

# Avant-garde declares itself at the top of its voice in large arena

The exhibition of modern art, *Avant-gARTE: From Square to Object* opened in Minsk with the assistance of the Ministry for Culture, the City Executive Committee, the Museum of Modern Fine Arts and the Centre of Modern Arts all during the running of the Ice Hockey World Championship

By Victor Mikhailov

Belarusian avant-garde was formed by artists-experimentalists, who are well-known today in many countries around the world. From the beginning of the 20th century, many Belarusian cities, especially Vitebsk and Minsk, served as special laboratories of art; vanguard art schools existed here for a long time. And, just like a century ago, today's domestic art is notable for its variety of experimental forms, absence of similarity, unilaterality and simplicity. In Belarusian art one can feel a strong influence of such phenomenon, as 'artistic generality', which is rich in formal and figurative searches, and experiments. Artistic avant-garde revealed itself in paintings, architecture, design, music, theatre and cinema. It influenced the whole style of life of the 20th century. The comprehension of art and the culture of Belarus in its vanguard manifestations remain real even today, as an understanding of the sources of our modern culture.

The uniqueness of this project is that, for the first time, avant-garde works, underground, non-conformist, from 1910 to 1990, are consecutively and fully represented at the Museum of Modern Fine Arts. The pieces represent a single composition *A Hundred Years of Belarusian Avant-Garde*. The exposition of the exhibition of modern art — *Avant-gARTE: From Square to Ob-*

*ject* — which opened in the building on the Prospectus of Pobediteley, 14, connects works of artists-avant-gardists of the 20th century and modern Belarusian artists of the 21st century, showing continuity of traditions and their development in painting, graphics, sculpture, arts and crafts, art-objects, design and photography. It gives visitors a chance to see the creative dynamics of Belarusian art in the 21st century. Formal and figurative searches, outstandingly revealed in works of the Belarusian underground during 1960-1970 and young artists in the 1980s, became a basis of modern Belarusian art, expanded its genre-



visual spectrum, promoted development of experimental directions of creativity and synthesis of various kinds of arts. Showing works



of modern Belarusian authors in a direct connection with the avant-garde of the 20th century, organisers of the project include it in a

global context of the environment of European culture.

The basis of the exposition consists of work by members of the Belarusian Union of Artists (Minsk and regions), the Belarusian Union of Designers and young authors. The majority of pieces were made during the last few years; some key



Exhibits from volumetric exhibition *Avant-gARTE: From Square to Object*

concepts are illustrated by exhibits from the collections from the country's leading art museums and private collections.

An interactive project explains to spectators about new forms and actual tendencies in the modern art. It is not for nothing that the exhibition unites artists, designers and photographers from different regions of Belarus. It shows different pictorial, graphic, sculptural works, art-objects, installations, video-art, design, photo and the best art projects of the last ten years.

The project — *A Hundred Years of Belarusian Avant-Garde* — at the Museum of Modern Fine Arts, represents the vanguard associations of the 20th century, the creativity of artists-nonconformists. On the basis of various collections (both private and state) the project fixes a variety of art. It is an original attempt to build a chronology and present vanguard associations, to interpret the concepts of avant-garde as an integral part of Belarusian art.

*The Artist and The City. BelART.by* is an open area on the Yakub Kolas Square; art in a public environment. In this way it becomes a more vivid and active component of city life. On the Yakub Kolas Square in Minsk one can find the third exhibition of reproductions on the theme 'Artist and City'. This year it introduces painting and graphics of domestic authors from the collection of the Museum of Modern Fine Arts. The exhibition will be accompanied by lectures from art historians and culture experts, seminars, masterclasses, screenings of documentary films, theatrical performances, concerts, demonstrations of collections of Belarus fashion designers and weekly meetings with Belarusian artists.

## Felix Yanushkevich's timeless treasures

Village of Rakov is worth visiting for those with an interest in history

By Lyudmila Minakova

Rakov is an agro-town in the Volozhin District, 40km from Minsk, but was once a large town: a cultural, religious and economic centre and the capital of the Oginski family's earldom. Many sights from its glorious past remain and new attractions are appearing.

### Aggressive greyhound

A complex of unusual red-brick buildings stand out among Rakov's architecture. One bears a plaque, reading 'Museum and Art-Gallery'. It's worth visiting simply to see the bronze guardian of the courtyard: a large greyhound with an aristocratic look. The same sculpture is found in Nesvizh and both were created by Valeryan Yanushkevich, a brother of the museum's owner. The latter — Felix Yanushkevich — is a restorer and famous artist whose

pictures hang even in the Tretyakov Gallery. As I visit, he's painting wet plaster frescoes in the entrance way, but kindly takes a break to chat.

### Reed organ from piggery

Felix's pictures and works by his talented brothers fill Rakov's gallery, which also boasts a collection of ancient documents, furniture, musical instruments, ceramics and fragments of Slutsk sashes: over 12,000 treasures in all. Naturally, they offer insight into the life of our ancestors.

Among the truly unique exhibits are an ancient reed organ (discovered in a piggery in the village of Vygonovichi) and an authentic portable writing desk, once owned by Adam Mickiewicz. The latter is a family relic, as the Yanushkevich

brothers' great-great-grandfather was Yevstakh Yanushkevich: the famous poet's personal secretary.

The gallery also displays a tall plaster mould, used to cast a bust



of Mickiewicz (erected in Novogrudok).

The museum's collection began with ceramics collected by Felix for his thesis. "Over time, I've become used to this business," smiles Felix. "After living in the city, I realised that I needed to return to my home town, where I was born. It holds the history of my family and my homeland. I've returned and am now inspiring others to follow my example. I show them my artistry and the rich history of Rakov."

### 'Golden age'

Mr. Yanushkevich can speak endlessly of Rakov. Interestingly, in 1921, the Belarusian-Polish border passed through, attracting smugglers of alcohol from Poland (into the USSR) and gold, furs and precious stones in

the opposite direction. The 500-page novel *A Great Bear's Lover* is devoted to Rakov's 'golden age'; written in 1937 by Sergey Pesetsky, it's about a secret service agent who pretends to be a smuggler. Written while Pesetsky was imprisoned, it was later translated into 17 languages. Mr. Yanushkevich's museum keeps a copy.

"Do you know what Rakov looked like until 1939 — when it was annexed to Soviet Belorussia? It had 134 shops, 96 restaurants and hundreds of kilos of gold in circulation!" Felix surprises us; he is truly a wonderful guide and a good host. Apart from running a museum, he's involved in ecotourism.

Felix decided to set up his unusual museum after visiting the Dali Theatre-Museum, in Spanish Figueres. The trip inspired his return and his 'treasury' of art.