

# Slutsk sash — a significant accessory of its time

Belarusian relics brought to National Art Museum from Vilnius

By Viktor Andreev

Four masterpieces of ancient Belarusian art are to be on display until June in Minsk, from the Lithuanian Art Museum: sash belts, as once worn by every local nobleman. Woven in Slutsk, founded by Armenian craftsmen Yan and Leo Mazharsky, at the instruction of the Radziwill Dukes, they were also known as 'Persian', since they drew inspiration from oriental embroidery. However, they were unique in also interlacing national Belarusian motifs.

"The belts were hand-woven, using silk, golden and silver threads," explains Yelena Karpenko, the Head of the National Art Museum's Ancient Belarusian Art Department. Re-



National Art Museum reveres wonderful new exhibits

vealing past masters' secrets, she tells us, "Initially, oriental belts were copied; then, exotic oriental flowers were replaced with Belarusian wild flowers: forget-me-nots, cornflowers, poppies and bellflowers. Belarusian craftsmen developed their own unique sashes, with labels reading 'In the town of Slutsk' and 'Yan Mazharsky'. These early belts had their own 'brand'.

Fringed sashes and those embroidered with precious threads are very rare today: only 11 are kept in Belarus. Those on loan from Vilnius are in superb condition. It's hard to believe they're really 300 years old.

Slutsk sashes were sewn from the early 18th-early 19th century, being worn by men as a symbol of status and wealth. They were

always worn at significant events and remain a central treasure of Belarusian culture. They were even copied in French Lyon two centuries ago.

The National Art Museum plans to further organise exhibitions of Slutsk sashes from various collections. Those from the Moscow State Historical Museum went on show at the National Art Museum in 2008-2010 and are likely to come again in 2013. According to Mr. Karpenko, the collection in Moscow was given as a gift by famous Russian collector and patron of the arts Piotr Shchukin. He donated several thousand Russian, European and oriental works of art in 1905, including about 100 Slutsk sashes.

Vladimir Prokoptsov, Director

of the National Art Museum, hopes that the exhibition of rarities from Vilnius will attract large crowds, especially as a unique portrait is also on display, by famous Minsk artist Valentin Vankovich. It depicts Wojciech Pusłowski — a major figure of Slonim nobility, who was a Councillor of Russian Tsar Alexander I. He was awarded the St. Anna Order for his efforts in the 1812 war against Napoleon, on the Russian side. He is shown wearing the Order, with his robe belted by a Slutsk sash.

Ms. Karpenko regrets that no original works by Vankovich remain in Belarus. "This is the first of his pictures to appear in his historical motherland for many years," she notes. The portrait is also on loan from the Lithuanian Art Museum.



Slutsk sashes still surprising in their sophisticated decoration

## Books found on 'free shelf'

Year of Book sees Gomel's Palace and Park Estate join book-crossing programme

A year ago, the book exchange movement was launched in Gomel, under the slogan 'Let's Turn the Whole World into a Library'. The first 'free shelf' appeared at the central city library (named after Gertsen); Gomel residents were encouraged to donate unwanted books, while taking other editions to read and return. Now, other city libraries and Paskevich Palace have joined the programme which aims to encourage a love of reading.

Having read a book, you can return it to any other public 'shelf' for others to enjoy. The cyclical process should ensure that editions remain widely available. The ease of locating books should inspire interest in reading and, even, discussion of well-loved texts.

The 'free shelf' at the Palace and Park Estate is located in its central hall, where a small book exhibition is showcasing editions on various topics.

## Funds raised from exhibition spent on major restoration

**Spirit of History charity exhibition of painting and photography hosted by Museum of Belarusian Cinema History, to raise funds for restoration of historical and cultural treasure: the former Svyatopolk-Chetvertinskie Palace in Zheludok**

The construction of Svyatopolk-Chetvertinskie Palace Estate in Zheludok began in 1823, when occupied by the Tizengauz family. The latter were modest in their architectural requirements but developed a large and beautiful park, which boasted its own system of avenues and paths. A stone bench was even created, upon which

was engraved the date of foundation: '1823'. Famous Italian architect Marconi designed the beautiful palace, combining modernism and baroque features, and the estate included its own vineyard and a wood-working plant.

Later, Zheludok passed to the Svyatopolk-Chetvertinskie family and major reconstruction took place in 1908. Sadly, the last Zheludok owner, Ludwik Svyatopolk-Chetvertinski, (1877-1941), ended his life in fascist Auschwitz.

Before the USSR collapsed, the estate housed a military unit. Today, the image of a red star is still evident over the main staircase, reminding us of its previous incarnation. In the early



Palace and Park Estate in Zheludok

1990s, the palace passed into the ownership of Konus state enterprise from Lida (part of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus). In fact, Konus still owns the site.

Various historical events have occurred over the years, with the place experiencing flourish and decline. Alexander Kundinenko's *Massacre* was shot there, allowing the once glorious estate to enter the annals of cinematic history. Meanwhile, last September, the palace and park estate became a place for creating picturesque canvas-

es. A group of Academy of Arts graduates has been working on a bright and poetic cycle of sketches over a short period of time.

Zheludok is located in the Grodno Region's Shchuchin District, giving the world Valery Vrublevsky, the dynasty of Tizengauz, the Catholic Church of the Ascension and the famous palace estate. In total, there are around 60 sites in the Shchuchin District which are important historically and artistically. Each boasts its own interesting fate.