

RUSSIAN ICON --- COLLECTION



RUSSIAN ICONS

FROM THE MID-17TH TO THE EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

THE OLEG KUSHNIRSKIY COLLECTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTION



Unique Story

- The collection began taking shape in the 1990s. Its unique feature is that it was assembled in the United States, following Oleg Kushnirskiy's move to the country.
- It encapsulates the twists and turns of the turbulent 20th-century history.

Significance

- 46 antique Russian icons featuring intricate iconography and rich narratives.
- The collection introduces a new perspective on Russian icon painting.
- The icons were meticulously restored by top experts.

Focus

- The focus of the collection is on overlooked Russian icons from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.
- A special place in the collection belongs to small-sized icons decorated with miniature stamps.
- At the core of the collection is a wide range of antique Russian icons dedicated to the Resurrection – The Harrowing of Hades, with major Church Feasts.

GEOGRAPHY

Many icons originate from the most notable iconographic centers of the Russian Empire — Vladimir region villages and Old Believer communities:

Palekh

Mstyora

Kholuy

Guslitsy

Vetka

Central
Russian
workshops

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Yearly Menaion

Second quarter of 19th century. Palekh

The Menaion, or Minyeia or Menology, is a set of 12 hand-painted Orthodox icons representing saints and major Church feasts, ordered by their commemoration from September to August. This specific antique Russian set is notable due to its rare complete state (Minyeia are typically found individually) and excellent preservation.

These Menaion Icons (meaning "monthly icons") became popular in Russia in the latter half of the 16th century, following the creation of the Great Menaion text under Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow. Typically small in size, these icons are traditionally used for veneration on the analoion, positioned according to their associated month.



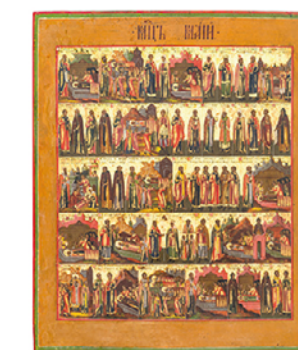
September

Size:
31 x 26 x 2 cm



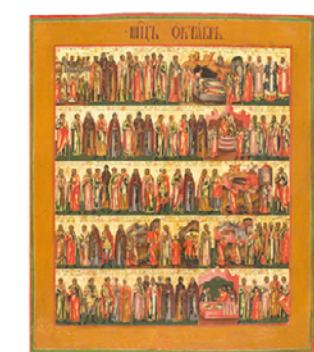
January

Size:
32 x 26 x 2,3 cm



May

Size:
31,5 x 26 x 2,3 cm



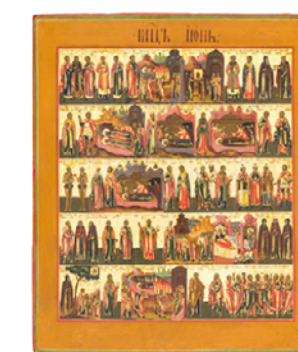
October

Size:
31 x 26 x 2 cm



February

Size:
31,5 x 26 x 2,3 cm



June

Size:
31,5 x 26,5 x 2,2 cm



November

Size:
31 x 25,5 x 2,3 cm



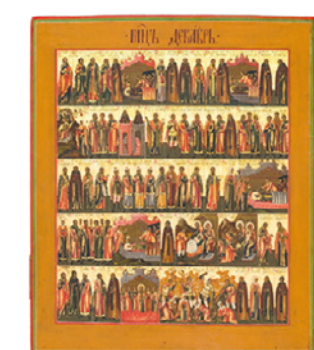
March

Size:
31,5 x 26,5 x 2,2 cm



July

Size:
31 x 26,5 x 2,3 cm



December

Size:
31,5 x 26,5 x 2,2 cm



April

Size:
31,5 x 26,5 x 2,5 cm

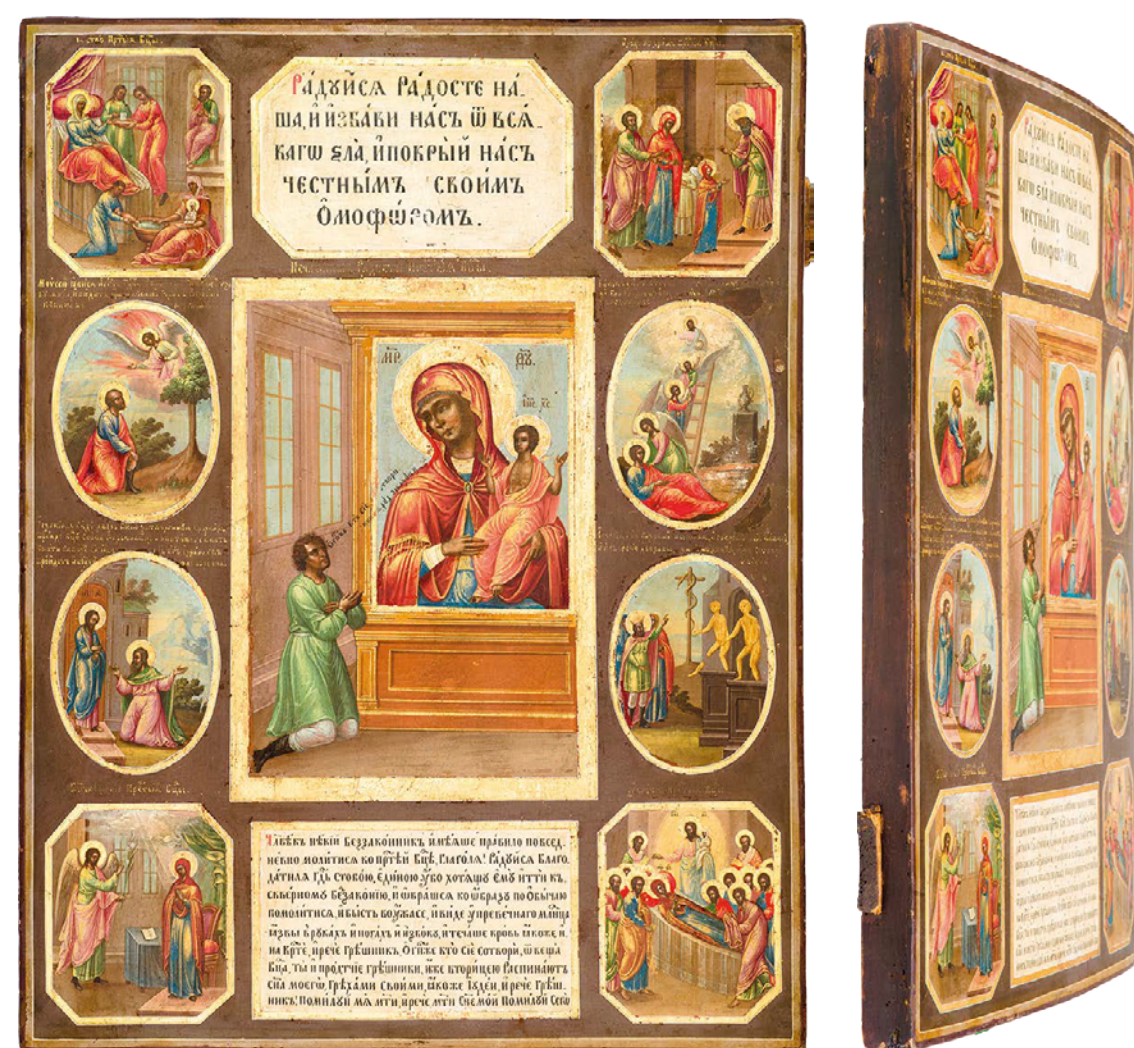


August

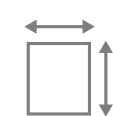
Size:
31 x 26 x 2 cm



THE UNEXPECTED JOY ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, WITH MARIAN FEASTS AND OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES



Icon:
third quarter
of the 19th century.
Moscow (?)



Size:
58 x 44 x 3 cm

[see on the website](#)

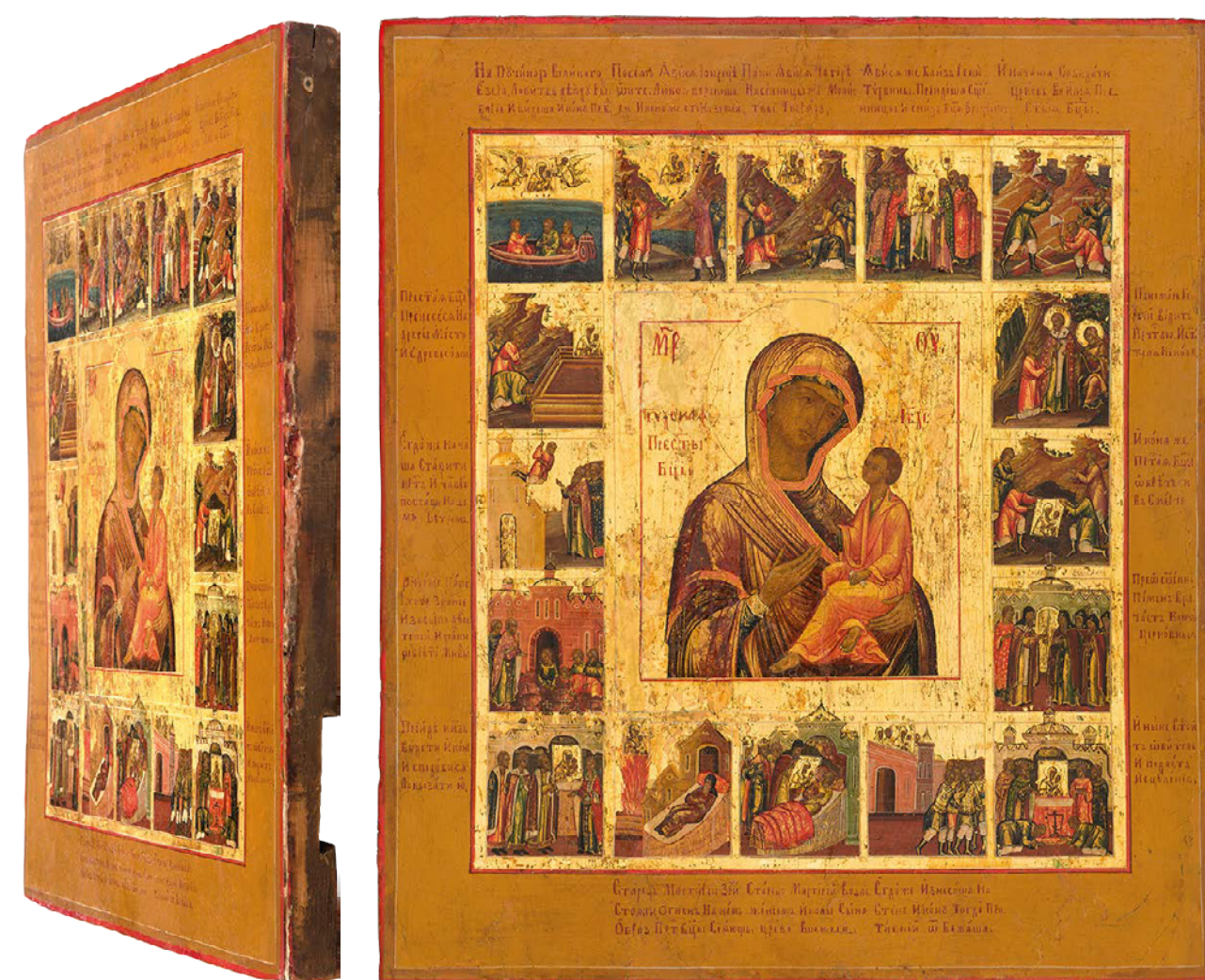
This artwork bears truly unique iconography. The venerated image of the Mother of God — “The Unexpected Joy” — is surrounded by the main Marian Feasts (the Nativity of the Mother of God, the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, the Annunciation, the Dormition of the Mother of God).

The "Unexpected Joy" iconography originates from a 1680 treatise titled "The Watered Fleece" by St. Demetrius of Rostov. It includes a narrative about a sinful man who would pray to an icon of the Mother of God before committing evil deeds. One day, he noticed blood flowing from the wounds of Baby Jesus on the icon, and upon querying, was told that sinners repeatedly crucify Jesus through their sins. The man, remorseful, sought the Mother of God's intercession for forgiveness. Initially, Christ refused three times, but upon the Mother of God kneeling, He granted forgiveness. This event led to the icon being named "Unexpected Joy," symbolizing unexpected salvation, forgiveness, and the endless mercy of the Mother of God.

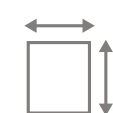


Expertise
Report

THE TIKHVIN MOTHER OF GOD, WITH THE LEGEND OF THE ICON IN 16 BORDER SCENES



Icon:
third quarter
of the 19th century.
Vladimir region



Size:
35,5 x 31 x 2 cm

[see on the website](#)

The Legend of the Tikhvin Icon emerged in 16th-century Russian icon art, depicting border scenes based on the Tale of the Miracles of the Tikhvin Icon. The tale recounts the icon's appearances and revelations in various locations, ending at the Tikhvinka River where it was entrusted to the faithful. This artwork depicts miraculous events associated with the icon, such as surviving three fires that occurred in the monastery built in its honor. The cult of the Tikhvin Mother of God grew in popularity in the 17th century, leading to the expansion of the tale. This icon represents the final version of the legend, completed in 1658 by Herodion Sergeev, a Tikhvin icon painter.

Scenes 13 and 14 are of particular interest. They depict the life of Saint Martyrius of Zelenetsk (early 16th century — 1603), founder of the Holy Trinity Zelenetsk monastery. After receiving a divine revelation, he established a new convent between Old Ladoga and Tikhvin. Before his journey, he commissioned two icons: one of the Holy Trinity and one of the Tikhvin Mother of God, which he kept with him until his death. Saint Martyrius used the Tikhvin icon to resurrect Prince Ivan, the Khan of Kasima's son. His life story was included in The Tale in the mid-17th century, but its depiction in Russian iconography is rare, enhancing the value of those that do represent it.

THE RESURRECTION – THE HARROWING OF HADES, WITH CHURCH FEASTS AND THE HOLY TRINITY IN 16 BORDER SCENES



During the Middle Ages, Russian icon artists adopted the "Rising from the Tomb" theme, influenced by Western European etchings. In the central scene of this icon, the Savior is shown facing forward with outstretched arms, carrying a standard and wearing a tunic and a broad himation, which distinguishes it from other common "Rising" scenes where Christ is typically partially naked.

The reverse of the antique icon panel bears several notable pencil inscriptions referring to the history of the icon and its owners (probably the Suslov family of famous icon painters). The date of the consecration of the icon, held in the ancient Holy Cross Church in the village of Palekh, on April 1, 1915, is also indicated.

Icon:
end of the 18th century. Yaroslavl

Size:
36 x 30,5 x 2,1 cm

[see on the website](#)



THE RESURRECTION — THE HARROWING OF HADES, WITH CHURCH FEASTS AND THE “PRAISE TO THE MOTHER OF GOD” IN 16 BORDER SCENES

This icon is an exemplary piece of Eastern Orthodox art created by Palekh iconographers in the late 18th century. It showcases their distinctive style influenced by the Stroganov artistic tradition. The icon features elongated body proportions, small round heads, and elegant limbs, reflecting the refined craftsmanship of the Palekh artists. The artist skillfully combines vibrant architectural elements and ethereal, multicolored mountains with a contemplative softness typical of religious icon painting in late 18th-century Palekh.

Icon:
end of the 18th century. Palekh

Size:
71 x 55 x 2,8 cm

[see on the website](#)

Detailed descriptions of all the icons are available on our website:
<https://russianicon.com/icons>

EXPERTISE REPORT



Irina Shalina

Expert on cultural values of the Russian Ministry of Culture (certificate No. 0226 dated 24.02.2010), Ph.D. in Art History, Leading Researcher at the State Russian Museum, Member of the Council of the St. Petersburg Regional Branch ICOMOS, National Committee Member of the Commission on the Culture of Ancient and Medieval Russia at the Scientific Council RAS on the History of World Culture

ЭКСПЕРТНОЕ ЗАКЛЮЧЕНИЕ

№ 027-22

«16» ноября 2022 года

НА ИКОНЫ ИЗ КОЛЛЕКЦИИ О. КУШНИРСКОГО (США)

Представленная на экспертизу коллекция иконописи Олега Кушнирского насчитывает 46 произведений русской иконописи XVII — начала XX веков, выполненных в разных центрах – Поволжье, Москве, Санкт-Петербурге, но по большей части, в иконописных селах Владимирской губернии (Палех, Мстёра, Холуй) и старообрядческих Гуслицах и Ветке. За редким исключением, все они исполнены в древнерусских традициях или ориентированы на образцы древней живописи. Среди них большое число первоклассных произведений миниатюрного письма этих центров, отличающихся техническим совершенством исполнения и незаурядностью художественного решения, а также своеобразными иконографическими особенностями многосложных композиций. Многие из представленных на экспертизу произведений обладают несомненной художественной, историко-культурной, музейной и коллекционной ценностью.

30

Эксперт по культурным ценностям Министерства культуры РФ
(удостоверение № 0226 от 24.02.2010)
Кандидат искусствоведения,
Ведущий научный сотрудник Государственного Русского музея,
Член Совета Санкт-Петербургского регионального отделения
Национального комитета ИКОМОС
Член Комиссии по культуре древней и средневековой Руси при Научном совете
РАН по истории мировой культуры

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see the document



OLEG KUSHNIRSKIY

Oleg Kushnirskiy is a prominent collector and expert specializing in Russian icons dating from the 16th to 19th centuries. Over the years, he has dedicated himself to preserving antique Russian icons that would otherwise be forgotten, often uncovering them in remote villages and antique markets.

His fascination with Russian religious art began in the 1980s when he was traveling extensively throughout the former USSR as a photographer for the Russian National Library.

Driven by passion, Oleg began accumulating books on the history of iconography and frequently visited museums to deepen his knowledge of this art form. It was during this period that he nurtured the dream of curating his own collection of Russian icons — a dream that ultimately became a reality after his relocation to America in the early 1990s.

[W | read the biography](#) 



OLEG KUSHNIRSKIY COLLECTION CATALOG

AUTHORS:

Anna Ivannikova

Specialist in Russian icon painting of the 18th–20th centuries, expert of the Russian Ministry of Culture, curator of the late icon painting collection at the State Hermitage Museum

Wendy Salmond

Ph.D., professor at Chapman University (California) and Chief Editor of the Journal of Icon Studies

Alek D. Epstein

Ph.D., Israeli sociologist and cultural scholar, Director of the Historical and Cultural Association Discovery Routes

BOOK LAUNCH AT THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

APRIL 26, 2023



Nikolay Zadorozhny

*Director of the Museum
of Russian Icons*



Sergey Khodorkovskiy

*Collector, antiquarian,
Russian icons expert*



Dmitry Sanoyan

*Historian,
Ph.D.*



Sergei Brun

*Head of the
excursion-methodological
department at the Moscow
Kremlin Museums, curator*



Alexei Lidov

*Art historian,
RAS academician*

**BOOK LAUNCH AT THE MUSEUM
OF RUSSIAN ICONS**
APRIL 26, 2023

watch the video 



EXPERTS ON THE COLLECTION⁽¹⁾

Alexei Lidov

*Art historian,
RAS academician*

We are witnessing an interesting phenomenon. The political and social events that we observe today will be a turning point in our lives and the lives of millions. At the same time, many amazing things are happening that we never even thought about before. I think private icon collections are a sign of the times. Their founders contribute to the preservation of Russian culture, and by acknowledging them, we pay tribute to these people and their work. I am sure that Oleg Kushnirskiy's collection will play an important cultural role.

Pavel Pavlinov

*Head of the Department of Theory and History of Art at the
V.I. Surikov Moscow State Academic Art Institute (MGAKI)*

The release of this icon collection catalog is really important and exciting. I asked Oleg Kushnirskiy for a few copies to have in the MGAKI library. The catalog caught the attention of the faculty, including Evgeny Nikolaevich Maksimov, a well-known artist who leads the monumental painting workshop. I introduced the catalog to my art history students, and some of them have already chosen seminar topics based on the icons featured in it. I also want to mention that the catalog is of excellent quality, allowing us to examine the collection in detail.

Sergey Khodorkovskiy

*Collector, antiquarian, Russian icons
expert*

History is not a collection of facts (or artifacts in the case of art history). This is primarily a context that gives an idea of the relationship of events, material and everyday culture.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when Russian icons began to be exported en masse to Europe and the USA, many bought them without a special system, as oriental exotics for interior decoration. There were others who viewed icons solely as financial investments. The value of Oleg Kushnirskiy's collection lies precisely in its conceptual thoughtfulness and completeness, in the dialogue of those masterpieces that make it up. Which is very rare among private collections — and almost an exception among private icon collections. I am glad that the general public now has the opportunity to get acquainted with the unique collection through this catalog and, hopefully, exhibitions in the future.

EXPERTS ON THE COLLECTION⁽²⁾

Lyudmila Belgorodskaya

*Professor of the Department of Russian History,
World and Regional Civilizations at the Siberian
Federal University*

While the traditional focus of art historians lies on ancient Russian icons, pre-Mongolian ones, Oleg Kushnirskiy's collection offers a different perspective, featuring icons from the more recent era of the 17th to the 19th centuries, which I find interesting and valuable. Personally, I found myself drawn to images of saints – real people that were later canonized – rather than biblical figures. Initially, I knew very little about some of these saints. As I leaf through the book, I continue to find an abundance of meaning in these works. This is beautiful and this is what makes antique art relevant today.

I see the icon collection assembled by Oleg Kushnirskiy in America as another example of the intricate cultural and historical connections between our two countries. In this context, the release of the catalog becomes yet another bridge, which, most importantly, was built by an individual – a private collector.

Anastasia Likhenko

*Research fellow at the Department of Ancient
Russian Art at the State Tretyakov Gallery*

It is always a great joy when collectors choose to publish their collection rather than keep it hidden away. This is of great importance for the advancement of art history studies as the catalog brings forth a range of artifacts into scholarly discussions that were previously unknown to both specialists and the broader community of ancient Russian art enthusiasts. It was incredibly gratifying to witness the numerous colleagues at the book launch of Oleg Kushnirskiy's collection catalog and to hear the warm words of appreciation with which they welcomed the publication.

EXPERTS ON THE COLLECTION⁽³⁾

Anna Sokolskaya

Host of Art Programs on "Radio Moscow"

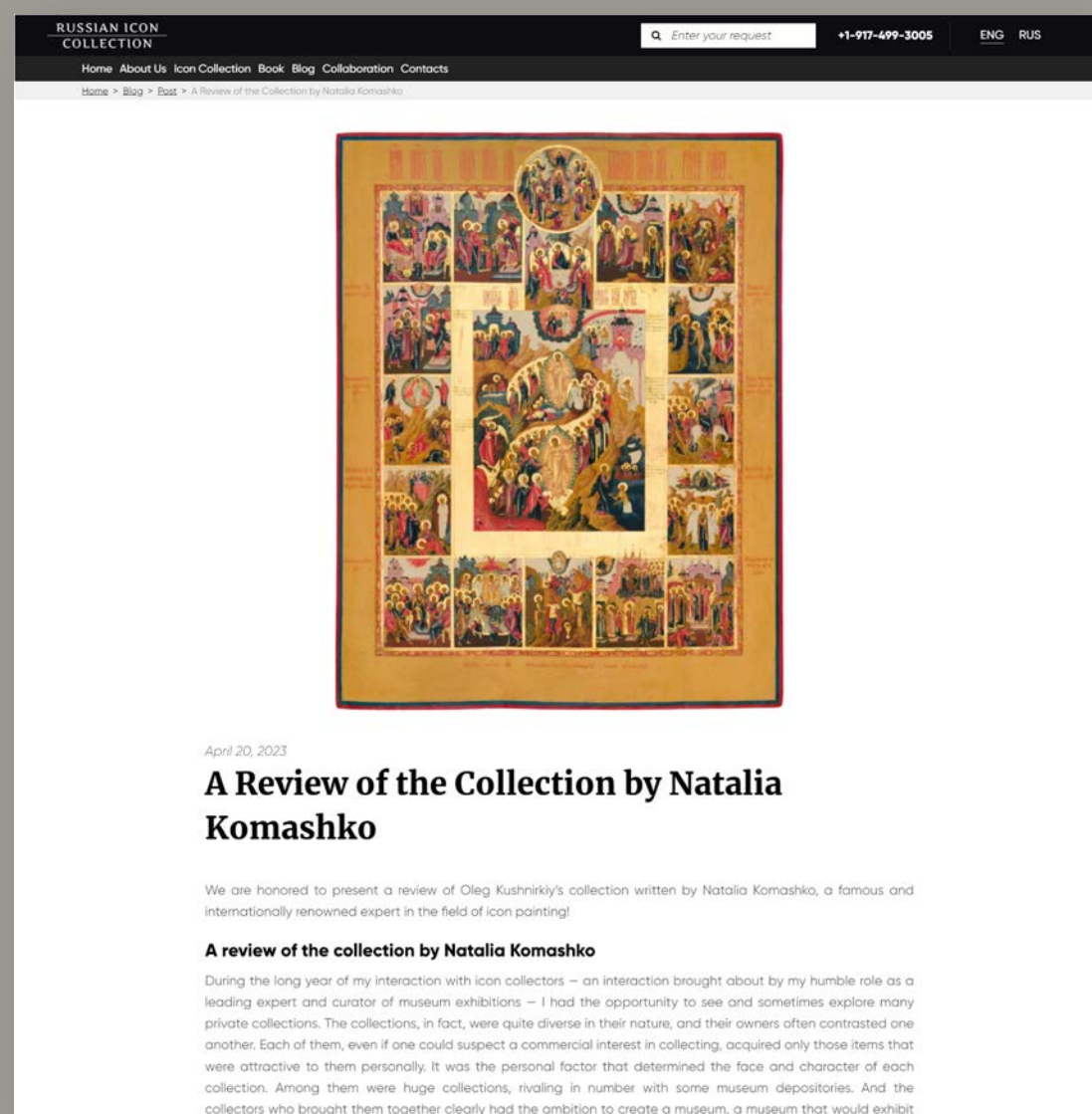
I find the timeframe chosen by Oleg Kushnirskiy for his collection very interesting. While we are familiar with ancient Russian iconography, we often overlook the artistic merits of icons from the second half of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. We sometimes forget that icons are not just artworks but also sacred objects. To some extent, they express the aesthetic and cultural beliefs of the entire people, of course, within the church canon. In Kushnirskiy's collection, a significant place is given to icons depicting the Harrowing of Hades. It is striking how the interest of iconographers in this theme correlates with the translation of the Bible into Russian in the second half of the 19th century.

Andrey Boldyrev

Collector and host of the YouTube channel "Russian Icons. Andrey Boldyrev Presents"

A collection is not just a set of artifacts: all the works within it are connected by a certain idea. It is very important that Oleg Kushnirskiy's collection is a unity, where each element has significance. Thus, the collection as a whole turns out to be more valuable than just the sum of the works that make it up.

REVIEWS



April 20, 2023

A Review of the Collection by Natalia Komashko

We are honored to present a review of Oleg Kushnirsky's collection written by Natalia Komashko, a famous and internationally renowned expert in the field of icon painting!

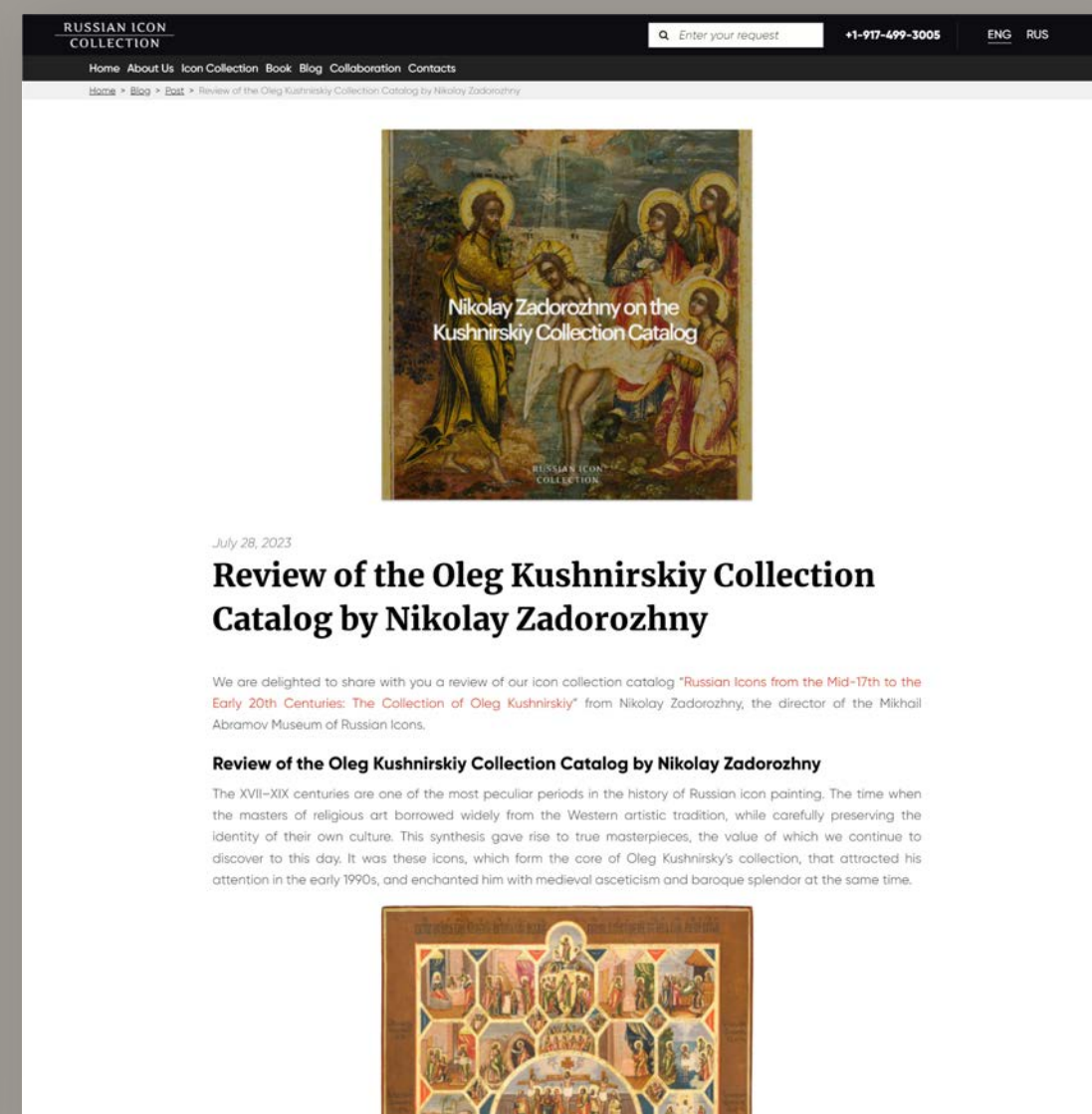
A review of the collection by Natalia Komashko

During the long year of my interaction with icon collectors – an interaction brought about by my humble role as a leading expert and curator of museum exhibitions – I had the opportunity to see and sometimes explore many private collections. The collections, in fact, were quite diverse in their nature, and their owners often contrasted one another. Each of them, even if one could suspect a commercial interest in collecting, acquired only those items that were attractive to them personally. It was the personal factor that determined the face and character of each collection. Among them were huge collections, rivaling in number with some museum depositories. And the collectors who brought them together clearly had the ambition to create a museum, a museum that would exhibit

Natalia Komashko

Leading research fellow at the Andrey Rublev Museum, member of the museum's expert council, expert of the Russian Ministry of Culture

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July 28, 2023

Review of the Oleg Kushnirskiy Collection Catalog by Nikolay Zadorozhny

We are delighted to share with you a review of our icon collection catalog "Russian Icons from the Mid-17th to the Early 20th Centuries: The Collection of Oleg Kushnirsky" from Nikolay Zadorozhny, the director of the Mikhail Abramov Museum of Russian Icons.

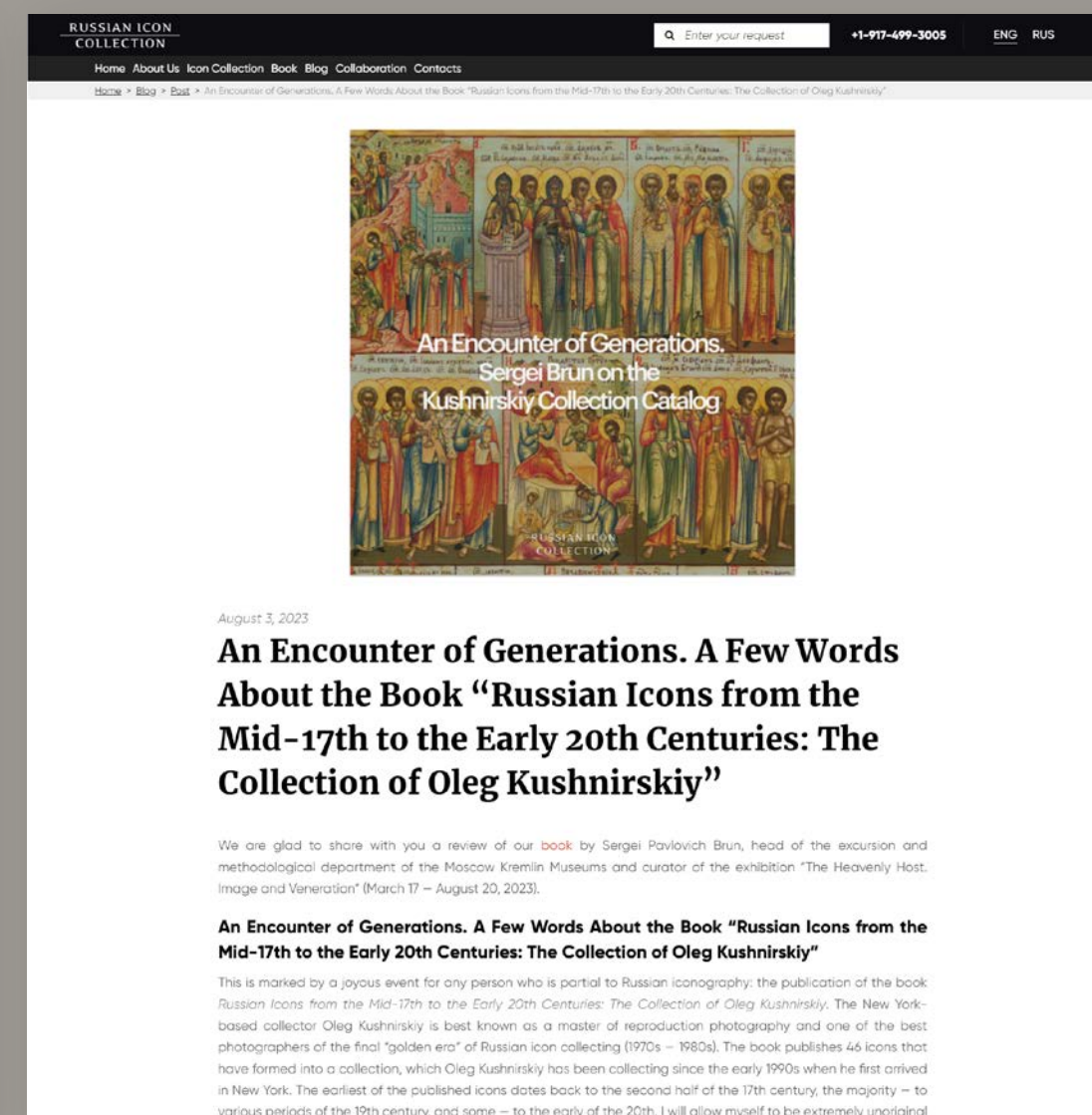
Review of the Oleg Kushnirskiy Collection Catalog by Nikolay Zadorozhny

The XVII–XX centuries are one of the most peculiar periods in the history of Russian icon painting. The time when the masters of religious art borrowed widely from the Western artistic tradition, while carefully preserving the identity of their own culture. This synthesis gave rise to true masterpieces, the value of which we continue to discover to this day. It was these icons, which form the core of Oleg Kushnirsky's collection, that attracted his attention in the early 1990s, and enchanted him with medieval asceticism and baroque splendor at the same time.

Nikolay Zadorozhny

Director of the Museum of Russian Icons

[open the publication](#)



August 3, 2023

An Encounter of Generations. A Few Words About the Book "Russian Icons from the Mid-17th to the Early 20th Centuries: The Collection of Oleg Kushnirsky"

We are glad to share with you a review of our book by Sergei Pavlovich Brun, head of the excursion and methodological department of the Moscow Kremlin Museums and curator of the exhibition "The Heavenly Host. Image and Veneration" (March 17 – August 20, 2023).

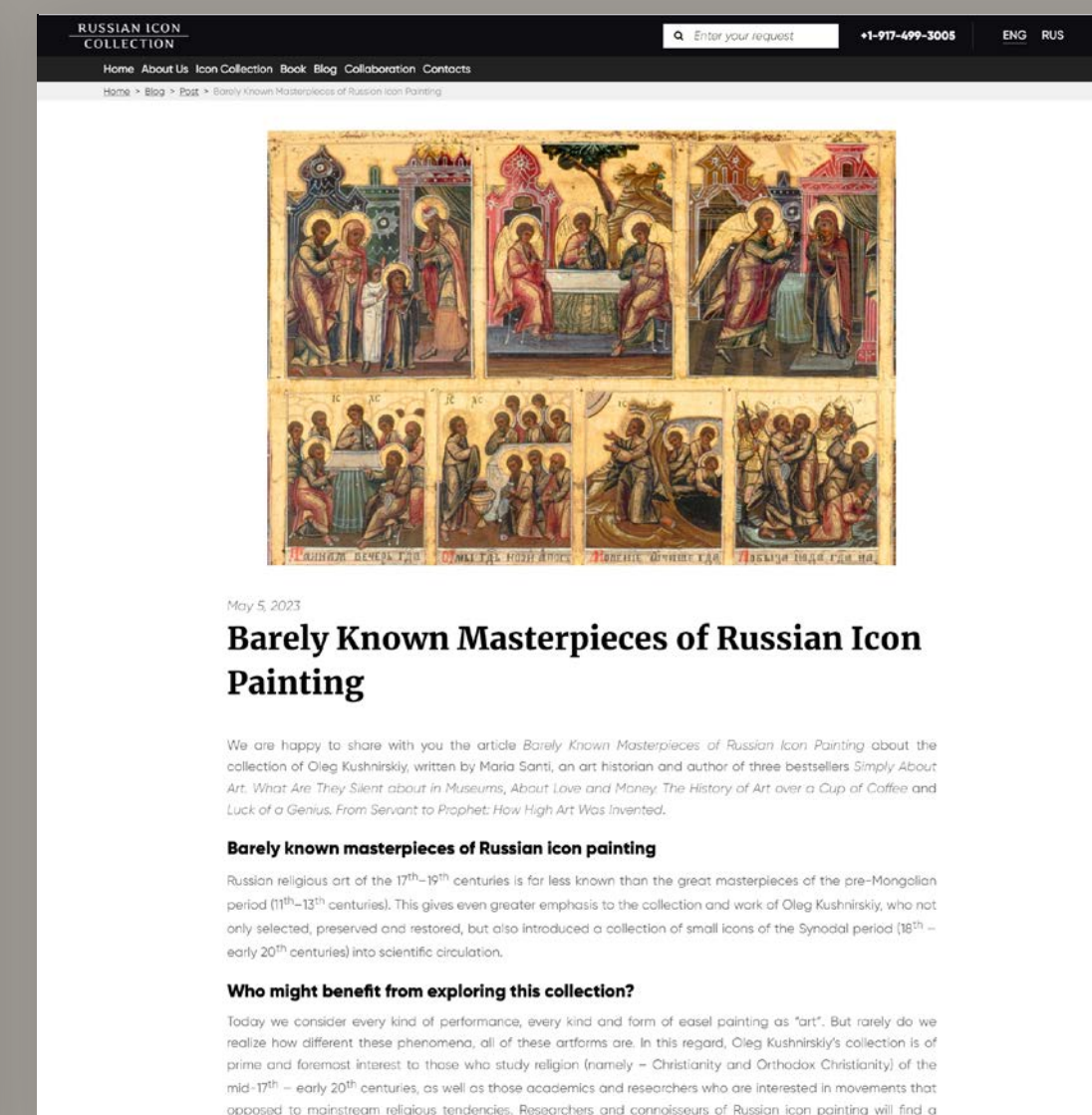
An Encounter of Generations. A Few Words About the Book "Russian Icons from the Mid-17th to the Early 20th Centuries: The Collection of Oleg Kushnirsky"

This is marked by a joyous event for any person who is partial to Russian iconography: the publication of the book "Russian Icons from the Mid-17th to the Early 20th Centuries: The Collection of Oleg Kushnirsky". The New York-based collector Oleg Kushnirsky is best known as a master of reproduction photography and one of the best photographers of the final "golden era" of Russian icon collecting (1970s – 1980s). The book publishes 46 icons that have formed into a collection, which Oleg Kushnirsky has been collecting since the early 1950s when he first arrived in New York. The earliest of the published icons dates back to the second half of the 17th century, the majority – to various periods of the 19th century, and some – to the early of the 20th. I will allow myself to be extremely unoriginal

Sergei Brun

Head of the excursion-methodological department at the Moscow Kremlin Museums, curator

[open the publication](#)



May 5, 2023

Barely Known Masterpieces of Russian Icon Painting

We are happy to share with you the article Barely Known Masterpieces of Russian Icon Painting about the collection of Oleg Kushnirsky, written by Maria Santi, an art historian and author of three bestsellers Simply About Art, What Are They Silent about in Museums, About Love and Money, The History of Art over a Cup of Coffee and Luck of a Genius, From Servant to Prophet: How High Art Was Invented.

Barely known masterpieces of Russian icon painting

Russian religious art of the 17th–19th centuries is far less known than the great masterpieces of the pre-Mongolian period (11th–13th centuries). This gives even greater emphasis to the collection and work of Oleg Kushnirsky, who not only selected, preserved and restored, but also introduced a collection of small icons of the Synodal period (18th–early 20th centuries) into scientific circulation.

Who might benefit from exploring this collection?

Today we consider every kind of performance, every kind and form of easel painting as "art". But rarely do we realize how different these phenomena, at of these art forms are. In this regard, Oleg Kushnirsky's collection is of prime and foremost interest: to those who study religion broadly – Christianity and Orthodox Christianity) of the mid-17th – early 20th centuries, as well as those academics and researchers who are interested in movements that opposed to mainstream religious tendencies. Researchers and connoisseurs of Russian icon painting will find a

Maria Santi

Art historian and writer

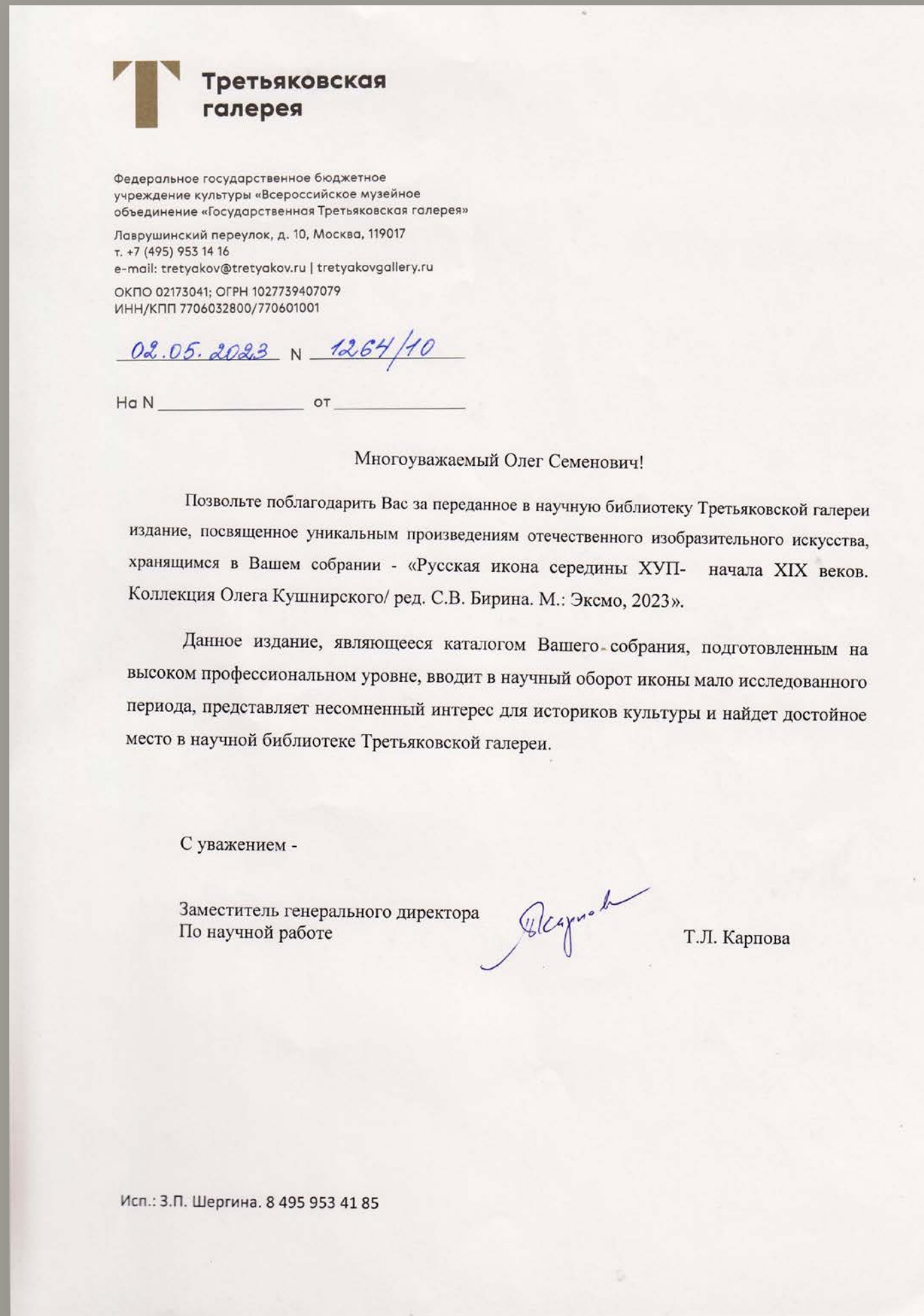
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EDUCATIONAL AND CHARITY ACTIVITIES

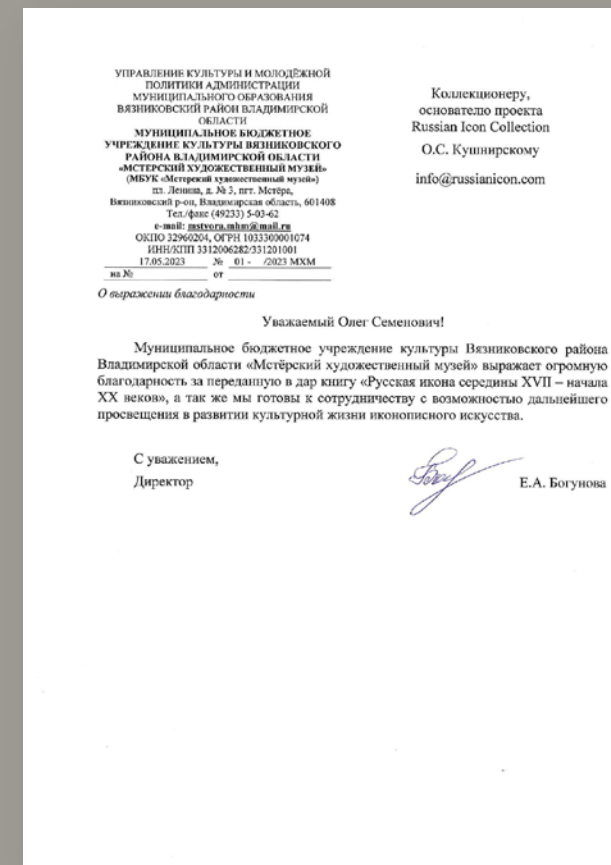
**Book copies have been donated
to more than 50 libraries and museums
across Russia, including:**

- Scientific Library of the State Tretyakov Gallery
- Library of the Moscow Kremlin Museums
- Library of the Moscow Orthodox Theological Academy
- Scientific Library of the State Hermitage Museum
- Scientific Library of the State Russian Museum
- Scientific Library of the Russian Academy of Arts

THANK-YOU LETTERS



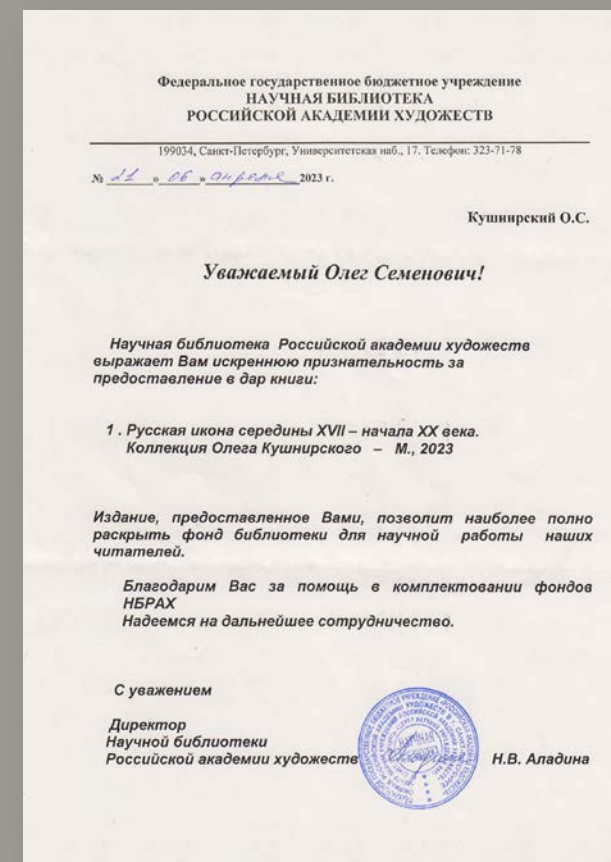
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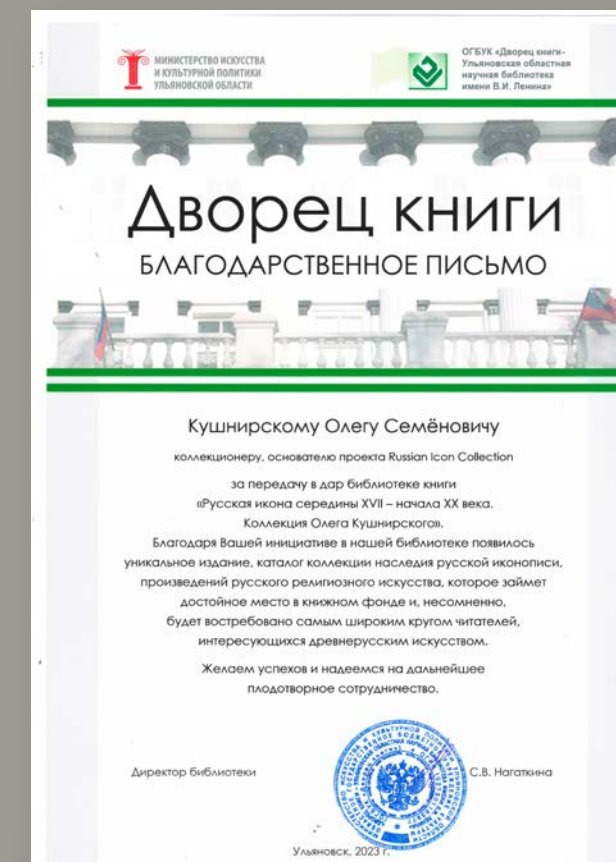
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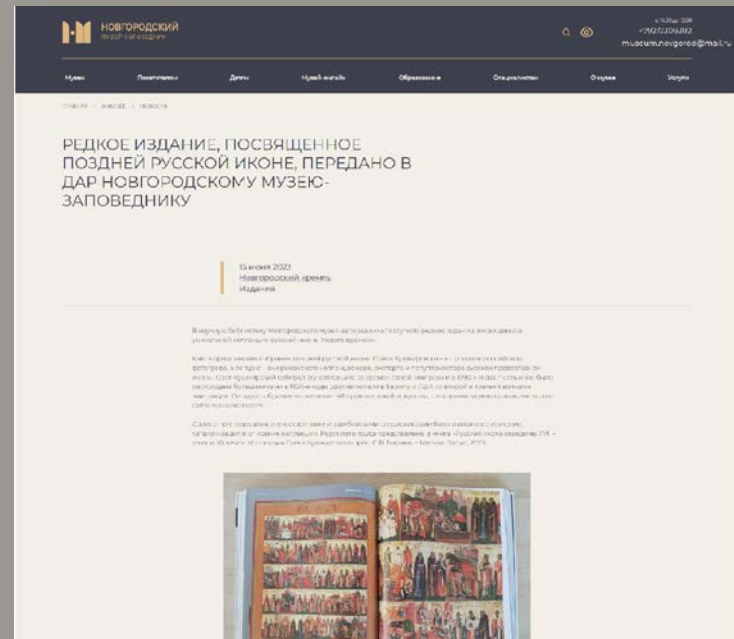
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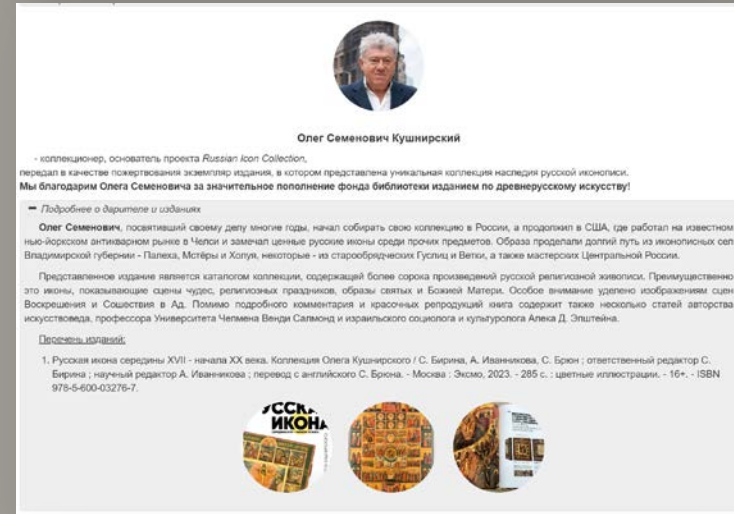
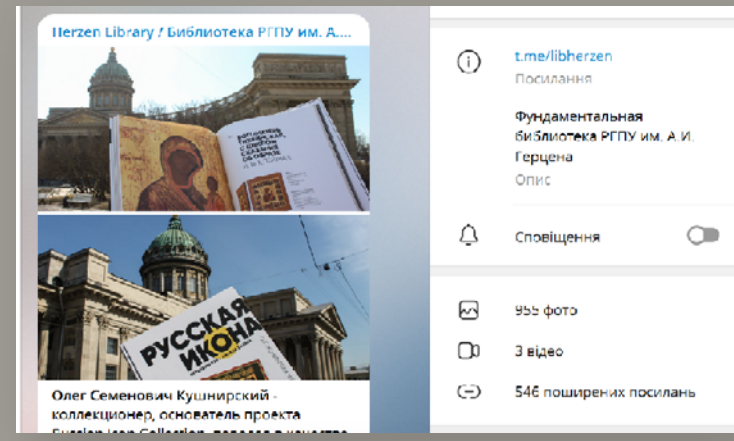
Novgorod Museum-Reserve

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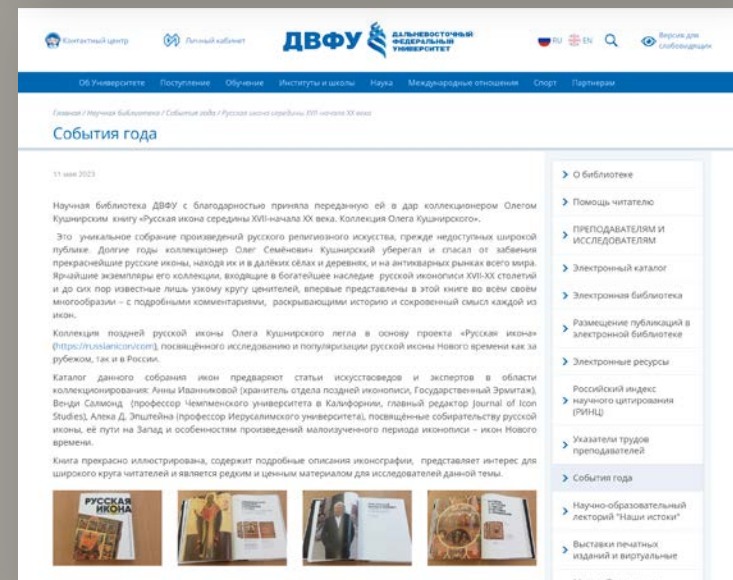
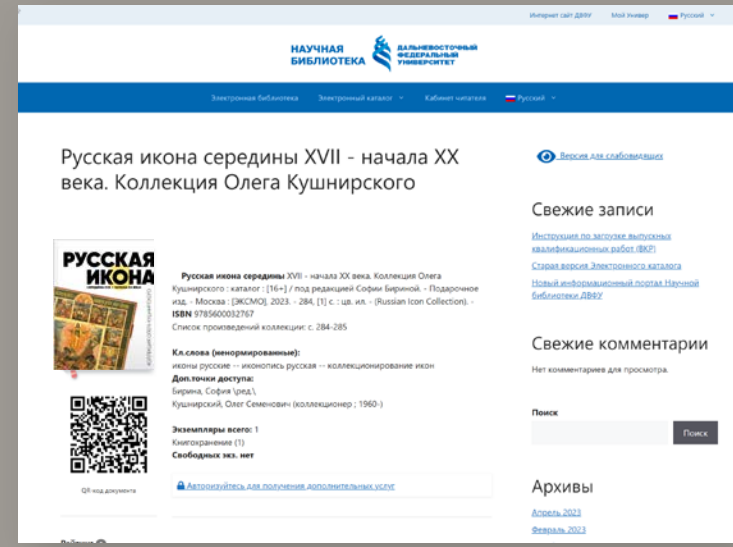
Tver Regional Art Gallery

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Fundamental Library of Herzen University

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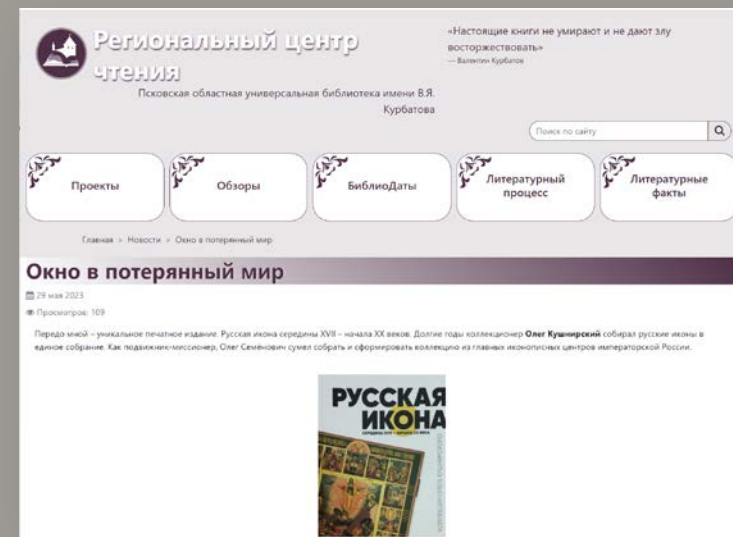
Scientific Library of FEFU

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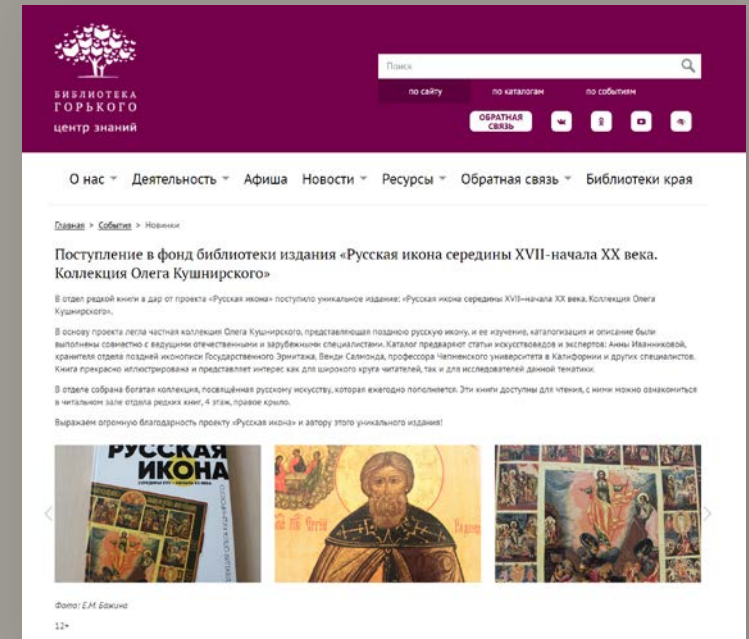
Regional Scientific Library of Arkhangelsk

open the publication



V. Y. Kurbatov Pskov Regional Universal Scientific Library

open the publication



A. M. Gorky Perm State Regional Universal Library

open the publication

PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK AT THE SIBERIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY

Lyudmila Belgorodskaya

*Professor of the Department of
Russian History, World and Regional
Civilizations at the Siberian Federal
University, is presenting the catalog
to students*



MEDIA COVERAGE



Bogoslov.ru "Russian Icons from the Mid-17th to the Early 20th Centuries: The Collection of Oleg Kushnirskiy"

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Русская икона середины XVII — начала XX века. Коллекция Олега Кушнирского. М., 2023. 228 с. ISBN: 978-5-600-02978-7. Редактор издания Софья Биркина, переводчик Сергей Бран. Фото: Russian Icon Collection

Одна из подобных книг недавно вышла из печати в Москве. Это крупноформатный каталог собрания иконописи американского галериста, основателя арт-логистической компании **Fine Art Shippers** Олега Кушнирского (р. 1960) «Русская икона середины XVII — начала XX века». Помимо непосредственного описания коллекции, издание включает несколько любопытных статей, рассказывающих о том, как после Октябрьской революции складывался рынок русской иконописи в США, какой категории предметы туда в основном попадали и какой характер имели раньше и имеют сейчас американские коллекции икон. В числе

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"An American Story of Russian Iconography"

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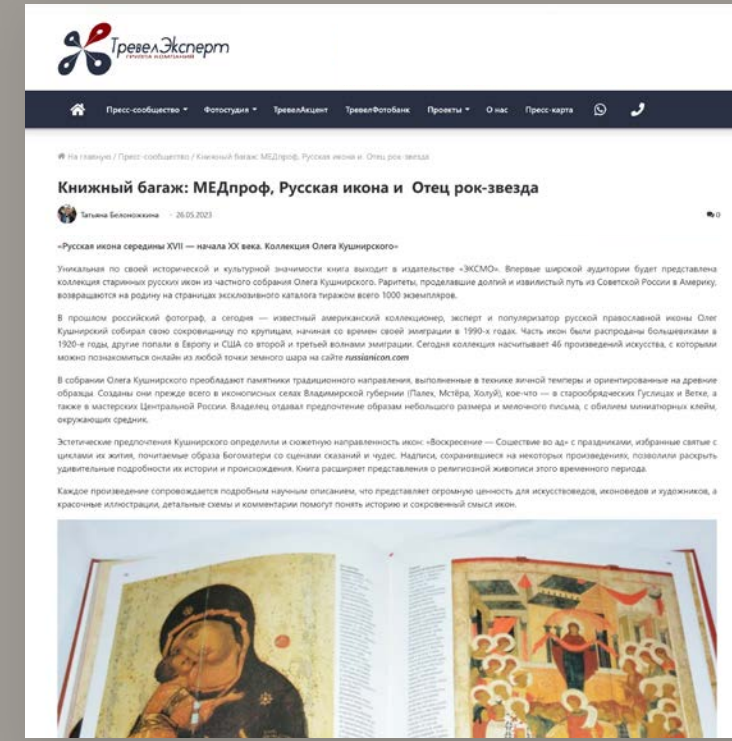
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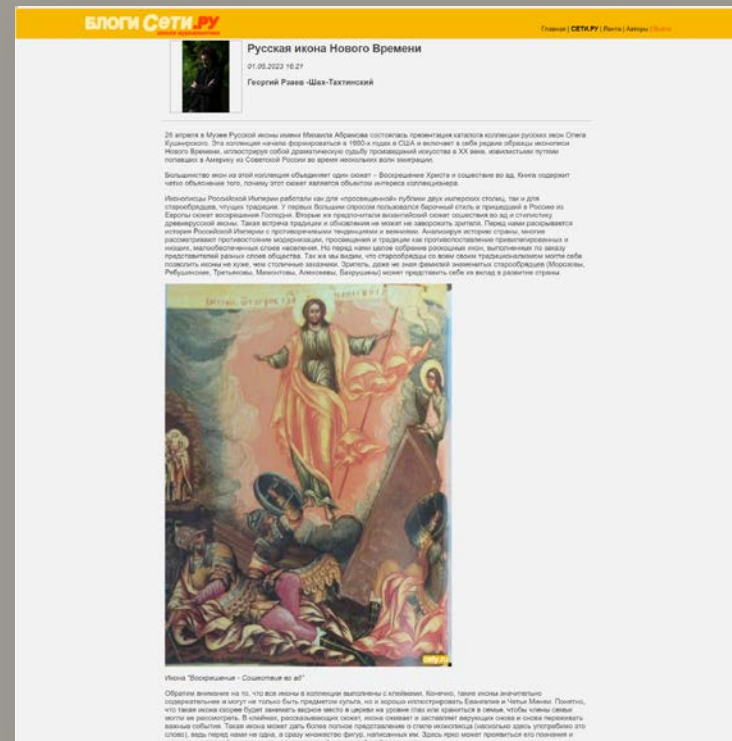
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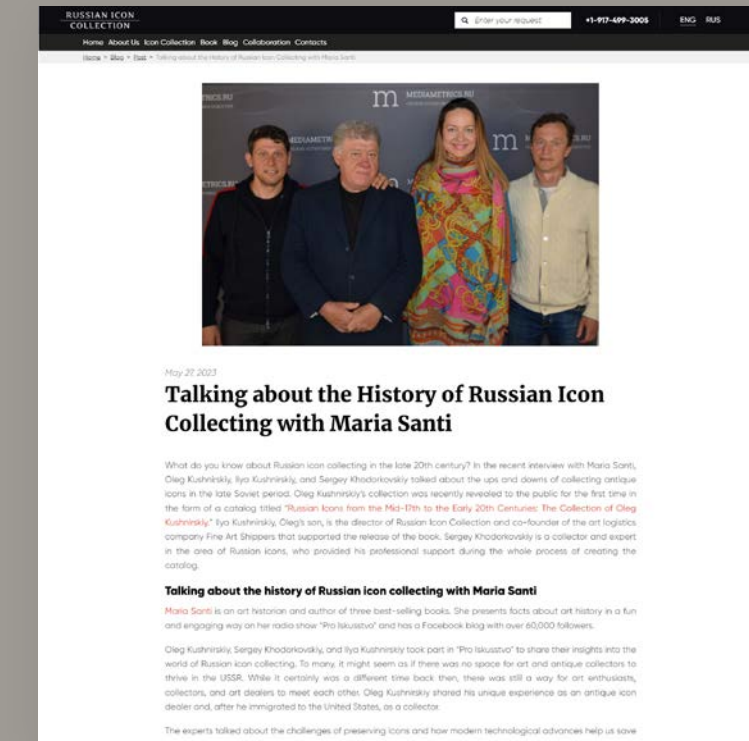
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RUSSIAN ICON IN AMERICA

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by icon expert **Andrey Boldyrev** on his
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by Andrey Boldyrev"

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Russian Icon in America. A Conversation
With Oleg and Ilya Kushnirskiy

6K views • 1 month ago

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'Русская икона. Показывает Андрей Болдырев'. The channel has 8,420 subscribers and 638 videos. The page features a banner with the text 'РУССКАЯ ИКОНА' and 'ИКОНА' along with a 'ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ' (Subscribe) button. Below the banner, there are navigation tabs for 'ГЛАВНАЯ', 'ВИДЕО', 'ПЛЕЙЛИСТЫ', 'СООБЩЕСТВО', 'КАНАЛЫ', and 'О КАНАЛЕ'. The video grid displays several recent uploads, including 'Эфиопская коллекция 8', 'Эфиопская коллекция 7', 'Горячий интерес к холодному оружию 75. Дагестан. Кумух...', 'Показывает Андрей Мстера в Музее...', 'Россия в мундире 233. Гимнастерка нижних чинов - восстановление из...', and 'Русская икона. Показывает Андрей Болдырев. 273. Презентация...'. Each video thumbnail includes a title, duration, and view count.

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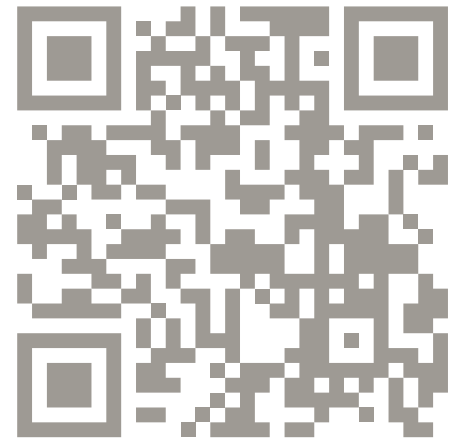
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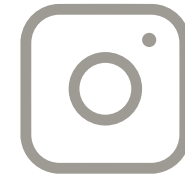
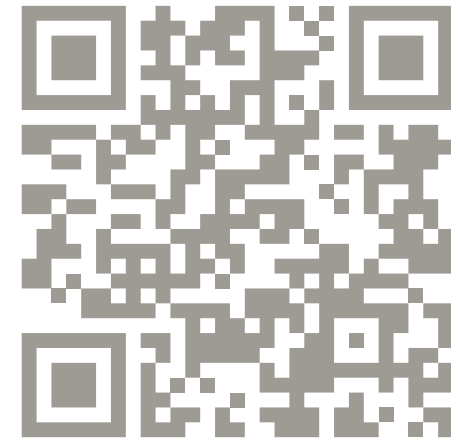
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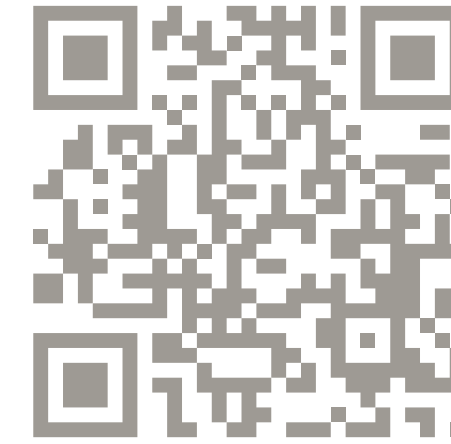
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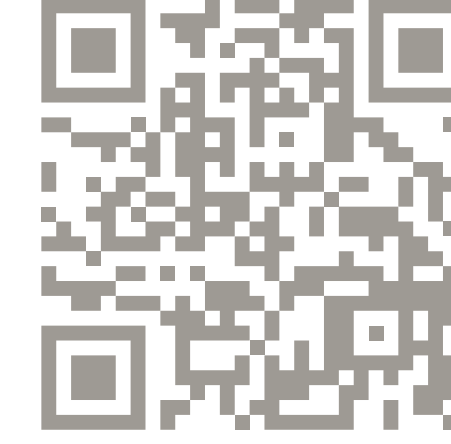
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