

From Paris to homeland — with huge creative luggage

National Art Museum hosts first personal exhibition by famous Belarusian artist Boris Zaborov

By Victor Mikhailov

The museum witnessed a full house, with crowds gathered not only in the hall, but standing on the stairs and on the upper floor. Crowds had already gathered but still more and more visitors were arriving. Generally speaking, such a large number of people was expected, since the art loving fraternity had been passionately anticipating the forthcoming exhibition.

The increased interest in Boris Zaborov's artistry was born last year when the painter came to Minsk, visiting the same museum, though on this occasion Mr. Zaborov (now known throughout Europe) brought his *Barnyard* picture to his native land, to present it to the country's major museum. Last year's event was interesting in many respects. For the first time in 30 years, the famous artist returned to his homeland. This was the beginning of the dialogue which eventually resulted in the present show. Mr. Zaborov, meanwhile, was not fully convinced that the exhibition would ever be organised and, during the show's solemn opening, he sincerely and emotionally thanked all those people who had made the effort to make the exhibition in Belarus a reality. He became lyrical saying, "I don't lack imagination but, even recently, I could hardly believe that this day would come. Nevertheless, it has. I'm grateful that this dream has been realised."

Boris Zaborov lived in Paris for the last thirty years. Many years ago, he went there for artistic reasons, wishing to fully discover himself as an artist. Before that, Mr. Zaborov was known as a book illustrator. He studied in Moscow and St. Petersburg, though was born in Minsk, here, in the Belarusian capital, he made his first artistic steps for which he feels pride. His further ambitions influenced his final decision to leave. His life in Paris was not easy at first. To earn money, Mr. Zaborov had to



Boris Zaborov is highly inspired at a press conference in Minsk

paint illustrative pieces for books once more — although he promised himself it would only be a temporary measure. Meanwhile, his talent began to be recognised and demanded. Mr. Zaborov established a proper life in Paris eventually but that experience

the long journey of circumstances and fate his life has taken. In the beginning of his emigration, the artist lost any hope of eventually reaching France. He lived in Austria for some time and even thought that he would stay living in Vienna for the remain-

artistic experience which he had gained in his native Belarus. Here, he became a professional, but in Paris, his artistic freedom helped him inspirationally realise his major theme.

At present, Mr. Zaborov's works are showcased in Minsk. He col-

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has led him to the major theme of his work: the recreation of the spirit of kinship between close people. He has been reaching towards this all his life but only in Paris was it finally developed. However, the photos taken with him from Belarus often excited him. These were the photos of his relatives and acquaintances. They stimulated nostalgia. Any photo is a fact while a picture is an image, Mr. Zaborov managed to lay a bridge connecting these two notions. This is a result of

ing years of his life. Mr. Zaborov once asked the Director of the Albertina Museum in Vienna (whom he knew) for advice and heard the reply which had influenced all his future plans. "It's better to be the last artist in Paris than the first artist in Vienna," Mr. Koshatsky told him. No doubt, these words from such an authoritative man influenced Mr. Zaborov's decision.

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lected these picturesque canvases from French, British, Belgian and Dutch private collectors. Some of them had no wish to part with the pictures but, on learning about their destination, could hardly refuse the artist. Minsk's exhibition also features works from French museums and the artist's own collection. Nevertheless, the show includes only a small part of all the pictures drawn by Mr. Zaborov. They have never before been showcased in such a way.

The exhibition at the National Art Museum embraces the whole Parisian period of Mr. Zaborov's artistry — there are 37 works painted in the last quarter of the century. Although differing in genres, all works on show in Minsk boast a general palette. These are landscapes and figure compositions. However, portraits prevail — depicting unknown personalities and having neutral titles: *A Girl in the Space*, *A Girl with a Ball*, *A Family Portrait...* However, these are not mere depictions of what the artist has seen. They are primarily the impressions, philosophy of life, traces of the time and movement in space. Style matters little. Although the author prefers the manner of an old photograph, his pictures are the continuation of history based on true life. These pictures should be viewed for a long time, with attention. Only then, can audiences realise what they depict and what the artist wanted to say through them.

Boris Zaborov's exhibition in Minsk is part of the Belarusian-French cultural project — as described by Belarus' Foreign Minister at the show's launch. The latter has personally done much to make this show in the Belarusian capital a reality. Mr. Martynov explained how the project had started some time ago — beginning with famous Belarusian cultural figures: Vankovich and Napoleon Orda. It was continued further in the 20th century by a brilliant pleiad of artists from the Parisian school and has found its development in our time. "Boris Zaborov's exhibition convinces us once more that the scale and depth of Belarusian pictorial art is of a European and global standard, rather than merely national," Mr. Martynov noted.

The Foreign Minister also stressed that Mr. Zaborov's exhibition at the National Art Museum is a significant step on the path of Belarusian-French cultural interaction. Generally speaking, this path has always been bilateral, since French influence on the Belarusian culture has a long history. Now, Boris Zaborov's artistic fate unites the cultural space of Belarus and France. After many years, the author is symbolically returning to his native land where he began his artistic path — via his show. No doubt, the exhibition will become an important artistic beginning for the creative return of our famous countryman to Belarus. This return will, no doubt, contribute to the further strengthening of our intercultural dialogue and the all-European cultural space. This idea was stressed by the French Minister of Culture and Communication, Frédéric Mitterrand, in his welcome address written in the catalogue for Boris Zaborov's show in Minsk. In turn, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Michel Raineri, noted at the show's opening that France is proud of the fact that this wonderful artist developed his talent in their country.



Works by artist Boris Zaborov require deep contemplation and honesty, making us philosophise on our existence