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This plate depicting an accordion player was painted at the State Porcelain Manufactory by a woman artist named Aleksandra

Vasil'evna Shchekotikhina-Porotskaia (1892–1967). Her work displays a lyricism not to be seen after Social Realism became the prevailing style. The Accordion Player's flattened perspective (note how the chair legs line up), bright colors, and stylized figure demonstrate not only her interest in, but also her freedom to explore Russian Folk Art, icons, and 18th- and 19th-century print sources.

THE ACCORDION PLAYER (DECORATIVE PLATE)
State Porcelain Manufactory
1891 (whiteware); 1925 (painting)
25.405

All images provided by Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens.
Photography by Ed Owen.

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Self-guided tour

HILLWOOD CONNECTIONS

RUSSIAN PORCELAIN AND THE FINE ART OF PROPAGANDA



This tour begins in the mansion's entry hall.

INTRODUCTION

Your exploration of Russian porcelain continues in the mansion. Here you can see the Imperial styles that inspired their Soviet and later counterparts in the exhibition *Fragile Persuasion*. There are also examples of other types of decorative arts that were pressed into political service. Whether proclaiming power while decorating the dessert table or dealing a blow to religion in a hand of cards, these “ornamental” objects communicate weighty messages and tell fascinating stories.

What is most intriguing about these seemingly modest figures is how they express some of Russia's proudest accomplishments, her most intense cultural conflicts, and her most painful political debates.

—KAREN L. KETTERING, FORMER CURATOR OF RUSSIAN AND EASTERN EUROPEAN ART

The first objects are in the Entry Hall of the mansion flanking the entrance to the Russian Porcelain Room.

I

These vases are typical of the Imperial style later revived by the Soviets. This particular pair has an intriguing connection to the Stalin era—a story of political treachery and betrayal involving the woman who gave them to Mrs. Post.

While living in Moscow, Mrs. Post became friendly with Madame Molotova, the Jewish wife of Stalin's second in command. Molotova was a manager in the textile industry, a powerful political position. She presented the vases to Mrs. Post in 1936 on behalf of the Soviet government. In 1949, she was arrested for “losing documents containing state secrets” and was sent to a labor camp. Her husband continued to serve Stalin as though nothing had happened.

Continue into the Russian Porcelain Room and turn to the case on your right.

PAIR OF VASES WITH
GERMAN PAINTINGS
Imperial Porcelain
Factory
1836
25.324.1–2

2

Few people today are aware that Abraham Lincoln and Alexander II shared a friendly correspondence. Lincoln abolished slavery only a few years after Alexander II emancipated the serfs. Evidence of the admiration the Russian people felt for Lincoln can be found among the traditional Russian embroidery motifs decorating this plate. At the top, surrounding the Imperial Russian Eagle is an inscription that reads, “With the people, through the people and for the people,” an adaptation of a famous line from the Gettysburg Address.

Proceed to the Icon Room and stop in front of the large ebony and lapis cabinet.

SOUP PLATE
Kornilov Factory
1900
25.160





3

Like the Imperial vases in the entry hall, this lavishly embellished cabinet has a storied past. Ippolit Monigetti (1819-1878) designed it in 1873, but not as you see it here.

The cabinet was a gift from Tsar Alexander II to his brother, Grand Duke Konstantin, on his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Portraits of the Tsar, his brother, and their wives decorated the panels when Mrs. Post purchased the cabinet in the Soviet Union. When it was delivered, however, these reminders of Imperial Russia had been removed. During the two decades leading up to Mrs. Post's arrival in 1937, confiscated riches of the former regime were sold to finance the revolution and industrialization. The Soviets were eager to profit from the past but apparently sought to erase it at the same time.

Move into the silver-walled passageway between the Icon Room and the Library, and look into the first case on your left.

CABINET
Nichols and Plinke (?);
Monigetti, Ippolit (designer)
1873
32.22



FINNISH PEASANT MAN
*Imperial Porcelain
Manufactory*
1780s
25.245



A CRUEL LOT
Gardner Factory
1880–1917
25.75



FIGURE OF
PEASANT WOMAN
*Imperial Porcelain
Factory*
1810–1820
25.150



RETURNING FROM
THE MARKET
Natalia Danko
Lomonosov Porcelain Factory
1920s
25.504

4

In 1776, Frederick the Great presented Catherine II of Russia with an extraordinary porcelain dessert service to commemorate her victory over the Turks in 1770. The service depicts, among other things, Ancient Roman Gods and various peoples of the Russian empire paying homage to the empress. Possibly annoyed by the fact that some of the Russian peoples weren't represented, Catherine commissioned a series of figures of the Peoples of Russia that included this Finnish Peasant. Catherine's figures are examples of some of the earliest uses of porcelain to communicate pointed, political messages.

5 (not pictured)

Not all Russian Porcelain was created for members of the Imperial Court. In 1766, the Gardner Factory began producing porcelain figures for sale to the public. In 1820, they manufactured a series based on illustrations of Russian street peddlers that appeared in the innovative Russian periodical *Vol'shebnyi fonar'* [Magic Lantern]. These figures were imitated and elaborated on for years to come. In fact, they inspired the "Revolutionary Street Figures" in *Fragile Persuasion*. One of the most popular and enduring characters was the coachman. With his bright blue robe and three-cornered hat, the coachman was the most colorful and familiar figure on Russian city streets in the 1800s.

In the same room, look to the case on your right.

6

The light-hearted mood portrayed by the coachman was darkened by the upheaval caused by the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. The debate about the effects of emancipation lasted decades and was reflected in porcelain figures like the vodka drinkers in *Fragile Persuasion*. Hillwood's collection includes sculptures that address different aspects of the "peasant question." At first glance, *A Cruel Lot* is a romantic depiction of motherhood, but the bare feet and sack of belongings suggest that the woman is homeless and unmarried. This tiny figure portrays a monumental fear—that traditional Russian culture and family life were being destroyed.

7

This pair of porcelain figures portrays an idealization of peasant life that persisted from Imperial to Soviet times. Some considered peasants "true Russians" because of their traditional clothing and lifestyle. The figure on the left is from the early 1800's, when artists had just begun to see peasants as subjects worthy of depiction. With her immaculate costume and classical pose, this elegant figure says little about the reality of peasant life. The figure on the right from the 1920s attests to the on-going popularity of this genre.

Return to the Entry Hall and go up the stairs to the hallway. Stop in front of the large case.

8

Lenin's propaganda campaign covered everything from monumental public sculpture to household objects. Graphic elements communicated fundamental political ideals to an illiterate population—in this case resulting in an exquisite design. The symbols of labor and agriculture decorating the cobalt blue rim of this plate represent Soviet objectives. The red star in the center was one of the earliest symbols of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and later, Communism. This plate was produced before the formation of the Soviet Union. The initials stand for "Soviet Federated Socialist Republic," the name given to Bolshevik Russia.



RED STAR PLATE
*State Porcelain
Manufactory*
1920
25.490



PACK OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS
PLAYING CARDS
Levashev, S.D. (artist);
*Leningradskaia kartochnaia
fabrika (printer)*
1920
55.53.1

9

These playing cards demonstrate the extent to which Soviet propaganda saturated society. Religion was one of its targets. Unwilling to tolerate allegiance to anything but the Soviet state, religion was discouraged and its practitioners persecuted. The fronts of the cards are decorated with color lithographs that depict religion as a tool of capitalism. A top-hatted capitalist with angel's wings decorates the Jokers. He holds the strings that control a Catholic priest, an Orthodox priest, a rabbi, and a shaman who kneel to this larger-than-life figure in the sky. We could ask who is really pulling the strings here, capitalists or the Soviet propaganda machine?