

# Illusions at edge of reality and fantasy

*Georgy Skripnichenko. Graphics exhibition, at Modern Fine Arts Museum, reveals new features of the famous man's rich artistic legacy*

By Victor Mikhailov

In November, the exhibition at the National Art Museum delighted Mr. Skripnichenko's fans. Well-known among late 20th century masters, for his unique realism combined with his own surrealism, his complex combinations of images, roused from the subconscious, embrace fantasy and reality in a web of paradox.

Mr. Skripnichenko's career has been extremely fruitful, across various genres and styles. Some will be surprised that his graphic pieces are just as impressive as his better known works. He began drawing graphic 'puzzles' in the 1960s, giving us a bemusing and surreal view

making him eager to depict his own impressions, rather than simply painting representations of landscapes and objects. He drew on real life observations, passing these through the prism of his imagination, finding a place for stylised figures in his web of lines. Some of his drawings became part of cycles on a theme, in black-and-white.

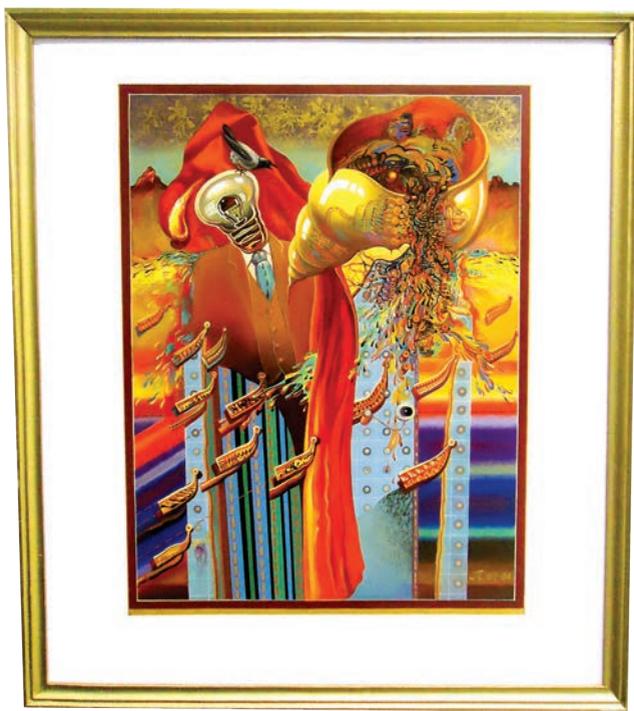
Looking at Mr. Skripnichenko's paradoxical graphic works, you can't help but feel art's broken laws. His absurd collections of lines and figures are intensely realised, yet display subtlety in their hints and allusions. His artistic language is disclosed through understatement, with each work having layers of meaning.

the world.

Creating his still-life paintings, Mr. Skripnichenko gave each element substance. It was



Solemn opening of Georgy Skripnichenko. Graphics exhibition (artist is central)



of reality. His works were intensively decorative and quite outrageous for that time. Grotesque and allegorical, with a firework of colours and images, they could hardly go unnoticed. He created a fantastic world which defied the usual classification and analysis, having twisted the rules with their spots of colour and assorted lines.

In the 1960s-70s, Mr. Skripnichenko was keen on Russian symbolism and the poetry of Akhmatova, Brodsky, Severyanin, Blok, Khlebnikov and Tsvetaeva. Their aesthetics greatly influenced his direction,

In the 1960s, when Mr. Skripnichenko's first works appeared at exhibition, his gouache and watercolour paintings and graphic drawings had a unified feel, sharing a small format. They appeared as variations on the same theme, and featured colour as well as an abundance of lines. His still-life works used complex compositions, with theatrically decorated backgrounds.

Later, he introduced more contrasts, asymmetry, broken lines and combinations of diverse objects. These were more unusual: a paradoxical perception of

common in the late 1960s-early 1970s for the everyday to be given close artistic attention. However, Mr. Skripnichenko's approach differed from that of most artists in that he chose items so far from beautiful as to be considered ugly: dented cans, old bottles and rusty iron teapots. These items were solid in their familiarity. With time, he added bizarre use of colour, to take these paintings to another level: cerise pink, raspberry red, purple and emerald green gave a metaphorical character to his compositions.

His works ten lost their narrative character and he changed the proportions of human figures, while introducing them more often. They took an ever more leading role in his graphic fantasies, with their deformed appearance, disobeying the laws of physics.

For his graphic pieces he used a thin quill or pencil, onto paper, creating a delicate and precise drawing, allowing him to portray the nuances of his emotions. These, he supplemented with subtle colour, in a mixed technique. They are more than preparatory sketches, rather being an independent branch of his creativity. Without them, a full perception of his later artworks would be incomplete. These works help us to understand his world outlook; we see the restless

run of his thoughts and feelings.

His dialogue with the surrounding world is as a theatre of dreams, filled with irony, critics and aphorisms. The stage accommodates his fantasies about the present and future, as well as his contemplations on the past. His recollections are those of a traveller, making judgments about those around him. He seems little aware of his audience, except to entice them deep into his fantasies, forcing them to ponder.

Such an approach was unexpected for Belarusian pictorial art in the 1970s. Most misunderstood his surrealism and fantastical themes. His displaced framing and unexpected angles, reminiscent of those seen in the West, were unwelcome: even rejected.

Mr. Skripnichenko's works were out of step with his time, even where inspired by real events and meetings. Contemporary reality didn't interest him, as he sought something beyond the usual. His early pieces echo with surrealism, cubism, expressionism and pop-art, with a hint of Salvador Dali and Roy Lichtenstein. The conceptualism and avant-garde trends of the 20th century appeared as fragments in his works.

However, his works retained their own, independent flavour, dominated by artistic ideas rather than techniques. He has never viewed technical mastery as a goal in itself, rather seeing such mastery as a path to expression. His defining feature is perhaps his desire to play games with logic.

His illusory works, on the edge of reality and fantasy, captured faces and objects with clear line and texture, amid colourful splashes and collage elements (insertions in such materials as wood and, even, orange peel). Nothing was taboo, enabling him to create his own integrity of vision.

Undoubtedly, his works were utterly unique in Belarusian art — no matter which medium he used. His 'language' has always been unique, allowing us to make up our own minds about his works. We can choose to reject and accept.

Looking at the huge range of pictures created by the master over the years, his deep and sincere love for his Motherland, its past and future, is evident.

His patriotism offers us familiar landscapes and images of his fellow countrymen and villagers, alongside portraits of historical personalities. Modernity collides with the familiar in ways continually surprising. In this way, his works are timeless, addressing the consequences of ecological disasters and reminding us that we are the result of our legacy.

