



Russian lacquer boxes : a narrative tradition : from the Frederick Seibold Collection.


Seibold, Frederick; Chazen Museum of Art
Madison, Wisconsin: Chazen Museum of Art, 2006

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**Russian Lacquer Boxes:
A Narrative Tradition**

From the Frederick Seibold Collection



Chazen Museum of Art



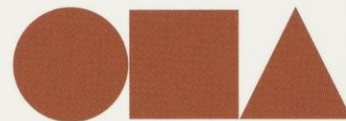
SLIP COVER DETAILS: A.D. Kochupalov, *The Tale of Vassilisa the Beautiful*, Palekh, 1994.

Russian Lacquer Boxes: A Narrative Tradition

From the Frederick Seibold Collection



PUBLIC RECEPTION
Friday, November 17
6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Mayer Gallery



Chazen Museum of Art

Russian Lacquer Boxes: A Narrative Tradition represents the evolution of applied and decorative arts in central Russia, culminating in a blend of visual art and cultural story telling. Russian lacquer miniatures are small, highly decorative papier-mâché boxes displaying everything from literary epics and fairy tales to lofty religious motifs, all expressed through highly detailed imagery.

This exhibition presents modern lacquer miniatures from the three villages of central Russia—Palekh, Mstyora, and Kholui.

Artists from these ancient centers of icon painting turned to lacquer miniatures only in the early twentieth century following the secularization of Russia after the 1917 revolution which destroyed the market for icon painting. By adopting the new artistic media, Palekh, Mstyora, and Kholui painters succeeded in reinventing themselves and gained international recognition as brilliant and unique schools of applied and decorative art.



HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC ROOTS OF PALEKH, KHOLUI, AND MSTYORA

Icon painting in the three hamlets dates back to the seventeenth century. Of the three traditions, Palekh icon painting, which followed the principles of the Moscow Stroganov school of fine iconography, had a reputation for the highest quality and refinement. Kholui and Mstyora craftsmen, deviating from the church canon of icon painting, had a less unified style similar to folk painting. However, Kholui and Mstyora craftsmen enjoyed their share of popularity and commercial success, and not just locally. As icon and mural painters, they sold their works all over the Russian empire and in the Balkans.

The art of lacquer painting was introduced to Russia in the eighteenth century, when the reformer Tsar Peter the Great opened the country to European culture. At the same time, Russian merchants trading with China imported lacquered goods along with other oriental exotica. The demand for fashionable lacquered décor remained high throughout the eighteenth century, as the new capitol, St. Petersburg, was growing and numerous new palaces and mansions were built for the Russian nobility. At first, Russian artists learned from European craftsmen, specially invited by Peter's order. By the end of the eighteenth century, lacquer painting had been firmly established in the country, and the first Russian factories producing lacquer painted decorative goods were established. Miniature lacquer paintings continued to develop as enormous demand for various small decorated objects, in particular snuff-boxes, increased. The most successful and famed tradition is associated with the Lukutin factory, an enterprise established at the end of the

eighteenth century in what is now the Village of Fedoskino. Since the early nineteenth century, the level of mastery and scale of production there were among the highest in Europe. It was the Lukutin-Fedoskino lacquer boxes that inspired Palekh icon painters in the revolutionary years of the twentieth century when the market for icons collapsed to pick up lacquer painting as an alternative artistic medium.

The first artists who ventured on the unfamiliar ground of secular miniature painting were experienced and well trained iconographers. Among the features that were inherited from icon painting were the inverted perspective, the highly ornamental and decorative treatment of form, two-dimensional figures and structures, the conventional, often symbolic, background of hills, waves, plants, and chambers, the manner of rendering clothes and animals, such as multi-colored horses with slender legs and swan-like necks, as well as the use of egg-tempera (although Fedoskino artists have traditionally used oil), and silver and gold paint. Many tight and well-developed compositions were also derived from established iconographic patterns. To ensure the continuity of craftsmanship, some of the best Palekh artists, for example, would teach and compile manuals of distinct stylistic features and techniques specific to icon-painting, so that students could creatively assimilate them into their own miniatures.

The technique and style alone do not constitute the whole idiom of Palekh, Kholui, and Mstyora miniatures. It is the content of the miniatures and the emotional effect they produce that particularly distinguish this form of art. The tradition of visual story-telling is inseparable from the art of the three hamlets. A viewer can usually 'read' the narrative behind the images with ease, even if unfamiliar with the story. This principle of narrative tradition in art is grounded in the belief that artists must paint so as to make the picture clear to everyone without explanation or inscription. The roots of this feature can also be traced to icon painting. When portraying saints' lives, icon painters had to be able to produce a detailed narrative of a saint's life in an emotionally moving and convincing manner.

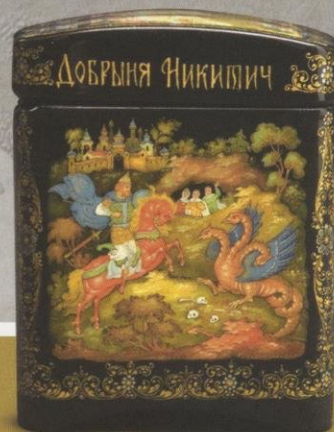


MODERN PALEKH, MSTYORA AND KHOLUI MINIATURES

The twentieth century history of Palekh, Mstyora and Kholui as centers of lacquer miniature painting is a fascinating story of the quest for unique individual and village styles amidst powerful state policies and a changing market. Following the dictates of the state, artists often had to focus on 'socially significant' subjects, such as industrial landscapes, portraits of party leaders, and various economic and political achievements of the socialist state. Not only commercial, but sometimes even physical survival of artists (as was the case in the 1930s) frequently depended on the 'right' choice of themes. Yet, at the same time and perhaps ironically, the state's active patronage of arts and crafts ensured that each school evolved into an individual tradition where artists and students were learning and working together, simultaneously creating a modern canon and ensuring its continuity. Because of this involvement, Palekh, Mstyora and Kholui emerged as easily identifiable and very distinct schools of art, rather than disparate groups of individual craftsmen.

from left to right

- V. Bogdanov, *The Bogatyri (Knights) of the Land of Russia*, Palekh, 2004. See checklist No. 37.
- M.V. Komarov, *The Golden Calf*, Kholui, 2003. See checklist No. 60.
- V. Zaitsev, *The Enchanted World*, Mstyora. See checklist No. 23.



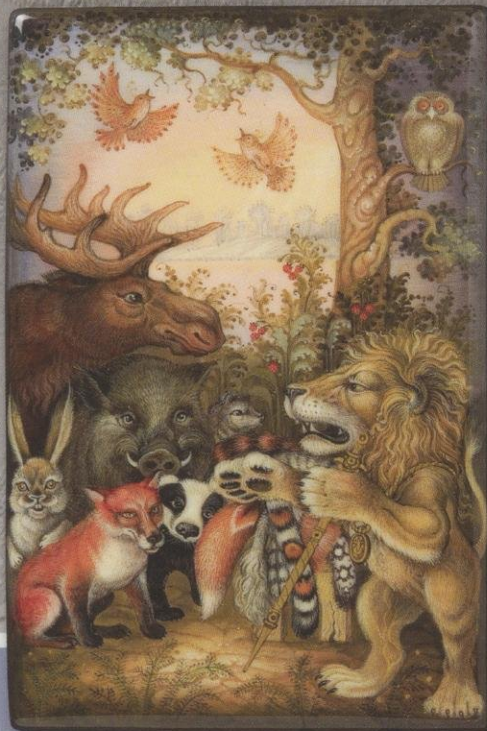
The Palekh School

The Palekh school remains the most renowned among the three traditions for its high artistic standards and refined flowing style of drawing and painting. Palekh lacquers are easily recognized by their overall deep black background and generous application of gold paint throughout the whole image, dramatic and contrasting colors, elongated figures, very dynamic, elegant and often 'swirl-like' draftsmanship, sometimes referred to as 'the singing line'. The human figure is always at the center of Palekh compositions. Besides traditional themes from Russian folklore, historical events and illustrations to literary works, Palekhians have perfected the 'lyrical' theme: scenes of courtship, dancers and musicians and country wedding escorts.



The Kholui School

The boxes coming from Kholui are more rooted in the Russian folk art tradition—the style is simpler, the lines are less precise, while the composition is full of folk motives and decorative elements. The color schemes are usually more diverse and slightly less harmonious than those in Palekh works. Thematically, Kholui lacquers are very diverse and the artists are successful at architectural landscapes, ancient Russian cities, churches, and famous architectural monuments of Moscow and St. Petersburg.



The Mstyora School

The Mstyora school is known for a bright, colorful palette and clarity of expression. Landscape is traditionally very prominent in Mstyora compositions. Unlike Palekh, Mstyora artists retained the blue skies in their works. The often brown foreground and the blue of the sky create a symbolic perspective in Mstyora images. The colors are usually softer than in the dramatic Palekh, often with a preference for cream, pale blue and chartreuse. Black is used for framing the image and the overall treatment of the box, while gold is generally reserved for the border ornamentation. In contrast to Palekh, Mstyora figures are usually short and a little stocky, but they are always on the move. Thematically, Mstyora artists are as fond of traditional folk and literary subjects as Palekh and Kholui. At the same time, still life and flower compositions with intricate ornaments have been popular with Mstyora artists.

THE COLLECTION

This exhibition consists of sixty works by contemporary artists. Many of them have already gained recognition and their works can be found in decorative art museums and private collections. A few of the presented artists belong to artistic dynasties of Palekh and Kholui and continue within their family traditions while searching for new expressive means and individual style.

About half of the boxes in the exhibition are decorated by Palekh artists, including the well-known A. D. Kochupalov (*Vassilisa the Beautiful*), A. Katukhina (*Untitled*), and O. Terentyeva (*Tale of the Frog Princess, Country Fortune Telling*). The Kholui artists include such famous contemporary painters as Nikolai Baburin (*My Dear Birthplace*) and Nikolai Denisov (*Stages of the Long Journey*).

Two artists in this exhibition represent the Mstyora school (V. Chernyshev, *Mother*; V. Zaitsev, *The Enchanted World*).

Thematically, the presented collection is very diverse. The main bulk of it covers Russian fairy tales, both folk and those written by such famous writers as Alexander Pushkin (e.g. *Ruslan and Lyudmila, The Tale of the Fisherman and the Golden Fish, The Tale of the Golden Cockerel, The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, etc.), Petr Yershov (*The Little Humpbacked Horse*), and Sergei Aksakov (*The Scarlet Flower*).

Alexander Pushkin's poems and fairy tales have been a particular favorite of lacquer miniaturists. This exhibition showcases lacquer boxes with very detailed and beautifully executed representations of Pushkin's themes. For example, in Lerin's *Pushkin's Fairy Tales*

the stories can be literally read line-by-line. The lid of a highly ornate and detailed miniature illustrates the finale of *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* when Prince Guidon shows his father around the magical kingdom, full of wonders: a little squirrel cracking nuts of solid gold, thirty three stalwart knights, and a wonderful princess with a crescent in her braids. The flowing design of the sides of the box produces an uninterrupted pictorial sequence with *Ruslan* defeating the Head from *Ruslan and Lyudmila*; the fisherman and his greedy wife, sitting by



■ A. D. Kochupalov, *The Tale of Vassilisa the Beautiful*, Palekh, 1994. See checklist No. 35.



A. Lerin, *Pushkin's Fairy Tales*, Palekh, 1999. See checklist No. 1.

the broken wash basin from *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Golden Fish*; the *Seven Knights* from *The Tale of the Dead Princess*; *The Priest and his Handyman*; and the lovely queen of Shamakha from *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*.

Although similar themes can be found on several boxes, each artist treats them differently by focusing on particular elements of the narrative, creating a different time sequence and mood for each scene, transforming his or her own interpretation of the story and its characters into a very personal narrative.



Among the literary themes, two boxes attract special attention. They represent Soviet literature: M. Komarov *The Golden Calf*, a satirical novel by I. Ilf and Yev. Petrov, and V. Chernyshev *Mother*, a revolutionary novel by M. Gorky. Komarov's work is particularly interesting, brilliantly conveying in a grotesque form the adventures of Ostap Bender, a small time con artist dreaming of an escape from Soviet reality. A Kholui painter, Komarov relies on the conventional style, and yet this box is an example of a modern and very individual approach that goes beyond tradition.

Another notable theme in the collection is architectural landscapes of old Russian cities and cultural monuments. This theme is represented in the collection by Gusarov's *Kizhi*, Kiselyov's *Moscow Kremlin*, Komarova's *Russian Churches*, and Arkhipov's *St. Petersburg* – all Kholui artists. *Kizhi*, in particular, is mesmerizingly beautiful. It portrays a magnificent seventeenth century complex of wooden churches on the Onega Lake in northern Russia. This and the other Kholui architectural landscapes are examples of the influence of easel painting on traditional decorative art, and, like *The Golden Calf*, these boxes represent the new, more individualized style favored by many young contemporary artists.

Since these three centers of lacquer painting are located in very picturesque places, many artists find inspiration in their surroundings. N. Baburin's *My Dear Home* is a wonderful example of a stylized image of Kholui. Yet, a mere landscape would be insufficient for a lacquer miniaturist. The box tells a complete story about Kholui—the history of its crafts, the artists at work, past and present images of the village interspersed with sneaking signs of modernity such as a car.



■ M. Komarov, *Three Years of Dobrynyushka's Life in Kiev*, Kholui, 2002. See checklist No. 39.



■ A. Katukhina, *Untitled (based on Snegurochka, the Snowmaid)*, Palekh, 1997. See checklist No. 33.

Educational Programs

A lecture by Darya Vassina, who researched and wrote this gallery guide, will be given on Thursday, December 14 at 5:30 p.m. in Room L140. Gallery hours will be extended to 5:30 p.m. before this lecture.

Support

Generous funding has been provided by Hilldale Fund, UW-Madison Center for Russia, East Europe and Central Asia (CREECA), and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

I Alexander Pushkin's Fairy Tales



1 A. Lerin Palekh 1999

Pushkin's Fairy Tales

Selected scenes from a number of Alexander Pushkin's fairy tales are illustrated on this box by Lerin. The style is refined, and the composition is complex and flowing, seamlessly moving from one plot to another. The lid depicts Prince Guidon showing his father Tsar Saltan the wonders of his island: the squirrel cracking golden nuts with emerald cores, the army of thirty three mighty knights, the fair princess with a moon under her braid. Tsar Saltan sees his long-lost wife and realizes that Prince Guidon is his son. The sides of the box show the old Tsar Dadon meeting the enchanting Queen of Shamakha (*The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*), Ruslan taking possession of the magic sword after having defeated in battle the Giant Head (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*), and the characters from the Introduction to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*: the green oak tree by the sea side, the learned cat chained to it by a gold chain, and the mermaid resting among the oak tree branches. Night and day the cat is circling around the tree. When he turns to the right, he sings a song, when he turns to the left, he tells a fairy tale.

2 V. Darovskikh Palekh 1999

Pushkin

The lid of this lovely miniature box is decorated with a portrait of Alexander Pushkin composing his magical poems. Each of the remaining eight facets of the box carries an image from one of these tales. Prince Guidon is looking at the approaching sailing ship bringing him his father, Tsar Saltan:

Through his spyglass, Prince Guidon sees the royal fleet sail on; While on deck, his father stands, spyglass also in his hands.

The victorious Prince Oleg of Kiev (*The Song of Prince Oleg's Prophecy*) is approaching the sorcerer to inquire about his fate: "What will happen to me? How will my life end?" Ruslan is fighting evil Chernomor, trying to slice off his beard and thus defeat him (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*); the handyman Balda is trying to make the devil pay taxes (*The Tale of the Priest and his Handyman Balda*), while the beautiful princess is waking up in her crystal casket to greet her fiancée Prince Elisei (*The Tale of the Dead Princess*). The style of this modern Palekh box is closer to that of easel painting than traditional Palekh miniatures.

3 S. A. Makarova Palekh 1993

Pushkin's Fairy Tales

This is a lovely box with images from the most popular tales by Alexander Pushkin: *The Tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Knights*; *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*; *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*; and *The Golden Cockerel*.

4 S. Repkina Palekh 1996

Pushkin's Fairy Tales

Each scene from Alexander Pushkin's fairy tales depicted on this box is accompanied by the corresponding lines from his works. The lid is painted with a series of scenes from *The Tale of the Dead Princess*, while the sides of the box carry medallions set in exquisite ornament with various images from Pushkin's other fairy tales, such as *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, *The Golden Cockerel*, and *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. This box is also a beautiful example of how masterfully the lines of the stories can be woven into the ornament of the miniature.

5 A. Zotov Palekh

Pushkin

Each facet of this box carries an image from Alexander Pushkin's fairy tales and poems. Prince Guidon from *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* is waiting on the shore for the arrival of the Tsar's fleet, the fisherman is asking the golden fish to grant his wife another wish (*The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*), the prophet is telling Prince Oleg his fate, a happy couple is enjoying a fast ride in a troika (*Winter Morning*), and Prince Yelisei is looking for his vanished bride (*The Tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Knights*).

6 N. Petrov Kholui

Tsar Saltan (based on Alexander Pushkin's *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*)

Tsar Saltan overhears three sisters who are confiding to each other their views on the subject of happiness. If chosen to be the tsar's bride, one is going to weave a lot of fine cloth, the second one is going to cook a great feast, while the youngest one is dreaming of a healthy and strong son. The youngest is chosen by Saltan for his bride. While the tsar is at war, the jealous sisters plot against the young queen, who with her little son Guidon is consigned to the waves in a barrel, which drifts onto an island. One day the grown Prince Guidon saves a swan from a predatory kite. The prince is rewarded with magic powers enabling him to build a Wonder City on the island, while the swan turns into a princess and consents to share his throne. Returning from the wars, Tsar Saltan hears of the famous island, and journeying there is reunited with his wife and son.



7 A. Titov and M. Titov Palekh 2004

Thirty Three Knights (based on *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* by Alexander Pushkin)

This box illustrates one of the miracles in the Wonder City of Prince Guidon: the thirty three mighty knights and their leader – Uncle Chernomor – as they appear from the depth of the sea to provide defense to the Wonder City.

8 S. Lebedeva Palekh 2005

Untitled (based on Alexander Pushkin's *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*)

This beautiful box represents various scenes from the tale, including the three miracles of the Wonder City: the thirty three mighty knights, the squirrel cracking golden nuts, and the beautiful princess with the shining moon under her braid. Although scenes from this fairy tale are found on a few other boxes in this collection, this box is distinctive for its minute size and is unusual for a Palekh artist's choice of background color—deep teal instead of black.

9 Unknown artist Kholui

The Tale of the Golden Cockerel (based on the fairy tale by Alexander Pushkin)

Frustrated by constant plotting of a neighboring hostile ruler, Tsar Dadon receives a gift of a golden cockerel from an astrologer. With

the bird watching over the city, the Tsar may sleep; danger will be sounded by a warning cav. At the cockerel's first alarm, the Tsar dispatches his two sons to lead his army, at the second, he decides to go himself to the field of battle. He discovers the bodies of his sons who seem to have killed one another. From a nearby tent there emerges a lovely Queen of Shamakha. She completely infatuates and fools the old Dadon, who asks her to marry him. On their return to the capitol, the astrologer reminds Dadon of his promised token of gratitude. The astrologer asks for the Tsar's bride. Infuriated, Dadon slays the astrologer. The queen deserts him, and he is killed by the golden beak of the avenging cockerel.

10 A.A. Zhukov Kholui 1996

The Tale of the Golden Cockerel (based on the fairy tale by Alexander Pushkin)

Compare this box with the Kholui unknown artist's box with the same title (no. 9).

11 M.V. Komarov Kholui 1998

The Tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Knights

Similar to the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, this fairy tale by Alexander Pushkin is about an evil step-mother who is jealous of a young princess and decides to get rid of her. She sends the princess to a forest and then tries to poison her with an apple. But the princess enjoys friendship and protection of seven brothers-knights and is eventually rescued by her fiancée, Prince Yelisei.

12 M.M. Veselov Kholui, 2002

Crown Prince Yelisei (The Tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Knights) by Alexander Pushkin)

Prince Yelisei searched all over the world for his lost fiancée. Meanwhile the princess has been poisoned by her step-mother, too jealous of the young princess' beauty.

Prince Yelisei turns for help to the sun, the moon, and eventually the wind in his desperate attempts to find his fiancée. The composition of the box is reminiscent of that of an icon, with the central character in the middle and smaller-sized scenes in the margins, producing a coherent narrative.



13 B. I. Kiselev Kholui 1994

The Tale of the Dead Princess (based on Alexander Pushkin's fairy tale)

Compare this box with others of the same title (see Nos. 11, 12, 14).

14 A. Zavarikhin Palekh 2001

(based on *The Tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Knights* by Alexander Pushkin)

This box depicts the finale of the story, when Prince Yelisei is bringing back the beautiful princess to her father. The evil and jealous step-mother learns from her magic mirror that the princess is alive and well.

15 V. Terentyev Palekh 1999

The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish

Once upon a time there lived a poor fisherman. One day he caught a magical golden fish who promised to fulfill any of his wishes if he let her go. He was a kind man and simply let her go free. After hearing the story, the fisherman's greedy wife sent him back to the

sea—she needed a new trough. The fish granted the wish, and a new trough magically appeared at the old couple's hut. But the fisherman's wife now wanted more: a new house, to become a noble lady, and, eventually, the Queen of the Land. Every time she sent her old husband to the shore, the golden fish would fulfill the wishes. However, the woman now wished to be the Empress of all Land and the Sea, and the golden fish to be her servant. The fisherman went back to the shore, called the fish and explained the last wish of his wife. The golden fish disappeared without a word. When the old man returned home, he found his old mud hut, his poor old wife, and the original broken trough.

16 A. Arsenyev Palekh 1996

Ruslan and Lyudmila (based on a fairy tale by Alexander Pushkin)

On her wedding day Lyudmila, the beautiful princess of Kiev, is kidnapped. Her new husband Ruslan and his three former rivals Rogday, Farlaf and Ratmir set on separate journeys to try and find her. Ruslan meets a good wizard who tells him that Lyudmila has been kidnapped by the evil sorcerer Chernomor. During his quest to find the sorcerer, Ruslan is forced into a battle with his jealous rival Rogday and kills him. A short while after, Ruslan meets a giant Head on a battlefield and defeats it in a battle. The Head tells Ruslan that all of Chernomor's power is contained in his long beard and gives Ruslan a sword to cut it off. When Ruslan arrives at Chernomor's castle they battle for two days and Ruslan manages to slice off the beard. Ruslan carries the unconscious Ludmila back to Kiev. But on the way back he meets treacherous Farlaf who plunges a sword into Ruslan at night, leaving him to die. Farlaf brings Lyudmila back to her father. Meanwhile the city of Kiev is besieged by enemies. Revived by a good wizard, Ruslan saves the city. He then goes to his bride-to-be and awakens her with a magic ring. Ruslan and Lyudmila are together again and live happily ever after.

II Other Fairy Tales and Bylinas (Russian narrative and epic poems)

17 O. Repkina Palekh 2004

The Scarlet Flower (based on the tale by Sergei Aksakov *The Scarlet Flower* and influenced by the traditional story of *Beauty and the Beast*)

The plot begins when a father must leave on a trip and promises to return with gifts for each of his three daughters. The youngest daughter asks for a scarlet flower that she saw in a dream. The father finds the flower, but it is on the property of a terrible forest creature who takes him as a prisoner. The youngest daughter tracks her father down, earns his freedom, and eventually falls in love with the beast, who is transformed into a handsome prince. This box depicts the scene from the story when the three merchant's daughters are admiring the gifts they asked their father to bring them: a magic mirror, a diamond crown, and a scarlet flower.

18 Prokofyev Palekh 1996

Untitled (based on the tale by Sergei Aksakov *The Scarlet Flower* and influenced by the traditional story of *Beauty and the Beast*)

This box is based on the same plot as O. Repkina's box; however, several scenes from the tale are represented, such as the conversation between the merchant and the beast when the merchant promises to come back in return for the flower, and the scenes in the beast's enchanted palace. The compositions of the scenes are very simple, and few of the traditional features of Palekh painting are present.

19 S. Makarova
Palekh 1997

The Tale of the Stone Flower
(based on a story by
Pavel Bazhov)

This is the most famous tale from the book *The Malachite Casket*, written by P. Bazhov, who based his stories on miners' tales from the Ural Mountains on the border between Europe and Asia. The mountains are famous as a source of precious stones such as malachite. This tale tells about the stone carver Danila who wants to discover the true beauty of the stones and secrets of stone carving. The Mistress of the Copper Mountain is believed to hold these secrets and to bestow the ability to turn gems 'into living beauty' on those who abandon this world and serve her exclusively. Torn between the need for artistic inspiration and his love for a village girl named Katya, Danila initially goes to the Copper Mountain to learn the secrets of stone carving. But he misses his beloved Katya and finally chooses her over the Mistress of the Copper Mountain. Impressed by his sacrifice, the Mistress of the Copper Mountain sends Danila back home without taking away the artistic talent he has acquired while in her service.

20 N. Ravinina
Palekh 2002

Untitled (based on
fables by Ivan Krylov)

Ivan Andreyevich Krylov (1769–1844) was the most famous Russian fabulist. Some of Krylov's earlier fables are loosely based on Aesop and Jean de La Fontaine, but later fables are his own creation. The box's sides represent scenes from the fables *Demian's Fish Soup* (on excessive hospitality), *The Cat and the Cook* (on resorting to action rather than words when authority needs to be exercised), *The Wolf in the Kennel* (on the futility of negotiating with the cunning enemy), and *Trishka's Coat* (on 'improvements' that make the original situation worse). The satirical tone of the fables is skillfully captured in these miniature images.

21 E.A. Vlasov
Kholui 2000

The Twelve Months (based
on a fairy tale by S. Marshak)

On a cold January day an evil step mother sent her poor stepdaughter to the forest to pick snowdrops for her stepsister's birthday. Although it was January and the first snow drops would appear only in the spring, the little girl had no choice but to go to the forest. There she met twelve men, from very young to very old, dressed in rich clothes. They represented twelve months of the year. The twelve months felt sorry for her, and decided to help her by bringing spring into the forest. The girl picked tender spring flowers and put them in her basket. The box is decorated by beautiful images of the twelve months swiftly but smoothly succeeding each other.

22 S. M. Dmitriev
Kholui 1998

*The Tale of the
Sleeping Beauty*

The box has a very unusual shape (a little hut) which tells the story of the Sleeping Beauty – a princess upon whom an evil witch cast a spell on her sixteenth birthday. She will wake up only if found and kissed by a prince. A good witch managed to soften the spell by putting to sleep the whole kingdom, so that when the princess wakes up she could see familiar faces around. The story is known as one of Charles Perrault's best fairy tales.

23 V. Zaitsev
Mstyora

The Enchanted World
(In the beginning only
the lion had a tail...)

A tale of unknown origin.



24 N. Petrov
Kholui 2004

*The Tale of the Little
Humpbacked Horse* (based on
the tale by Petr Yershov)

Once upon a time there was a peasant family that owned a wheat field. One morning they found that during the night, someone had been trampling around in the field and ruining the wheat. Ivan, the youngest of the three brothers, whom everyone thought was the fool in the family, managed to catch the wonderful mare that had been destroying the field. He let the mare go in exchange for two golden-maned steeds of unheard-of beauty and a small humpbacked horse that would become Ivan's best friend. One day Ivan found a shiny feather dropped by a firebird and kept it, despite his pony's warning not to touch it. This led to a series of adventures and troubles for Ivan, but eventually, with the little horse's help he overcomes them, catches the firebird, marries a beautiful tsar-maiden and rules the land.

25 N. Petrov
Kholui

*The Tale of the Little
Humpbacked Horse* (based
on the tale by Petr Yershov)

Similar to Petrov's other box based on the same tale, this box has almost identical selections of scenes. The boxes differ, however, in the shape, choice of color and drawing technique. The drawing on this box is less defined; the figures are more stocky and static. However, these features are compensated by a lavish use of intricate, lace-like gold ornament framing four scenes on the sides of the box, as well as a luminous multi-figured image on the lid.

26 V. Terentyev
Palekh 2002

*The Sun, the Moon, and the
Raven Voronovich*

This box depicts a Russian folk tale about an old man who marries his three daughters off to the sun, the moon and the Raven Voronovich. After visiting each of his sons-in-law, the old man tries to imitate their magical powers at home, but fails.

27 S.A. Zakharov
Kholui 2001

The Seven Simeons (based
on a folk tale)

This box's imagery is based on the same story as that of N. Veselov's box (no. 28). This is also a Kholui box, but is different from Veselov's not only in shape and size (five images instead of one), but also in the selection of scenes and the style of execution. It is a more refined piece of art, with a well-defined drawing, more generous use of gold ornament, richer and more nuanced color pallet, and an overall higher level of craftsmanship.

28 N. Veselov
Kholui 2002

The Seven Simeons

The tale tells a story of seven brothers – seven Simeons. Each of them has a particular talent: the two eldest brothers can forge and install in the ground such a tall post that when the next brother climbs it, he can see all the lands and seas of the world. Another brother can build a magic ship, which yet another brother can navigate under water. Yet another brother is a superb merchant. Only the youngest of the seven Simeons turns out to be a thief. One day the tsar of that land hires the brothers to find a beautiful princess for him to marry. When the brothers arrive in the kingdom where the princess lives, the youngest brother lures her onto their ship and brings her back across the ocean to the tsar. All the brothers get generously rewarded by the tsar.

29 V. Terentyev Palekh 2001

The Tale of the Frog Princess

One tsar ordered his three sons to marry. Each was to shoot an arrow and marry the woman who finds it. The eldest brother's arrow was picked up by a nobleman's daughter, the middle brother's arrow landed in the yard of a merchant's daughter, while the youngest son's arrow went into a swamp. He discovered that a frog had found the arrow, so he had to marry the frog. When the tsar ordered his daughters-in-law to make him fine shirts and bake him delicious bread, the frog turned into a beautiful princess, Vassilisa the Wise (sometimes Vassilisa the Beautiful), at night when everyone else was sleeping, and made the best shirts and bread. The tsar then announced a feast at the palace and commanded his sons to come with their wives. There for the first time Vassilisa the Wise appeared for everyone to see, including her husband Ivan. Later at the dance, Vassilisa performed magical feats with the wave of her sleeves. The wives of the other sons tried to do the same but only succeeded in making a mess. Prince Ivan, the youngest son, wanted his wife to remain a beautiful princess, so he ran home and burned her discarded frog skin. Vassilisa sadly told him that now she would have to become the prisoner of the Sorcerer Koshchei the Deathless, and she disappeared. Searching for her in the forest, Prince Ivan spared several animals who promised to help him in the future. He then came to the hut of a Baba Yaga, a grandmother spirit, who told him he could only free his wife by killing Koshchei. Koshchei's death could be triggered by the breaking of a needle, which was well-hidden in an egg, inside of a duck, which was inside of a rabbit, sitting in a locked chest at the top of an oak tree. Although Ivan could not get the chest down from the tree himself, the animals he had spared broke each thing open until Ivan had the egg. He broke it, broke off the tip of the needle inside, and Koshchei died instantly. Ivan lived happily ever after with Vassilisa.

30 O. Terentyeva Palekh 1994

The Tale of the Frog Princess

This box illustrates the same tale as V. Terentyev's box (no. 29).

31 E.M. Efimov Palekh 1993

The Tale of the Frog Princess

This box also illustrates scenes from this fairy tale.

See V. Terentyev's box with the same title (no. 29).

32 N. Petrov Kholui

The Tale of the Frog Princess

This is another artistic interpretation of the popular folk tale about Ivan and Vassilisa the Wise (the Beautiful) upon whom Koshchei the Deathless casts a spell and turns her into a frog. Ivan fights Koshchei and breaks the terrible spell. This beautiful multi-tiered box is full of ornate and elaborate images illustrating various episodes from the story.

33 A. Katukhina Palekh 1997

Untitled (based on Snegurochka the Snowmaid).

A daughter was born to Spring and Frost. They called her Snegurochka ("sneg" means "snow" in Russian). She resembled her father Frost and her beauty was often compared to that of a sunny winter day. Snegurochka's life was carefree and happy in Frost's woodland. One year, when winter was coming to its end, Snegurochka's parents let her join the young people in the village, warning her to beware of Lel and his songs. She met an old childless couple and settled in the village with them. She attracted everybody's attention, but was unable to return love. Eventually, she understood this, became sad and called for her mother's help. Mother Spring was well aware of women's sorrows and presented her daughter with a wreath of blooming flowers. At once Snegurochka began to see everything about her through different eyes. She felt that she was able to love. When her glance met that of a young man who had previously been seeking her attention with no success, her heart caught fire and she... melted. This exquisitely painted box depicts the scene when Mother Spring talks to Snegurochka, with Lel in the background.

34 V. Baikalova Kholui 1998

Queen of the Night

This is an unusual piece executed in many shades of green, depicting the Queen of the Night and her helpers—the fairy tale characters who usually appear at night time—the mermaid, the forest fairy, and syrin, a fairy tale bird with a female head.

35 A. D. Kochupalov Palekh 1994

(based on The Tale of Vassilisa the Beautiful)

This is a wonderful work of art, reminiscent of the style of the classical Palekh artists with their characteristic 'flowing' depiction of human bodies and horses, laconic, but dramatic color scheme (clear shades of orange, gold, red, and chartreuse on the black background, with gold paint gleaming through the whole image), and the overall feel of dynamism and elegance of the composition. The story of *Vassilisa the Beautiful* is a variation on *The Tale of the Frog Princess* (no. 29).

36 V. Terentyev Palekh 2001

The Tale of Vassilisa the Beautiful

This is a variation on *The Tale of the Frog Princess*. There once lived a father who had three sons. Two of the boys chose regular brides, while the youngest, Ivanushka, brought home a frog from the marshes. But the frog was actually the beautiful Vassilisa, over whom Gorynych the Serpent had cast a magical spell when she refused to marry him. But Ivanushka did not renounce his love. He had to overcome many obstacles before he returned Vassilisa to her former appearance and killed the three-headed dragon. See no. 29.

37 V. Bogdanov Palekh 2004

The Bogatyri (Knights) of the Land of Russia

This box depicts four legendary bogatyri (powerful knights) from the country's stormy medieval history: Mikulya

Selyanovich, a mighty plowman who plows at a miraculous rate, Ilya Muromets, Alesha Popovich, and Dobrynya Nikitich – the knights at Prince Vladimir's court in Kiev. Their heroic feats of strength are devoted to defending their land and described in many *byliny* (Russian narrative epic poems).

38 M. Komarov Kholui 2001

Ivanushka Godinovich

The scene on the box is based on a *bylina* (a traditional Russian epic poem passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth), of the same name in which Ivanushka Godinovich finds a bride, a beautiful merchant's daughter, Marya Dimitrovna, and takes her with him to Kiev. However, the end of the story—of which there are many versions—is unhappy. Marya is unfaithful and meets her death at the hand of Ivanushka.

39 M. Komarov Kholui 2002

Three years of Dobrynyushka's life in Kiev (Based on the bylina, a traditional Russian epic poem passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth: For three years did Dobrynyushka live in the capital city of Kiev...)

The *bylina* tells about Dobrynya Nikitich in Kiev and his encounter with Marina, the witch, who turns him temporarily into a bull. The lid of this lovely box depicts Dobrynya shooting an arrow at a dove. For no reason, he misses and the arrow hits a window in Marina's house. In anger, Marina thinks of a way to punish Dobrynya.

40 V. Stroganov Palekh

Untitled

The imagery of this box is based on various Russian *bylinas* – epic stories about powerful and courageous knights defending the country against real and mythical enemies.

III Everyday Life and Genre Scenes

41 S. Zakharov Kholui 2000

My Kholui

This beautiful box shows different scenes of the village of Kholui, its architecture and people.

42 M. Arkhipov Kholui 1998

Neighbors

This box tells a contrasting story of two neighbors – a rich landlord and a poor peasant. While the landlord is spending his days enjoying life and the company of his wife, the poor peasant and his whole family toil on the land.

43 N. Baburin Kholui 2004

My Dear Home

This is a very poetic and heart-felt depiction of the village of Kholui. The box tells a detailed story of Kholui, the history of its crafts (embroidery, icon and lacquer painting), the artists' work, the past and present of the village, its peasant traditions and occupations (harvesting, making sour cabbage for winter), its people's pastimes (riding in a troika, singing and dancing), as well as its ancient architecture. A careful viewer will notice a few signs of modernity included in the traditional scenes, such as a car in the background of a traditional harvesting scene, contemporary clothes of the boaters, or a couple with a stroller on the pier. The four sides of the box also represent four different seasons of the year. (43 a-b Preliminary Studies of side panels for *My Dear Home*).

44 V. Terenyev Palekh 2002

The Serenade

This is an unusual genre scene set in either Spain or Italy and showing a young man serenading his beloved. The costume detailing draws attention to the fusion of European medieval and Renaissance elements and traditional Russian folk costume details.

45 B. Volkova Kholui 1999

Falcon Hunting

This is a genre scene depicting an ancient type of hunting in Russia. Falcon hunting came to Russia from Asia (Mongolia and Kazakhstan) during the period of the Mongol-Tartar Yoke (1243-1480). During the reign of Russian Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (1629-1676), falconry in Russia was historically important: falconers from Western Europe were sent to Russia to be educated and instructed at the tsar's falconry court, which kept about 3,000 gyrfalcons – the strongest and the most beautiful birds of prey used in falconry. In Russia, gyrfalcons were the prerogative of the tsar and his select retinue. Even the nobility (let alone the peasantry) were not allowed to deal with gyrfalcons. When diplomats from Persia or Sweden came to Russia, the best diplomatic present was a gyrfalcon – a present like that could even prevent a war between the nations. At the end of the eighteenth century when firearms appeared, falcon hunting was scaled down.

46 V. Veselova Kholui 2004

A Wedding

This charming miniature shows newlyweds in a cart, greeted in a traditional Russian manner with bread and salt at the doorsteps of their new home.

47 O. Terentyeva Palekh 1997

Fortune Telling on the Eve of the Holy Theophany (Baptism of Christ)

There is an ancient Russian tradition of fortune telling on the eve of Baptism (19 January) when young unmarried girls try to find out if they will get married in the coming year, and who will ask for their hand in marriage. This box represents various popular ways of finding out one's fortune on this day. One of these traditions is to throw a shoe over the fence and see who will pick it up. Another is reading one's fortune with the help of candles and a mirror. The images on the box are both playful and serious, skillfully conveying a mixture of excitement and apprehension felt by the young girls.

48 Yu. Medvedeva Palekh

Untitled (based on a popular Russian folk song *A snow whirl is rushing along the street...*)

A snow whirl is rushing along the street...

and through the snow whirl there goes a beautiful girl.

You, stand still, please stand still, my beautiful girl,

my joy, please, allow me to take a look at you!

At your charming beauty, at your bright face.

You, stand still, please stand still, my beautiful girl,

my joy, please, allow me to take a look at you!

Your beauty makes me lose my mind and all my strength, my good lad!

You, stand still, please stand still, my beautiful girl,

my joy, please, allow me to take a look at you!

49 T. Milyushina Kholui 1998

Christ Has Risen

The title of the box is a reference to a Russian Orthodox greeting on Easter day "Christ has risen." The reply is "He has risen indeed." Then people usually kiss on both cheeks three times, as seen on the left hand side of the box. The center of the box shows the church interior with a priest announcing the resurrection of Christ to the parishioners. On the right hand side, a Russian Easter meal is depicted with a traditional cake and painted eggs.

IV History



50 O. A. Kopienko Kholui 1999

*Stenka Razin (based on a popular song *From beyond the wooded island...*)*

Stepan (Stenka) Timofeyevich Razin (1630-1671) was a Cossack leader who led a major uprising against the nobility and the tsar's bureaucracy in Southern Russia. The folk song about Razin tells a story of his marriage to a Persian princess and the unease it created among Razin's followers. To restore peace and the sense of camaraderie, Razin throws the young woman into the Volga River where she drowns. The Russian melody was used by Tom Springfield in the song *The Carnival is Over* that placed The Seekers at #1 in 1965 in Australia and the UK.

From beyond the wooded island to the river wide and free proudly sailed the arrow-breasted ships of Cossack yeomanry.

On the first is Stenka Razin with his princess by his side drunken holds in marriage revels with his beauteous young bride.

From behind there comes a murmur "He has left his sword to woo; one short night and Stenka Razin has become a woman, too."

Now, with one swift mighty motion he has raised his bride on high and has cast her where the waters of the Volga roll and sigh.

51 V. Baikalova Kholui 1996

The Peddlers (based on a poem by Nikolai Nekrasov)

Written in an authentically folkloric style, this nineteenth century poem tells a simple and tragic story of two peddlers, Tichonych and Vanya, who are robbed and murdered by an impoverished forester, leaving Vanya's beloved, Katya, to wait in vain for his return. The happier part of the poem—Vanya's courtship—became widely known as a folk song, *Korobeiniki* (The Peddlers), which remains very popular to this day. The three distinct scenes on the box represent (from left to right) Vanya's courtship of Katya, a successful trading day for the peddlers, and, finally, the murder scene in the dark of the forest.

52 N. Petrov Kholui 2002

The Journey of Afanasii Nikitin Across Three Seas

The images on this box are based on the fifteenth century document by Afanasii Nikitin, a Russian merchant from the city of Tver (northwest of Moscow). In 1466-1472, Nikitin made a journey via Derbent and Baku to Persia and then further to India and described his adventures in a journal. Each facet of this two-tiered box represents a stage of his journey, starting with a farewell at home and continuing through the far-away exotic lands to the southeast of Russia.

V Architectural/ Landscape

53 A. Musatov Kholui

Kizhi

This box depicts the *pogost* (enclosure) of Kizhi located on one of the many islands in Lake Onega, in Karelia northwest of Russia. Two eighteenth century wooden churches and an octagonal clock tower, also in wood and built in 1862, can be seen there. These unusual constructions, in which carpenters created a bold, visionary architecture, perpetuate an ancient model of parish space and are in harmony with the surrounding landscape.

54 N. Komarova Kholui 1997

Russian Churches

Kholui artists have been very successful at painting architectural landscapes, ancient Russian cities, churches, and famous architectural monuments of Moscow and St. Petersburg. This box is an example of a poetic depiction of the architectural masterpieces of the Russian "Golden Ring" – a circle of ancient Russian cities to the northeast of Moscow. These old cities, including Vladimir, Suzdal, Kostroma, Yaroslavl, Rostov the Great, Pereslavl-Zalesskiy, and Sergiev Posad are steeped in history and boast some of the best and unique Russian architectural ensembles of the twelfth through seventeenth centuries.

55 N. Arkhipov Kholui 1998

St. Petersburg

This is a beautiful example of architectural landscape painting by a Kholui artist. The box is decorated with images of famous and most recognizable monuments of St. Petersburg, including the Winter Palace, the Admiralty, the Peter and Paul Fortress, St. Isaac's Cathedral, and the Monument to Peter the Great by Falconet.

56 V.V. Kiselyov Kholui

The Moscow Kremlin twelfth–nineteenth centuries, "Moskva"

The lid of this box shows the picturesque St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square in Moscow as well as the Kremlin monuments – the three cathedrals, the belfry and the towers of the Kremlin wall. The sides of the box are decorated with selected images of some other famous Moscow's churches.

57 M. Komarov Kholui 2002

The Fall

Komarov paints a very poetic Russian autumnal landscape in subdued shades of yellow, silver and brown, accentuated by the gold in the birch tree foliage. The birch tree is a traditional visual symbol of the Russian landscape, and the country itself.

VI Soviet Themes

58 N. N. Denisov Kholui 2001

Stages of the Long Journey

This box represents major milestones in the Russian/Soviet history: the October Revolution of 1917, the Civil War of 1918-1921, the introduction of electricity to Soviet Russia, World War II, and the reconstruction of the countryside after the war.

59 V.M. Chernyshev Mstyora 1973

Mother (based on the 1906 novel by Maxim Gorky)

This novel describes the awakening of revolutionary feeling in an ill-treated peasant woman. The image on the lid of the box illustrates the last scene in the novel, when the main character, Nilovna, (the mother), recognized by a traitor and facing arrest, is spreading revolutionary leaflets at the railway station. The mounted police are closing in on her. The box is painted in the naive simplistic style reminiscent of the Russian lubok style of folk painting.



60 M.V. Komarov Kholui 2003

The Golden Calf (based on a 1930 satirical novel by I. Ilf and Yevg Petrov)

Komarov's work brilliantly illustrates, in an exaggerated style, the adventures of Ostap Bender, a small-time con artist who dreams of riches and an escape from Soviet reality. The lid of the box shows Ostap Bender, towering like a puppeteer over the other characters of the book and opening the curtain, as if introducing the characters/puppets he is about to manipulate. The sides of the box depict many of the memorable episodes from the novel, such as car races and the adventure with the underground millionaire Mr. Koreiko and his suitcase full of money.

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Tuesday – Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Saturday – Sunday 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.