



Sergey Balenok's artistry attracts much attention at his personal exhibition, with graphic works to the fore

Pictures on show lack total unambiguity but express hope

Artist Sergey Balenok calls his personal exhibition at Modern Fine Arts Museum in Minsk *Incorrect Graphics*

By Victor Mikhailov

Sergey Balenok is a top level graphic painter, as proven by his works. Like all talented people, he expresses himself with all his soul. His latest show contains around 60 works created over the last decade, which he stresses were painted on the spur of the moment. "There's a talent inside me, which orders me to draw but, in order to do so, you must recollect something," notes Mr. Balenok.

His works really leave the impression that a true photographic shot has been taken. His artistic technique involves the use of a delicate brush, with lines adding to the effect of a dusty film. He adheres to a definite avant-garde style, explaining that the title of his exhibition is a protest against the strict rules of 'academic drawing'. "There exists such a phenomenon as correct drawing, although art shouldn't follow academic rules; it expresses the state of your soul and your impressions, as well as your mood and the weather. It exists independently, while being part of society. You can draw in any manner — academically or otherwise. I fall into the 'incorrect' category," explains Mr. Balenok.

Most of the pieces currently exhibited are on show to the public for the first time. A long break preceded the opening of the current exhibition. "My last personal exhibitions took place at the National Art Museum in 2004 and at the Modern Fine Arts Museum in 2002," notes Mr. Balenok.

There's no doubt that his style is unique — similar to abstract painting, with his own twist. He's known most as



S. Balenok: *Trees on Roof*

a graphic painter, with works kept at art museums worldwide; he is highly recognised.

Here, he tells us what he has learnt and how he draws. It seems more appropriate for him to assess his own works. Who, if not the artist himself, can explain his own world outlook — so ambiguous to others?

I'm inspired by the idea of 'sketching from memory', showing what the mind remembers of its surroundings: fragments of landscapes, interiors or meetings. Everything is composed in my head, preserving the flavour of what I've seen. I can also combine an autumn evening and a summer morning; this is how pictures are born. They aren't copied directly; nor do they show a definite state of mind or mood. Rather, they illustrate information from my head.

What about themes or meaning?

There are none; the audience can decide on their own,

choosing what they find interesting. Art has two stages: creation by the artist, then viewing by the audience. The artists cannot control the latter, since audiences have their own dialogue with art. It's best for the artist to stay at home, drinking tea quietly, leaving the audience to communicate with his artworks.

Judging by your works, your creativity is not thematic, since this would imply directed thoughts. As you say yourself, your pictures are reflections of some details from memory — nothing more.

This depends on how you view them. If you saw an apple laying in the snow it would arouse an association for you...but this might differ between you and the next person. It's better not to be too definite; subjectivity is preferable.

There is always much discussion of hidden meaning in art. Does this not apply to you?

Art has followed a similar purpose since the time of Ancient Egypt: it should be beautiful. Later, ideologists began to seek themes and meaning; it's no bad thing... just a sign of our modern times. In my opinion, the most important aspect is whether audiences are interested enough to spend time looking at a work of art. This shows whether it has the power of attraction. When you see a man and a woman depicted with an oar, what meaning can there really be? It's merely reporting an illustration of the past. The moment existed but I wouldn't dare to call this art...

Most artists won't like your words.

I don't doubt it; I'm confident they'll dislike my opinion.

Not everyone understands you. Your manner of drawing is unique. Isn't it originality for the sake of originality? Don't you ever wish to surprise audiences?

Not really; I'm not arrogant enough to think like that. I respect myself for my originality and I have enough ambition. It just so happens that I've created lots of graphic works, on impulse; I'm not ashamed to say that I wasn't trying to surprise anyone. I just knew what I wanted to depict. I often struggled with myself, drawing and painting for hours at the institute. Although I can draw from nature, I stress that I usually create graphic pieces for myself. Primarily, a picture should appeal to me; only then will I exhibit it.

However, your graphic works aren't easy to perceive.

I often depict negative moods, as people are far from being always positive. I try to show that pessimism is bad

and should be avoided. I don't have absolutely positive or negative pictures, reflecting joy or sorrow; rather, I have a little of both. These aren't unambiguous; instead, they leave a feeling of hope.

Let's return to shape again. Is this your way of thinking or just a way to create an attractive work?

No, it's a way of thinking. We all have a mind, capable of reason and intellectual thought... albeit in various capacities. Pragmatists boast more reason while intellectuals usually have more 'stupidity'. I believe my mind comprises half intellect, a quarter thought and

manner. Another student did the same thing but the commission accepting term papers told them not to draw like that. I recall distinctly that they said one Balenok was quite enough. I can't say that I always drew like this; it just happened. What greater recognition can there be for an artist than his pictures being exhibited in galleries? My graphic works are held by art galleries in the USA, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, Belarus, Poland and Germany. The Bavarian Chancellor once told me that my collection was a national legacy for Germany. It wasn't my aim; it had never occurred to me.



S. Balenok: *Lamp Posts in the City*

even less reason. I often wish to have more reason. When I was a student, there was an exhibition of Baltic painters which surprised me greatly; it was as if something was flying and hissing through the air. Someone advised me to think in the way I wished to draw. I've memorised this phrase. When I was a fourth year student, I depicted something in a graphic

Do you like public attention?

Of course; I'm a rather ambitious person.

Should art be more international or national?

I think that there should be various views of the same art. It should be both national and international. However, my pictures are more international.