

Handcraft and souvenirs

FOLK & NATIVE ART

Isolated by vast distances and long winters, Russians evolved an amazing spectrum of richly decorated folk art. Perhaps most familiar are the intricately painted, enamelled wood boxes called *palekh*, after the village east of Moscow that's famous for them; and *finift*, luminous enamelled metal miniatures from Rostov-Veliky. From Gzhel, also east of Moscow, came glazed earthenware in the 18th century and its trademark blue-and-white porcelain in the 19th. Gus-Khrustalny, south of Vladimir, maintains a glass-making tradition as old as Rus. Every region also "has its own style" of embroidery and some specialize in knitted and other fine fabrics.

The most common craft is woodcarving, represented by toys, distaffs (tool for hand-spinning flax) and gingerbread moulds in the museums, and in its most clichéd form by the nested *matryoshka* dolls - surely the most familiar symbol of Russia, although they actually only date from 1890 (see russian-crafts.com/nest/history.html for the history of the *matryoshka* and other crafts). Overflowing from souvenir shops you'll also find the red, black and gold lacquered-pine bowls called *khokhloma*. Most uniquely Slavic are the 'gingerbread' houses of western and northern Russia and Siberia with their carved window frames, lintels and trim. The art of carpentry flourished in 17th- and 18th-century houses and churches.

Late in the Soviet period, all manner of handicrafts could increasingly be found only in homes or in museum collections. But the coming of the free market and a revived interest in national traditions has brought much more good craftwork into the open, and the process has been boosted by the restoration of churches and mosques and their artwork. There has also been a minor resurgence of wood- and bone-carving. An even more popular craft is *beresta*, using birch bark to make containers and decorative objects, with colours varying according to the age and season of peeling. In Tuva, soapstone carving and traditional leather forming are also being rediscovered.

The Russian doll

Her name is *matriochka* and act even as literary or philosophical metaphor. You can miss them in no tourist place. Of peasant woman, it became political these last years: you will have those representative all state leaders, since Lenin, or even the tsar Nicolas II, until Putin. The drawing is of various quality... The big eyes to Walt Disney are of bet today and it will be difficult you to find other more traditional models. Look on markets and in the area around the big railway stations. Sometimes, peasant women sell it, which are much prettier and bigger. If you are fan of dolls, also see dolls in traditional costumes, very appreciated by the small girls whom the parents collect...

Samovars

Also symbolic as the *matriochka*. They are brass and sometimes silver. Today, often in simple metal and electrical. In origin, they got warm to coal or to wood. They put logs in the chimney in the middle and water around. On the indented crown of the top they deposit the teapot with a very strong infusion of tea. To serve, they overturn a bit of infusion and they drown with the water of the samovar by putting the cup under the tap. Of the time of Tchekhov, they spent the afternoon, or even the day, to drink some tea in the park and, thanks to samovar, tea was always hot. In canteens, you will also see from it. The best

samovars were fabricated in *Toula* (south of Moscow). Attention, you must acquire an approval to export ancient samovars.

Chkatoulki

These are the chewed paper painted boxes. They can make it out of wood, so they are cheap and can make a presentable memory. But they have got nothing to do with those of *Palekh*, city where painters paint in the tempera of objects (boxes, brooches, icons) paper chewed. Painting is lively, the bottom is black, the drawing draws inspiration from Russian stories or from historical or religious subjects and relay of the art of the miniaturists. Every limps a work of art is and price is well brought up. There are other cities and villages which make this type of objects, as Fédoskino (region of Moscow), with inlaying of mother-of-pearl on presentations of landscapes or still life. But Palekh is the most renowned, so as to have become a generic name.

The coloured shawls

They are quasi inevitable. There also, qualities very differ. The nicest are fabricated in Pavlov Possad (region of Ivanovo, in the northeast of Moscow). Also see the white lacy wool shawls, fine and hot and sold by peasant women near markets, near railway stations and sometimes on Arbat. So that it is perfect, it is necessary that he it passes entirely in an alliance (it is rare).

Painted trays

Most known is painted in Jostovo, a village of the region of Moscow close to Mytichtchi (where they also construct the wagons of the subway). These are metallic trays on which fruits or flowers are painted in coloured oil lively.

Wooden dinnerware paints

Spoons, bowls, dinnerware or even pieces of furniture are painted of coloured plant decors black, red and golden. The bottom is gilded. The eccentrics come from Khokhloma (region of Nijni Novgorod), but there are simulations. The wooden, unique spoon covered for a long time in the Russian campaigns, is a present - frequent memory.

Ceramic of Gzhel

Gzhel is a village of the region of Moscow. its dinnerware (sugar bowls, teapots, cups, etc), its toys, figures and various objects in majolique are renowned and often collected. The dark blue drawings, more seldom light blue on white glaçure, are easily recognizable. There is true Gzhel and falsehood. It is written, as for porcelain underneath.