

## Conference Paper

# The Cultural Phenomenon of Artworks in Hot Enamel Technique

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**Abstract**

The article explores the phenomenon of the emergence of artistic enamel as a medium for standalone easel works during the Soviet and later Russian period in contemporary Russian history, tracing the historical development of this art throughout several decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and explores its origins and perspectives. The work of outstanding Russian enamel artists, founders of different schools of hot enamel, which influenced the formation and development of the author's artistic enamel is highlighted. This analysis demonstrates the potential of the hot enamel technique in a wide range of artistic works, both in its dimensions (from miniature to monumental works) and its range of subjects and styles. Hot enamel has proven itself to be a versatile medium and is being embraced by creative artists in search of new materials and techniques. Hot enamel in Russia was influenced both by international artistic developments and by Russian trends and stylistic explorations, finding inspiration in other types of art and the contemporary art scene.

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## 1. Introduction

The historical, technological and artistic evolution of hot enamel technique has been described by various authors. G.N.Komelova [1] in her research *Essays on the Masters of Miniature of 18th – early 19th centuries* discusses Russian enamel miniature artists. The theme of enamel in art has been explored by A.A.Gilodo [2], who established the background and contributory factors in the emergence and development of original artistic enamel works up to the 1990s. O.Yu.Zhevlakova [3] has explored the evolution of enamel as a medium of original artistic works during the 1960s–1970s. In her research, Ya.A.Aleksandrova [4] traces the works of artists belonging to the Saint-Petersburg artistic enamel school, determines which factors contribute to the development of enamel artists, describes the features of an original artwork and shows how they are tied to the artist's creative approach. However, since 1990s enamel techniques received a new impetus: artists belonging to different style and genres have taken an

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increasing interest in hot enamel techniques and began using them to create panels. This technique has become especially popular among artists working in monumental decorative art. The increasing popularity of this art, the establishment of artistic groups of enamellers, the development of regional enamel centres and the explorations of enamel painting and the influence of monumental artists on the transformation and development of artistic enamel – all of this requires further research.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The technique of artistic enamel has been around for over two millennia. In Russia the development of this art is intrinsically tied to the national traditions and roots; its origins can be found within the deep layers of history. Through all this history and up to 1970s, enamel was used decoratively, to emphasize the lustre of metal. However, since 1970s enamel has acquired new purposes, become a medium for creating standalone works and completely changed the artists' attitude to this technique. A.Gilodo notes that the development of this phenomenon is linked to the events of 1972 [1, p.38], while O.Zhevlakova shows in her research that the origins of this process date back to the 1960s. [3, p.72] In this paper readers will find an attempt to explore this phenomenon through historical, stylistic, political and economic perspective. I show the influence of 1920s–1940s trends in Soviet art on the development of these techniques, the subsequent international evolution of enamel art in 1960s–1970s and the direct influence monumental artists exerted on the transformation of enamel technique and its establishment as an original artistic medium.

Enamel art was already known in Russia before Mongol invasion – it was borrowed from Byzantium. However, enamel became truly popular only in the 15th century. After the emergence of Russian centralized state, centres of enamel production appear in a number of cities. In Moscow, in Kremlin, Ivan the Terrible established by decree the Golden and Silver Chamber whose aim was to create objects from gold and silver, including those decorated with enamel. The techniques used during this period included enamel over cast ground (which was known even before the Mongol invasion) and enamel over filigree. In the mid-17th century, under the influence of European traditions, there was an emergence of a new technique of enamel painting and painted enamel miniature. In 1779, the class of miniature painting was established in Saint-Petersburg, at the Imperial Academy of Arts. It was headed by the famous miniature artist and academic P.G.Zharkov. Initially the students were taught ivory miniature, as well as enamel miniature painting. The class was constantly changing and since 1790

finally became established as a class of miniature painting [1, p.54]: this education becomes the first foundation for the development of miniature enamel painting in Russia. At the same time, we see the establishment of various enamel centres in Russia, each with its own special features: Moscow produced light-coloured painted enamels, Saint-Petersburg specialised in portrait and genre miniature enamel painting, Rostov developed religious miniature painting. By the end of 18th century, miniature enamel painting in Russia developed beyond the limitations of decorative and applied art. [2, p. 32] In the 19th century, conditioned by the new social and technological developments, enamel items became popular among various social classes. During this period all major jewellers (Grachev, Kurlyukov, Nemirov-Kolodkin, Ovchinnikov, Olovyanishnikov, Postnikov, Sazikov, Fabergé, Khlebnikov) use enamel to decorate their works, experimenting with various techniques: enamel over filigree, champlevé enamel, enamel over cast and etched ground, pique-a-jour enamel, cloisonné enamel, painted enamel, miniature painting, guilloché enamel. The abundance of available techniques led the artists to choose enamel for their works, either traditional or original. After the 1917, enamel traditions continued to exist in Rostov as a workshop (*artel*) that united city artists working in this craft. [2, p. 37] We know the names of some miniature enamel artists who had worked in the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> and first decades of the 19th century (Burov, A.Vsesvyatsky, Gvosdaryov, G.Elshin, P.Ivanov, A.Moshchansky, S.Petrov, S.Troitsky, Chaynikov) [5].

During the 1920s–1940s, the themes change drastically: instead of religious subjects, the artists decorate their works with flowers on white or colourful backgrounds; Soviet symbolism abounds. [2, p. 37] In 1950s, after the WWII, the workshop became the Rostov Finift' Factory. Factory artists launched various original artistic genres used to decorate jewellery, caskets and tableware. Among them were: flower genre (artists T.Mikhaylenko, E. Kotov), portrait genre (artist A. Zaytsev), landscape genre (artists A. Tikhov, V.Kochkin) and historical genre (artist V.Grudinin). [6] It is important to note the influence of political ideas on decorative and applied arts in general. After capitalism was abolished, Soviet state launched the project whose purpose was to resurrect folk crafts. The result was the establishment of art and crafts schools and workshops. There highly experienced masters could transfer their knowledge to younger generation. The leading idea was to bring art to the masses, to facilitate the development of artistic, aesthetic and cultural values of the people. Artists were invited to take part in the production, with the goal of facilitating the ideology of the radiant communist future. Artists of different styles worked enthusiastically at plants and factories. One of the most important creative achievements of this period were the works of the State Porcelain

Factory in Petrograd (Saint-Petersburg), where such artists as S.V.Chekhonin, K.Petrov-Vodkin and M.Dobuzhinsky designed porcelain items with official agitational motives. [7]

The 1960s were marked by such landmark events as new scientific discoveries and space exploration. Utopian moods of the era provided fertilizing influence on the artistic ideas of the thaw period. Decorative and applied arts entered the new cycle of development. The artists of this era rejected new forms and attitudes but experimented with new technologies [3, p. 71]. Enameller artists sought the new stylistic and technological solutions reassessing traditions of the past. One of the Soviet innovators of this period was Lvov (Lviv) artist Yaroslava Muzyka (1894–1973). [8] In 1930s she had already begun to experiment with cloisonné enamel. In 1963 she created a series of works on metal plate titled *Old Slavic Gods, Hutsul Legends, A Witch and a Ghoul* [3, p. 74]. From 1772 to 1918 Lviv was a part of Austro-Hungarian empire. This geographical proximity could have inspired Ya.Muzyka to adopt this technique so early.

In Hungary in 1962 Lampart Enamel Industry Works began its first experiments with enamel. [9] New technological breakthroughs brought by the Hungarian masters led to the explosive popularity of hot enamel technique. In 1972 the Union of Soviet Artists organized a meeting in Budapest between Hungarian and Soviet artists, where one of the main ideas of this international symposium was introduction of enamel artworks in architecture. In the summer of 1975, a new International Enameller Workshop was established in the industrial district of Kecskemét (Hungary). Since this year, symposiums were visited not only by the applied artists but also by monumental artists working with architectural spaces. Participation in these symposiums helped Soviet artists to develop a new understanding and vision of the enamel's role in contemporary art. [9] International enamel symposiums that were taking place in the 1980s in Hungary (Kecskemét), France (Limoges) and Lithuania (Palanga) helped the artists reach international standards and gain acknowledgment from their foreign colleagues.

The collapse of the USSR led to the dissolution of the Artistic Foundation. After losing state commissions, the artists were forced to search for the new opportunities. The artists of post-Soviet countries who knew each other through residences at the artistic dachas (Senezh, Chelyuskinskaya, Palanga) came together to explore a new trend: metal painting (on copper or steel) with the subsequent firing. In the 1990s we see the establishment of the group of monumental artists eager to explore hot enamel technique: among them N.Vdovkin, A.Karikh, B.Klovhkov (Moscos Higher College of Arts and Industry), A.Talashchuk, L.Malysheva, G.Likhovid (Leningrad Higher College of Art and Industry named after V.I.Mukhina). [10, p. 81] The artists enthusiastically

embraced the new technique creating original easel paintings. The recognition arrived with the establishment of new enameller centres and schools. In 1991 one of the first of those was opened in Yaroslavl: Emalis International Centre created by enamel artist A.Karikh. [11, p. 14] In 1995, based in Saint-Petersburg Stieglitz Academy and with the support of its rector A.Yu.Talashchuk, the teaching program for monumental artist for the first time introduced hot enamel technique. [4, p. 17] In 2004, an enamel workshop headed by B.N.Klochkov opened at the Ural Academy of Art and Architecture. In 2005 N.Vdovkin created Association of Enamel Artists of the South of Russia [11]; the same year Enamellers Guild was established and began to develop connections with foreign enamellers and organizations [12].

### 3. Discussion

One of the characteristic features in the development of original easel enamel painting is the exploration and innovations carried out by monumental artists in hot enamel technique. One of the first innovators in this area was Alexander Talashchuk, a monumental artist and a participant of Kecskemét symposiums in 1983, 1986, 1988. He contributed greatly to the development of enamel technique becoming one of the founders of Leningrad/Saint-Petersburg school of easel enamel painting. [4, p. 16] A.Talshchuk is enthusiastically working in hot enamel and watercolour techniques. These two different materials are united by technical skills developed based on the artistic tasks outlined during the experimentation with hot enamel technique: expressiveness and picturesqueness of material, transparency and density, textural variety. He also borrowed typical features of monumental compositions: their decorative character, laconic colour scheme, stylized forms, symbolism and iconic character.

Alexander Karikh, founder of Emalis International Art Centre, is a well-known artist whose skills as a monumental artist were developed at the artistic dacha residences under the influence of Shikotan group (plein air at the Shikotan island). [14, pp. 5–6] This combination of different trends in painting influenced his style in his enamel works. A.Karikh's hot enamel works channel the themes, pictorial quality and expressiveness of monumental compositions. In his later work, apart from their picturesqueness and graphic expressiveness, we find laconic spots, the "naked" metal (metal covered by a transparent layer of enamel applied to protect the metal surface from burnout) at the surface of composition, which forms the integral part of these works. This technique would become a characteristic feature of Yaroslavl enameller school and a typical element of A.Karikh's works.

Nikolay Mikhaylovich Vdovkin is a monumental artist and an enameller. Since 1991 he has been organizing symposiums at his workshop (village of Pobegaylovks, Stavropol Krai). From the interview of N.Vkovkin:

My diploma states that I'm a decorative and applied artist, and mostly I work with architectural interior. In this area I have to do everything: stained glass, metal, mosaic, glass. I believe that glass had led me to enamel. Of course, I used enamel when working on architectural interiors, but I approached it as a decorative material. Like metal or glass. But I wanted to truly expand my works in this beautiful, highly promising technique. Finally, I switch to using enamel only and started using it for easel paintings. In 1985 I visited the Hungarian city of Kecskemét, the well-known European centre of enamel art. There I learned a lot. Today I visit almost every year. I take part in the workshops and symposiums, conduct my own master classes. [15]

The works of N.Vdovkin connect the viewers to the old Russian painting and resonate with the church paintings created by the artists. His major themes are: motherhood, Bible stories, the struggle between good and evil.

Boris Nikolayevich Klochkov is a monumental artist and an enameller. He has been working in hot enamel technique since 1991. He is the founder of Ural enamel school. In 2000, for the first time in Yekaterinburg, works made in hot enamel technique were presented to the wide public together with other decorative and applied artworks. These were paintings by Russian and foreign artists shown at the First Ural Exhibition of Decorative Art, which featured artists from Russia, CIS countries and Western Europe. The idea of the exhibition belonged to B.N.Klochkov, who also became the show's main artist. He managed to secure participation of Russia's leading enamellers. The exhibition worked in several Ekaterinburg venues: in the Museum of the History of Ural Architecture and Industrial Machinery, Museum of Jewellery and Stonecutting Arts, exhibition hall of the Ekaterinburg Branch of the Union of Russian Artists, exhibition hall of the V.G.Belinsky Regional Research Library. [16] This exhibition inspired many Ural artists to pick up hot enamel technique by providing a new perspective on this material. In 2004, an enamel workshop headed by B.N.Klochkov opened at the Ural Academy of Art and Architecture. [10, p. 81] Each year students from the Department of Monumental Decorative Art could choose a course that taught them hot enamel technique, with the subsequent training at the Emalis centre to help them put their new skills into practice. Later hot enamel was included in the main teaching course of the specialisation *Monumental and Decorative Art*. The students' first attempts were clearly influenced by B.Klochkov's style. The connection between monumental art and

hot enamel technique became embodied, first and foremost, in the influence of its artistic and stylistic features on the decorative format of small-scale pannos.

The works of B.Klochkov are characterized by confident plastic lines, laconic imagery and relief effects. This feature became the artist's characteristic trait in his hot enamel compositions. Lines and relief effects can be also seen in his monumental works. Here we see clear resonances with his painted textile works made in collaboration with Vera Grekova: topics of family, motherhood and love.

The size of the works produced by the workshops at UrGAHA (Ural Academy of Art and Architecture), both by Boris Klochkov himself and by his students, typically resembles church icons in terms of proportions (aspect ratio). Icon genre is typical for enamel art. In an interview with A.Yu.Talashchuk, the leading enameller of Saint-Petersburg school of hot enamel (dated October 18 2016), Ya.A.Alexandrova touched upon the format convenient for an enameller artist: "...he determines the format convenient for himself and for the technique, which is close to the size of movable church icon". [5, p.113] This is mostly determined by the size of the kiln. However, enamellers can also use Christian themes and the language of religious decorative art.

While preserving monumental approaches to composition, monumental artists have made substantial contribution to the development of hot enamel technique using it to create small-scale easel pannos. By combining monumental, decorative and easel techniques, enamel art has become a standalone type of art.

## 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is possible to say that monumental artists who tried the new material and technique were the first to develop compositional and technological approaches to metal painting with subsequent kiln firing; they also established enamelling schools and centres and created a living tradition transmitted to the next generations. The vitality of this art is confirmed by various exhibitions of hot enamel works: international, all-Russian and regional, held in different regions and cities of Russia and attracting enthusiastic audience.

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