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Studying folklore in literature classes as one of the sources for creating an artistic image in works of traditional art crafts

Abstract. The article examines the role of folklore study in the professional development of artists engaged in traditional arts crafts. It demonstrates how plots, images and motifs from oral folk art (fairy tales, songs, proverbs, legends) inspire students to create embroidered and lace works of traditional applied art. Specific examples of art and graphic projects by students of the Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts, which reflect folklore themes, are provided.

Keywords: oral folk art, artistic image, traditional applied art, art and graphic project.

Folk poetic creativity is “the totality of various types and forms of mass verbal artistic creativity that have become part of the everyday tradition of a particular people” [6, p. 234]. Folklore is an integral part of fostering love for the Motherland, one’s people, its great past and those realities that form the basis for the revival and development of all types of traditional art crafts.

For many centuries, practically any activity was accompanied by a song (one of the oldest genres of folklore, combining “an extended narrative with strong emotional resonance) [6, p. 277], a bylina or byvalshchina (“a short oral story about an event that supposedly took place in reality” [6, p. 59]), a fairy tale (“an epic, predominantly prosaic artistic work of magical, adventurous or everyday character, based on fiction” [6, p. 383]), and jokes or playful rhymes (a minor genre of folklore, “a humorous dialogue, address or funny episode built on illogic” [6, p. 304]).

Labor activities gave rise to proverbs (“brief, rhythmically organized, stable, figurative folk sayings” [6, p. 291]) and sayings (“figurative expressions that clearly define and evaluate some aspect of life”, lacking “a generalizing moralizing meaning” [6, p. 283]). Nowadays, when we use them, we often do not think about their origin, whereas all of them are, to some extent, connected with the activities and creative spirit of our ancestors.

Children are introduced to folklore in early childhood, and their knowledge is subsequently expanded, as the school curriculum includes the study of oral folk art in literature classes. In particular, in primary school [11], both minor genres of folklore (proverbs, sayings and playful rhymes) and fairy tales [10] are studied. Unfortunately, in senior grades, works of oral folk art are no longer addressed, and all attention is focused on literary texts, even though many of them were created

based on folklore plots and motifs (such as the fairy tales of A.S. Pushkin, children's stories by L.N. Tolstoy and A. Platonov, and poems by S.A. Yesenin, among others).

In literature classes for students studying various types of traditional art crafts, the study of folklore holds an important place. This is due to the fact that the plots and images of oral folk art can and often do become a source of inspiration for creating works of traditional applied art, such as artistic embroidery, artistic lace-making, jewelry, and more. Works of oral folk art embody the foundations of the Russian mentality: love for the Motherland and parents, and fidelity to traditions. They instill diligence, respect for elders, teach one to listen to the opinions of others, observe the commandments of the Russian people and develop patience, attentiveness, kindness, observation and perseverance. Oral folk art and traditional art crafts play a key role in preserving Russian cultural identity, ensuring a connection between generations.

When implementing the secondary vocational education program in the field of study 54.02.02 Decorative and applied arts and folk crafts, it is necessary to consider that “an artist needs not only to master the content of professional modules that teach technology, materials science, the basics of composition, design and performance skills <...>, but also to acquire the content of humanities and general education disciplines, among which 'Literature' ('Russian language' as its linguistic foundation) is decisive for forming knowledge about the connection between language and the traditions of this type of art, as well as for defining the meaning of concepts, developing the ability to analyze and interpret works of art and extracting information for educational and professional activities” [4, p. 5].

The study of literature begins with oral folk art. Familiarization with folklore is carried out through its minor forms – proverbs and sayings, which often define the main qualities and skills of the Russian person: “*small but capable*”, “*patience and hard work overcome everything*”, “*to cook porridge from an axe*”, “*they harness slowly, but ride fast*”, “*jack-of-all-trades*”, “*dashing fellow*”, “*white hands love others' labors*” [2], and others.

At first glance, such an assignment seems simple; however, in practice, students enthusiastically recall proverbs and sayings, explain their meanings, tell to whom they can be applied, and in what situations they are used. At the same time, it is not always possible to provide examples from their own reading experience – to name literary characters to whom these characteristics can be attributed.

Many Russian proverbs still do not lose their relevance, for example, proverbs about labor and craftsmanship. Students recall well-known expressions, try to match the beginnings of proverbs (*Business before, As you make your bed, If you want to eat cakes, If you like the ride, No pain, Idle hands are, The spinning wheel is not God, Work done, Measure twice, If you take the yoke, The day drags on till evening, The cat loves fish but*) and their endings (*pleasure, so you must lie on it, don't sit by the oven, you must also pull the sled, no gain, the devil's tools, but it gives you a shirt, have your fun, cut once, don't say you're not strong enough if you have nothing to do, doesn't want to get its paws wet*) [3] or to continue them (for example, *The eyes are afraid, but ...*, or *A full belly is deaf...*, *One works with the hoe, and...*, or *We were spinning, and you were...*) [3]. Such tasks help students understand how

much the Russian people valued labor, realizing that only through it is it possible to live, raise children, trade and engage in creativity.

Fairy tales, both magical and domestic, also allow one to understand the Russian person's attitude toward creativity and craftsmanship. Whichever magical tale we take, it invariably speaks, to some extent, of craftswomen and craftsmen (for example, "The tale of the youth-restoring apples", "The Frog Princess", "Koschei the Deathless", "Morozko", and others). In domestic tales, there is also an emphasis on an honest approach to one's work ("Kroshechka-Khavroshechka": "*The mistress had three daughters <...>, but they only knew how to sit by the gate and look out at the street, while Kroshechka-Khavroshechka worked for them, sewed their clothes, and spun and wove for them*" [9, p. 89]; "Vasilisa the Beautiful": "*The stepmother gave all three girls their evening tasks: she made one of them lace, another knit stockings and Vasilisa spin*") [9, p. 99].

Speaking of folklore traditions, it is appropriate to mention the Ural tales collected by P. Bazhov. Masters create wonderful jewelry from Ural gemstones, equal to which cannot be found anywhere else: "*The fashion, you see, was to make berries out of stones. Grapes, currants, raspberries and so on. And there was a set rule for everything. Black currants, for instance, were made from agate, white ones – from durmashki (Ural folk name for translucent or white pebbles, most often quartz), strawberries – from sealing-wax jasper and arctic bramble – from small tourmaline beads glued together. In short, each berry had its own stone. For the roots and leaves, there was also a specific order: some were made from ofat (ophiocalcite), others from malachite or eaglestone and sometimes from some other stone*" [1]. Fairy-tale characters in search of inspiration and role models – plots and motifs for their creations – accomplish the impossible: they go into the stone, to the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, hoping to create a work of art never seen before: "*Danilushko looks, and there are no walls. Trees stand, towering high, but not like those in our forests – they are made of stone. Some are of marble, others of serpentine... Below, the grass is also made of stone. Azure, red... all kinds... The sun is not visible, but it is bright, as if just before sunset. Golden little snakes are fluttering between the trees, as if dancing. The light comes from them. The ground here is like simple clay, and on it grow black bushes, like velvet. On these bushes are large green bells of malachite, and in each one is an antimony star. Fiery bees are shimmering over those flowers, and the stars are tinkling ever so softly, as if singing*" [1]. Isn't this a perfect image for embroidery, lace or a piece of jewelry?

In their professional activities, artists of traditional art crafts often turn to the images created by Russian folklore. Folklore themes are peculiar integral categories of the art system, which transform disparate creative material into a holistic work. "The interdisciplinary connections between the structural elements of the content of literature, the Russian language and technology, materials science, the basics of composition, design and performance skills, expressed in concepts, historical and biographical facts, and texts of professional themes, are beyond doubt" [4, p. 24].

Consequently, the knowledge gained in literature classes can be applied by students when creating artistic images in the products of traditional art crafts.

When comparing a folklore plot and its embodiment in items of traditional applied art, it is advisable to conduct research with students on the colors and names of precious stones in folklore. In Russian folk tales, not only are archaic words for clothing often found, but also lexemes denoting colors. What colors and pigments were used in traditional art crafts? For example, *bel'*, *bagrets*, *zelen'*, *sinota*, *chervlen'* are names of colors for dyed fabrics. If the material combined multicolored threads, it was called *pestryad'* or *pestrina* (motley fabric). There were other names as well: *smury*, *pomerkly*, *sreniy*, *zekry*, *pelesy*, *plavy*, *polovy*, *redry*, *smagly*. One can try to guess what colors they denoted and match them with modern definitions: *dark gray*, *black*, *white-gray*, *turquoise*, *dark brown*, *yellowish*, *yellowish-white*, *reddish-yellow*, *dark red* [13, p. 328]. As a creative assignment, students can be asked to research the history of color names. It is not always possible to convey shades of color even with the help of complex adjectives, whereas the existing figurative descriptions of color shades with colorful metaphors traditionally provide students with an additional incentive to study the artistic and technological features of this art form.

Costume served as an indicator of a person's social status, occupation and way of life [13, p. 344]. The collar, sleeves and hem of a shirt were often decorated with embroidery, which functioned as a protective charm. To make the embroidery more exquisite, it was embellished with gold threads, pearls or precious stones, which over time led to the appearance of neck ornaments (*ozhereliya*) and shoulder ornaments (*oplechiya*).

Let us consider several artistic and graphic projects depicting embroidered and lace works created by students of the Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts.

In the collar, executed in the “Russian satin stitch” embroidery technique, the heads of two roosters are clearly visible; their bodies and wings are rendered in openwork embroidery, while the “tails”, intertwining in an intricate pattern of white, blue and red threads, create the illusion of a starry sky with a delicate crescent moonbeam (Fig. 1⁵¹). The shape of the piece – a ten-pointed star – symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and the sunrise awakened by the roosters. It is likely that the basis for this pattern is the fairy tale of the firebird, literary variations of which can be found in “The tale of the golden cockerel” by A.S. Pushkin and in “The little humpbacked horse” by P.P. Yershov. In the folk tale “The firebird and Vasilisa the Princess” it is said of the golden feather of the firebird: “*the feather shines like fire*”. Traditionally, the bird's feather brings misfortune to whoever finds it, but it is so bright and alluring that no one can resist it. In Yershov's fairy tale, the feather “*lights up the field as if it were daytime; / Wondrous light streams all around, / But it neither warms nor smokes*”. And the birds themselves, one of which the hero caught, “*shining with bright flame, / <...> Twirled in a fiery whirl / And soared beyond the clouds*” [5]. The embodiment of the fairy-tale firebird, most likely inspired by the peacock – an exotic rarity in Rus' – were its distant relatives, the roosters, who were not coincidentally called “golden” and were always addressed

⁵¹ Figs. 1-11. Photo from the methodological fund at the Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts – branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts.

politely and affectionately (*Petya-cockerel, golden crest, oily little head, silky little beard*). In the tale by A.S. Pushkin, the rooster is not only beautiful but also wise: «Here is the sage before Dadon <...> took out of the sack / A golden cockerel / <...> My golden cockerel / Will be your faithful guard: / If all around is peaceful, / He will sit quietly; / But if from afar / You should expect war <...>, / Then my cockerel will instantly / Raise his crest, / Cry out and stir, / And turn to that place» [9].

The nightingale is often mentioned in Russian folk songs. This is because these unassuming songbirds produce marvelous trills. Their songs always evoke a special, poignant feeling of love for the native land. The nightingale can perhaps be called the soul of Russia. Girls address it with complaints of unhappy love, asking it to convey greetings to their beloved; longing for their homeland is also often expressed through an appeal to this bird:

*At this time in my beloved homeland,
The bright sun rises early,
Even the little nightingale
Sings more cheerfully and clearly!* [15, p. 12].

The author of the collar on the theme “Nightingale’s song” embodied the image of the most delicate birds of the Central Russian nature – nightingales – in lace (Fig. 2). The lace forms a closed composition: two pairs of birds look at each other, while the other two, with crowns above their heads, are gracefully curved in the shape of a swing. The numerical and coupling lace-making techniques allow the impression of nightingale trills to be conveyed in the collar and the smooth edge line gives the piece lightness and completeness. This is a nightingale’s song frozen in lace and the lacemaker’s dream of happiness.

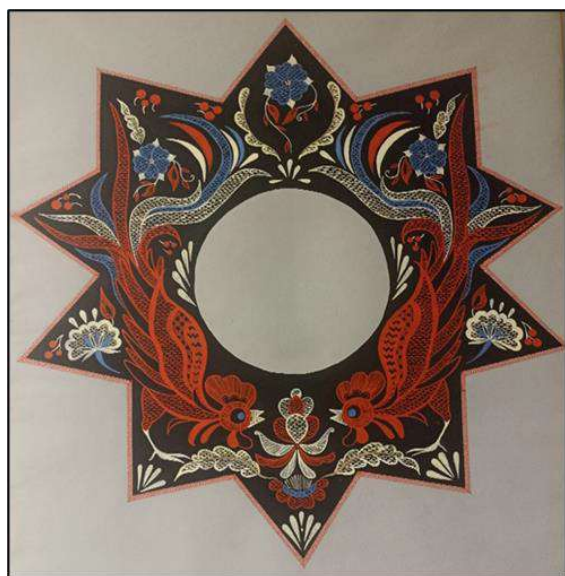


Fig. 1. A. Kozyreva. Artistic and graphic project of the collar “Firebird”. 2022. “Russian satin stitch” embroidery technique. Educator: S.Yu. Anisina

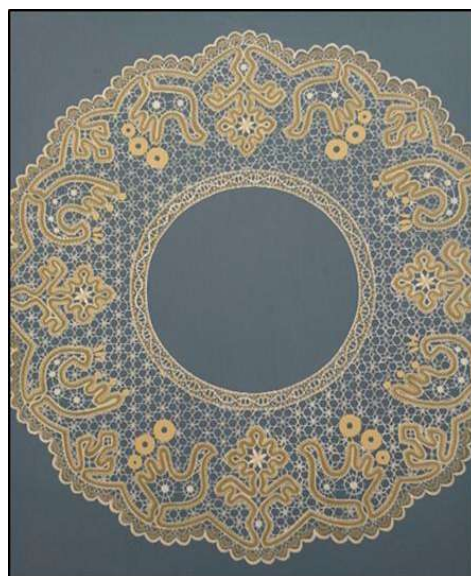


Fig. 2. E. Baranova. Artistic and graphic project of a lace collar “Nightingale’s song”. 2021. Coupling and numerical lace-making techniques. Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova

Folklore has preserved legends (tales, bylinas) about mythical creatures described in the medieval collection “Physiologus”. One of such mythical beings is the phoenix, capable of rising from the ashes – *“The most beautiful bird of all, even more beautiful than the peacock. The peacock's appearance has neither gold nor silver, but the phoenix is adorned with hyacinths and precious stones. Its head is crowned with a wreath”* [14]. It is the phoenix that is depicted on the lace panel “Birds of paradise garden” (Fig. 3). When creating this piece, the author drew inspiration from the folk legend of the phoenix, skillfully using various shades of red to create the image of this mythical bird. Different lace-making techniques, carefully selected colors and a well-thought-out composition give the work a sense of multidimensionality.

In general, the ornamentation in lace works is composed of plant motifs. Silhouettes of flowers – for example, the sunflower (a symbol of the sun), chamomile and bluebell – as well as trees, are rendered in lace patterns.

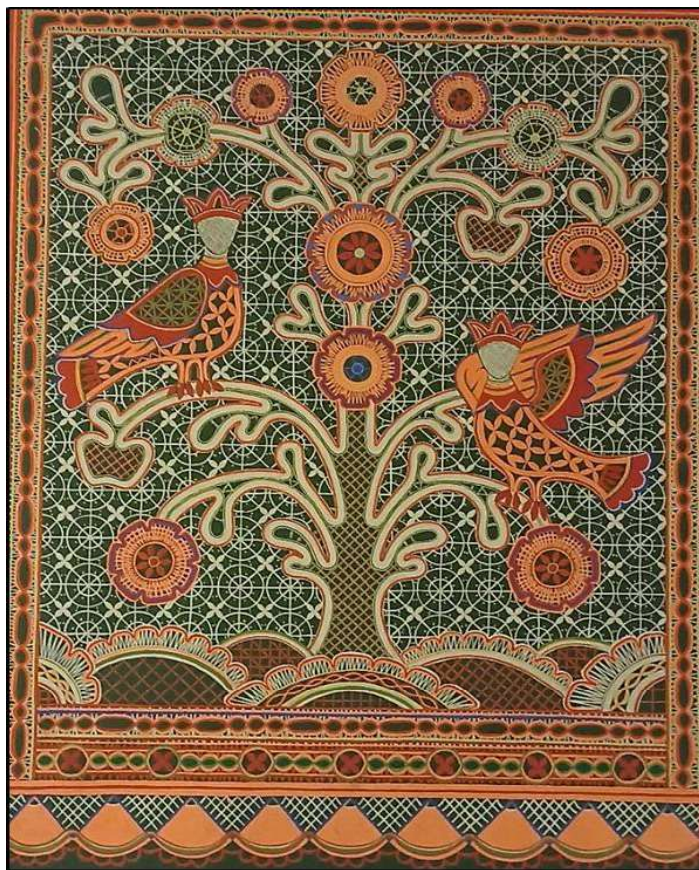


Fig. 3. E. Petrova. Artistic and graphic project of a panel “Birds of paradise garden”. 2022. Coupling and numerical lace-making techniques.
Educator:
D.Yu. Khristolyubova,
Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts

The artistic and graphic project features a doily titled “Apple tree in blossom”, whose ornament depicts a blooming apple tree branch – a tree often mentioned in fairy tales: *“There stands an apple tree. – Mother Apple Tree, hide me! – Eat my wild apple! She quickly ate it. The apple tree shielded her with its branches and covered her with leaves: the geese flew over”* [8, p. 115] (Fig. 4). The closed pattern, executed in dark red tones, portrays an apple tree branch with orange blossoms, some already in full bloom and others still in buds. The combination of warm color shades creates a sensation of sunny heat.



Fig. 4. L. Shakhnazaryan.
Artistic and graphic project of a doily
“Apple tree in blossom”. 2024.
Coupling and numerical
lace-making techniques.
Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova,
Ryazan institute of traditional
applied arts

The artistic and graphic project of the collar “Summer burst into a bright salute”, presented in Figure 5, is drawn with a realistic depiction of the multi-thread scan lace technique of Izheslavl lace. The rich dark red tones along the edge of the collar gradually transition to lighter shades toward the neckline.



Fig. 5. V. Verbenkina.
Artistic and graphic project of
a collar “Summer burst into
a bright salute”. 2021.
Multi-thread scan lace technique.
Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova,
Ryazan institute of traditional
applied arts

The creation of this piece of traditional applied art was inspired by the Ivan Kupala festival. N.V. Gogol’ describes this magical night in his story “The Eve of Ivan Kupala”: *“Look, a small flower bud is reddening and, as if alive, is moving. Indeed, it’s strange! It moves, grows bigger and bigger, and reddens like a hot coal. A little star flashes, something quietly cracks, and the flower unfolds <...>, like a flame, illuminating the others around it”*.

In folklore, this night is mysterious and enchanted, when passion flares between young people who, holding hands, jump over the fire so as never to be parted. The color of the July velvet night, shimmering stars, the blazing fire, the tightly clasped hands of girls and young men over the flames (love is a ring) and the blooming fern flower.

Peasant life is inseparably linked with the land. Many songs are dedicated to the vastness and beauty of the native land. Under the accompaniment of these songs, craftswomen created exquisite lace, weaving the colors and images of their homeland into the patterns. The songs were sung about groves, rivers and fields of the Russian land: *“Oy, you, wide steppe, / Free steppe, / How far you stretch, dear mother”*. The main decoration was flowers, bright and fragrant: *“Shall I go out, shall I walk out, yes, / Into the valley, into the dale / <...> / I picked a little flower, yes, / I wove a wreath, yes”*. The songs inspired “floral” motifs.

Figure 6 presents a lace doily shaped like a flower. The neutral colors – gray and pale blue – create a background, against which the red-orange outline (scan) of the flowers stands out in bright contrast. The bright band framing the doily enhances the restraint of the background and emphasizes the saturation of the colors. The ornament on the lace band (Fig. 7) echoes the pattern of the doily and repeats like a refrain in a song or a folk recitative.



Figs. 6, 7. E. Baranova. Artistic and graphic projects of a doily and an ornamental band “Field flowers”. 2021.

Coupling and numerical lace-making techniques.

Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova,

Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts

Particular attention is drawn to the bright collar, executed in the coupling and numerical lace-making techniques (Fig. 8). The combination of white, turquoise and shades of red gives the piece a festive appearance. The absence of an external frame looks especially advantageous: it creates the illusion of a wreath of herbs. The pattern itself is inspired by songs about the rowan tree and the birch tree – the most popular at evening gatherings: after all, these songs tell of a girl’s loneliness, longing for her beloved (*“In the field a birch tree stood, / In the field a curly birch tree stood”* or *“Why do you stand, swaying, / Slender rowan tree, / Bowing your head /*

To the very fence? ”), seeking reliable support in him (“How I wish, rowan tree, / To reach the oak, / Then I would not have to / Bend and sway”) [12]. The carved leaves of the birch and rowan are intertwined with bright red rowan berries, creating a sense of brightness, festivity and even boldness.

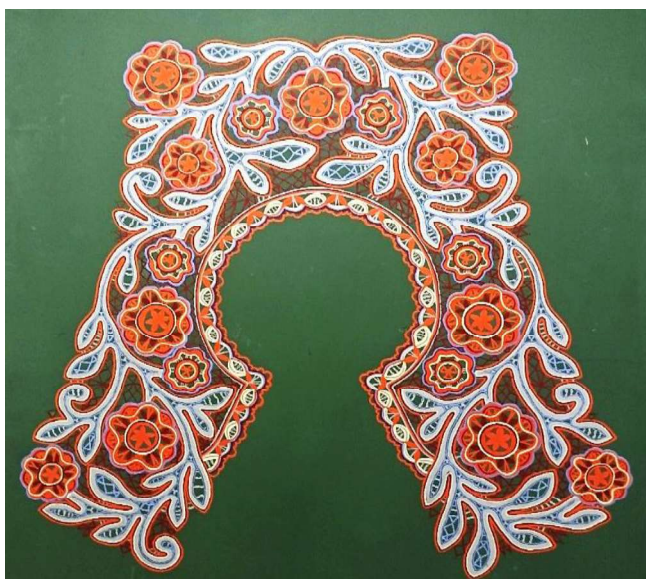


Fig. 8. M. Fedoseeva. Artistic and graphic project of a collar “In the embrace of a fairy-tale summer”. 2021. Coupling and numerical lace-making techniques.

Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova,
Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts

It is impossible to imagine Russian nature without winter frosts (*“Oy, frost, frost, do not freeze me! / Do not freeze me, nor my horse!”*) and fluffy snow. Winter themes are inspired by blizzards, snowstorms and falling snowflakes. In winter, peasant life brought a time of rest from fieldwork. The most joyful festive celebrations took place in January and were associated with Christmas and Epiphany, with Yuletide in between. This was a time for evening gatherings and fortune-telling by candlelight to glimpse one’s future beloved: *“In a small, bright room / A light is burning. / A young spinner / Sits by the window”*. This motif is popular in both painting and literature (for example, in V.A. Zhukovsky’s

“Svetlana” or K. Vasiliev’s *“Expectation”*). Patterns on the window intertwine with the whirls of a snowstorm; nothing can be seen in the darkness of the night as blizzards rage, but a candle burns on the windowsill, lighting the way for a traveler, perhaps a destined one. And the maiden sees from her window: *“Down the street, the snowstorm swirls, / Behind the snowstorm, my darling walks”* [12] (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. A.N. Morozova. Artistic and graphic project of a band “Winter”. 2019.

Coupling lace-making technique.

Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova,
Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts

Figure 10 depicts a snowflake captured in colored lace: a fluffy guest has landed on a woolen mitten. Its lifespan is only a few seconds, yet how beautiful and perfect it is: all lines are sharp, without a single flaw. What a plot for a new airy, snow-white pattern with touches of blue and in the center shines a bright diamond, reflecting with its facets the ray of light that fell on the snowflake. The octagonal

shape of the doily once again emphasizes that this is indeed a snowflake, only its lifespan is incomparably longer.

Winter patterns are perceived by everyone in their own way and are embodied in lace according to their artistic vision: *“The blizzard howls in the field, / Oy, fiercely, fiercely, fiercely! / It beats against the windows, beats against the roof, / Beats against the stone chimney. / Oy, snow-snowflake, / White snowstorm!”* [12]. The collar “Winter tale” features a repeating pattern: someone will see frost-covered twigs in it, someone – forest trees wrapped in snow, someone – frozen glass and someone – a winter snowstorm (Fig. 11). The pattern repeats over and over; it is monotonous, like winter itself, however, if you take a closer look at its sparkling patterns – they are perfect and never get boring.

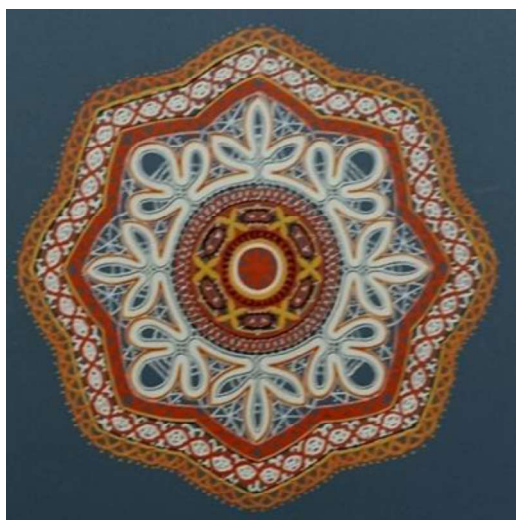


Fig. 10. A.N. Morozova. Artistic and graphic project of a doily “Winter”.

2019. Coupling and numerical lace-making techniques.

Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova



Fig. 11. E. Filatova. Artistic and graphic project of a collar “Winter fairy tale”.

2022. Coupling lace-making technique.

Educator: D.Yu. Khristolyubova

Ryazan institute of traditional applied arts

Thus, knowledge of folklore as a reflection of the Russian mentality helps students choose plots, motifs and images when developing their own artistic and graphic projects of lace and embroidery, drawing on Russian folk tales, bylinas and songs. Using expressive artistic means, they harmoniously reveal and embody the universal ideas of the Russian worldview. This tradition must not only be preserved but also developed, which is greatly facilitated by the study of folklore in literature classes.

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