Grandmother

A stern grandmother sits outside, spinning wool from a petrified wood distaff (Fig. 20). The wool is rutilated quartz, the filaments of which appear as wool fibers. Her dress is snowflake obsidian; her kerchief amethyst. Her wool-lined vest is jasper lined by grape agate. She sits productively on a petrified wood log and unmodified malachite ground surface, making it appear she is working outside. The fine thread she is working is made of gold filament.

A close-up of Grandmother reveals a sternly majestic but toothless visage; she is intently focused on her delicate task. Note the fine woolen thread emanating from her left hand (Fig. 21).

Although Konovalenko was once criticized for making oversized hands, many of his later sculptures silently but definitively deflect such criticism. In this case, the Grandmother’s hand is expertly rendered, complete with fingernails, wrinkles, and near-perfect proportions (Fig. 22).

Figure 20. Grandmother. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-1.h. The top of the woman’s head is 22 cm high.
Vasily Konovalenko’s gem-carving sculptures in Denver

Figure 21. *Grandmother*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-1.q.

Figure 22. *Grandmother*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-1.x.
**Ice Fishing**

One of Konovalenko’s many fishing sculptures, *Ice Fishing* is notable for its stark color palate (Fig. 23). At first glance it seems rather plain, with a middle-aged man placidly enjoying a winter day on a frozen lake. On further examination, compelling details become apparent, including the infusion of color in the use of ruby for his mittens and lapis lazuli for his scarf. The ice is rutilated quartz, the filaments of which make the surface appear crazed and cracked. The man’s hat is agate, his coat labradorite, and his boots obsidian. His fishing pole is silver; the fishing line is gold.

A close-up view of the man’s face in *Ice Fishing* reveals a startling similarity to that of Leonid Breshnev, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union from 1964 until his death in 1982 (Fig. 24). It may just be a coincidence, as Konovalenko created a quintessentially Russian/Ukrainian face, but it is possible that Konovalenko was working on this sculpture at the time of Breshnev’s death in 1982. Konovalenko had a history with Breshnev. *Picking Mushrooms*, one of Konovalenko’s sculptures on display at the State Gems Museum in Moscow, was commissioned by Breshnev to honor one of his favorite pastimes—picking mushrooms with his grandchildren.

*Ice Fishing* is one of the few sculptures in which Konovalenko included animals. In this case, he put two dead fish on the ice alongside the fisherman (Fig. 25). They are simply made of agate; one even lacks an eye. Ms. Konovalenko says her husband believed that fishing was about the process, not (necessarily) the product. As such, the imperfectly rendered fish in this sculpture are allegorical, reflecting the fact that the pastime can be enjoyed even without catching trophy-sized fish.

![Image of Ice Fishing sculpture](image.png)

*Figure 23. Ice Fishing. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-9.d. The top of the man’s coat is 24 cm high.*
Vasily Konovalenko’s gem-carving sculptures in Denver

Figure 24. *Ice Fishing*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-9.j.

In the Sultry Afternoon I

An obese man gorges on watermelon while enjoying a cool soak on a hot afternoon (Fig. 26). His skin is Beloretsk quartz; his eyes sapphire, the towel draped over his arms, jasper. The water pool is rendered by a slice of agate with gold-plated silver trim; the barrel is petrified wood and silver. Note the uncut green watermelon floating in the pool behind the man’s left arm.

A close-up view shows the man’s soft, fat hands, indicating a life of leisure. He enjoys a single-minded, yet vacuous focus on the watermelon (Fig. 27).

Figure 26. In the Sultry Afternoon I. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-18.d. The top of his head is 19 cm high; the base is 36 cm in diameter.

Figure 27. In the Sultry Afternoon I, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.18-h.
In the Sultry Afternoon II

A buxom woman enjoys a cup of tea while soaking in a pool (Fig. 28). She is much more animated and social than her male counterpart in In the Sultry Afternoon I, and is talking with an invisible companion. In terms of balance and execution, this is one of Konovalenko’s masterpieces, for he combined color and texture to produce a vibrant scene that is equally compelling and humorous from all sides, including the top.

The pool is agate, surrounded by gold-plated silver trim. The rings in the agate nodule are used to look roughly like ripple marks expanding out from the woman and her table.

The woman has just poured agate tea into a cacholong cup; she has a lump of sugar in her left hand, ready to dunk into the tea in classic Russian fashion (Fig. 29). Konovalenko used natural flaws in the raw material to make it appear she has spattered tea on the cup. Her hair is rutilated quartz, held back by a turquoise band. Her bathing suit is lapis.

Demonstrating that Konovalenko’s sculptures are to be seen from all sides, even a partial top view reveals a masterpiece (Fig. 30). The umbrella is decorated with small, incredibly detailed cloisonné, demonstrating his mastery of yet another artistic technique.

The woman’s face is expressive; her sapphire eyes sparkle with delight as she actively engages in conversation with her unseen companion (Fig. 31). The faces Konovalenko produced during his time in the United States are some of the most expressive he ever created. Although this is certainly a function of his maturation as an artist, Ms. Konovalenko says that it is also because they were created during the happiest period of his life.

Figure 28. In the Sultry Afternoon II. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.10-f. The top of the umbrella is 23 cm high; the base is 50 cm long and 33 cm wide.
Figure 29. *In the Sultry Afternoon II*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.10-p.

Figure 30. *In the Sultry Afternoon II*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.10-z.
Vasily Konovalenko’s gem-carving sculptures in Denver

Figure 31. *In the Sultry Afternoon II*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.10-w.
Laundress

The Laundress stares into oblivion, resigned to the monotonous plight of a routine and mundane task (Fig. 32). Her feet are immersed in cool but murky water; her favorite pyrite washing stone and petrified-wood washboard close at hand. The base is agate, rimmed by malachite.

The size of her hands and forearms, and the masculine robusticity of her back, testifies to a laborious life. Her unblemished skin, by contrast, testifies to youth. A feminine touch, in the form of a delicate pearl necklace, graces an otherwise pedestrian wardrobe and silently mocks her predicament.

A close-up view of her face reveals Konova-lenko’s mastery of Beloretsk quartz (Fig. 33). Her face is delicate but expressive, embellished only by her sapphire eyes. Her kerchief is turquoise, her blouse aventurine.
Figure 33. Laundress, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.17-h.
**Mower**

The *Mower* sings while he works, a not-so-grim reaper following the rhythms of an agricultural lifestyle, harvesting the season’s rye (Fig. 34). His pants are agate, his shirt beryl, and his satchel’s strap is ruby. The pile of rye is rutilated quartz.

A close-up of his face reveals compound eyes (Fig. 35). The pupils are sapphire, surrounded by gold irises. The sclera, or white portion of the eye, is undifferentiated Beloretsk quartz that also forms his head. The man’s mustache, and possibly eyebrows, are rutilated quartz; his hat snowflake obsidian.

The *Mower* has perfectly rendered feet; note the nails and wrinkles Konovalenko has carved on the toes (Fig. 36). Konovalenko used natural flaws in the Beloretsk quartz to yield a calloused heel. Variations in the agate pants look like faded denim.

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*Figure 34. Mower. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.11-g. The top of the man’s hat is 23 cm high; the base is 28 cm long and 20 cm wide.*
Vasily Konovalenko’s gem-carving sculptures in Denver

Figure 35. *Mower*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.11.z.

Figure 36. *Mower*, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1.11-p.
Figure 37. On The Stroll. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-4.c. The top of the man’s hat is 30 cm high; the base is 26 cm by 21 cm.
**On The Stroll**

Vibrantly colored, *On the Stroll* illustrates a couple strolling into the forest (Fig. 37). The man seems confident; the young woman sings innocently as she plays a balalaika, but the surprise on her face indicates she has begun to understand his ulterior motives. They walk on a rough chalcopyrite ground surface characteristic of a forested environment. His shoes are sapphire, hers are red picture jasper. Her blouse is varicite, paired with a horizontally banded nundoorite skirt. His opal shirt is overlain by a lapis lazuli jacket. Her youthful face is Beloretsk quartz; her wavy hair is onyx, which Konovalenko rarely used, overlain by a goldstone kerchief (Fig. 38). Her tripartite eyes, like those in *Swan Song* (see Fig. 62) and *Wanderer* (see Fig. 70) have sapphire pupils, gold irises, and agate scleras. This leads to significant differences in the expressiveness of her eyes compared to his, which are simply sapphires set into Beloretsk quartz. His cap is white jasper, his hair is agate.

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*Figure 38. On the Stroll, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-4.z.*
Modeled on memories of a man Konovalenko hired to paint his Leningrad apartment in the early 1960s, Painter is a forlorn yet strangely proud old drunk, trying to convince his client that he has done a wonderful job when in fact his work is a disaster (Fig. 39). His thin physique, pale complexion, and gaunt appearance belie years of hard labor with noxious chemicals, coupled with alcohol intake and poor nutrition.

The genius in this sculpture has to do with how Konovalenko made use of internal attributes and characteristics of the stones to add detail to both the man and the scene. Painter stands on a dirty, canvas-covered floor made of petrified wood. The wood cells have been replaced with jasper, milky quartz, and other minerals, giving it a mottled appearance. Just to the right of the paint bucket, visible in its shadow, Konovalenko has taken advantage of natural variations, perhaps tree-rings, in the petrified wood to make it appear as if the bucket has been pushed to the right, causing the canvas to bunch up. When compared with the uniformly white paint in the bucket, it is clear that the Painter has made a mess of the floor.

The Painter’s jasper face shows significant signs of age and toil (Fig. 40). Konovalenko used natural variations in the stone to create a reddened beard, while also making it look like the man has burst capillaries in his nose and around his eyes, perhaps from excessive alcohol consumption. As with so many other sculptures, the eyes are sapphire. Unlike so many others, however, Konovalenko has made the right eye opaque as if it was injured in the past, or is beset by a cataract. Note the detail with which Konovalenko rendered the amethyst and quartz paint brush located just below the man’s right jaw. The hat is snowflake obsidian, trimmed with grape agate to give it a rough edge.

A close-up of Painter reveals yet again that Konovalenko used natural variations in the stone to make it appear that the man has spattered paint all over his right hand and on his apron (Fig. 41). Konovalenko carved a tiny circular button on the lapis lazuli shirt, just above the apron center.
Vasily Konovalenko’s gem-carving sculptures in Denver

**Figure 40.** Painter, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-2.g.

**Figure 41.** Painter, detail. Neg. No.IV.DMF.1-2.z.