

# Art unconstrained by time

## *Exhibition of Three Icons* opens at National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus

By Igor Nilov

The exhibition shows the 18th century Old Testament Trinity (The Hospitality of Abraham) icon, from the Polotsk National Historical and Cultural Reserve, alongside the 18th century Christ Pantocrator icon, from the National Museum of Art, and the mid-19th century Do Not Weep for Me, Mother icon, from the Grodno State Museum of Religious History.

The Museum, in preparing its celebration of the arrival of Christianity to Kievan Rus, decided to work with the Ministry for Communications and Information to create souvenir envelopes bearing three stamps depicting the best icons. They clearly reflect the skill of Belarusian painters. The envelope was issued on Monday, with a ceremony attended by the President of Belarus and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. "Today, our museum is home to original icons," noted Vladimir Prokoptsov, Director General of the National Art Museum.

The Old Testament Trinity icon is well-known for depicting the Christian trinity, based on the first book of the Holy Bible; the Lord appeared in the form of three men to Abraham, who told his wife Sarah to entertain



Exhibition at National Art Museum of Belarus already widely visited

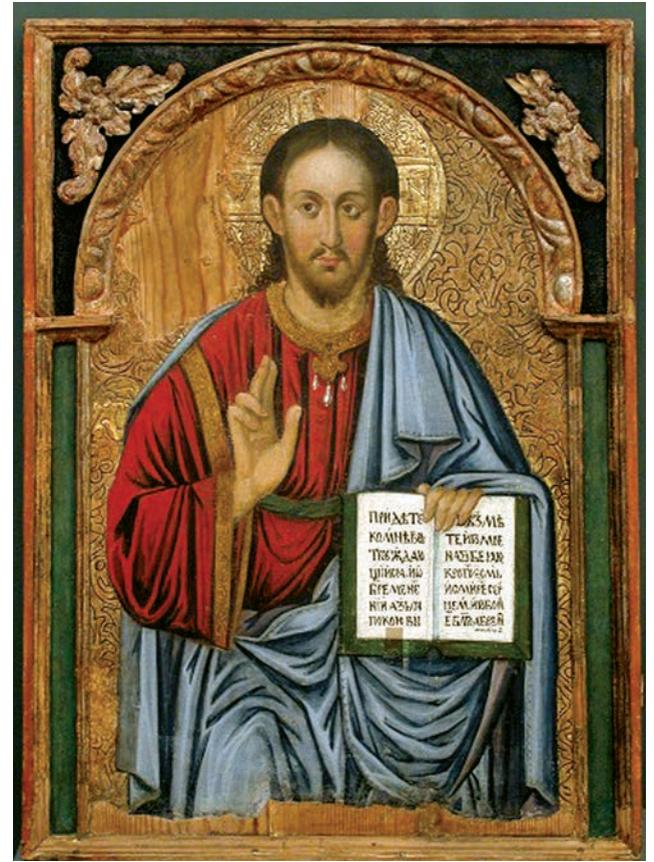
the guests. One of the visitors predicted that middle-aged Sarah would give birth to a son, Isaac. In the centre of the painting, there is a round table filled with symbolic food. Meanwhile, under the oak of Mamre, we see God the Father with a sceptre in his left hand; Christ with a staff topped with a cross stands to his right while to his left is the Holy Spirit. In the foreground to the right, Abraham is depicted kneeling at the table while Sarah emerges tentatively from behind a door near the top of the canvas.

The work is typical of Belarusian icon painting in the 18th century, combining traditions of icon painting with fine academic painting. The icon has distinct composition, an artistic style of painting and unusual patterns, as well as a transparent colour palette.

"It doesn't matter how many times we return to the well-known story, we always discover something new; each artist gives his own flavour to the iconography and canonical painting in a story. These icons show the canonical-artistic features of our Belaru-

sian school," notes Anatoly Butevich, a writer and translator, and former Minister of Culture of Belarus.

Christ Pantocrator follows Byzantine models, yet is connected with typical Belarusian icon painting of the 17-18th century in its interpretation of the Saviour's image. Marked by soft features, which convince us of His willingness to hear prayers and grant forgiveness, the figure has spiritual depth and expressiveness. The harmony of colour and the use of carved decorative effects in the orna-



Belarusian icon Christ Pantocrator, 18th century

mental background place the icon among the best works of the Belarusian school from the 18th century.

Typical iconography from Russia and Belarus follows the Byzantine style and the Old Believers' period, which served as an inexhaustible source of spiritual material. Do Not Weep for Me, Mother, like much Byzantine art from the 13th century, shows Christ in the tomb, His naked body half concealed in the coffin, His head lowered and eyes closed, with hands crossed over His chest. Behind, we see

the cross. To the viewer's left, His mother mourns for him.

Belarusian museums carefully preserve monuments of Orthodox culture, while allowing them to be seen by the wider public. Vladimir Prokoptsov notes, "The Exhibition of Three Icons starts a series of events dedicated to the anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in Kievan Rus." In September, the National Art Museum will open a major international exhibition of Orthodox icons from Russia, Ukraine, Serbia, Moldova and other Orthodox countries.

## Artists' friendship explored through vivid colours and paints

By Alexander Pimenov

**Project brings together artists from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Serbia**

The Vitebsk Art Museum is currently hosting an exhibition called *Slavic Brotherhood*, featuring works by artists from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Serbia. The initiative began in 2008, when Vladimir city painter Natalia Britova met an original Belarusian artist called Alexander Zakharenko, from Kostyukovich, in Moscow; the pair decided to unite artists who shared the same spiritual outlook and have since held five exhibitions. This year's is the most impressive, having 16 artists participating.

Each painting gives a different perception of the world, while sharing the theme of acquainting audiences with the regions in which the authors live. At the All-Russia Vasnetsov open-air competition, Natalia Britova was given a state award from the Kirov Region, called *Inspiration*. Svetlana Vrublevskaya, the assistant professor to the design chair of Vitebsk State Technological University, also dis-



One of the pictures presented at the exhibition in Vitebsk

played several canvases at the competition.

She tells us, "The organisers selected seven of my portraits; most are images of my fellow artists. Among them are Oleg Skovorodko and Gennady Faley, from Vitebsk, but there are also residents of places where I've worked in the open air — such as Mariyskaya village."

Orel Region Olga Dushechkina's expressive landscapes and the captivating graphics of Victor Belyukov, from Yekaterinburg, are also on display, alongside landscapes by Olga Boroday, from the Moscow School

of Painting. You can see stunning views of the Carpathians, thanks to Lyudmila Borshosh-Letun, from Ukraine, while Serbian Mirjana Stojanovic shares views fanned by the winds and mists of the Adriatic.

The exhibition features more than 70 landscapes, portraits and still life works, displaying the national colour, life and culture of each artist's homeland. The project moves to the Bogorodskoe exhibition hall in September, located in the Eastern Administrative District of Moscow. In early 2014, it will come to Grodno.

## 'King of instruments' with silver pipes

**Belarusian State Philharmonic Main Hall organ restored**

Restoration of the 'king of instruments' began not long ago, to connect a new control panel and expand the organ's range, while undertaking maintenance. Organist Gennady Chernyavsky tells us, "One more stage of reconstruction may be needed next summer."

The organ was originally produced by Czech Rieger-Kloss and was

first played inside the Belarusian State Philharmonic Hall in 1963. The giant organ boasts 107 registers, 6,366 pipes, a control panel with four manuals and a pedal. As tall as a four storey house, its mechanism is concealed behind a spectacular façade of wood and metal, silver and gold, vertical, horizontal and canonic pipes. It is one of the main symbols of the Belarusian State Philharmonic Society, its silver pipes gracing the institution's emblem.

## 18th century map in museum town hall

**Museum of Mogilev History presents new acquisitions for collection**

An edition of *Wonderful Messages about Jesuits in Belarus*, released in 1786 in German Frankfurt-am-Main, has been solemnly donated to the museum. Other recent acquisitions on show include those donated by Mogilev residents and friends of the museum. Among the most exciting items is map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, drawn by Belgian cartographer Gerard Mercator, dated 1608. An edition of *Illustrirte Zeitung* newspaper, from 1863,

depicts rebellions in Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. There is also a collection of 18th-19th century coins. The presentation was dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the reopening of the town hall, which houses the museum, restored within under three years. The building is a three-storey structure, with a tall clock tower and 15th-17th century interior. Among the numerous clock faces is a special calendar whose hand makes a complete circuit every 500 years. As the hand moves on another clock face, it indicates landmark dates in the history of Mogilev.