



Belarusian painters developed abstract aesthetics as early as 1910 in pictorial art

# Kind of art which provokes wide variety of associations

National Art Museum reminds us that Belarusian painters developed abstract art in early 20th century

By Victor Mikhailov

We can boldly affirm that the Belarusian arts movement has long enjoyed avant-garde traditions. The brightest representative of abstract trends was Kazimir Malevich, who lived and worked in Belarusian Vitebsk in the early 20th century. This fact alone announces that Belarusian abstract art boasted strong foundations. Abstractionism (from Latin 'abstractio', meaning removal and distraction) is a trend of non-figurative art, giving an alternative to realism in painting and sculpture.

One of its aims is to create definite colour combinations and geometrical compositional forms, arousing various associations among spectators. It shaped an independent trend in the early 20th century, founded in Russia by Vasily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov. In the Netherlands, Piet Mondriaan and Theo van Doesburg were best known for the style but Kandinsky first began experimenting in 1910, rejecting realism to reveal the deeper spirituality of objects and ideas.

Interestingly, abstract art has two bright manifestations. The first is 'organic', which harmonises splashes of colour without reference to reality, using colour for its intrinsic value as well as its richness and musical associations, reflecting the lyricism and drama of human emotions. The second is 'geometric', as used by Paul Cézanne and the Cubists. It combines geometric shapes with straight and broken lines and has a range of subdivisions: Rayonnism, non-objectiveness and



More than 30 works on show at first exhibition at National Art Museum devoted to abstract art in Belarus

suprematism. Theo van Doesburg said this juxtaposed the 'simplicity, clarity, con-

structiveness and functionality' of pure geometrical forms to the 'occasionality, uncertainty and despotism of nature'.

After WWII, a new generation of abstract art borrowed the principle of 'psychological automatism' from surrealism. The accent shifted to the process of creation, giving birth to 'painting-action'. Abstract surrealism became recognised as a genre of abstract art in the USA in the 1950s.

Belarusian painters developed abstract aesthetics as early as 1910 in pictorial art, opening new horizons of creativity. However, these only gained real momentum in the 1980-1990s, when art broke free of narration, practicality and social prejudice. Belarusian abstractionism was unique in its use of colour and shape, as well its combinations of the

figurative and abstract.

This is the National Art Museum's first exhibition dedicated to abstract art in Belarus, displaying works from the 1920s until the present day. Some painters clearly follow the supramatic traditions of Kazimir Malevich: Nadia Léger, Alexander Slepov, Alexander Malei, Valery Schastny, Lyudmila Rusova and Galina Vasilieva. Each is inspired by Malevich's interpretation, dynamics and rhythm. Yefim Royak combined the principles of cubism and Rayonnism while Zoya Litvinova's paintings use geometric abstraction, diluted with non-figurative elements (which significantly enrich her pictures). Many artists have created their own concepts with colour and shape: Igor Kashkurevich's concentric surfaces; the neoplastic images of Sergey Kiryushchenko; Vladimir Providokhin's graphic

compositions; and the ceramic shapes of Tamara Sokolova.

Figurative elements, presented as sign and abstraction, are evident in works by Yan Kuzmitsky, Nikolay Bushchik, Leonid Khobotov, Yevgenia Lis, Vladimir Pantelev, Tatiana Siplevich and Andrey Basalyga. Meanwhile, Anatoly Kuznetsov, Alexander Vakhrameev, Valery Pesin, Konstantin Selikhanov, Tatiana Radzivilko and Maxim Petrulya use abstract expressionism and conceptualism. It is as if they are creating a new system of symbols, inspired by their environment, emotions and thoughts, and expressed via shape and colour.

The exhibition features 33 works by 27 artists, with most from the collection of the National Art Museum of Belarus. After the exhibition, many of the more modern paintings are being donated to the museum.

**Centaur Shooting with Bow. 2010. Alexander Slepov**

