

Information technologies of the project of new  
museum exposition

“Periods of the history of Kolomenskoye”

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My presentation will deal with Kolomenskoye museum-reserve in Moscow and projects involving use of new technologies that the museum experts intend to employ in their everyday work.

Let me say a few words about the museum. It is located in Moscow and occupies a site of 390 hectares. The peculiarity of our museum consists in the fact that quite diverse monuments and objects of cultural heritage are concentrated in it. Lands of Kolomenskoye where the museum is located has been inhabited by people since the most ancient times.

The very landscape of Kolomenskoye is the unique object of the cultural heritage. The museum-reserve is situated on a high beautiful place at the Moscow river bank. The oldest trees in Moscow, oaks that are more than 600 years old have survived to the present time in the place. Flood plains, rare herbs and flowers included in the Red book, ravines with exposed geological strata, streams and springs belong to natural monuments. The old park of planted oaks, larches, fir trees, elms and ash trees and gardens of apple and pear trees occupy the greater part of Kolomenskoye plot.

The particular value of Kolomenskoye museum is imparted by the fact that the place served as the summer time residence of the Russian tsars for good six hundred years. Originally Kolomenskoye was situated outside Moscow city boundaries. It lies south off the city and Russian potentates did not select the place for their residence on the high beautiful river bank just by chance. In the course of centuries wood palaces for tsars and their families, numerous buildings for service and economic use were constructed there to be replaced with more magnificent buildings. Entries to the estate were decorated with gala gates. Special premises were designated for Tsar's guards, administration, for storage of foodstuffs and wines earmarked for the Tsar's consumption. Therefore, a unique architectural ensemble consisting of 20 monuments of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries has formed in Kolomenskoye.



Church of the Ascension is rightfully considered to be an architectural monument of the universal importance. The church was built in 1532 to commemorate the birth of the heir to the Russian throne who would be the Russian Tsar Ivan the Fourth and would earn nickname ‘the Terrible’. Church of the Ascension was built by an Italian architect who had been invited to Russia by Tsar Basil the Third to decorate the Tsar’s favorite summer residence. Architectural design of the church is brilliantly matched to the surrounding landscape. In 1994 the monument was included in the list of universal cultural heritage protected by UNESCO.

The state museum was established in the site of former Tsars’ residence in 1924. At the time being Kolomenskoye is one of the biggest museum-reserves that exist in Russia. Its official name, **State art and historical-architectural and natural-landscape museum-reserve “Kolomenskoye”** reflects the main directions of its activity. The museum is financed by the government of Moscow city from the municipal budget funds.

The epoch of the museum collection gathering began soon after establishment of Kolomenskoye state museum, in 1920s and 1930s. Petr Baranovski, architect-restorer and a remarkable figure was the museum founder. Years when he was creating the museum, i.e. 1920s and 1930s were bleak for the Russian culture and the Russian Orthodox Church. Churches and monasteries were being closed in Russia because the government started to implement policy of atheism as the basic ideology. That created a threat for monuments of the ecclesiastical art that were concentrated in the very temples and monasteries. Upon closure many churches were demolished while icons and other pieces of ecclesiastical art were summarily destroyed. It was precisely the period when Petr Baranovski started to bring icons and other pieces of ecclesiastical art from closed churches and cloisters of Moscow and Moscow region to Kolomenskoye. Expeditions to the Russian North

regions also helped to contribute to the museum collection. Thus a unique museum collection has been formed in Kolomeskoye. Nowadays the artistic collection comprises more than 150 thousand pieces of art including ancient icons, books and manuscripts, objects made of wood, artistic metal works, graphic arts pieces, textiles.

You see special closet for icon collection keeping in custody. Depository for icons is the place where scientific identification of monuments and their origins, their description, their photo capture, other research works are carried out. It is precisely the place where scientists process and prepare the information which is used as the basis for electronic database of the museum collection.

To be sure, our museum has restoration shop of its own. Experienced restoration artists perform conservation and restoration works with our movable monuments. In accordance with the Russian Federation laws on museums and museum funds every museum item is to be properly accounted for and duly registered in the museum accounting and keeping documentation. Records entered in the Main inventory book of a museum are the principal legal documents the Russian museums have in respect of their collections. Such books are kept from the day of a museum foundation. In our museum records are made since 1924, that is to say, from the moment of the museum foundation. Entry on a museum item made in the Inventory book reflects the item characteristics: inventory number, name/designation, dimension, date, place of origin, way of acquisition, degree of preservation. Last year we have performed a great work to prepare this basic information on every of 150 thousand museum items for input in the electronic database: we have converted documentary records into electronic format. Specialists who had special equipment and skills were invited to the museum. They scanned all pages of the Museum Main inventory books.

Kolomeskoye enjoys an enormous popularity. Approximately 7 million people visit it annually. Visitors are Muscovites and residents of other Russian regions, foreign tourists, schoolchildren,

students, retirees. Many of them come to the museum repeatedly. Visitors survey the museum on their own or do that as organized groups with instruction of professional guides.

How can we convey the information on the history and architecture of Kolomenskoye, the artistic collections stored in the museum funds in its totality to visitors? Is it possible, with help of modern technologies, to demonstrate to visitors the discoveries the museum experts make in the process of direct work with the museum items? Is it possible to involve a visitor into the process of scientific examination of a monument, to demonstrate to him or her that the museum is not a mere dull and boring aggregation of old things but the place where joy of creativity and scientific discovery resides permanently?



To achieve these goals we are introducing new information technologies in the museum work practice.

New historical exposition dedicated to history of Kolomeskoye was opened last year. We have accommodated it in the Front Palace Gates ensemble which is the architectural monument. The exposition occupies eleven halls of the building from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The exposition topic is “**Periods of the history of Kolomeskoye**”. At the time being we are completing the work in the final hall.

In parallel with elaboration of the concept, artistic design and selection of exhibits the scientific team of the museum has prepared a program of exposition halls equipment with electronic information devices. We install information booths in our exposition halls. Through these booths we are going to provide our visitors with narrative and visual information that will help them to get knowledge of Kolomenskoye, its history, its monuments of archeology, nature and architecture and its wonderful collections of artistic pieces.

This information has to be adapted to diverse levels of demand and knowledge. Targets of information are:

- schoolchildren
- adult visitors
- specialists

We intend to include in information booths those materials that are not exhibited in the exposition: layouts of the site, documents, etchings, drawings, that is to say, everything which will help a visitor to acquire a more detailed knowledge of the history of Kolomenskoye itself.

The second layer of information is detailed information on works of art exhibited in halls.

Let's consider in greater detail how one our exposition halls' central topic is revealed with help of modern information technologies. Icons from the museum funds are exhibited in this hall. The hall topic is «**Architecture in Russian icons**». 50 icons are exhibited at the exposition area of 80 square meters. What does constitute peculiarity and uniqueness of the exposition?

Icons of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with images of saints beatified by the Russian Orthodox Church are exhibited. These are images of brothers-princes, monks-founders of monasteries, God's fools and blessed ones glorified by their holy lives and posthumous miracles. As it is known, the icon is the supreme and superb achievement of the Russian spiritual seeking.



Uniqueness of the exhibited collection consists in the fact that the saints are depicted against architectural background of those Russian towns or monasteries where they committed their spiritual heroic deeds.

The Russian prince Vsevolod is depicted on the 16<sup>th</sup> century icon “**Saint Vsevolod-Gabriel, the prince of**

**Pskov**". On the icon the prince holds in his hand a church built on his order. The church has survived to the present time, though in very much recast form. Its appearance on the icon helps us to reproduce the ancient, original appearance of this well known in Russia temple.

Without special explanations it will be difficult for visitors to find out what monuments of architecture are shown on the icons.

You may see the 17<sup>th</sup> century icon "**Saint Anthony of Siyisk with life**". In the middle part of the icon Anthony of Siyisk praying to the Saint Trinity image is presented. This saint lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and founded the monastery on the Siya river in the Northern Russia.

The middle part of the icon is surrounded by twenty miniatures that illustrate scenes from the saint's life. By virtue of electronic technologies we are able to demonstrate every miniature stamp (little scene) and every smallest inscription in the old Russian language which accompanies every image and unfold them to the full extent of the display installed in the hall. Stamps provide wonderful samples of the architecture typical to the Russian North.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century icon with images of two Moscow saints, **Saint Basil the Blessed and Saint Maxim the Blessed**, is among masterpieces of our museum. Both saints were particularly revered in Moscow. Therefore, the artists placed the view of Moscow architectural hallmarks on the icon. The cathedral of Basil the Blessed (constructed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) is depicted in the middle of the icon. Buildings of the Moscow Kremlin are placed on the left and on the right of the cathedral. Architecture on the icon shows these monuments in the appearance that they acquired in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so they are depicted as the artists saw them. In this particular case architectural studies allow establishing time of the work of art more exactly.

What information will be offered to visitors in order to help them in perceiving complicated but intriguing topic of the hall?

We place a general summary of the exhibition topic in the hall and add to it short labels near every work of art. If we confine ourselves merely to these traditional means of communication

with our visitors then the greater part of their emotions would be focused primarily on gloating, i.e., on admiration generated by the superb artistic level of works exhibited in the hall. However icons with architectural backgrounds convey several strata of underlying, hidden information; art historians, keepers, restorers have carried out a huge set of the most interesting researches of these icons and have drawn archive and written sources in these studies. All that invisible for visitors but very useful for them scientific “cookery” may be excellently demonstrated by modern electronic methods.

As early as at stage of the hall layout designing we determined the place for installation of plasma display where visitors may get required information.



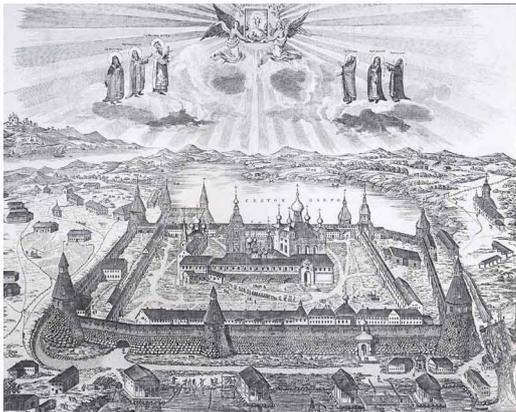
The 19<sup>th</sup> century icon “Saint Fathers and Prelates, Resting in the Solovetsky Cloister” depicts saints who were held in particular reverence in the Solovetsky monastery, the major spiritual center in Northern Russia. The cloister is situated on islands of the White Sea, 65 km off the Polar circle. Inscription which indicates the year of this cloister foundation, 1874, has been discovered during restoration works.

The value of this work consists in depiction, beneath the saints' feet, of the Solovetsky cloister architectural ensemble in the appearance it acquired by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is, as the icon painter saw it. The view of monastery taken from a bird's flight height is unfolding before visitor's eyes: cathedral, churches, bell towers, monks' premises, mighty stronghold walls. A steamship is depicted in the foreground and a dry dock for boats overhaul is depicted among engineer installations.

We introduce the following themes in succession of our electronically generated images:



- copy of icon with image of the Solovetsky cloister architecture with designation of every architectural monument;
- print of 1848 which served as the original model for creation of architectural composition;



- the 19<sup>th</sup> century icon with image of two Solovetsky saints, **Saints Zosima and Sabbatiy of Solovetsk** where the Solovetsky cloister is also depicted;
- the present-day view of the Solovetsky cloister.

These images will allow visitors to get comprehensive information on the monument exhibited in the hall. However, by virtue of electronic means we may show things that normally are hidden from eyes of to an inquisitive visitor: lengthy, time-consuming process of the icon restoration. This icon underwent restoration at the restoration workshops of the museum for two years and every stage of the process is reflected in photo documents. We offer visitors a chance:

- to examine every smallest details of the work of art;
- to read inscriptions, legends, marks etc.;
- to get information on the painter and his epoch;
- to familiarize with the topic of the artistic work;
- to familiarize with explication which explains the name of every architectural monument;
- to see analogs (prints, icons of similar themes, miniatures)

For investigation of the exhibited work in depth we introduce information on restoration of the icon with short explanatory text:

- - general appearance of the icon prior to the restoration
- - process of layer-by-layer removal of later depictions
- - performance of restoration shadings
- - general appearance of the icon after the restoration.

Employment of advanced museum technologies in the museum exposition and exhibition activity allows visitors of different levels to select volume of additional information every visitor needs, to scrutinize details of a work of art.

Thus, advanced information technologies in the practical museum work allow doing a lot. We preserve a vast amount of information on a museum item and provide a chance to open our reserve funds for everyone who seeks to get access to them and to this part of the world cultural heritage. We introduce in our expositions such means that 20 or 30 years earlier might seem to be absolutely alien to the artistic historical artifacts. By virtue of electronic technologies we are acquiring the ability to see better and to demonstrate to our visitors smallest details and fragments of works that are exhibited in our halls. We can instantly send information to the other part of the world and get immediate response to our messages. Yet nothing will replace that joyful feeling of encounter with the genuine, authentic and beautiful in search of which people come to our museums, archives and libraries. Pleasure to see with one's own eyes, to feel excitement, surprise

and involvement in the great work of culture makes people to overcome great distances and to fill halls of our museums every day.