

Yermakova M.V., candidate of pedagogical sciences, deputy director for scientific and methodological work of the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting – a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, 141052, Fedoskino village, Lukutinskaya st., 33; e-mail: ermakova-80@mail.ru

Skripunova N.E., lecturer of the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting – a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, 141052, Fedoskino village, Lukutinskaya st., 33; e-mail: skripunovs@mail.ru

Rostov enamel: a contemporary interpretation of Maya civilization art

Abstract. The article examines the content of the academic assignment “Interpreting an artwork of Maya civilization art in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting”, as well as its implementation by first-year bachelor’s students within the framework of the discipline “Mastery of Rostov enamel”.

The empirical basis of the research consisted of six enamel plates. Using one of these works as an example, the sequence of professional actions performed by a student was analyzed: transferring the line drawing, applying layers of paint, “smoking out”⁶⁴ the oil from the plate, conducting intermediate firings, evaluating the result obtained and subsequent correction of the painting. The instructor organizes the execution of the assignment and provides interim assessment, on the basis of which further steps are determined jointly with the student.

Keywords: Rostov enamel, professional training of artists, educational assignment, interpretation, technological sequence, firing, enamel painting, Maya civilization.

Introduction

The artistic and technological specifics of a particular type of traditional applied art determine the content of learning tasks aimed at students mastering performing skills. When executing Rostov enamel painting, it is necessary to consider the properties of the paints, the order of their application and the results of intermediate firings of the plate.

In professional pedagogy within the field of traditional art crafts, significant experience has been accumulated in developing curricula and organizing instruction for mastery training [2; 5; 7]. For the present study, the following theoretical propositions are both essential: the connection between curriculum content and the artistic-technological specifics of a particular art form, and the sequential mastering of professional actions by students.

In the context of Rostov enamel painting, previous research has examined technological techniques for completing academic assignments, including the

⁶⁴ Smoking out (“Vykurivanie”) is a technological operation that precedes the firing of the painted layer. It involves removing oil from overglaze paints applied to an enamel plate. To achieve this, the enamel plate is placed into and removed from a preheated muffle furnace several times until the oil has been completely burnt off.

sequence of working with overglaze paints and conducting intermediate firings [8]. The potential of using copying and project-based tasks in training enamel artists was revealed through the scholarly analysis of V.D. Kotkov's creative legacy [4].

Thus, existing studies allow us to consider an academic assignment simultaneously from the perspective of organizing students' learning activities and the artistic-technological specifics of Rostov finift. This article focuses on the sequence of professional actions performed by students during the completion of the academic assignment "Interpreting an artwork of Maya civilization art in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting".

Assignment execution involved preserving the compositional basis of the source image and its realization through the means of Rostov enamel. The student determined the sequence of applying paint layers, considered the properties of overglaze paints, the ratio between painted and unpainted enamel areas, the possibility of using gold-containing paint, evaluated changes in the painting after firing and determined subsequent steps depending on the result obtained. The cycle – "applying a layer of paint – 'smoking out' the oil – firing – evaluating the result – subsequent painting" – reflects the sequence of professional skills being mastered by the student.

This study presents the experience of completing the academic assignment "Interpreting an artwork of Maya civilization art in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting" within the framework of the discipline "Mastery of Rostov enamel". The initial visual material consisted of images selected by instructors in accordance with the theme of the upcoming exhibition project. For the purposes of this article, artistic-technological interpretation is defined as the realization of a source image through the means of another art form while preserving its compositional basis. The interpretive nature of the artwork was primarily associated with the "transfer" of the image into a different "artistic-technological system" – its realization through the medium of Rostov enamel painting.

The series of works was created for the exhibition project of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, which was presented to a wide audience at the Russian house of science and culture in Paris in March 2026 [1]. Yu.I. Krivozubova notes the importance of student participation in exhibitions for professional training, linking it to the formation of readiness for future professional and exhibiting activities [6, p. 278].

The aim of the research is to define the content of the academic assignment "Interpreting an artwork of Maya civilization art in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting" and the specific features of organizing students' learning activities during its completion.

Materials and methodology

The research materials consisted of six academic works created by first-year bachelor's students in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting within the framework of the discipline "Mastery of Rostov enamel". The work was carried out under the direct supervision of an instructor, who provided oversight at all key stages – from preparing the enamel plate and transferring the line drawing to

executing the painting, conducting intermediate firings, evaluating the result obtained, correcting and completing the piece.

The main research methods included participant pedagogical observation, artistic-technological analysis and comparative analysis of the students' works. During the participant pedagogical observation, the completion of professional actions stipulated by the assignment at the main stages of work was recorded. Photographic documentation of individual work stages served as an additional source of data. Artistic-technological analysis made it possible to study the sequence of applying paint layers, firing processes, evaluation of the results obtained and subsequent correction of the painting. Comparative analysis was applied when comparing the six completed academic works in terms of their compositional solution, color scheme and the detailing of the miniature painting execution.

Results

The sequence of professional actions stipulated by the assignment is examined using the example of one student work – an instructional plate depicting an archer figure (Figs. 1-4⁶⁵).

At the first stage, the student transferred the line drawing from a reproduction onto tracing paper pre-soaked with oil (calque), and then from the calque to the prepared white enamel surface of the plate (Fig. 1). The transferred contour reproduced the arrangement of the figure and other elements, delineating the boundaries of future color areas. At this stage, the student determined which parts of the image would be painted with refractory overglaze paints, which sections of the enamel surface would remain unpainted and where gold-containing paint was intended for use.

Prior to working on the plate, preparation of the overglaze paints was required: powder compositions were mixed with machine oil until a homogeneous consistency was achieved. The first pictorial layer was applied thinly (Fig. 2), as at this stage the main local color relationships were established. In accordance with enamel painting technology, high-melting overglaze paints were used first; subsequent tonal intensification was carried out after firing. In the work under consideration, during the first stage, blue, ochre, brown and purple areas were outlined, while part of the white enamel surface remained open.

After the first firing, it was not the initially applied color that was evaluated, but its state after thermal exposure. Based on the result obtained, the student reinforced areas of insufficient density, refined (adjusted) the color relationships and introduced darker or cooler shades. Therefore, the second pictorial layer was not a simple repetition of the first; its content was determined by the actual condition of the enamel work after firing (Fig. 3).

⁶⁵ Figs. 1-9. Photo from the archive by the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting.

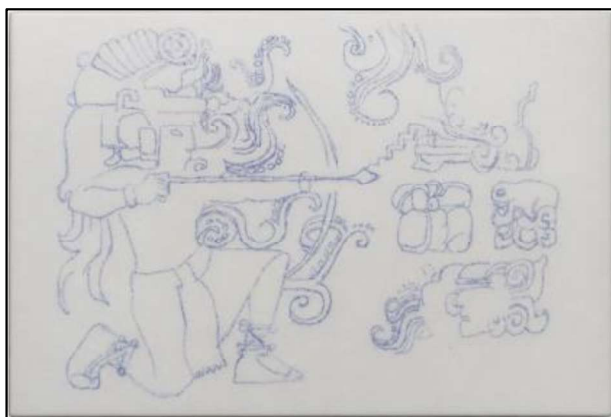


Fig. 5. V.A. Polyakova, first-year bachelor's student. "The Archer" instructional plate.
Outline transfer



Fig. 6. V.A. Polyakova, first-year bachelor's student. "The Archer" instructional plate.
Applying the first paint layer

A separate technological task for the student involved the initial application of gold-containing overglaze paint. Before working on the main plate, test swatches were executed to check the consistency of the material, the distribution of the application and the quality of firing fixation after baking. The gold-containing paint was applied locally – to elements of the headdress, decorative scrolls and specific significant details. After an intermediate firing, the density of the gold areas was re-evaluated and corrected with subsequent applications if necessary.

At the final stage, fine details and contour rendering were specified. Dark linear strokes were executed using a combination of black and purple paints; in decorative scrolls and individual elements, a gold stroke was used. After the final firing, the colored and gold sections were unified by the glossy surface of the enamel (Fig. 4).



Fig. 7. V.A. Polyakova, first-year bachelor's student. Plate "The Archer". Adjusting color relationships



Fig. 8. V.A. Polyakova, first-year bachelor's student. Plate "The Archer". 2026. Enamel, refractory overglaze paints.
Supervisor: N.E. Skripunova

The generalization of data from pedagogical observation and artistic-technological analysis allowed the student's completion of the task to be presented as a sequence of interconnected professional actions (Table).

Sequence of professional actions performed by a student
in Rostov enamel painting

Stage	Student's professional actions	Result
Execution of the line drawing	1. Transferring the image contour from a reproduction to tracing paper (calque). 2. Transferring the line drawing from the tracing paper onto the enamel plate. 3. Determining areas for painting and blank spaces, as well as locations for applying gold-containing paint	Preparation of the contoured base for subsequent painting
Applying the first paint layer	Application of main local colors while preserving designated unpainted areas of the enamel surface	Establishing basic color relationships before the first firing
Intermediate firing	“Smoking out” the oil from the paint layer, firing with strict adherence to the required temperature regime and safety regulations	Thermal fixation of the paint layer
Evaluation of the result after firing	Joint analysis with the instructor of: color changes, uniformity and density of the paint layer, preservation of the contour line and readability of details	Determination of necessary adjustments and content for subsequent painting stages
Application of subsequent paint layers and intermediate firings	Reinforcing color relationships, refining details, re-painting specific areas followed by “smoking out” the oil and firing each applied layer	Incorporation of gold accents into the compositional solution
Application of gold-containing paint	Test painting on samples, localized application, evaluation of the result after firing, re-application if necessary	Sequential refinement of the painting taking into account the results of previous firings
Final stage	Refinement of contours and fine details, arrangement of color and gold accents	Completion of the artwork's artistic solution

The technological cycle of actions – “application of the paint layer – ‘smoking out’ the oil – firing – evaluation of the result – subsequent painting” – was repeated several times; the number of pictorial layers and intermediate firings was determined by the state of the specific piece. The same sequence of professional actions was organized by the instructor for the remaining five pieces (Figs. 5-9).

The artistic and technological solutions differed in terms of color usage and the application of gold-containing paint. In the composition “Preparation and consumption of atole”, ochre and brown tones prevailed, while metallic accents were used minimally. Conversely, in the work “Mishcoatl slaying the jaguar”, gold-containing paint was applied to highlight calendar signs, the animal figure and individual elements of the costume. In the multi-figure composition “Presentation of captives to the ruler”, a light-blue color field separated the figures from the background and supported the segmentation of the composition. Thus, a unified technological sequence did not lead to uniformity of artistic solutions

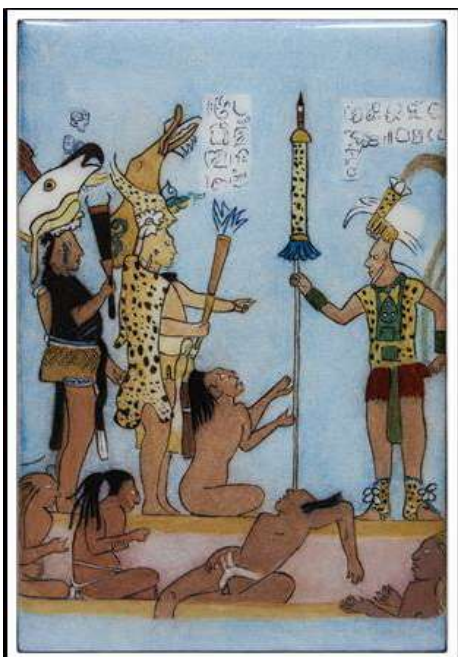


Fig. 5. P.G. Skvortsova, first-year bachelor's student.

Panel "Presentation of captives to the ruler". 2026.

Enamel, refractory overglaze paints.

Supervisor: N.E. Skripunova

In works with an abundance of fine details, the student was required to accurately reproduce the contour during its transfer onto the enamel plate and maintain the readability of elements throughout the painting and firing processes. In multi-figure compositions, the student constructed harmonious color relationships between the figures and individual sections of the image. In five out of six works, a portion of the white enamel surface remained unpainted, separating the local color areas. In one of these works, alongside the unpainted areas, a light-blue tone was used as a general color foundation (Fig. 5).



Fig. 6. A.D. Mitina, first-year bachelor's student. Panel "Deity and calendar signs".

2026. Enamel, refractory overglaze paints.

Supervisor: N.E. Skripunova



Fig. 7. P.A. Kondrashova, first-year bachelor's student. Panel "Calendar composition". 2026.

Enamel, refractory overglaze paints.

Supervisor: N.E. Skripunova

Thus, despite the common technological sequence, artistic solutions varied depending on the specific features of the source image. In this way, the visual primary sources – while preserving their compositional and conceptual basis –

acquired a new material embodiment through the medium of Rostov enamel painting.



Fig. 8. P.G. Skvortsova, first-year bachelor's student. Panel "Preparation and consumption of atole". 2026.

Enamel, refractory overglaze paints.
Supervisor: N.E. Skripunova



Fig. 9. Zh.N. Kozlachkova, first-year bachelor's student. Panel "Mishcoatl slaying the jaguar". 2026.

Enamel, refractory overglaze paints.
Supervisor: N.E. Skripunova

Discussion

The obtained results show that mastering technological operations when executing a work in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting is linked to the organization of students' learning activities by the instructor and the structuring of its stages.

The considered organization of student activity corresponds to approaches presented in studies devoted to the professional training of traditional applied arts artists [3; 5; 7]. In this task, the sequence of actions is determined by the technology of Rostov enamel, while each subsequent stage depends on the result of the previous firing.

O.V. Golovchenkov notes that the organization of academic work is largely determined by the teacher's professional position and pedagogical preferences [2, p. 12]. In the assignment under consideration, the organizing role of the instructor consisted in structuring the sequence of stages, conducting interim assessment and gradually delegating the function of self-assessment to the student.

Particular importance was attached to the evaluation of the result after firing. Changes in color, paint layer density, contour preservation and element readability are taken into account when determining further work on the piece. Thus, the student not only masters individual technological operations but also learns to determine the subsequent action based on the outcome of the previous stage. At the initial stages, this work is carried out under the direct guidance of the instructor, who gradually involves the student in independent evaluation of the result obtained and decision-making for subsequent steps.

The assignment allowed students to focus on mastering Rostov enamel technology. Since the composition and main elements were defined by the reference sample, the primary work involved transferring the image onto the enamel surface, building color layers and adjusting them after firings.

The interpretive nature of the task manifested primarily in the transfer of the image into a different artistic-technological system. An image that initially existed in a different artistic environment was reproduced using the means of a unique traditional art craft – Rostov enamel (finift) – applied with overglaze paints, involving sequential firings and in some cases, gold-containing paint. As a result, the recognizability of the source artwork was preserved, while its material and execution technique changed.

The use of gold-containing paint expanded the content of the assignment: the student had to consider not only the color scheme but also the properties of the new material, test its “behavior” after firing and correlate the gold accents with the painting already executed.

Conclusions

The conducted analysis showed that the academic assignment “Interpreting an artwork of Maya civilization art in the technique of Rostov enamel miniature painting” was organized as a sequential mastery by students of an algorithm of professional actions related to executing a work in this technique. The instructor structured the technological process and currently assessed the obtained result.

Creating images in the technique of Rostov enamel (finift) miniature painting allows one to regard the works as a contemporary artistic-technological interpretation: while preserving the compositional basis of the source image, its material embodiment is determined by the technology of enamel painting, the nature of the paint layer, the firing system and the use of decorative possibilities of enamel.

Using the example of one instructional plate, the sequence of work execution was traced: transferring the line drawing, applying layers of paint, “smoking out” the oil, intermediate firings, evaluating the result obtained and subsequent paint retouching. This sequence was repeated during the creation of the piece and the content of the next stage was determined taking into account the state of the painting after the previous firing. In the course of such work, the student not only mastered individual technological operations but also learned to determine subsequent actions based on the outcome obtained.

Despite the general technological sequence, the content of individual work stages was determined by the state of the painting after firing and the specific features of the particular image. This manifested itself in varying density of subsequent paint layers, the character of color adjustment, the preservation of the open white ground or the use of a colored enamel field and methods for introducing gold-containing paint.

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