

# Knowing cosmos well by sight

People's Artist of Belarus, sculptor Ivan Misko, celebrates his 80th birthday

By Irina Gureeva

Mr. Misko boasts so many awards. However, more importantly, his famous sculptures grace and beautify our nation. One of his works which is situated in Zhodino honours Anastasia Kupriyanova, whose five sons never returned from the war. Most 'war memorials' depict valiant soldiers, recalling their bravery and sacrifice, while Mr. Misko's humble female figure is shown in her quiet deed of tolerance and forgiveness. It is no less powerful and earned him the State Award of the USSR.

In fact, his true passion has always been the cosmos. He may be the world's only sculptor to know the night sky by sight. Over the

years, he has created around 50 sculptures of cosmonauts — as well as compositions and bas-reliefs. This 'space sculptor' is an honorary guest at Star City. Moreover, the Russian Federation of Cosmonautics awarded him the Yuri Gagarin Order. On the eve of his 80th birthday, he chatted on the phone to the Federation's President, Vladimir Kovalenok — a twice Hero of the Soviet Union.

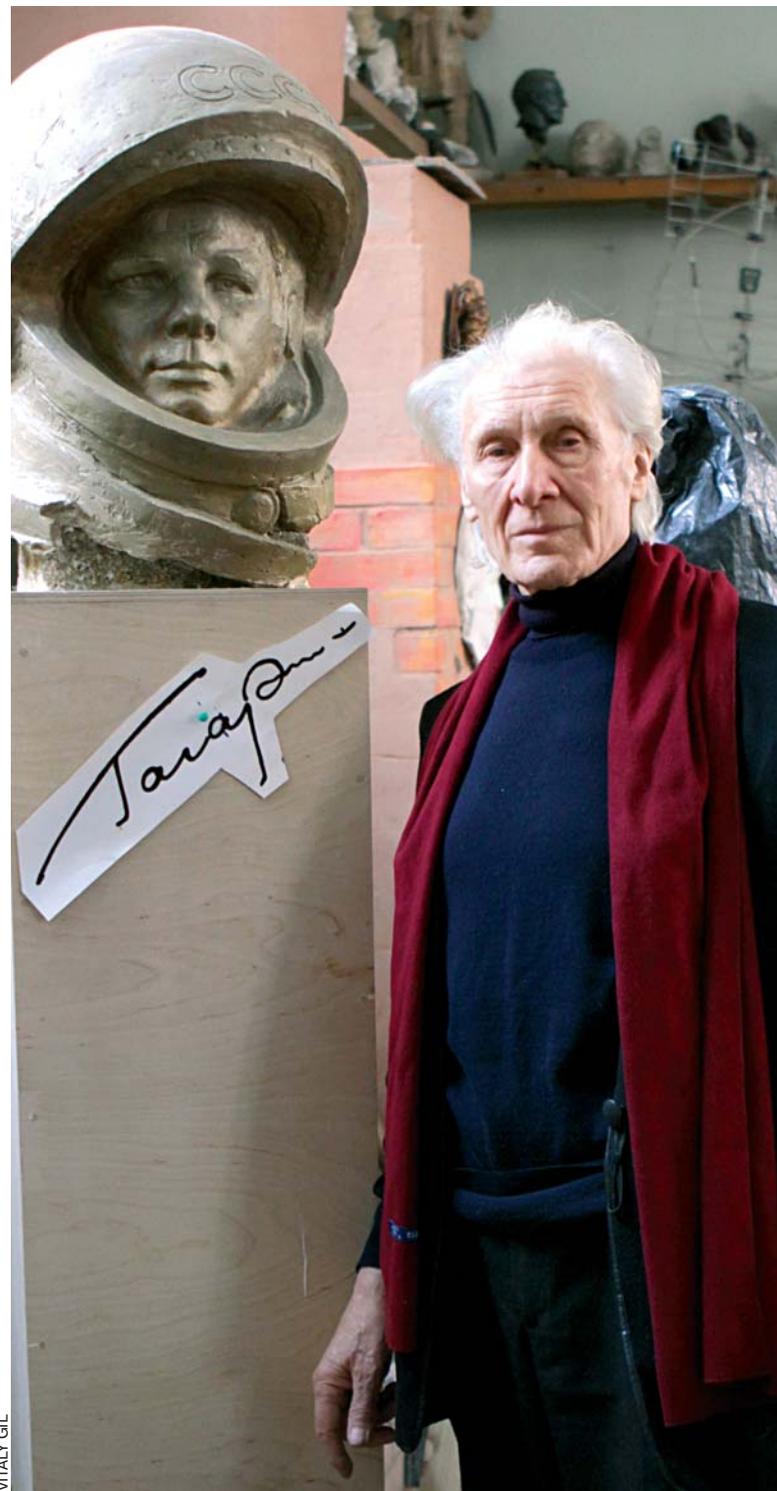
His sculptures are to be seen in museums in Krakow, as well as in private collections throughout the USA, Japan, France, the UK, Italy, Austria, Cuba, Hungary, Romania and Vietnam. However, Mr. Misko dreams of opening an exhibition at Star City, which could then tour all the home cities of those cosmonauts whose portraits he has embodied

in bronze.

**Does our country have a national school of sculpture?**

Yes, but it's very easy to lose it, as I've observed. During Soviet times, the High Artistic School operated in Moscow, attended by those from all socialistic countries. They would return home on graduating. Some 10-15 years later, we can see that their albums are all similar — be they Mongolian or Moldovan. However, the Georgians do seem to produce different works to the Estonians. Why is this? Sculptors need to be constantly working with clay, as pianists must have their piano keys, listening only to themselves while creating their artworks. I remember my teacher, Alexey Glebov, telling his students jokingly to go to genius Azgur's studio in his absence and play with his moist sculptures to understand his technique.

Once, years later, the maestro agreed to create my bust; it was unforgettable. He worked so quickly, spreading his fingers and sinking his thumbs deep into the clay where the eyes should be while defining a chin and cheek-bones with his little finger. He then tore the clay like a vulture tears a hen. It was magnificent. He strained every sinew within a few minutes, using exact and aggressive strokes. I then saw the familiar process. Azgur was



Ivan Misko near a sculpture of the world's first cosmonaut

improving and polishing his work — as all artists must do. They need to be ever working, mastering their talent and feeling inspiration.

**You've spent hours working and communicating with cosmonauts. You've also listened and thought a great deal. What does the universe mean to you?**

It holds a great attraction. When I was a boy, I could spend

hours looking into the sky, while sitting on a haystack. As the years passed, I understood that we gain a feeling of thirst for something elevated, some understanding of what is beyond ourselves. We are aware of the ambiguity of human nature: we're gods and animals simultaneously. The sky is above us, as if constantly calling us towards the divine.



Sculptor remains full of creative plans

## University students show love and appreciation for their native language

Belarus' Culture Minister, Pavel Latushko, recently attended International Mother Language Day, hosted by the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts. He noted that every world language should be respected and appreciated, although we all love our native language best

By Tatiana Grigorieva

"Our literature boasts many names of which the whole world is proud. We should take care of our language, at the very least as a sign of respect," he asserted, calling upon everyone to try to speak Belarusian more frequently. "The preservation of our traditions depends solely on us," he

added.

The tradition of celebrating Mother Language Day appeared at the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts long ago. With each year, this holiday grows more popular and its scale expands. This time, guests were offered contemporary batleika (puppet theatre) and interesting quizzes. There was even a per-

formance by the Choreography Chair ensemble — a laureate of international and Republican contests and festivals; the group receives a special scholarship from the Special Fund of the President of Belarus for Support of the Talented Youth. Gramnitsy folk band also performed, alongside the winners of a contest to create the best poem and song



Holiday dedicated to native language

in our native language, recently hosted by the university.

Traditional Belarusian dishes, prepared by university students and teachers, were available for tasting and guests could learn the pas d'Espagne — an almost forgotten dance.

International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by UNESCO in 1999, aiming to pro-

mote and preserve the world's cultural and language wealth; in fact, half of its existing 6,000 languages are under threat. February 21st was chosen for the date as, in 1952, five students were killed during a demonstration calling for Bengali to be an official language of Pakistan; its eastern part later became the independent state of Bangladesh.