

Through the prism of a smile

Exposition at National Art Museum reveals comic moments from 20th century Belarusian graphics

By Victor Mikhailov

Satire is similar to bell ringing: the sound is great even if a small hammer beats a huge bell — noted famous Belarusian literary satirist Kondrat Krapiva. Following the same train of thought, the National Art Museum's exhibition (comprising about 70 graphical pieces from its collection) is original in theme and artistic expression. The works date from 1910 to the 1990s, with caricatures featuring largely, alongside other grotesque images and compositions. All sharply and convincingly reflect their age, showing the development of satire in Belarus' fine arts.

The exhibition is part of celebrations for the 70th anniversary of Belarus' major satirical magazine: *Vozhyk (Hedgehog)*. Caricatures by such classical painters as Anatoly Volkov, Sergey Volkov, Yevgeny Gankin, Grigory Gromyko, Nikolay Gurlo, Victor Zhdan, Mark Zhitnitsky, Sergey Romanov, Valentin Tikhonovich, Askold Churkin and Leonard Churko are on show.

Satire has always acted as a powerful instrument to expose and laugh at the negative aspects of life, using the grotesque to arouse a reaction. We cannot help but form



Sharp and penetrating eye of a caricaturist can arouse serious thoughts

a personal reaction to each work. Satirical sketches analyse the international, political and cultural problems of the day, as well as the daily routine of the common man and his relations. It's easy to see that some past themes remain topical while others are very much of their time — such as satire dealing with the Cold War, atheism and the peace movement. The success of the satirical genre has inspired art-

ists to update their methods, turning away from stereotypes and traditional methods, creating artistic individuality. Artists' unique style is more evident than ever.

The museum has a rich collection of 'friendly travesty', as seen from the show. This includes pencil drawings on small sheets of paper by Vilno artist Adam Ponyatovsky and large portraits by Mikhail Lisovsky — from 1910 onwards. On

display also are works by Belarus' literati from the 1960s. Some humorous works from the 1920s include drawings by unknown artists alongside those by Nikolay Malevich and talented Piotr Sergeevich. Famous figures of science and culture are parodied, with artists holding a mirror to their time. Caricatures by Zenon Pavlovsky and Konstantin Kukso stand out in their individuality.

Without exaggeration, we can assert that Belarusian artists created their own unique school, applying various comic and satirical genres. The principles of grotesque and humour were developed by some in an original way; Sergey Voichenko and Vladimir Tsesler particularly stand out for their series of posters exploring cultural issues which were contemporary for their time.

Unique exhibition reflects impressions

Minsk hosts exhibition of Valery Vedrenko's photo-plastics — *Gervyaty Mysteries*



Show's exhibits treat architecture as art

By Anastasia Yanushevskaya

25 photo-plastic compositions are on show — inspired by St. Trinity Roman Catholic Church, in the village of Gervyaty (in the Grodno Region's Ostrovets District). The church is among the best examples of early 20th century neo-Gothic architecture in Belarus.

Mr. Vedrenko explains that the exhibition is unique in being fully dedicated to a single Roman Catholic church, studied from all angles: sculptural, architectural and spiritual. Being a professional architect, he accidentally

discovered the church, viewing it 'as a true pearl of Belarusian architecture — not appointed or renewed, but a pearl which exists quietly unnoticed'. "This is an example of architecture and art of which Belarusians can be truly proud, without thinking that something better might exist in Europe," asserts Mr. Vedrenko.

The master uses his own original style — called 'photo-plastics'. "The method is often called a photo montage," explains Mr. Vedrenko, adding that he uses digital technologies to create 'visually pure works consisting

of many components'. These reflect his impressions and recollections. "When we recollect something, we don't just see one image but several, each layered upon one another in parallel. Some images are connected with the place while others might relate to something else," he explains.

The curator of the gallery, Yekaterina Savitskaya, notes that *Gervyaty Mysteries* is an interesting phenomenon in Belarusian photography — both from the point of view of Belarusian culture and in attracting attention to little-known sights.

In line with cultural plan

By Tatiana Shurova

Gavriil Vashchenko's Picture Gallery in Gomel acquires new exhibition hall and art salon

A 150 sq.m contemporary exhibition hall and art salon are now situated in Lenin Avenue, not far from the original gallery building. The hall is equipped with movable metal structures, a gallery system and advanced air conditioning while the art salon exhibits souvenirs, and a wide range of materials for paint-

ers and craftspeople. Work was funded from the city budget.

The new site has opened with an exhibition of the best works by Gomel artists and a personal exhibition by painter Lyudmila Zhizhenko, who enjoys using oil paints. Around 50 of her unique artworks are on show, including watercolour and graphic pieces. According to the Director of the gallery, Lyudmila Shimbaleva, the opening of the new exhibition hall and art salon is one of many events tak-

ing place in Gomel in 2011 as part of the *Cultural Capital of Belarus and the CIS* project.

Gavriil Vashchenko's Picture Gallery honours the People's Artist of Belarus. He was a professor and academician of painting, who created pictorial, graphic and monumental works. The site was unveiled in 2002, housing Vashchenko's fifty works, donated by his family. The gallery's collection is being constantly expanded, with new painters being showcased.

Alone with wild nature

By Yelena Germanova

Sergey Plytkевич's Wild Life in the Centre of Europe photo exhibition on display in Gomel

This is the second time that the author is presenting his works in Gomel, his *Belarusian Exotics* having been on show in 2004. The current event is dedicated to the release of a new photo album of the same title.

58 photos of wild animals and untouched corners of nature comprise the current exhibition, the photographer's lens capturing bears, wolves, wild boar and birds, alongside elk. The author wanted to show that, unlike most European countries, Belarus still



Photo hunter Sergey Plytkевич's characters

boasts places untouched by urbanisation.

Mr. Plytkевич spent many days alone in the countryside, searching out successful shots. To capture pictures of an eagle, he spent three days in a tree! Natural-

ly, shooting wild animals can often be dangerous, requiring steady concentration. He built special 'hides' from brushwood and branches, leaving just a small hole for his camera, waiting patiently for just the right moment.