The "binding" is in three sections: front and back cardboard covers, each hinged and stitched to convex cardboard "spine". "Spinal" cavity blocked at each end and divided into two compartments by half-moon shaped pieces of wood. The smaller compartment is lined with silver plastic film, the larger with gold. Each contains a scroll on a spool.

The scrolls are made from 2 sewn-together sheets of clear plastic film, containing paper cut-outs. The smaller scroll contains animal shapes cut from newsprint with black drawn embellishments. The larger scroll contains coloured paper shapes and the inside surface of each sheet of film is written, scribbled, drawn and painted on. The ends of each scroll protrude through slots in the "spine": they are secured to wooden rods to which are added wire and rod extensions serving as handles, which allow the scrolls to be viewed by pulling through the slot. The rod handles are stowed when not in use by metallic clips set into the "spine".

Inside covers feature rough collage elements with hand-painted text by Kharms. Wire clasps are fixed to edges, which attach to pegs stuck on to main body of work. Front cover contains holes edged with sculpted papier-mâché ridges revealing parts of features within. It also incorporates a picture frame inset surrounding a configuration of 11 cup-shaped paper "caps", arranged in 2 rows of 6, attached to 2 lengths of wire. The wires are held in place by a spring-and-catch contraption which, when released, causes the caps to flick-up.

The main body of the work, the "text-block", consists of 3 open topped cardboard and wood compartments, linked at the edges with hinges of rod and wire. The construction is further linked by wire to the "binding". The first compartment contains 2 rows of 6 brass bell-like cup shaped caps mounted on metal strips riveted to the wood (paralleling caps on front cover). On each is painted a letter of the Cyrillic alphabet. Under each cap is a grooved perspex disc, riveted to the wood. Lower down are 11 wooden pegs, individually lettered, mounted on grooved perspex discs, linked to their brass-topped counterparts with twine, forming pulleys. A separate pulley system is situated below, topped with wooden peg and larger, unlettered copper bell/cap on a strip. A pierced-headed metal pin is wedged into a hole in the perspex disc under the cap through which is threaded a small wire with a copper chip attached, resembling a miniature padlock. When the pulley is operated the chip flies up, hits and rings the bell/cap. The base of the compartment is covered with stuck-on paper labels, each bearing the name of a historical, living (or fictional?) personage.

Pasted to "spine"-facing side of the compartment is a small iconic detail from ink self-portrait by the writer, shown in profile smoking a pipe. The underside of the compartment features a portrait of Kharms executed in paint and collage on wood and the painted inscription "D. Kham i A. Poret". Hinged to the underside edge of the first compartment is a copper sheet, ridged on the rear and edged with silver and clear protective coatings, featuring on the front another expressionistic painted portrait, overwritten in pen with text embossed in the copper. The inside of the second compartment is painted grey with text picked out in white. It contains 3-dimensional face masks sculpted from packing paper, one an "unwearable" crushed profile, the others labelled, on reverse: "khimik" (chemist), "fizik" (physicist), "rabochi?" (worker),
"pisatel?" (writer), "khudozhnik" (artist), "kompozitor" (composer) and "Van?i?a Rublev". Each mask is threaded with elastic band; the unnamed "profile" mask is threaded with black cord. The cardboard underside features a handwritten text, decorated with paint, entitled "Pomekha" (Obstacle) and is framed with strips of rabbit fur.

The third compartment, fashioned entirely from cardboard, features a three-dimensional moving tableau of a torture scene featuring a sculptural caricatured human head and hands from papier-mâché, with springs for "arms". The "instruments of torture" comprise cog-wheels, etc., crafted from wood, a plastic spatula, twine, metal springs. A crank protruding from the outside edge may be turned to rotate wooden spherical "eyeballs" of victim. The crank-rod also operates pulleys to which are linked to other moveable parts, including a wooden cylinder with nylon bristles inserted which, when rotated, resonate on a comb-like metal plate from a musical box, screwed-in. At the base is a wood and concertina-folded packing paper feature representing an open book whose pages "flutter" as the torture takes place.

A gadget resembling a stethoscope, fashioned from papier-mâché, metallic strips and clear rubber tubing is loosely laid-in. The cardboard underside features a painting of a figure, predominantly in black and white, entitled "Smert" (Death). A paper pocket glued to the top edge contains a Russian school exercise book featuring excerpts from Kharms' writings (not texts written/painted on the work itself) translated into English by George Gibian. Texts are hand-written in black ink and illustrated with ink drawings.

Housed in a mixed-media box, constructed from corrugated cardboard plus wood, wire and metal and fashioned to resemble a case with a convex cardboard lid, hinged and threaded to the main construction, painted silver on the outside and coloured black within. The lid is inlaid with paper written over with a text partly obscured by overpainting and collage. Lid may be fastened using cardboard tabs with slots, hinged to edge of lid, which fit over wire loops protruding from front of box through which fasteners may be pushed, carved from wood in the shape of human hands, with "extended index finger" serving as the bolt.

Fasteners are riveted to the ends of metallic strips set into papier-mâché ridges protruding from the front of the box, fashioned in the shape of "lips". When closed and bolted, the box front resembles a human face: metal strips providing V-shaped "nose", hand-shaped bolts (with index fingers pointing outwards) a pair of "eyes". A "tongue" scroll, bearing painted and hand-written text and decorated on both sides with washes of pigment, protrudes from the "mouth". Another scroll is slotted into the "forehead", with black and white illustration on one side, a coloured figure, over-painted with text, on the other. Scrolls are held in place by knotted string loops attached to metal hooks.

The upper part of each side of the case is cut away to create openings: metallic strips of varying length, coiled at the end, are slotted into the box sides to partially block the openings, evoking shattered and bent prison window bars. The case stands on four wooden pegs. It may be carried using a handle constructed from wood and metal.

**Dimensions**

Height: 46 cm, Width: 40 cm, Depth: 21 cm

**Museum number**

38041994105443

**URL**