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Exhibition of the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy) at the Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris

From October 3rd to October 25th, 2024, in accordance with the Collaboration Agreement for 2024 between the Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris and the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy), an exhibition titled "Traditional Applied Arts of the Moscow Region as a Masterpiece of Russian Culture" was held at the Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris.

The official opening ceremony was attended by Kirill Viktorovich Rynda, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to UNESCO, Director of the Representation of the Ministry of science and higher education of Russia in France, Ms. Svetlana Viktorovna Zhilina, and Valentina Fedorovna Maximovich, President of the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy), doctor of pedagogical sciences, professor and academician of the Russian Academy of Education.

Paris hosted genuine masterpieces – diploma and student works from the Fedoskin Institute of Lacquer Miniature Painting, Bogorodsky Institute of Wood Carving, Sergiyev Posadski Toy Institute – affiliates of the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy) – in such traditional arts and crafts as Zhostovo decorative painting, Fedoskin lacquer miniature painting, artistic embroidery, metalworking (jewelry), and Bogorodskaya wood carving.

The exhibition included not only displays of these traditional crafts but also short lectures, educational talks, and workshops aimed at Russians and French citizens, including teachers of schools, members of diplomatic missions, children, teenagers and adults. Prior to our arrival, a schedule of events was prepared, enabling those interested in exploring Russian cultural heritage to register in advance.

Throughout their stay in Paris, more than 130 workshops were conducted. The total attendance of the exhibition exceeded 600 people, half of whom were French and representatives of other countries, such as Venezuela, Pakistan, and Poland.

The Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy) was represented by highly skilled artists, including candidates of pedagogical sciences Mikhail Alekseyevich Saltanov, director of the Fedoskin Institute of Lacquer Miniature Painting, Elena Vitalyevna Sayfulina, head of the Department of Artistic Embroidery, Marina Vladimirovna Churakova, head of the Department of Jewelry and Bone Carving, and third-year student Ekaterina Sergeevna Evdokimova from the Bogorodsky Institute of Wood Carving. The event was led by Valentina Fedorovna Maximovich, President of the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy), doctor of pedagogical sciences, professor and academician of the Russian Academy of Education.

The Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy) is the only institution in Russia offering higher education in the field of folk arts and crafts. It develops its own curricula, including continuing education courses and short-term workshops covering 23 different traditional crafts.

Prior to the exhibition in Paris, the content and focus of the workshops were discussed with Svetlana Viktorovna Zhilina, director of the Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris. Based on these discussions, the school developed comprehensive teaching programs and materials, including specific examples and templates for creative work, such as Zhostovo decorative painting, Fedoskin lacquer miniature painting, jewelry, embroidery and Bogorodskaya wood carving.

Each lesson with new students started with identifying basic knowledge and skills in the chosen craft. The outcome surpassed expectations: no child, whether Russian or French at the age of 6-7 years, abandoned their work incomplete or stopped attending classes altogether. Some children attended multiple sessions daily throughout the entire duration of the exhibition, demonstrating sustained interest and commitment.



Fig. 1. Workshop on Zhostovo decorative painting conducted by M.A. Saltanov, director of the Fedoskin Institute of Lacquer Miniature Painting

The enthusiasm and engagement of both children and parents showed that the workshop format effectively introduced them to new skills and helped them explore traditional crafts for the first time. Over 20% of participating adolescents returned daily, and some attended twice per day, showing strong dedication and passion for learning.

Teachers, particularly from French schools, also showed keen interest in enhancing their qualifications through workshops, expressing curiosity about both theoretical and practical aspects of traditional crafts.

For Fedoskin lacquer miniature painting, children aged 6-12 years could complete an ornamental composition using geometric elements cut out from foil, while older participants used oil paints to add a botanical motif in Zhostovo decorative painting (as seen in Fig. 1)².

At the jewelry workshop, children aged 12 years "hammered out" petals and leaves of a rose from copper, while older participants created a pendant with intricate detailing (see Fig. 2, 3).

² Fig. 1-7. Photo by the author.

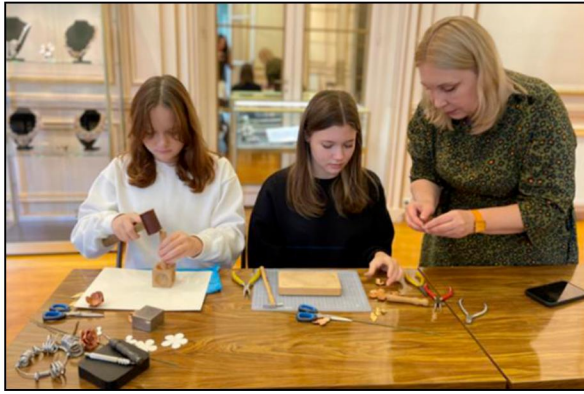


Fig. 2. Jewelry workshop – initial stage of forming the petals of a rose – conducted by M.V. Churakova, head of the Department of Jewelry and Bone Carving at the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy)



Fig. 3. Participants of the jewelry workshop with M.V. Churakova at the center

During the artistic embroidery workshop, participants had the opportunity to learn simple decorative stitches or more complex gold embroidery techniques. Each participant chose their own color scheme for the embroidery, explored and enhanced their finished work with beads, sequins, stitches, and chains (see Fig. 4, 5).



Fig. 4, 5. Embroidery workshop focusing on the "smooth silk" stitching technique

Special attention was drawn to the Bogorodskaya wood carving workshops (Fig. 6, 7), where participants carved figures of bears onto pre-cut blocks of wood. The task involved replicating realistic features of a bear – such as eyes, ears, nose, mouth, front and hind legs, and fur – onto the surface of the block. Each participant proudly carried away their completed bear, which symbolized Russia – strong, intelligent, and courageous. One teenager even built a plane with a bear sitting at the helm.

It is worth noting the high interest of the management of the Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris, particularly Svetlana Viktorovna Zhilina, in organizing a professionally executed exhibition that would avoid misrepresenting Russian culture through a simplistic approach. We share her vision and aim to ensure that the presentation accurately reflects Russian culture.



Fig. 6. Workshop on creating a movable wooden puppet figure of a squirrel



Fig. 7. Workshop on processing linden wood shavings for creating a flat bear figurine. Conducted by E.S. Evdokomova, instructor from the Bogorodsky Institute of Wood Carving

The successful and fruitful collaboration culminated in signing an additional agreement to the previously concluded contract between the Higher School of Folk Arts (Academy) and the Representative Office in France of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation. This supplementary agreement ("No. 1 dated October 27, 2024") extended the existing agreement from May 24, 2024, planning to organize a series of exhibitions and workshops at the Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris, highlighting regional historical types of traditional applied arts, such as artistic embroidery, lacquer miniature painting and jewelry.

These ongoing practices of holding exhibitions and workshops abroad serve not only as emotional experiences for those appreciating Russia's high-end cultural heritage but also help to foster an ethical perception of Russia itself.