published in conjunction with the Spring, 2004 exhibition. It includes 46 color plates plus 10 color vignettes, a timeline of major event in the Soviet Union span of history, and a commentary by independent scholar Jane Friedman discussing the eight aspects of the exhibition: Cult of the Leader, The Great Patriotic War, Space Exploration, Agricultural Progress, The Soviet New Man, The Soviet New Woman, Traditional Rural Life and The Severe Style. 48 pages, soft cover. Published by The Museum of Russian Art, 2004. \$20.00, plus \$5.00 shipping and handling. Minnesota residents add 6.5% sales tax. For other titles available from TMORA, visit the web site: www.tmora.org



Individual Membership \$30 Receive two issues of VIEW newsletter, 10% discount at the Museum Gift Shop and advance invitations to limited attendance events at the Museum.

Partners Membership \$50 Benefits apply to two adults.

Family Membership \$65 Benefits for two adults and registered children under 18.

Benefactor Membership \$125 Family membership benefits plus complimentary copy of the 28-page "Hidden Treasures" brochure.

Patron Membership \$250 Benefactor benefits plus a one-year subscription to "Russian Life" magazine.

Contributing Sponsor \$500 Patron benefits plus "Soviet Impressionism," by Vern G. Swanson, Ph.D., a 300-page, hard-bound volume on 20th century Russian painting.

Leadership Sponsor \$1,000 Membership benefits plus invitation for two to attend annual Trustees' Reception.

Yes, I share the vision and support the mission to help perpetuate TMORA's cultural legacy!

The Museum of Russian Art Membership Application

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Bloomington, Minnesota 55438-2400
Phone: 952-914-0200 | Fax: 952-943-2072
www.tmora.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (H) _____ (W) _____

E-mail _____

Membership Level _____

Contribution _____

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Credit Card No. _____ Expiration Date ____/____/____