

Marc Chagall's *Paysage Vert**Le Somnambule*Chaim Soutine's *Eva*

# Chagall and Soutine's new return to homeland

World art masterpieces created by Belarus-born masters may soon be showcased in Minsk

By Yury Chernyakevich

A report by Belarusian news agencies has aroused interest among all art lovers: not long ago, Belgazprombank purchased four valuable paintings from Sotheby's auction house. Three of the Parisian school paintings are by Belarus-born Marc Chagall: *Le Somnambule* (bought for \$341,000), *Pendule Au Ciel Embrasé* (\$605,000) and *Paysage Vert* — painted in the late 1940s, (\$137,000). The fourth is Chaim Soutine's *Eva* (1928) — costing almost \$2m.

Until 2012, Belarus — the homeland of Chagall and Soutine — possessed not a single original work by these artists. However, in February 2012, Belgazprombank bought Soutine's *Les Grands Pres a Chartres* (\$400,000),

alongside Chagall's *Les Amoureux* (\$650,000), from Christie's. The Belarus-born Parisian school artists show at the National Art Museum featured both works, among many others rarely gathered together.

People often ponder how much pictures by Chagall, Soutine, Kikoine or Kremengost, guessing several hundred Dollars. Certainly, their value goes beyond currency. On seeing the works exhibited in Vitebsk, your heart quite stops in pride and admiration. It's wonderful to be able to appreciate and compare such works, although we might envy those who own such masterpieces in private collections.

Works by Belarus-born Parisian school artists are greatly in demand, leading to prices rising. In February

*Pendule Au Ciel Embrasé*

2007, Sotheby's witnessed a global sensation when *L'Homme au Foulard Rouge*

by Soutine (born in Smilovichi, near Minsk) sold for an incredible \$17m — setting a new record among Expressionistic paintings. Chagall's *Bestiaire et Musique* (1969) sold for almost \$4m at a Seoul auction in October 2010 while Picasso's *Le Modèle dans l'atelier* went for just over \$2m. Michel Kikione's *Lying* was sold for \$800,000 Euros in 2007 while the average price of works by another Belarus-born artist — Pinhas Kremengost — varies from \$10,000-\$15,000.

To buy a work by an acknowledged master, you need hundreds of thousands or, even, millions of Dollars so few are in a position to buy. Such prices have been an insurmountable obstacle for Belarusian museums but Belgazprombank's decision to acquire the works,

Osip Lyubich's *Landscape with Red Roofs*

for exhibition in Minsk, Gomel and Vitebsk, has sent a lifeline to art lovers in our country. It's hardly surprising that there is huge interest in the masterpieces: the bank's present corporate art collection by Expressionist artists is actually the largest in Belarus and, even, in Eastern Europe. Plans are afoot to buy more such paintings, as Belgazprombank's Chairman of the Board, Victor Babariko, emphasises. He tells us, "We wish to further expand our collection. Belarusians' sincere interest in art has inspired us to make new plans."

The existing art project is being taken up by Art-Belarus, adds Mr. Babariko. "We plan to open a museum or gallery showing Belarus-born artists' contribution to global art culture — from the

times of the Polotsk Principality to our modern day. Besides paintings, we'll display Frantsisk Skorina's books, Slutsk sashes and Napoleon Orda's drawings. It's possible to gather these exhibits with help from state museums and private collectors. We may even discover Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya's famous cross. We'd love to believe this could happen," he muses. The future project has a single aim: to enable visitors (mostly schoolchildren and students) to learn about Belarusian history by seeing our national wealth with their own eyes, rather than only in textbooks. Belarusian art lovers are soon to enjoy new surprises and discoveries, admiring world and national artefacts previously available to only a few collectors. The time cannot come soon enough.

## Gogol style performances

Maxim Gorky National Academic Drama Theatre launches new Season of Belarusian Drama with *The Executor*

By Yury Pinchuk

Staged by Artistic Director Sergey Kovalchik, the play features Anatoly Golub, Klementina Batenkova, Emilia Pranskute, Alexandra Bogdanova, Yelena Dubrovskaya, Ivan Matskevich (Belarus' Honoured Artiste) and many other famous actors.

Alexey Dudarev's *The Executor* has an interesting history, being written under the pseudonym of Denis Shvabsky — in true Gogol style! The venerable modern Belarusian playwright clearly wanted to see if his work would be 'rated' when presented 'alone'. He e-mailed it to the Russian Theatre, who accepted the play enthusiastically, and Mr. Kovalchik decided to stage it immediately. He

A scene from *Executor*

then contacted the 'unknown' playwright and found that Mr. Dudarev was behind the work.

The play is a continuation of Gogol's *Inspector* and is quite experimental. Some Gogol fans may be doubtful but neither Mr. Kovalchik nor Mr. Dudarev is shy of pushing boundaries.

Those familiar with Ivan Khlestakov's adventures in a Russian provincial city will certainly be curious to see what might have happened after the famous last, silent scene. The premiere received rave reviews so it seems likely that the play will enjoy theatrical success.

The 2013-14 Belarusian drama season marks the 80th jubilee for the Maxim Gorky National Academic Drama Theatre. Another premiere is to be presented in mid-July, *The Oracular*: based on Andrey Makayonok's famous *Intimidated Apostle* and staged by Boris Lutsenko. The classical performance is expected to cause a stir. Rehearsals also continue for Nikolay Rudkovsky's *Demons: Post Scriptum* (based on Fiodor Dostoevsky's novel).

"Belarusian drama is not seasonal," notes Mr. Kovalchik, adding, "In this respect, the name of our project is conventional. Our theatre boasts rich traditions of staging plays written by domestic playwrights and writers: classical and contemporary."

## Pesnyary's star lit up

Star to Vladimir Mulyavin appears in Yekaterinburg

A commemorative star has been installed bearing the name of Vladimir Mulyavin, People's Artiste of the USSR and BSSR and the founder of Pesnyary vocal and instrumental band. It is to be found in the square in front of the Variety Theatre in his native city of Yekaterinburg

and a monument is likely to follow. A considerable amount of funds have already been raised and a site is being discussed. The certificate for Mulyavin's commemorative star has been transferred from Yekaterinburg to the Ministry of Culture Belarus, to be on show at the Vladimir Mulyavin Museum at the Belarusian State Philharmonic.

## Warmth well received

Documentary Warmth wins Grand Prix at X International Film Festival in Portugal

Belarusian director Victor Aslyuk's film about the felt boot makers of Smilovichi has taken more international awards than any other domestic documentary in recent years. The Portuguese film festival celebrates black and white documentaries, believing that monochromatic film allows other elements to

come to the fore, adding greater emotion and intensity.

Organised by the Art School in the town Porto, festival audiences were able to see how man and machines unite in making the unique boots. While winter snows and ice freezes the outside world, those inside the warm factory in Smilovichi wipe the sweat from their brow, working in harmony and rhythm, as in a dance, to create the world famous footwear.