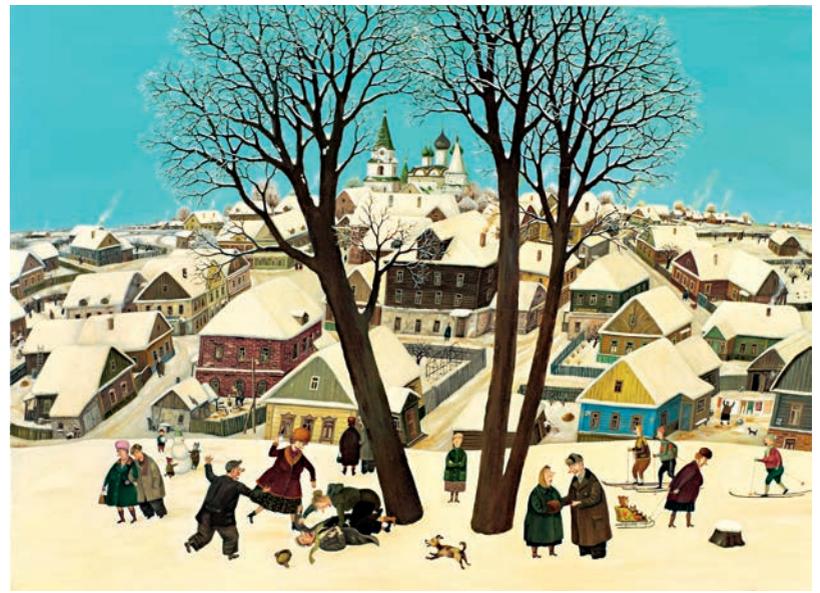


Allusions of artist Gubarev

On the main Minsk street, in a bookshop called Tsentralny, there is a big album standing on a shelf. All the books are in good condition, but this album is tattered and tousled, its pages bristle. It has been pinched and pulled by human attention, making it seem thicker than it actually is. It is full of amusing, sad, naive and wise pictures by the artist, Valentin Gubarev. Different people take this book in their hands, slowly look through the pages, learn, wonder, smile, peer at it and rub their eyes, not believing that the artist depicted them. Many times, I have seen how people examined that book, showing each other the reproductions and pointing a finger at them.



By Vladimir Stepan

Today, the Belarusian artist is famous, self-reliant, and independent and, as his peers consider, successful. However, all began with an ordinary phone call from Moscow, which rang 20 years ago. Valentin picked up the receiver, and a pleasant female voice asked whether the artist 'Gubarev' was still alive? Then, when he met with Frenchmen, the hosts of well-known galleries, everything fell into place. It turned out that, by accident, (or possibly not) a small catalogue of his pictures, printed on cheap paper, fell into their hands. The works of this unknown artist from Minsk surprised them and aroused their interest. He was offered a, not very burdensome, contract, which he signed, and began to work. Valentin explains all this with a smile, which reflects surprise, pleasure and easy subtle irony. He is excellent, observant and impartial to himself a story-teller.

Popularity

My pictures were not exhibited during Soviet times. But when they took one picture for an exhibition, they at once wrote about it in the newspapers. Naturally, they criticised it. It was a portrait of electrician at a poultry plant, whose surname was Golub. It was ordinary, simple person with funny ears. All other works were praised in the newspaper, but not mine. I was criticised for being 'atypical' Now, I always try to avoid paths in creativity. In one picture, *Medlyak*, there are men and woman dancing with high feelings, with love, and I intentionally took off the boots of the protagonist. He dances in his socks... Is this really pathos?

Inscription on a T-shirt

In foreign countries, spectators feel respect for artists. People go to galleries when they are interested in art, not to get warm, or to find shelter from rain, as our people do. I have a picture, *Second Sign of Chastity*, which was exhibited in a gallery in Paris. Many people approached me wanting to buy it, but something bothered all of them and they held back. And then the mistress of the gallery approached me and explained that they would have sold this canvas long ago, even on photos in the catalogue, "but because of 'this' we cannot..." she began to explain in a whisper. In a picture, there is a small person in a hat, wearing a T-shirt. He sits with his back

to spectators, and is fishing. There is an inscription on his T-shirt 'Zidan'. Apparently, this word bothered people. I said that I could paint over the inscription. The eyes of the woman suddenly filled with tears of happiness. The following morning, I walked ahead of the employees of the gallery, who followed like sword-bearers. One carried brushes, another, paints. I approached the picture, brushed, and there was no longer the inscription. The picture sold immediately. But the main thing is, that I saw a respectful attitude towards the artist.

Swings

Once, in the same gallery, one lonely woman dared to approach to me and said hesitatingly, that she had bought a picture three years earlier. "During the whole three years, I lived looking at it every day. For me, this picture is a source of love, happiness and good human mutual relations. (In the picture there are swings, a man and a woman...)" I thought over, recalling the plot. And then she said, "You know, recently I began to doubt his feelings". Can you imagine this? I wanted to joke, but when I looked into her eyes they were full of tears. I thought over and, through an interpreter, explained that love of man and woman is not just kisses. Sometimes it is enough how he looks at the reflexion of his girlfriend, how he admires her silhouette.

"Yes-yes, you are absolutely right! Thank you! I have understood, that everything will be alright with them," said the Frenchwoman. And I suddenly saw how her eyes started shining, how she became recharged, and how this additional charging would be enough for another three years. And then I thought and said to myself 'Valentin, you should work with greater responsibility. After all, this is what spectators think, looking at your picture, while even you could not imagine that the mu-

tual relations of painted characters could be so important for somebody, that the sight of man, his pose, facial expression is so important...'

About happiness

The only happiness for a creative person is to not work to order. It is like a bird which sits on a branch and sings. When you can live in the way you want. It is possible to wish this for any artist. If I want, I can create a joyful work and, but if I am sad, my work is not so cheerful, but more melancholy. It is splendid, when an artist sings free, like a bird.



Vernissage

Once, the gallery in France decided to create a personal exhibition. They were very excited and worried. I did not understand their excitement and asked the mistress of the gallery, with the help of an interpreter, why she was so nervous? Is she nervous because she had to buy a new dress? The interpreter explained that the madam was afraid of failure. After all, they had publicised me for so many years and, if the exhibition had been unsuccessful, all people would have known about it. The most important thing for a gallery is their reputation. However, the exhibition was successful and the organisers were really happy. Their reputation did not suffer. The vernissage (the preview) lasted for two days. The first day was for regular clients and the second was for all-comers. During this time, they enticed new artists from other galleries. According to their understanding, a good artist is always in demand and it is important in what galleries he has been already exhibited. A good artist does not sit in a workshop, waiting for somebody finds him or her.

My Olekhnovichi

Theoretically, I could live in Paris or in Vichy. But how can I fall in love with that life? Is it impossible to fall in love through newspapers and magazines? Only here, when I come to my Olekhnovichi, I can sit at the table and sun warms my crown. On the table, everything there is mine. I leave my house and huge elm meets me. Nearby, there are a lot of hens running around. At the fence, a barking dog, old Zaporozhets car is seen under the hay. I sometimes think that if I had not arrived in Belarus, would I have become an artist or not? It is impossible to calculate.

Once, I had an exhibition in Germany. A lot of our artists gathered,

surrounded me and wanted to learn the secret of my success. The secret is rather simple. It is not necessary to imitate someone, even someone successful. Mastery is not so important, as well as membership in the Union of Artists. The ability to feel is important today. If I worked only as a handicraftsman, I would not be needed in France. Individuality and charisma are important. After all, nowadays it is difficult to surprise people with anything. It is ever important to paint an apple or flowers in one's own way. An artist should be exclusive. That is what all people want. God grant me health, so that I could come to my workshop every morning, and, in the evening to hope that the night ended faster, so that I could work longer. I do not dream to please anyone. I peer through myself and adapt only to myself, and the spectator notices it.

About each new

I think about each new picture for a long time. I go with it, sleep with it. If I forget it I rejoice. It means that it was badly thought up. But sometimes it happens that I rub my hands with anticipation of my future work. I dream and imagine what else I can add to the picture. When it starts overflowing in me, I start to paint. A small canvas can be finished in two to three days, whilst a big one may require as much as three weeks. I think that I paint quickly, but all the same, I cannot accept every offer to make a big exhibition somewhere. I have to refuse... I try to work every day.

About canvases and women

I mostly use paints from St. Petersburg. Once, in France, I bought a whole roll of canvas. It was fine, white, smooth and without any small knots. I was riding home in a car, stroking the roll from time to time, as if it were the foot of a young lady. I smiled, imagining, how we would arrive in Minsk and how carefully I would bring it into the workshop. But it appeared that it was premature to celebrate, because their canvas was bad. Our canvases, as well as our women, are better.

It is easy to talk about Valentin Gubarev's pictures, they are very literary, with a plot, and are concrete. But, after seeing them in real life, something special remains that is impossible to explain. A sad, childish, naive and wise smile remains. As if a truth was opened only for you, and that you have learnt the answer to one of life's eternal questions.