

**Malyshev M.Yu.**, *teacher of the Kholuy institute of lacquer miniature painting named after N.N. Kharlamov – branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, 155633, Ivanovo region, Yuzhsky district, Kholuy village, Moskovskaya str., 1a, e-mail: dave1962@mail.ru*

### **Application of J. Itten's contrast theory in Kholuy lacquer miniature painting**

**Abstract.** The article analyzes the contribution of J. Itten to the development of painting theory and pedagogy. Special attention is paid to the color contrast theory – a foundation for creating harmonious and expressive works of art. The study is based on an analysis of the coloristic solutions found in the works of Kholuy artists and their comparison with the principles of color harmony outlined by J. Itten in his work «The art of color». Special emphasis is placed on studying the specific features of applying contrasting color combinations in Kholuy lacquer miniature painting, where traditionally complementary colors are used against a black lacquered background. The paper provides a detailed analysis of the main types of color contrasts and their correlation with chromatic solutions characteristic of Kholuy lacquer miniature painting. Based on the conducted research, it is concluded that traditional techniques of coloristic resolution in Kholuy miniatures largely correspond to the theoretical positions of J. Itten, which confirms the universality of his concept of color contrasts.

**Keywords:** kholuy lacquer miniature painting, painting, color, contrast, tonality, accent, landscape, artistic image.

Kholuy lacquer miniature painting represents a unique phenomenon in the history of Russian art. It combines the principles of easel painting and artistic stylistic features, leading to the creation of special works of art [1]. An important factor determining the quality and expressiveness of these works is the skillful use of color contrast.

J. Itten was an outstanding Swiss artist, art theorist and educator who made significant contributions to the development of color theory. He was born in Zurich in 1888 and received education at the Zurich school of arts and design, studying painting, sculpture, architecture and music. His research focused on the problem of color interaction and its influence on human perception. As a result, he developed a system of color harmony based on the principle of complementary colors, which became the foundation for many modern artists' and designers' creativity.

In 1920, J. Itten founded an art school in his hometown, where he taught until his death in 1967. Among his students were such renowned artists as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Le Corbusier.

Between 1911 and 1913, J. Itten published the book “The art of color”, in which he substantiated the interrelation between color and psychology of perception. In 1921, the books “Form and color” and “Seven contrasts” were issued, focusing

on the investigation of principles of harmony and contrast in art. The scientific work "Individual palette" from 1921 deals with the development of individual style in an artist, while in "Ability to see" (also 1921), the author emphasizes the importance of intuition and creative approach in art. These studies have had a significant impact on the development of contemporary art and continue to inspire artists and designers. Kholuy lacquer miniature painting serves as a perfect example of how the theory of color contrast can be applied in art.

Itten's primary contribution to color theory lies in the creation of the color wheel, which serves as a tool for identifying harmonious shade combinations [6]. He identified seven types of color contrasts:

- Hue: primary colors exhibit maximum contrast levels, which diminish when mixed with other hues or impurities;
- Brightness: maximum contrast occurs between achromatic colors – white and black – and also between yellow and violet among chromatic tones;
- Color temperature: relationships between warm and cool shades create a sense of volume or perspective within a composition;
- Saturation: saturation decreases when adding an achromatic or complementary color;
- Complementary colors: two colors that produce a grayish tone when mixed together and are located opposite each other on the color wheel;
- Simultaneous contrast: subjective perception causes the sensation of seeing a complementary color adjacent to a particular hue due to the way human vision processes colors;
- Area: proportions of color areas, whose harmonious ratios were derived by another famous researcher, J.W. Goethe [3].

The theory of color contrast involves the principle of opposing colors, forms, and textures in painting to enhance expression and image depth. Its application in Kholuy lacquer miniature painting includes using the artist-developed principles of working with color, specifically employing seven types of color contrasts to articulate the idea behind the piece and convey a memorable artistic impression.

Hue contrast is the simplest type of contrast, involving the use of distant colors from the spectrum to achieve interaction between them. It allows for the creation of bright and saturated compositions, conveying various emotional states such as joy or sadness. As an example, consider the contrast between primary colors: red, blue, and yellow, which are positioned on opposite sides of the color wheel. When combined, they achieve maximum color contrast, which can be utilized to convey diverse emotions and moods.

In V.I. Fomin's work "The tale of tsar Saltan" (1958) (Fig. 1<sup>49</sup>), the hue contrast is achieved through the application of a vivid, rich, and festive color scheme intended to convey the joyfulness of the heroes' encounter depicted in the narrative. To accomplish this effect, V.I. Fomin uses pure primary colors – red, blue, and

---

<sup>49</sup> Fig. 1, 2. Valentin Ivanovich Fomin. Box "The tale of tsar Saltan": State catalog of museum collections of the Russian Federation: Electronic text // Goskatalog.Ru: Website. – URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=4369146> (accessed February 24, 2024).

yellow – in the focal point of the composition (Fig. 2). Light-dark contrast is a fundamental principle in nature. White and black serve as the base tones for defining light and shadow, while intermediate grey tones may range from light to dark depending on environmental conditions.



Fig. 1. Fomin V.I. Box "The tale Of tsar Saltan". 1958.  
State museum of Kholuy art  
(Kholuy village, Ivanovo region)



Fig. 2. Fomin V.I. Box "The tale of tsar Saltan". 1958. Fragment.  
State museum of Kholuy art  
(Kholuy village, Ivanovo region)

Other colors can also create light-and-dark contrast. According to J. Itten's theory, yellow is the lightest color, while purple is the darkest. Pure yellow is bright and luminous, whereas deep blue is dark, and light blue shades appear pale and weakened. Dark red has strength, but when lightened towards yellow, it loses its intensity. When working with light-and-dark contrast, the artist aims to maintain it across two, three, or four basic tonalities. Although there might be variations in tonal differences within certain parts of the picture, the main groups should remain coherent and comprehensible so that the overall composition remains organized, clear, and powerful.

The decorative plate "Snegurochka" (Snow Maiden) by A.A. Kamorin is a unique work of art in which the contrast of light and dark plays a significant role. (Fig. 3<sup>50</sup>). In this narrative composition, the artist employs the contrast of light and dark to create an effect of volume and depth in the image. The dark background accentuates the silhouette of the figure, making it more expressive and memorable (Fig. 4). Lighter shades of clothing and hair give the work softness and airiness, evoking a sense of magic and fairy tale [4].

<sup>50</sup> Fig. 3, 4. Kamorin A. Plate. "Snegurochka": State catalog of museum collections of the Russian Federation. Electronic text // Goskatalog.Ru: website. URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=43367464> (accessed February 24, 2024).



Fig. 3. Kamorin A.A. Decorative plate "Snegurochka". 1971.  
State Rostov-Yaroslavl architectural and art museum reserve



Fig. 3. Kamorin A.A. Decorative plate "Snegurochka". 1971. Fragment.  
State Rostov-Yaroslavl architectural and art museum reserve



Fig. 5. Kiselyov B.I.  
Box "Orlenok". 1964.  
All-Russian museum of decorative art (Moscow)

It's worth noting that the contrast of light and dark can also be used for reverse effects. For instance, in order to convey tension, B.I. Kiselyov employed a contrast in his work "Orlenok" (Fig. 5<sup>51</sup>), depicting the protagonist as a dark silhouette against a light background. This contrast is a vital element of composition that assists the artist in conveying the mood and atmosphere of the work [2].

According to the color theory of J. Itten, the red-orange color exhibits the highest thermal characteristic, while the blue-green shows the lowest thermal characteristic. Intermediate color shades behave similarly to gray gradations in brightness contrast.

Perception of these color characteristics depends on surrounding color elements, which can lead to modification of the perceived thermal characteristic of the color, either increasing or decreasing it.

When examining various images of Snegurochka (Snow Maiden) in Kholuy lacquer miniature paintings, particular attention is deserved by a papier-mâché box

<sup>51</sup> Fig. 5. Boris Ivanovich Kiselyov. Lid from box "Orlenok". From the set "Box Orlenok" with removable lid: State catalog of museum collections of the Russian Federation. Electronic text // Goskatalog.Ru: website. URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=449478> (accessed February 24, 2024).



created by the artist V.B. Tikhonravov (рис. 6<sup>52</sup>). The compositional solution of this piece is based on a vivid contrast between cold and warm colors. The painted background of the box is executed in cool tones, creating an atmosphere of a winter landscape. The image of Snow Maiden is rendered in warm shades of red and orange, which gives the work expressiveness and depth, optically highlighting the figure of the fairy-tale character [7] (fig. 7).



Fig. 6. B.V. Tikhonravov. Box "Snow Maiden". 1955. State museum of Kholuy art (village of Kholuy, Ivanovo region)

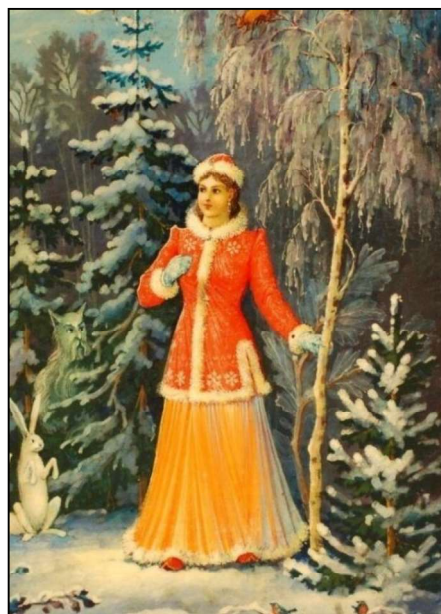


Fig. 7. B.V. Tikhonravov. Box "Snow Maiden". 1955. Fragment. State museum of Kholuy art (village of Kholuy, Ivanovo region)

Additional colors are those that when mixed together produce a neutral gray tone. For example, yellow and purple (Yu.S. Bulkin's "Slavnoye More") (Fig. 8<sup>53</sup>), orange and blue (V.A. Belov's "Heavenly Brothers") (Fig. 9<sup>54</sup>), red and green (Fig. 10<sup>55</sup>). They retain their intensity next to each other, ensuring static stability of the composition [5].

The use of complementary color contrast in Kholuy lacquer miniature painting contributes to the creation of harmonious compositions, ensures visual perception

<sup>52</sup> Figs. 6, 7. Boris Vladimirovich Tikhonravov (1929–1977). Box “Snow Maiden”: State catalogue of museum fund of Russian Federation. – electronic text available at: Goskatalog.Ru website. – URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=4355655> (accessed February 24, 2024).

<sup>53</sup> Fig. 8. Yuri Serafimovich Bulkin. Lid from Trunk "Slavnoye More": State catalogue of museum fund of Russian Federation — electronic text available via Goskatalog.Ru website — URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=449431> (accessed February 24, 2024).

<sup>54</sup> Fig. 9. Vladimir Andreevich Belov. Box "Heavenly Brothers": State catalogue of museum fund of Russian Federation. – electronic text available at: Goskatalog.Ru website. – URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=449666> (accessed February 24, 2024).

<sup>55</sup> Fig. 10. Tikhonravov Boris Vladimirovich. Box “Set a date soon”: State catalogue of the museum fund of the Russian Federation. – Text: electronic // Goskatalog.Ru: website. – URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=449815> (accessed February 24, 2024).

stability, and highlights the artistic center of the work. Complementary colors maintain their saturation when placed close to each other on the surface.



Fig. 8. Yu.S. Bulkin. Box "Slavyanoye More." 1958. All-Russian museum of decorative art, Moscow

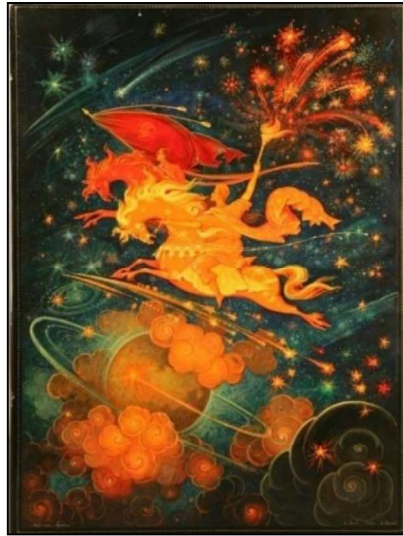


Fig. 9. V.A. Belov. Box "Heavenly Brothers". 1962. All-Russian museum of decorative art, Moscow



Fig. 10. B.V. Tikhonravov. Box "Set a date soon". 1955 r. All-Russian museum of decorative art, Moscow

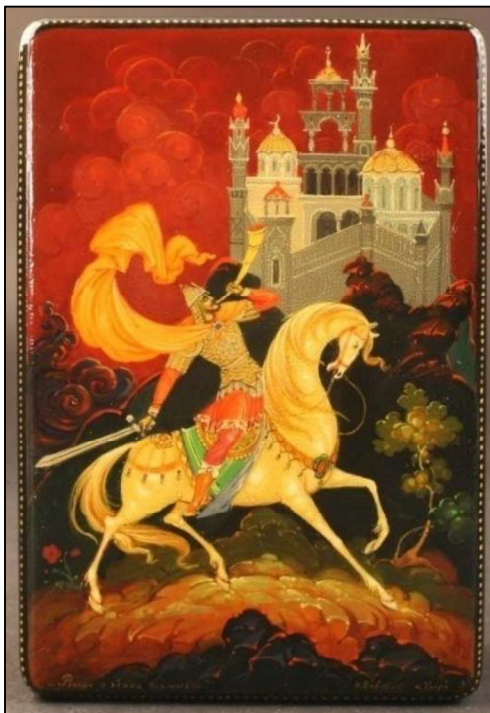


Fig. 11. Baburin N.I., Box "Ruslan at Chernomor's castle." 1965. All-Russian Museum of Decorative Art, Moscow

Simultaneous contrast is the phenomenon where we perceive a color change at the boundary between two adjacent colors. Johannes Itten provides an exercise example: within a colored area, there is a gray square, and the observer's eye begins to see complementary hues to the main color.

When simultaneous contrast is applied, an additional color is simultaneously created in our perception of the primary color. Simultaneous colors arise only in our visual perception and cannot be physically fixed or measured. This technique is



rarely used in Kholuy lacquer miniature painting, but it can be found in its classical understanding in N.I. Baburin's work "Ruslan at Chernomor's castle." (Fig. 11<sup>56</sup>). In the background of the narrative composition, a temple painted in grey color is depicted. Against the backdrop executed in crimson tones, the grey color acquires a greenish hue.

A more complex form of this contrast was employed by D.M. Dobrynin, the founder of Kholuy lacquer miniature painting, in his work titled "On rest" (рис. 12<sup>57</sup>), using the artistic technique of "strikes-dabs" of different colors in landscape painting [8].

Fig. 12. Dobrynin D.M., Box "On rest." 1934. All-Russian museum of decorative art, Moscow.



Simultaneous contrast can be enhanced or weakened through various shades and levels of illumination of colors. It plays a significant role in art because it allows for creating interesting visual effects.

Saturation contrast is utilized by artists to accentuate the principal subject within a composition. Faded colors such as grays appear more 'alive' due to the presence of highly saturated colors nearby. This technique in painting relies on the opposition of bright and subdued tones. It helps to distinguish the focal point of the composition, enhancing its expressiveness and interest for the viewer. This type of contrast is most clearly demonstrated in V.F. Blinov's work "Hockey" (Fig. 13), where the bright attire of hockey players contrasts starkly with the gentle surroundings of the wintry landscape (Fig. 14).

When using saturation contrast, the artist selects bright colors for the main object while leaving the surroundings pale or using subdued tones. As a result, the main object stands out prominently against the background, drawing greater attention. This technique is frequently employed in landscape painting, helping create a sense of depth, volume, and movement.

<sup>56</sup> Fig. 11. Baburin Nikolai Ivanovich. Lid from box "Ruslan at Chernomor's castle": State catalogue of the museum fund of the Russian Federation. – electronic text // Goskatalog.ru: website. – URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=449216> (accessed February 24, 2024).

<sup>57</sup> Fig. 12. Dobrynin Dmitry Mikhailovich. Lid from box "On Rest": State catalogue of the museum fund of the Russian Federation. – electronic text // Goskatalog.ru: website. – URL: <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=449232> (accessed February 24, 2024).



Fig. 13. Blinov V.F., Box "Hockey." 1962.  
State museum of Kholuy art  
(Kholuy village, Ivanovo region)



Fig. 14. Blinov V.F., Box "Hockey." 1962.  
Fragment. State museum of Kholuy art  
(Kholuy village, Ivanovo region)

The contrast based on the size of color spots consists in utilizing different proportions of colors in a composition, which enables creation of expressive works of art and emphasizes the artistic centers of the piece. One example of applying spot-size contrast is M.Yu. Malyshev's graduation qualification work entitled "Palm Sunday in Valaam monastery" (рис. 15<sup>58</sup>).



Fig. 15. Malyshev M.Yu., Tabernacle  
"Palm Sunday in Valaam monastery".  
Graduation qualification work. 2019. Higher school of folk arts.

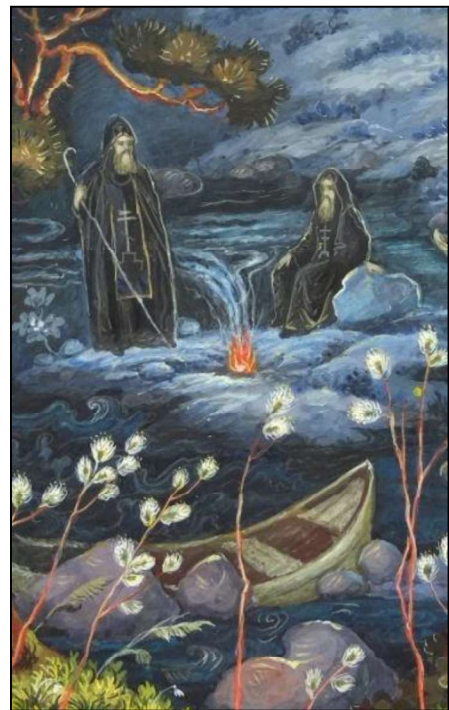


Fig. 15. Malyshev M.Yu., Tabernacle "Palm  
Sunday in Valaam monastery". Fragment.

To achieve expressiveness of one of the artistic centers in the middle ground, specifically in depicting the fire in one of the compartments, pure orange paint was applied (Fig. 16). Meanwhile, the entire work employs soft combinations of

<sup>58</sup> Fig. 15, 16. Photos by the author of the article.



complementary blue and orange colors. This approach allowed for the creation of a pronounced focus that remains visible even from a considerable distance.

It is important to note that the application of contrast based on the size of color areas enhances other types of contrast, giving the artwork special liveliness and expression.

Thus, the theory of color contrast plays a crucial role in the development of art. Its application in Kholuy lacquer miniature painting enables artists to create harmonious and expressive works by employing various types of contrasts.

### References

1. Al'bedil' M. F. Russkaya lakovaya zhivopis'. Palex. Mstera. Fedoskino. Xoluj : al'bom / M. F. Al'bedil'. – Sankt-Peterburg : Yarkij gorod, 2007. – 304 s. – ISBN 978-5-9663-0084-5. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.
2. Besshaposhnikova Yu. A. Xudozhestvenno-stilisticheskie osobennosti lakovoj miniatyurnoj zhivopisi : Palex, Mstera, Xoluj : uchebnoe posobie dlya studentov, obuchayushhixsya special'nosti «Zhivopis'» specializacii «Xudozhnik – zhivopisecz (cerkovno-istoricheskaya zhivopis')» / Yu. A. Besshaposhnikova, V. Yu. Borisova, D. V. Zavalej ; Vy'sshaya shkola narodny'x iskusstv ; pod nauchnoj redakciej V. F. Maksimovich. – Sankt-Peterburg: VShNI, 2018. – 48 s. – ISBN 978-5-6042073-9-0. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.
3. Itten Ioxannes. Iskusstvo czveta / Ioxannes Itten ; perevod s nemeczkogo ; predislovie L. Monaxovoj. – 2-e izdanie. – Moskva : D. Aronov, 2001. – 96 s. – ISBN 978-5-94056-008-3. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.
4. Kamorin A. A. Lakovaya miniatyura. Xoluj / A. A. Kamorin. – Moskva : Interbuk, 1995. – 152 s. – ISBN 5-7664-1057-3. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.
5. Nekrasova M. A. Sto let spustya. Vzgljad na perspektivu / M. A. Nekrasova. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j // Narodnoe iskusstvo. Russkaya tradicionnaya kul'tura i pravoslavie. XVIII–XXI vv. Tradicii i sovremennost' / Rossijskaya akademiya xudozhestv, Institut teorii i istorii izobrazitel'ny'x iskusstv ; pod redakciej M. A. Nekrasovoj avtora proekta – sostavitelya. – Moskva : Soyuz Dizajn, 2013. – S. 589-606. – ISBN 978-5-00016-003-9.
6. Porto I. B. Nikolaj Kry'mov zhivopis' grafika teatr : katalog-rezone. V 2-x knigax. Kniga 1 / I. B. Porto ; redaktor: A. Samoxin. – Moskva : Iskusstvo – XXI vek, 2009. – 320 s. – ISBN 978-5-98051-056-5. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.
7. Rozova L. K. Iskusstvo xolujskoj miniatyurnoj zhivopisi : al'bom / L. K. Rozova. – Leningrad : Xudozhnik RSFSR, 1975. – 120 s. – ISBN 5-7664-0696-7. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.
8. Russkaya lakovaya miniatyura: tradicii i sovremennost': katalog / sostaviteli: L. L. Pirogova, V. G. Kochenkova, M. I. Lukina ; avtor vstupitel'noj stat'i L. L. Pirogova. – Moskva : [b. i.], 2013. – 308 s. – ISBN 978-5-9904009-3-1. – Tekst : neposredstvenny'j.