

Solopova A.A., senior lecturer of the department of professional disciplines at the Institute of traditional applied arts – Moscow branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, 115573, Moscow, Musa Dzhalil' str., 14, corp. 2; e-mail: Cemetary.151@mail.ru

The content of the training in decorative painting “moscow letter”: historical aspect

Abstract. Based on archival sources introduced into scientific circulation for the first time, the article investigates changes in the content of training in the mastery of the decorative painting technique known as "Moskovskoe pismo" ("Moscow letter") during the period from 1977 to 2017. The analysis covers stages of transformation in educational practice, ranging from initial vocational education preparing performers for the "Khudozhestvennaya gravyura" ("Art engraving") industrial association to advanced professional preparation of highly skilled artists within higher education programs focused on creating original works of art. The findings of this research provide a foundation for developing current curricula in teaching the mastery of "Moscow letter" decorative painting within higher education institutions, thus ensuring preservation of the peculiarities inherent to this unique traditional form of traditional art crafts.

Keywords: traditional art crafts, decorative painting "Moscow letter", painting on metal, content of training in craftsmanship, Moscow school of art trades, higher education.

Over the past decade, Russia has witnessed a predictable increase in interest towards reviving and preserving unique but semi-forgotten forms of traditional art crafts. One such phenomenon is "Moscow letter" [11], a bright example of decorative painting that emerged in Moscow at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Distinguished by its vivid pictorial qualities, harmonious blending of genres, complex structure, wide spectrum of techniques, and decorative methods, "Moscow letter" achieved significant heights in the field of interior design. Issues concerning the formation of the distinctive features of "Moscow letter" decorative painting have been examined in the works of O.V. Fedotova [4] and G.V. Tsvetkov [7; 8]. The influence of migration on the development of traditional applied arts in the Moscow region, including the advancement of "Moscow letter" decorative painting, has been revealed in I.A. Shapovalova's study [9].

Professional training of decorative painting artists specializing in "Moscow letter" at the level of higher education becomes crucial amidst the threat of losing the aesthetic and technological particularities intrinsic to this art form. Such training serves as the primary means of safeguarding and thoughtfully advancing the cultural-historical heritage of the capital, thereby playing a significant role in its ongoing development. However, the process of reviving the decorative painting technique of "Moscow letter" has not previously been subjected to comprehensive

study or systematic organization regarding instruction at the university level. Consequently, there currently exists a problem associated with the objective necessity of developing a scientifically grounded curriculum for mastering the skills of "Moscow letter" decorative painting within higher education programs.

To address this issue, an analysis of the historical pedagogical experience in teaching the mastery of "Moscow letter" decorative painting was conducted. Previously unused documents were introduced into scholarly discourse for the first time. The core of the investigation consisted of archival materials, including academic journals, orders, diplomas of graduates from the Moscow school of art trades spanning the years 1977–2001, as well as periodic publications covering activities of the "Art engraving" production association. Furthermore, interviews were held with alumni of the Moscow school of art trades.

The Moscow school of art trades (currently the Institute of traditional applied arts – Moscow branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts) remains the sole institution dedicated to preserving and promoting the decorative painting technique known as "Moscow letter".

The history of establishment and development of the Moscow school of art trades has been described by O.V. Fedotova [5], I.A. Shapovalova, A.Yu. Butov, Y.S. Saltanova [10].

Although the department of decorative painting on metal was officially established at the Moscow school of art trades in 1975 [4, p. 61; 7, p. 105; 10, p. 19], our examination of archival records reveals that the first order admitting students to this department was issued only in 1977.

In 1977, the Moscow school of art trades functioned as a vocational technical institution, offering basic professional training for students majoring in "Painting on metal" specifically for employment at the "Art engraving" production association (Fig. 1³⁶). Based on the goal of educating metal painters, the curriculum content and specifications for assignments were structured accordingly.

Teachers responsible for practical training worked without instructional manuals or visual aids detailing the step-by-step process of executing individual painting elements. No methodological resources were available; samples provided by the "Art engraving" production association, such as painted trays, served as references. The primary teaching method involved demonstrating the painting process by experienced teachers accompanied by verbal explanations.

Thus, the content of future artists' training encompassed progressive acquisition of skills related to "quick writing", copying and creating variations of trays decorated with Zhostovo-style paintings. This system ensured the necessary professional proficiency required for obtaining a qualification grade and working at the enterprise.

Starting from 1987, the Moscow school of art trades entered a new phase in teaching the mastery of decorative painting. This change occurred because former graduates began taking teaching positions at the school. Active restoration efforts

³⁶ Fig. 1. Photo from the private archive of L.L. Nemkovich, graduate of the Moscow school of art trades (studied from 1978 to 1981).

for the decorative painting technique known as "Moscow letter" commenced, facilitated by close collaboration between the Moscow school of art trades, the "Art engraving" production association and the scientific research institute of art industry.



Fig. 1. Students of the Moscow school of art trades practicing in the workshop of decorative painting at the "Art engraving" production association



Fig. 2. Grigory Viktorovich Tsvetkov presenting his work – a painted tray entitled "Melody of white nights"

An important factor contributing to the revival of the decorative painting technique known as "Moscow letter" was the active reinterpretation and adaptation of products manufactured by the "Art engraving" production association by instructors and students of the Moscow school of art trades. Particularly notable contributions were made by G.V. Tsvetkov, who carried out a creative experiment based on production samples, refining the technological aspects of tray painting (Fig. 2³⁷).

³⁷ Photo from the private archive of G.V. Tsvetkov.

The training program included sequential mastery of three decorative painting techniques: "alla prima", "transparent painting" and "multi-layered painting", along with the creation of independently designed projects. Students underwent internships at the "Art engraving" production association, which fostered improvement in artistic and technological foundations and professional skills.

In 1990, the Moscow school of art trades was converted into a specialized secondary educational institution. By Order No. 111 of Rossouzmestprom dated 1991, it was reorganized into an advanced-level specialized secondary educational institution – a college.

During the course of the study, attendance logs for theoretical studies of college students from 1992 to 2001 were analyzed from the archives of the educational institution. Groups studied from 1992–1994 with a three-year term of study and groups from 1995–1999 and 1997–2001 with a four-year term of study were taken for analysis.

From 1992 to 2001, the training program covered the following components: development of drawing skills; training in the "alla prima" technique when completing exercises and trays named "Poppy flowers", "Tenderness", "Rowan berry", "Kalinka"; instruction in the "transparent painting" technique when performing plant ornaments and trays named "Narcissus", "Fruits"; learning the "multi-layered painting" technique when completing exercises like "Scattered fruit", "Rose bud" and the tray named "Fruit bowl".

On subsequent courses, students faced more challenging tasks: decorating trays according to their own compositions ("For memory"), miniature flower painting exercise, replicating box decorations ("Flowers"), painting boxes with landscapes, brooch decorations and bird depiction exercises. On the concluding course, students completed academic assignments such as "Architectural landscape" and "Female portrait". Introducing these topics into the training program was closely linked to solid preparatory grounding in academic drawing and painting. Since 1983, analogous themes had already been incorporated into the syllabi of these disciplines. Throughout their studies, students engaged in decorating metal trays, boxes and plates made of hardboard.

Diploma works completed in 1999 and 2001 predominantly featured floral motifs alongside landscapes, ornaments, symbolic elements and female figures (Figs. 3³⁸, 4). Decoration was performed on various forms: large trays, sets consisting of trays with accompanying boxes or glasses and pairs of small trays.

Authoritative art historians were invited as reviewers of student works. Among them in 1999 were V.A. Baradulin, candidate of art history, honored worker of culture of Russia; L.N. Goncharova, candidate of art history, senior research fellow at the State historical museum; and Z.G. Malaeva, senior research fellow at the All-Russian museum of decorative, applied and folk arts.

³⁸ Figs. 3-6. Photos from the methodological fund of the Institute of traditional applied arts – Moscow branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts.



Fig. 3. I.L. Smirnov. Diploma work on the theme: "Lake – remembrance..." (One item from set – winged tray). 1999.



Fig. 4. M.I. Kalinina. Diploma work on the theme: "Lady of the Copper mountain" (One item from set – rectangular tray). 1999.

The activity of the Moscow school of art trades received high recognition from the Ministry of education of the Russian Federation. In 2002, the school obtained a license to conduct educational activities at the higher education level. "Establishing a higher educational institution marked a powerful impetus for transforming and developing the system of professional education in this field at the dawn of the twenty-first century, becoming a significant event not only in Russian but also in international art pedagogy" [5, p. 55]. Significant contribution to this achievement was made by doctor of pedagogical sciences, professor, member of the Russian academy of education, honored teacher of the Russian Federation, V.F. Maksimovich, who served as director of the school since 1984.

The content of training in the mastery of "Moscow letter" decorative painting for undergraduate students, which was built upon identified traditions of instruction embedded in college-level training programs, was significantly expanded. The curriculum was developed with consideration for a six-year duration of study and included an extended list of assignments. The program comprised seven sections and twenty-six topics. Three sections were devoted to studying the techniques of "Moscow letter" decorative painting: "alla-prima", "transparent painting" and "multilayered painting"; two sections focused on exploring the specifics of miniature representations; another two sections addressed the execution of compositions independently devised by students.

For the first time, specialized didactic tools were created for teaching the mastery of "Moscow letter" decorative painting at the undergraduate level. Initial textbooks were authored by O.V. Fedotova [3] and G.V. Tsvetkov [6]; a textbook was prepared by I.Yu. Arkhangelskaya [1]. Teachers developed visual aids illustrating the step-by-step execution of separate elements and motifs of decorative painting. These tools were extensively utilized in classes. Educators demonstrated the execution of individual painting elements, conducted workshops and offered recommendations for improving the quality of work.

Graduation qualifying works of students enrolled in this program exhibited a broad variety of shapes and formats, represented by small three-dimensional objects such as chests, boxes and tabletop accessory sets. Miniature painting techniques dominated the majority of these creations. For instance: a chest created by A. Avramenko includes depictions of human figures, birds, landscapes and clusters of flowers; E. Emelyanova's graduation project showcases a leaf-shaped tray and three apple-shaped boxes adorned with images of apple branches with leaves and blooms, insects, birds, landscapes and still-life scenes (Fig. 5); at the centerpiece of N. Petyankina's work is a multifigured composition surrounded by lily blossoms and ornaments inspired by traditional carved window frames; V. Yurkova's desktop bureau features landscape paintings portraying Chekhovian locations, emphasizing objects and flowers on the desk, along with a portrait of the writer (Fig. 6); Safonov's chest-box "Borodino" achieves a harmonious blend of still-life and landscape motifs.



Fig. 5. E. Emelyanova. Graduation qualifying work on the topic: "Application of mixed technique in depicting landscape and floral motifs on lacquered items 'Apple savior'" (tray and three boxes)



Fig. 6. V. Yurkova. Graduation qualifying work on the topic: "Decoration of furniture items with decorative painting 'Walks with A.P. Chekhov'" (desktop bureau)

These works indicate a high level of training among students. Graduates successfully solved complex educational and creative challenges involving the combination of various painting genres – still life, landscape, narrative compositions featuring humans and ornaments – in a single work. However, almost no brushstroke painting technique, which is a hallmark of "Moscow letter" and fundamental to all three traditional techniques, was employed in creating these works. Therefore, these works, being outcomes of training, do not entirely correspond to the specificity of "Moscow letter" decorative painting.

In 2011, higher professional education transitioned to a tiered personnel training system aligned with federal state educational standards, mandating a detailed transformation of learning content, including in the domain of "Moscow letter" decorative painting, with a four-year duration of study.

The curriculum for the mastery of "Moscow letter" decorative painting consisted of five sections and eighteen topics. The structure of the first three sections remained practically unchanged. An important innovation in the fourth section was the assignment to complete a painting based on one's own project and copies of

lacquer miniature painting works, namely "Floral still life" and "Flowers and landscape motif". The fifth section explored the combination of "Moscow letter" decorative painting techniques with miniature imaging techniques.

Concurrently, public demand for items decorated with this type of painting shifted towards more extensive usage in interior decoration and display in spacious exhibition halls. As a result, graduating students started painting large-scale planar objects for their final projects. Nonetheless, the bulk of the educational assignments continued to focus on working with small formats (boxes, panels, plates and trays measuring up to 30×40 cm).

In 2017, graduates of the four-year training program painted identical large-format planar items consisting of panoramic panels measuring 120 x 80 cm and chairs. Some compositions featured landscape motifs paired with floral painting, while others highlighted floral motifs set against polychromatic backgrounds.

Analysis of these works revealed shortcomings in understanding the specifics of painting on large formats: inefficient utilization of space (most works lack a clear central focal point or dominant element capturing viewers' attention); inadequate scaling of elements (compositional elements such as flowers and landscapes appear too small relative to the format, impairing distant viewing perception); insufficiently unified color scheme (excessive use of numerous shades in the background without tonality generalization and contrast accents).

Based on the analysis of the historical experience of training in the mastery of "Moscow letter" decorative painting from 1977 to 2017, transformations in the structure and content of educational programs can be identified. Initially oriented towards narrow production-oriented tasks in vocational education, the training goal gradually evolved into cultivating highly qualified artists. Key milestones in this process included: academic and methodological support for the educational process by university faculty members, expansion of applications for "Moscow letter" decorative painting across various artifacts and active engagement of learners in creating their own works.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in systematically documenting the unique pedagogical experience of training in "Moscow letter" painting from 1977 to 2017. The findings constitute a theoretical foundation for designing the content of training in "Moscow letter" decorative painting and make substantial contributions to researching and enhancing professional education in traditional art crafts.

The practical significance resides in implementing the developed content of training in "Moscow letter" decorative painting, inclusive of methodological tools, into the educational process of universities. This will ensure the preservation and accurate transmission of the distinctive features of this art form.

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