

Georgy Skripnichenko's own view of harmony of centuries

Around a hundred original works by Georgy Skripnichenko showcased at National Art Museum as part of his moving *Harmony of Centuries* exhibition

By Victor Mikhailov

The exhibition is a true revelation not only to visitors but to his colleagues. Famous artist Zoya Litvinova tells us, "Georgy is great! He reveals his artistic personality through his pictures."

Mr. Skripnichenko is among those few who rarely sell their works, holding them dearly. Those on show at the country's major museum are really causing a stir, as there's no doubt of Mr. Skripnichenko's genius. He is a legend of Belarusian fine art, creating wonderful characters in incredible combinations. Neither is he afraid to create unusual juxtapositions or alter 'reality'; his canvases are simultaneously wonderful and awful, comic, lofty and tragic.

Back in the 1980s, he had already made a name for himself as a surrealist and, through the 1990-2000s, continued to skip between reality and fantasy. Museum staff admit that his canvases are notable for their expressive irony; he ponders serious matters with a smile. Mr. Skripnichenko creates his own realism through fantasy, in a unique manner.

The current exhibition's major sponsor is Priorbank. "I'm delighted that some people in our country are eager to support cultural events," emphasised former Culture Minister Pavel Latushko, at the opening ceremony. "Their help allows us to present this wonderful project: Georgy Skripnichenko's personal exhibition. He has his own unique style and is known far beyond Belarus. He is the first Belarusian surrealist: an artist through and through."

Mr. Skripnichenko's works resemble those of Dali, with twisted whiskers and a cunning eye. Aged over 70, he is still full of energy and curiosity, answering our questions honestly, from the heart.

What inspires you?

Love of art. I can hardly imagine life without art. I have to draw. If I approach a canvas, I can't stop painting.

As an artistic person, do you need to be inspired?

I wouldn't be devoted to pictorial art without some kind of passion. I'm especially inspired by my cat, Markiza, who is almost 12. This cat has been a true gift, changing my lifestyle drastically.

Is your wife jealous?

She understands, as she is an artistic person also. She lectures

at the Contemporary Knowledge Institute, and is writing a series of books on design.

How can two artistic personalities live together?

We have a 'guest' marriage. I live in my workshop. We 'date', which allows us to preserve a sense of novelty.

Have you ever calculated how many pictures you've drawn so far?

I've never done so but can guess at about a thousand.

Are your pictures expensive?

Honestly, I've never created works with the intention of making lots of money. Gallery owners and collectors know that if they come to purchase three works they may leave with one. I'm not overly greedy! Money is vital but I don't wish my workshop to be emptied.

Do you have works with which you'd never part?

All — without exception [smiling].

Who is your strictest critic?

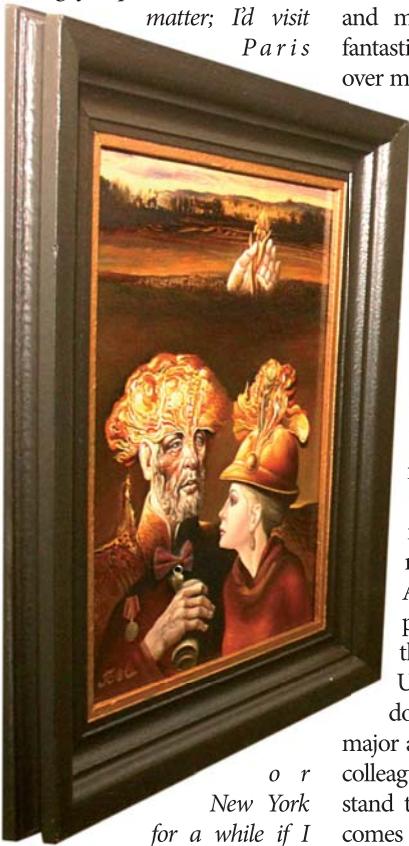
Pushkin said: 'You are your own supreme court, judging your own work strictly'. Only we know our true worth and potential.

Do you have any life ambitions?

Truly, I'd like to be more talented.

Have you ever wanted to leave the country?

Never permanently. Traveling for pleasure is another matter; I'd visit Paris



for a while if I had the money, as these cities have their own spirit and a brilliant artistic atmosphere.



Georgy Skripnichenko invites to visit his personal exhibition at National Art Museum

However, I can only work in my studio and at our cottage in the Nalibokskaya Pushcha.

Which have been your saddest and happiest moments?

I'm happy living and working. Feelings of disappointment have been my saddest.

Mr. Skripnichenko studied under Iosif Eidelman but Alger Malishevsky and Leonid Shchemelev also influenced his artistry. The latter lectured at Minsk's Art College in the 1960s and advised the talented and industrious young man.

The master began his path by illustrating books by classical Belarusian authors. He also loved water colours and pictorial art. In the early 1980s, Mr. Skripnichenko began experimenting, creating his own world: kind and sad, gracious and mysterious, realistic and fantastic. Studying his works over many years, it's clear that a deep love for his homeland, its history and past, rests at the heart of his creativity. He muses much on modern life also, as we see in his easily recognisable landscapes and in the faces of his countrymen and historical personalities. With some anxiety, he explores the potential for ecological disaster.

Mr. Skripnichenko is a member of the Belarusian Academy of Fine Arts and, in 2005, was proclaimed 'Person of the Year' by Cambridge University. However, he does not view this as his major achievement. His family, colleagues and friends understand that his true inspiration comes from time spent in his workshop or in his village in the Nalibokskaya Pushcha. He creates pictures which inspire us to



ponder the world in new ways — as is fitting for a true master.

What's your artistic credo?

I'm a realist, so I can't draw abstract works. I adore Rembrandt, El Greco and Velazquez. Almost everything I depict is real — yet altered, probably as a result of fashion. My ideas appear from out of nowhere, guided by intuition. Sometimes, I merely need to touch a canvas for a stroke of genius to come. Of course, sometimes, I have a plan but, as a rule, I don't make prior sketches. My works evolve on the canvas: usually, a realistic picture with surreal elements.

Are you a philosopher?

I've never thought so since philosophy is a lofty matter. I have intuition but I'm a bad philosopher and thinker. I do work hard though.

What's your attitude towards popularity?

It should be taken for granted if it's deserved. I've not experienced this, so I have no idea really but it's pleasant when your work is appreciated at an exhibition — especially when you agree that it's a worthy success. Everyone likes to know that people aren't indifferent to their efforts.

What are your artistic

plans?

To never stop working!

Are your works inspired by real life?

Definitely; anything else is impossible. All my works proceed from reality and are connected with me, my home town of Slutsk and my home city of Minsk. Wherever I travel abroad, I always yearn for my workshop. We have a perfect national school — including graphics, pictorial art and sculpture. We rival anything abroad and are even better in some spheres.

Are you a Belarusian artist or international?

Naturally, I'm a true Belarusian artist. However, I'm not keen on dividing artists in this way. If I'm a Belarusian artist of a high level, then I must also be an international painter. I appreciate Picasso, Salvador Dali, Van Gogh and other modern

artists from across the world; they impress and inspire me to create my own style. It would be strange if we remained uninfluenced by what is around us. As a

member of the world community, I perceive everything around me while pursuing my own aims. The greater your abilities as an artist, the more international you become. Exhibitions abroad are evidence of this. In the field of arts, we cannot ever be isolated.

What inspires you in art? After so many years, aren't you fed up?

I cannot do anything else and it's impossible for me to grow tired of art. I may be tired physically but I have no choice but to continue. I have no other desire in life. I may have ups and downs but these are the natural rhythms of life.

