

## MEDVEDEV: MASTER OF INTARSIA

By Amber Michelle – Chief Curator & Storyteller



Medvedev at work in his shop.

Nestled in the heart of Chelsea, one of New York City's most active art districts, sits the Wilensky Gallery, dedicated to displaying minerals as works of art. Inside this treasure chest are breathtaking, sculpture-like mineral specimens that are works of art made by Mother Earth. In addition to the mineral specimens, tucked away in a separate room is an exhibition of Intarsia boxes by award-winning artist Nicolai Medvedev.

Intarsia is a stone inlay technique in which stone pieces of the same thickness are cut and shaped to fit snugly together to create a design. It has been around for several centuries but today very few artisans are trained or skilled in this method. Medvedev's intarsia boxes are all handmade, mostly from malachite, lapis lazuli, rhodochrosite, sugillite, turquoise, marble and opal.

"I developed a palette of minerals that I like to work with due to their hardness and intensity of color," says Medvedev. "The materials are easy to work with, they cut and polish well. I have gotten a lot of older material that was found 100 years ago or so from collectors; I like that material because the colors are richer."

### The Art of Intarsia

Medvedev is originally from the Republic of Turkmenistan, where there is a rich heritage of textiles and craftwork. Following his love of art and painting, he studied at art institutes in Ashkhabad and Moscow. While he was studying, Medvedev visited museums in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, where he became enamored with the displays of intarsia. He eventually stopped painting, choosing instead to express his creativity through the art of intarsia.

His designs are inspired by the textiles and other artifacts from his native Turkmenistan. "My designs are primarily geometric," explains Medvedev, who came to the United States in 1980. "I was influenced by the geometric designs and color combinations of the rugs that came from there."

Medvedev began making pendants and earrings, creating his art while working full-time at another job. After a few years of perfecting his craft, he began creating his boxes. He eventually connected with the EF Watermelon Gallery in Old Lyme, Connecticut, where his jewelry and boxes were sold and where he had an opportunity to work full time on his intarsia. His art progressed to the point where he was invited to do a show at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History from 1991 to 1993. He holds the distinction of being the only living artist given a show at the Smithsonian.



Big Garden

### Intarsia Stepped Up



Prince of Dreams

"Nicolai took intarsia and stepped it up by using the finest gem material," comments Mona Lee Nesselth, Graduate Gemologist and collector "He approaches his designs like a painting. His vibrant color palette explores and reveals the hidden natural beauty within minerals."

When he builds a box, Medvedev starts by selecting a mineral that will be its centerpiece, which is always the top. Once he has the center worked out, then Medvedev works his way outward, selecting other minerals in complementary colors. The design follows the centerpiece of the lid and that is what determines the size and proportions of the box. No two are ever alike, "Each project has its own approach," he comments, noting that it can take anywhere from a couple of months to a year or more to create one of his boxes.

Stuart Wilensky, president of Wilensky Fine Minerals and himself a collector of fine minerals, was introduced to Medvedev by a mutual friend during the Denver Gem & Mineral Show. Wilensky had admired Medvedev's work for many years and had hoped to showcase it at some point. Now, his vision is a reality. "The colors of Nicolai's work are dazzling, as is the quality of his work," concludes Wilensky. "I equate his work with the great masters of the Renaissance. He doesn't copy them; he uses modern materials, which I like. His work is meticulous. And he is passionate about it. He also has a strong artistic and aesthetic sensibility. He takes the same types of minerals that I have, then he cuts and polishes them and creates works of art."

*Medvedev: Master of Intarsia* runs through February 28th, 2019, Monday through Saturday, from 11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. at the Wilensky Gallery at 173 10th Avenue, New York, NY, 10011.

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