



Exhibition at National Art Museum covers whole panorama of works on cosmic theme, created by sculptor Ivan Misko

# Ivan Misko's cosmic scope

Exhibition of works by well-known sculptor and People's Artist of Belarus hosted by National Art Museum

By Victor Mikhailov

More than 40 works by the artist are on show, including sculptural portraits of such distinguished cosmonauts as Yury Gagarin, Piotr Klimuk, Vladimir Kovalenok, Valentina Tereshkova and their colleagues from France, Bulgaria, Syria, Japan and other countries. The exhibition includes pencil sketches depicting images of cosmonauts and a number of photos portraying sculptures mounted and stored in Mr. Misko's studio.

Belarusian-Russian cosmonaut Colonel Oleg Novitsky, of the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre, attended the opening. Since 2012, he has participated in a six-month expedition to the International Space Station, on the crew of the 'Soyuz TMA-06M', returning to Earth in March of this year.

Ivan Misko has been working on the theme of space since the first-ever cosmonaut Yury Gagarin entered orbit. "The flight of a cosmonaut is an act of knowing the unknown. My aspiration is to know the soul of a cosmonaut," the artist explains, adding that he finds cosmonauts like everyone else, but 'a little bit kinder' and 'with stronger nerves'!

At a press conference before the exhibition opening, the sculptor announced his plans for a new project on the capital's Kosmonavtov Street, saying, "It will be a huge bas-relief devoted to space. There will be three figures placed before the stars: Piotr Klimuk, Vladimir Kovalenok and Vladimir Novitsky."

He added that he is preparing for a much bigger exhibition at the Museum of Minsk History — planned to open by next Cosmonautics Day, on April 12th, 2014.

An album devoted to the life and work of Ivan Misko was presented at the opening of the exhibition, containing biographical details as well as various pictures of his works.

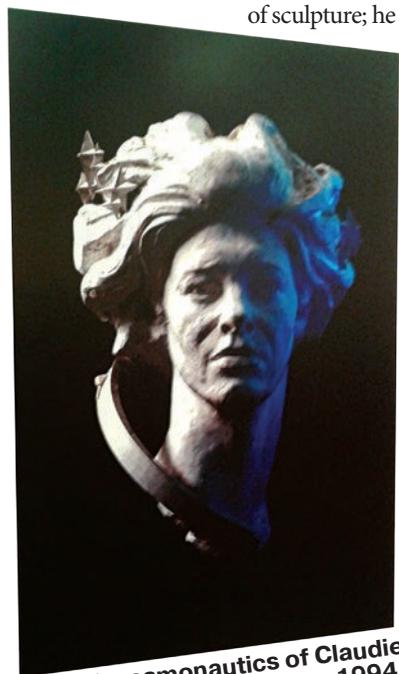
Of course, it's always preferable to see a sculptor's works life-sized, so the latest exhibition is not to be missed. His studio has a rich history, being housed in a 19th century former stable, in which he took residence 40 years ago. The first Belarusian cosmonaut, Piotr Klimuk, became the sculptor's first model in this studio and was the first to sign a mirror brought by the sculptor from his house. Each

member of the Star City space crew has signed it over the years, since Mr. Misko was once a constant guest at Star City, being its resident sculptor. Like a real secret-service agent, he was sworn to secrecy.

Ivan Misko is the most famous space sculptor across post-Soviet territory, having created likenesses of every Soviet cosmonaut — and others besides. His studio boasts a door of cosmonauts' autographs, as at Baikonur cosmodrome.

A sculptural portrait of Gagarin was Misko's first in his space series, which he began to sculpt on the day of the cosmonaut's death. He worked on the portrait in his old studio, situated in the art museum. Today, this first bust of Gagarin is mounted in the legend's home country.

In fact, Mr. Misko began to sculpt while in the army. He gained a place at art school, with painting as his specialty, but failed to take up his place, lacking accommodation. After serving in a tank regiment, he began studying under Andrey Bembel, a master of sculpture; he



French cosmonauts of Claudie André-Deshays. 1994.

has been in love with the genre now for 55 years.

Ivan Misko headed the Republican Monumental Council for 12 years. Now, he is responsible for town planning in the Minsk Region and manages the Regional Monumental-expert Council. He donates all his works to the country and his studio is likely to become a museum, with him-



Working on bust of cosmonaut Piotr Klimuk. 1975.

self as its first employee! He is unique in having dedicated his artistic life to the space theme, using not only sculpture but sketching and photography to capture the character of each brave cosmonaut. Among them are Piotr Klimuk, Vladimir Kovalenok, Alexey Leonov and Valentina Tereshkova. He has even depicted Anna Timofeevna Gagarina, with whom he enjoyed a great friendship.

All cosmonauts arriving in Minsk have visited Ivan Misko's studio: Georgy Beregovoy and Valery Ryzmin, Vitaly Sevastianov and Victor Savinykh, Yury Romanenko and Yury Glazkov, Tamayo Méndez from Cuba and Mirosław Hermaszewski from Poland. An especially great friendship has united the sculptor with Piotr Klimuk and Vladimir Kovalenok: his fellow citizens.

Georgy Beregovoy once joked that, since Baikonur had a door where all cosmonauts placed their signatures, Mr. Misko should do the same. The joke became a reality and the door is now on show alongside the sculptures, photographs, memorable souvenirs and other artefacts, at the National Art Museum.

Over the years, other guests started adding their signatures, including Alexander Lukashenko, during his time as a deputy of the Supreme Soviet.

As a young boy, Ivan Misko heard the name Star City and yearned to visit. Of course, his dream later came true. Within a few decades, the sculptor was an annual visitor to his second studio, where he created his portraits

of cosmonauts and learnt about their training schedules and personal lives. He once obtained a permit to try out the training simulators, which left him feeling drunk for two days. One simulator imposed the illusion of flying around the globe. Following his experience, he chatted with American astronauts, who admitted that it's easy to become depressed or irritable during space missions; accordingly, selection is conducted carefully.

Ivan even took saunas with the cosmonauts, who were able to spend whole days in the heat. Of course, it was part of their training to endure high temperatures. While working in Star City, the sculptor made a great number of masks of cosmonauts' faces, before their flights. Each was surprised on afterwards viewing the results, which seem to capture a moment in time and revive their memories of each mission.

Naturally, Mr. Misko's depiction of Yury Gagarin is among his most prized. On hearing a radio announcement of his tragic death, Mr. Misko surrounded himself with photos of the first cosmonaut and began a sculpture of the heroic pilot. He later left it outside to dry and, on returning home after an hour, was met by fire-engines extinguishing his burning barn. The sculpture was damaged (harking to Yuri's own death during a fighter jet crash) but later restored, and resides still in his studio.

In due time, the sculptor met Yury's mother, Anna Timofeevna Gagarina, who visited his studio more than once.

One of his portraits of Anna, cast in bronze, is mounted in the homeland of the first cosmonaut. He recalls, "Her kind, clever eyes are still in my memory." The great lady was always warmly welcomed by cosmonauts.

Yury's mother presented Mr. Misko with some of her son's photos, one bearing the inscription: 'For Ivan Yakimovich, with wishes for success. July, 1979 A. Gagarina'. He also met the mothers of Pyotr Klimuk and Vladimir Kovalenok, embodying them in his Mothers of Heroes.

Sculptural portraits and compositions devoted to cosmonauts can be found not only in Ivan Misko's studio and Star City but in each of the brave crew members' homeland and, often, further abroad.

Mr. Misko's passion has driven his lifelong love affair with space, having been rarely compensated for his frequent trips, with their associated costs. Many of his works were made without having been ordered and with no guaranteed payment. Sadly, it's been three years since his last visit to Star City, leaving some works unfinished and, frustratingly, preventing him from meeting the cosmonauts training for their new flights. In fact, his next dream is not to take his exhibition to Star City but to allow it to tour the native countries of his cosmonaut subjects.

More than once, museums have asked to buy particular works but he refuses, being reluctant to see his collection broken up. However, for many years, he has been hoping for a sponsor to come forward, willing to take the whole collection. It would certainly create a unique feature, drawing visitors from far and wide.

The sculptor is currently working on a bust of Oleg Novitsky, the third Belarusian in space, who helped crew the ISS. "I find it easy to work with Oleg; time passes quickly while we're chatting," smiles Mr. Misko. "In honour of the exhibition opening, Oleg gave me a photo of Minsk, taken as the space station flew over Belarus."

Ivan has worked not only with Belarusians and Russians but with cosmonauts from Poland, Cuba, Romania, Mongolia, France, Germany, Bulgaria, Syria, Great Britain, Vietnam, Austria, Japan, Afghanistan and India, creating works which are well-known far beyond the borders of Belarus.