

Ironic chevalier Igor Rimashevsky

All true artists know that truth lies in the detail. Accordingly, Igor Rimashevsky is generous, like a child loved by parents and friends.

By Vladimir Stepan

Gazing on Rimashevsky's canvases, I become stupid, falling back into childhood, smiling without realising. My thoughts turn to ice lollies, bright candy, catapults and coins, and my magnifying glass, through which I once examined feathers, bright bugs and blades of grass, read miniature inscriptions, explored small cracks, and perused thousands of other tiny, unnoticed details.

One of his canvases depicts a huge red cat climbing a tree to reach a bed's nest. Ravens fly nearby, croaking with open beaks, their wings black and feathers sticking out like saw teeth. The cat is like a phoenix, knowing the answers to all philosophical questions. Moreover, the cat and birds are huge while the houses and people are small. It's as if you have climbed a neighbouring tree to spy on them.

Another canvas portrays Minsk in winter: *Glacial Period*. We see the bright houses of the Troitsky Suburbs — its streets, trees and people. Icicles hang from roofs, making them appear like table cloths, while workers in bright uniforms traverse the roofs amusingly to knock them down.

Like Rousseau, Pirosmashvili and Generalich, his works are called naive and primitive; however, all were self-taught while Mr. Rimashevsky boasts two diplomas of secondary and higher special education. He has a very professional attitude towards his work while skilfully using the methods of his predecessors.

The walls of his small studio are covered in bright and festive canvases, giving the impression of an exhibition. Many are recognisable, offering a window onto particular streets or courtyards — like looking through a kaleidoscope.

"I studied to become a decorator at the Art College and studied monumental painting at the Academy. I spent many years working at an artistic factory where I was obliged to make 'socialist creations'; this allowed me little chance for personal expression but I had to put up with it. I do decorate jugs, plates and furniture,

draw calendars and illustrate books but it's a shadow of my true vocation. I have to earn money to support my family but true art is an occupation for the soul," emphasises Mr. Rimashevsky, turning his gaze from one picture to another.

You speak of applied art while your exhibitions mostly showcase your pictures.

Yes. As soon as I make a plate, for instance, it is bought immediately. I like to be in-

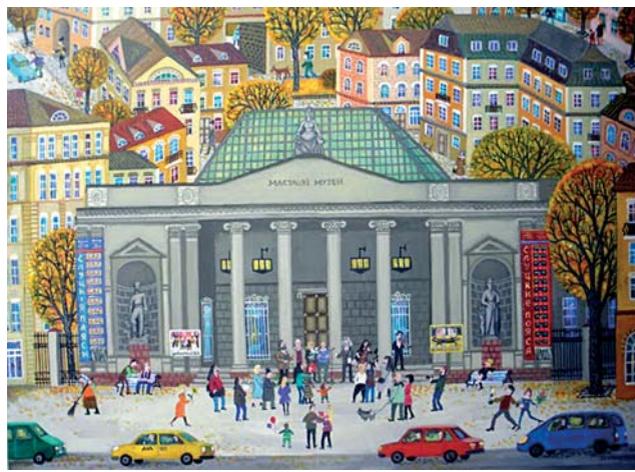


spired by my surroundings and what fills me with joy.

Igor, do you have a pet cat?

I've always had pet cats and dogs. I currently have two cats and a dog; all my pets have been ones I've rehomed except for a dog we bought in 1999. My wife and I were walking along the street when we saw a woman selling a small white dog with spots. It looked like a cow and cost just \$1. It's now 13 years old.

Once, a cat was crying in the entrance hall for a couple of days, so we opened our door and 'invited' him into our flat on New Year's Eve. It came in, looked around and decided to stay; he wasn't even afraid of the dog. Our other cat was attacked on the



Our museum



street by dogs and we initially thought she'd die but the vet managed to save her. You know, these cats 'earn their keep', as I constantly draw inspiration from them.

This reminds me of a scene from a Soviet comedy where Vitsin is trying, unsuccessfully, to sell money-boxes in the shape of cats at the market, alongside buckram rugs depicting frivolous mermaids.

People are sentimental and many have pets. I feel it's essential not to use stereotypes in drawing cats, dogs or birds. It's how we depict rather than what. For example, Van Gogh drew sunflowers and irises; it could have looked vulgar but didn't. The same is true of animals. I know that many

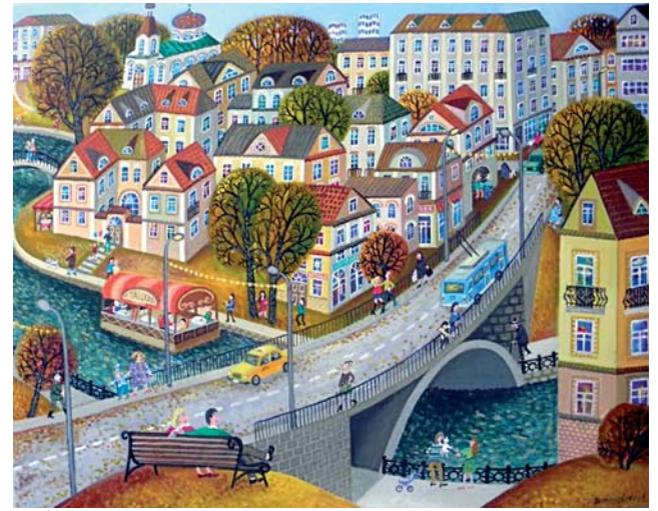
call my art 'cats and dogs' but I ignore those comments. These works give me pleasure — which is enough.

And money...

Few businessmen have true works of art at home, mostly hanging photos and diplomas in frames. Luckily, my doctor friend, who runs his own firm, collects pictures.

It's often said that canvas painting is dying and could soon disappear.

I think the popularity of such works has fallen because new technologies have made photography so very affordable. However, the theatre has endured, as have cinema and music. Traditional painting will always exist. I've been recently approached for per-



I will show you Minsk



Residential question

Works by Igor Rimashevsky are kept at the National Art Museum, as well as in private collections throughout Russia, Germany, Austria, Australia, Greece, the USA, Israel, Italy, France, Poland, Ireland, Turkey, Spain and Switzerland.

mission to allow my works to be reproduced as high quality prints, since not everyone can afford to buy an original piece; it's very expensive to own a canvas painting even though we all dream of such a thing.

Sadly, the line between good and bad technique has been blurred; previously, definite criteria existed for mastery and professionalism; now, all artists are geniuses! It's very difficult for the public to understand. Thirty years ago, artists were either professional or amateur: those who were educated and those who were self-taught.

Igor, who are your friends?

I have just a few, who I've known since school: one

is a doctor and another is an amateur painter, who draws cinema billboards. A decade ago, I met an enthusiastic and devoted German who was organising exhibitions and buying works. He helped our actors by helping fund their performances and fell madly in love with Belarus. He bought a flat here, married and has many local friends. He hardly bothers to return to Germany at all. He owns many of my pieces.

Where do you tend to exhibit now?

Last year, I gave a small exhibition at the art salon and one more, jointly with my wife, at the Palace of Arts, to mark my 50th birthday. I believe these should be organised only when you have lots of works to display and something to really show the public. Unfortunately, few halls in Minsk can host small exhibitions.

Igor, you were born in Minsk, studied here and continue to live in the capital. You draw, write and observe life in Minsk a great deal, so what do you think of its progress? Have the places of which you wrote 15-20 years ago changed in appearance?

You know, my heart always aches for Minsk's centre. I live in Kirov Street, opposite the former House of Pioneers. I'm not against the construction of new buildings; we can't do without them. However, I advocate a delicate attitude towards the city landscape. Just look at the Troitsky Suburbs! There's a huge white house which seems to oppress the old suburbs. I don't like some buildings and won't ever draw them, as is my right.