

Nikas Safronov: 'Meeting Belarusians is truly like a breath of fresh air for me'

Minsk presents amazing works in various genres by Honoured Artist of Russia Nikas Safronov for the first time, at the Mikhail Savitsky Art Gallery — a branch of the Museum of the City History



Nikas Safronov

By Victor Mikhailov

Nikas Safronov, an academic at the Russian Academy of Arts, is one of the most well-known modern Russian painters. Most of his works are held in private collections but are also found in museums worldwide. Sophia Loren, Alain Delon, Pierre Cardin, Diana Ross, Montserrat Caballé, Madonna, Nikita Mikhalkov, Steven Spielberg, Tina Turner, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Elton John, Mick Jagger, Pierre Richard, Richard Gere and Elizabeth Taylor are among those who have bought his canvases.

The exhibition in Minsk presents 100 pictorial and graphic works created from the late 1990s until 2013, in various genres: landscapes, still-life works, portraits, and surrealistic compositions — including his unique 'Dream Vision' style.

Mr. Safronov's works on show include portraits of actor Johnny Depp, ballerina Maya Plisetskaya, Hollywood 'cowboy' Clint Eastwood, and French beauty Sophie Marceau. His latest works are devoted to the Olympic Games in Sochi; they convey the force and beauty of sports against the majestic and bewitching natural environment.

His personal exhibitions always cause excitement in cultural circles. In 1995, he enjoyed an exhibition in Istanbul, followed by personal exhibitions at the Academy of Arts in Moscow, at the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk, and in Italian Bergamo, in 1996.

His pictures have appeared in Toronto, Rome, Zurich, New York, Sochi, Riga, St. Petersburg and other cities worldwide. In 2005, he was featured in the *World Book of Knowledge*, for his outstanding contribution to modern art, being awarded the 'da Vinci Diamond'.

People have much to say about Safronov, either loving his work or hating it. Some have even called him 'odious'. However, it's impossible not to recognise his talent. He was raised among a family of six children, and was obliged to work as a watchman, yardman and loader from a young age. Now, he receives orders to paint the portraits of well-known politicians and show business stars, charging upwards of 10,000 Dollars and Euros. His Moscow 15-room apartment is listed among UNESCO's cultural monuments.

Spectators



Women prevail among visitors to the exhibition of Russian artist Nikas Safronov in Minsk

It's the first time I've exhibited in Minsk, although I've had exhibitions in other major Belarusian cities: Gomel, Vitebsk, Brest and Mogilev. With delight, I've observed how Belarusians admire my work, without prejudice or negative remarks. It's a very pleasant and enthusiastic at-

very creative, sincere, warm and hospitable; they are ever searching, to discover something new. Certainly, Belarusians are also beautiful — especially women. My love for Belarus is boundless: genuine and sincere.

Village housing

When I was in the Vitebsk Region, I visited the museum-estate of Ilya Repin and thought how wonderful it would be to buy a nearby estate to become my museum. There would be such an amazing view of the Belarusian countryside from the veranda. I might buy a cottage in a Belarusian village, and a little cart, so I can go from Poltava's Shishki, where I have a small

house, to my Belarusian village. I'd then paint the road. I've already worked in Belarus, painting a series of pictures connected with Barbara Radziwill: ordered by a Belarusian numismatist.

Pricing policy

It doesn't matter if I sell pictures for \$1 million; what is important is that they are my legacy for eternity. My pictures vary in price depending on who is buying them: a museum, my friend or someone who has touched me with their story. For example, one man came to me wanting to buy a picture. I went out to lead him to his car and he admitted that he'd come by metro, having been saving for 8 years in order to buy one of my pictures. I was touched and immedi-

ately returned half of the money to him, as well as sending him home with my driver.

Criticism

As a rule, I don't take any notice of criticism, as it tends to be fabricated and prejudiced. You can write anything you like, saying that I copy photos, or that I show printed copies at exhibitions. Regardless of what you read online, the proof is in seeing the canvases. In truth, I don't use the Internet, and have little idea how it works. I have three secretaries who show me information gathered online and I'm often shocked by what's written. Very little of what I read online is true. I live my life guided by the principles

Heroes

People ask me if I ever paint ordinary people — like milkmaids. Of course, I do. I've painted milkmaids, collective farmers and tramps. What's vital is capturing their personality. I'm also fascinated by anyone who achieves something outstanding, regardless of their nationality. I'd love to paint your triple Olympic champion Darya Domracheva.

The situation in Ukraine

I would dearly wish for our countries to be on friendly terms, communicating without enmity. I spoke about this at a recent press conference in Ukraine. The day before the referendum in Crimea, I went to a Ukrainian children's home. For a couple of months, I was giving master classes so that I could present, as promised, 27 pictures: one for each bedroom. We — Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians — are neighbours. Nothing should divide us and there is no need to be enemies. I've brought a picture by Ukrainian artist Belsky to Minsk: *Forever with Moscow, Forever Together with Russian People*. Now, I have something to refer to when talking about Ukraine.

Age

With age, you acquire wisdom, but lose your freshness of perception. I haven't lost my ability to paint, feel and empathise but something is missing, so I travel in search of this. My trip to Belarus, meeting Belarusians, is like a breath of fresh air.



titude, showing that Belarusians are pure, unspoiled and unsophisticated. Belarusians have a love of art and can distinguish 'true' art from 'fake'.

Auctioning pictures

When the Minsk exhibition ends, on 5th-6th May, Belarusians will have a surprise. My old friend and companion Andrey Berezin, the Director of Paragis Auction House, has suggested that we auction off my works, including a picture devoted to the World Ice Hockey Championship. On returning to Moscow, I'll paint it! I already have ten pictures inspired by the Olympic Games in Sochi and they're being displayed to the public for the first in Minsk. My canvas on the theme of the Ice Hockey Championship will also be on show for the first time.

Belarusians

How would I describe Belarusians? Hardworking, vulnerable,

