



Ivan Nikiforov (1897–1971)

# ARRIVED TO BE WED

Pushkino, Moscow Region, RSFSR

1971

About the project

<https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/>

*Watercolour on paper,  
aluminium paste*



Труды, 1971



SELECTED BY

**Zhaklin Nikiforova,**

*Curator of the Collection of Rare  
Books, Paintings, Graphics,  
Documents, Photographs*



The Tsaritsyno collection has a touching work by one of the best naive artists in Russia, Ivan Nikiforov. This is just a museum object, and behind it is a whole human life.

I noticed the paintings of this artist, my namesake, when I took the collection of paintings for storage, and a colleague said, 'Look, can these artworks here by any chance be your relative's?' We laughed, but in the evening I was reading about the unforgiving fate of this man, which certainly impressed me.

It is important to remember that Ivan Nikiforov created his works despite of fate, not because of it. He was born on August 29, 1897, in the village of Monakovo, near the town of Vereya, Moscow Province, to a peasant family. After graduating from two years of three-year parochial school, little Ivan was sent to Moscow to learn the craft. At first, he worked at the confectionery factory 'Sans Rival'. The boys collected firewood and water, and then spent whole days rolling hot caramel blanks, causing blisters on their hands.

In the First World War in 1914, he fought in the infantry, in the Civil War, in the artillery and a special battalion of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (VChK) in Odessa. After the war during the devastation and unemployment, he wandered for a long time between the city and the countryside in search of a better life. When collective farms were created, he was elected chairman because he could write. In the mid-1930s, he worked in Moscow at a factory. He settled in Pushkino near Moscow and worked as a loader on the railway. In the early days of the 1941–1945 war, when loading an echelon, a machine broke down and crushed him. He spent over a year in the station hospital, from where he came out crippled and on crutches. Again, he was looking for a job, but nobody would take him in. Only at the insistence of an acquaintance, he was hired to look after

the warehouses at the station. Ivan Nikiforov and his family lived in a poorly habitable cabin in the middle of the railway tracks, where trains roared day and night. And so it went on for almost 20 years.

Thrown out of the merry-go-round of life, he reached for his pen and brush. Later he recalled, 'I used to read books in the library, and once I wanted to write something. I started to write a story, the life of a man I knew. Sometimes my granddaughter visited me. She enrolled in an art class... then she quit, stopped painting. I took her paints and thought I could use them. After all, books are illustrated with pictures, so that's what I would do for my story. For two years, I wrote this book of seven hundred pages and more than a hundred illustrations'.

His family did not approve of his hobby, they burned down the manuscript and many drawings, but he continued to paint. To keep his family out of his work, Ivan Nikiforov built a small shed next to his cabin, where he created hundreds of wonderful watercolours. But for me, this artist is also fascinating because of his unorthodox way of seeing, because he depicted expressive scenes from peasant life using an unusual perspective and diagonal composition similar to Aleksandr Rodchenko's experimental photographs. The artist seems to look at the scene from above, and we see not only the wedding party with guests and young people who are in the church to be married, but also the everyday life of the village: someone is carrying water from the well, children are sledging, passers-by are casually walking, discussing the latest news, and curious neighbours are watching them from the windows.