Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

WOODEN TOYS FROM EASTERN EUROPE
G72

Two wooden figures from the former Czechoslovakia



The making of wooden toys is a traditional craft across many parts of eastern Europe. The toys are sold to tourists and provide an income for craftspeople and their families. Some families have formed larger businesses and now export toys all over the world. The picture on the right shows a small toy-making factory in Svinary in the north of the Czech Republic.





The two tall figures were collected by the Museum before the former Czechoslovakia was divided into two countries - The Czech Republic and Slovakia. This happened peacefully in 1992.

The figures were made by the same person - look at the maker's mark carved into the bottom. They have also been beautifully handpainted. Both have moving parts, which are operated by pulling a piece of string at the back. Unfortunately the string has broken on the figure in the yellow dress. One is holding a baby and the other is churning milk to make butter.

Russian stacking doll



The little Russian doll with the yellow rings can be taken apart. She provides a good game for children. The aim is to try to put her back together again in the right order. This is a traditional style of toy - some other examples are shown in the pictures below.







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Russian nesting dolls



Russian nesting dolls are generally thought to be an age-old tradition - actually it's quite recent, dating from about 1850. The idea is thought to have come from Japan where similar dolls were made representing the seven Gods of fortune. This idea was brought back to Russia and combined with the tradition of carving Easter eggs, making what we recognise today as the Russian nesting dolls, or Matryoshka dolls, as they are known in Russia. The name Matryoshka was popular in the nineteenth century and came from the Latin word *mater* meaning mother. The curvy, full figure of the Matryoshka doll with her round face and rosy cheeks was thought to be motherly and kind. This can be seen well in the smaller set of Matryoshka in the box.



Most Matryoshka consist of at least five dolls, like the examples in the box, although the number can be much higher. Look at the picture on the right - there are 37 in one set!

A Matryoshka Museum opened in Moscow in 2001, which has over 14 thousand dolls in its collection. The museum's exhibitions show how the dolls have developed and changed over the years and celebrates the fact that they are a worldwide symbol of Russia.



The larger set is unusual. The painting styles are different and the characters do not seem related. In fact one looks Japanese - perhaps a reference to the origins of the tradition.

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Wooden horse and cart from the former Yugoslavia

This pretty horse and cart was handmade in the former Yugoslavia, which divided into the countries shown in the map on the right during the 1990s. There was much conflict at the time and many people lost their lives.



The horse and cart was the traditional method of transport and can still be seen in some rural areas today.

Look at the carving marks on the wheels of the cart and the legs of the horse.



Wooden push toy from the former Yugoslavia

The unpainted toy is also from the former Yugoslavia, although the exact area is unknown. The stick is placed in the hole in the centre and used to push the toy along. The wheels are not smooth and so rub against the squares above to rotate them. This is called a cam.

