

Nesting Dolls

You've seen many types of art. You've also seen many types of dolls. Did you know that some dolls are considered to be forms of art?

Folk art is a form of art

that shows something about the people of an area. It is usually made by ordinary people, not great artists, but it shows what the people of the area find important or interesting. Folk artists often make things that people use, like rugs or plates.

A form of folk art from the country of Russia is the nesting doll, or *matryoshka* doll. The word *matryoshka* comes from a Russian name—Matryona—which means “little mother.” Matryoshka dolls are made in decreasing sizes that nest inside one another. All of the dolls except the smallest one can be pulled apart to show a smaller figure inside. The smallest doll is often made of a single piece of wood.

Matryoshka dolls are shaped like cylinders, meaning they are long and round. They have rounded heads

and few or no features that stick out. The dolls have no hands, unless they are painted on. Usually there are five dolls in a set, but some sets have a dozen or more dolls.

People in Russia began to make these dolls a little more than 100 years ago. They learned about nesting dolls from folk artists in Japan, who had learned about them from folk artists in China. The Japanese wooden dolls were made to look like the seven lucky gods of Japanese myths.

Chinese artists began making nesting boxes about a thousand years ago. Later, they began making nesting dolls. In the first Chinese sets, the smallest doll held a single grain of rice.

The first matryoshka dolls were figures of women. Today, nesting dolls are made in many different shapes. They include animals, political leaders, fairy-tale characters, and even movie stars. Clearly, this form of folk art still shows what people find interesting.



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