

# Group portrait against bright background of several epochs

National Art Museum hosts exhibition of single painting by People's Artist of Belarus Vladimir Stelmashonok, *Words on Belarus*, as part of *Belarusian Artists Worldwide* exhibition



Museum exhibition of single painting features Vladimir Stelmashonok's *Words on Belarus*

By Victor Mikhailov

The artwork, created almost forty years ago, depicts prominent figures from Belarusian national history and culture: Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya, Kirill Turovsky, Frantsisk Skorina, Simon Budny, Piotr Mstislavets, Simeon Polotsky, Frantishkek Bogushevich, Kastus Kalinovsky, Aloiza Pashkevich (Tetka), Maxim Bogdanovich, Yakub Kolas, Yanka Kupala, Tishka Gartny and Vladislav Golubok.

Vladimir Stelmashonok created the work dozens of years ago, yet it is still considered to be a classic work, harmoniously combining monumentality and depth,

with a true message. The artist combined the techniques of canvas and monumental painting with those of creating posters, applying the grotesque to embrace symbolism without losing his meticulous accuracy. His reserved colour scheme, which reproduces the colourful motifs of white and red rushniks, brings the faces of characters into distinct relief.

People's Artist of Belarus Vladimir Stelmashonok was an active participant in the country's public life, being a deputy of Gorbachev's final USSR Supreme Council and used to head a cultural committee. He was born in 1928 in Minsk and successfully fin-

ished his first year of study at Minsk's Polytechnic Institute's Architectural Department. Suddenly and unexpectedly, he left for Leningrad, where he entered the Higher Art and Industrial School (named after Mukhina). He then moved to Leningrad Art School's Theatrical and Decorative Arts Department. As a student, he created sets for Leningrad's theatres while attending evening courses of graphics at the Academy of Arts. In 1957, he finished his studies at the Ilya Repin Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, as a member of the Pictorial Department. He also defended his 'Young Builders of Minsk' diploma thesis at

Ioganson's studio.

After graduating, he returned to Belarus and dedicated his time to creating portraits of shaft sinkers and shovel operators. His inclination towards portrait painting is clearly revealed in these pieces, which portray energetic characters very much of their time. Their bright individuality reflected his own personality.

People's Writer of Belarus Yakub Kolas was the subject of one of his first works, with his creative individuality immediately apparent. Back in his student years, when the poet was still alive, Mr. Stelmashonok drew several sketches of Yakub Kolas, which became the basis

for the portrait he began in 1966.

The image of Yakub Kolas in the portrait includes social motifs, embodying the idea of the strong ties between the poet and his native land. He is depicted against a generalised natural landscape: a track crosses a field behind him, symbolising life's path. Its brown colour palette, imbued with warm golden tones, unites the poet with his environment. The background's simplicity stands in contrast with the main figure, which looks almost carved in relief.

His portrait of Rygor Shirma is similarly painted. The artist gathered a large collection of folk songs in

his lifetime, releasing several collections of folk songs and headed the State Academic Choir of Belarus. The figurative solution for the portrait came from folk songs, with a visual pattern of song-like melodiousness achieved with light ornamentation.

The artist shows Mr. Shirma as if absorbed in the kingdom of folk music, carefully selecting the best pieces. Mr. Stelmashonok uses colour's symbolic meaning, with white — a common thread in Belarusian folk art — acting as the keynote of his lyrical atmosphere.

By understanding the history of his creativity, we can better appreciate the rich palette of his legacy. Mr. Stelmashonok was more than a painter, also excelling in the sphere of monumental art — using the materials of glass, mosaic and marble. He created stained glass works, wall paintings and carved panels on plaster. He even created a classical stained glass work of poet Yanka Kupala for his Literary Museum in Minsk.

...Of course, *Words on Belarus* occupies a special place in the artist's creativity and is deservedly chosen for display at the country's major art museum in this single picture exhibition so many years after its creation. Its idea is strong, bringing together those historical personalities who have left a remarkable trace on Belarus' history. All gave their lives to the service of their Homeland, Fatherland and Nation, as enlighteners and philosophers. They united those around them, feeling it to be their earthly vocation. The painter depicts them passionately assisting others, eager to be close to them. He does this skilfully and delicately, with an apparent sense of gratitude.

ALEXANDER RYZHECHKA

## Autumn to bring true extravaganzas

By Darya Polynskaya

**International Mammoth Festival in Minsk to show riot and abandon of contemporary avant-garde art for twelfth time**

The organisers prepared spectators for the flamboyant show in advance, making the potential audience aware of the nature of its unique content. Their 20 minute presentation brought even the most sophisticated spectators into a trance.

Barmaglot (Jabber-

wocky) Plastic Studio demonstrated true Brazilian passions: love, birth and death. Two creatures dressed in outfits made from plastic bags gracefully skipped onto the stage and produced unreal sounds, thrilling the audience's imagination with striking symbolism. Spectators shifted nervously in their chairs and then loudly applauded; it seems that the more unintelligible a show, the more genius it displays.

Phytoartdesign Studio

presented an original collection of clothes, with wonderful girl-insects wearing cellophane cocoons and dragonfly glasses creeping onto the stage. Smoothly moving, they pushed dung balls before them.

The show finished with a brutal collection, entitled 'The City of Anthropomorphous Boxes, or Following the Traces of Salvador Dali'. Costumes made from paper, polyethylene, foil and other materials won't be certainly worn in daily life but the Fes-

tival's producer, Yuri Budko, is confident that these must be sewn. "Our Mammoth is a place for masters to meet and chat, working in adjacent areas yet jointly creating something completely new. Clothes are works of art but can also be part of a performance," he notes.

The fact that the Festival has been regularly organised since 1995 shows that art can exist for its own sake. The forum has been the starting point for many Belarusian designers and stylists, so

what should spectators expect to see in early October? The Festival traditionally begins with a contest demonstration of avant-garde fashion and body art. The competition of video art has become an innovation, with video performances (lasting no longer than five minutes) presented to the jury. Concerts will also please those present, with Vladimir Chekasin, one of the world's most authoritative performers of avant-garde jazz, performing.



Fashionable avant-garde