



Artist Ruslan Vashkevich's recent exhibition at National Art Museum causes a stir

Endless labyrinths of creative searches lead to *Museum* show

National Art Museum hosts *Museum* art project by painter Ruslan Vashkevich

By Victor Mikhailov

Painter Ruslan Vashkevich is quite a noticeable figure on the art stage of contemporary Belarusian art. Many remembered him by his flamboyant appearance, as well as his ironic creativity. He is known in Belarus and beyond, having given personal exhibitions in Minsk, Moscow, Amsterdam, Paris, Granada, Chicago, Tallinn, Rome and Kiev. Mr. Vashkevich's works were on show at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005 and are kept at the National Art Museum of Belarus and Modern Fine Arts Museum in Minsk, alongside the Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in New York, Moscow's Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of New Art in Pärnu, as well as in private collections.

What is the significance of his recent exhibition showcased at the major museum of the country? He explains that it's a conceptual rethinking of the function and status of a museum in



Alternative painting style inspires increased interest in pictures

contemporary culture, saying it is a 'rehearsal of a museum — a model of artistic intervention, masked in golden frames true to scale'. His 'museum' has no bor-

ders, whether between the past and the present or art and non-art. The distance between great masters and ordinary spectators disappears, as does the border

between classical painting and adverts. It challenges the idea of a museum as 'a bastion of cultural respectability' whose works are only worthy of judgment by 'professionals'. He believes art is for everyone, since it encapsulates our universal life experience. Ruslan's project asks us to ponder how museums can be contemporary, interactive and provoking, as well as educational and entertaining.

He also offers insight into how artists assess one another's works, looking at the evolution of art through the ages, from the use of simple brushes to computer special effects. Over twenty of his works are on show, with his new pieces neighbouring the already well known 'old' pictures, inviting us to compare and bring new interpretations.

The post-modernist ideas of sequence and order (still allowing for an author's unique vision) are applied by Ruslan as a potentially limitless resource for artistic ex-

perimentation through various genres and techniques. He shows us that each painter's relationship with the artistic traditions of the past is irrefutable. To say that an artist refuses or accepts such traditions is too narrow a statement; all art proceeds from that which came before, according to Mr. Vashkevich. He believes our study of the history of art not only teaches us about form and style but allows us to re-assess values, modernising and refreshing our world perception.

Although this isn't a retrospective, the exhibition gives an insight into the range of the painter's artistic search. Painting is replaced with installations and supreme 'dedications' to Velasquez. A row of photos stand alongside sketches and reproductions, embracing classical still-life themes, the erotic and the sinister. Meanwhile, the classical traditions of the past are the prototype for contemporary advertisements.

Opera expands borders of influence

Belarus' Culture Minister, Pavel Latushko, breaks sensational news of plans for second opera theatre – in Gomel – during opening of *Teatralny Koufar* Festival

By Valery Pimenov

The theatrical community is hugely excited by the news, wondering whether it will truly come to pass. "The creation of a branch of the Bolshoi Theatre is only, as yet, being discussed but it's evident that one opera theatre is not enough for such a country as Belarus. There should be at least two," stressed Mr. Latushko.

The idea has been hanging thick in the air in Gomel since reconstruction of the Palace of Culture of Railway Workers was completed this spring. Gomel is known for its love of theatre, boasting a drama, youth and puppet theatre already, so an opera

house would surely receive great support.

Bolshoi Theatre employees share their views:

Nina SHARUBINA, soprano, Honoured Artiste of Belarus:

Bravo, bravissimo! Undoubtedly, one opera theatre is not enough for our country. Many strong-voiced young singers from the Gomel Region have attended the Academy of Music's Vocal Department, so I don't see any obstacle to the creation of a new troupe from Gomel itself. I'm confident that a strong and professional company could establish there. If good living conditions and salaries are provided, there won't be

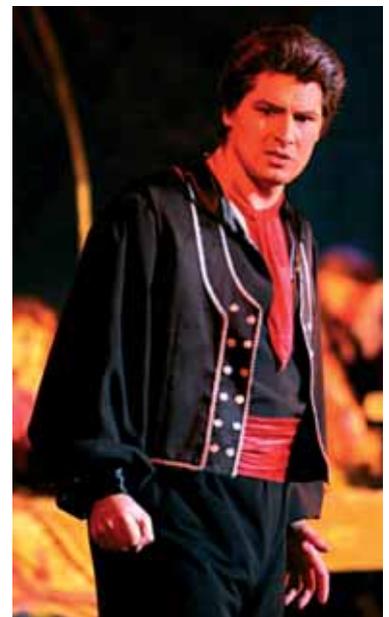
any problem in keeping them in the regional centre.

Mikhail PANDZHAVIDZE, chief director of the Bolshoi Theatre:

The idea of creating a new company is only just, although I have some doubts regarding staff. We recently auditioned graduates and students from the Academy of Music and there were very few of sufficient level. If an alternative theatre appears, it would be a breakthrough for our company. In Russia, soloists from the Bolshoi Theatre are taken from provincial opera theatres countrywide; it's wonderful when such companies exist.

Vladimir GROMOV, baritone, a diploma winner of an international competition:

I'm not prepared to move to Gomel to live and work. However, sessional work in an alternative theatre is normal practice. It would be a pleasure for me to perform on Gomel's opera stage, if the opportunity appears. I don't think it will be easy to establish a troupe for the new theatre, although we enrol talented newcomers from the Academy of Music annually. I've no doubt that the audience in Gomel will be receptive. I've performed there several times and Gomel residents are very keen. Before performances, we often see buses from regional centres near our Bolshoi Theatre, showing audiences' interest in the operatic genre. It's great.



Vladimir Gromov in *Aleko* opera
The MT's reference:

The National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre is to open a branch in Mogilev, at the Palace of Culture of the Region, with performances staged two or three times monthly.