

Spiritual images appear in their primeval beauty

National Art Museum showcases eleven restored icons for the first time

By Viktor Mikhailov

The image of the Holy Mother is the most popular religious symbol of Belarus. The exhibition is truly interesting, showcasing forty icons from the Belarusian National Art Museum's collection — all related to the Blessed Virgin. Most of the Belarusian icons are drawn in the Orthodox manner, with just three (icons of the Virgin of Krakow, of Boruny and of the Snow) painted in compliance with Italian traditions, rather than Byzantine. The exhibition also includes those from the 19th century Russian icon painting school.

The sacred image of the Mother of God — deeply mourning for the future sufferings of her Son — is one of the most emotional topics of Orthodox iconography. Most of the images were formed in the 9th century, in Byzantium. Icons brought to Kiev Rus became the focus of worship and set the standard for new works. Legend says that Luke the Evangelist painted the first icons of the Virgin: Hodegetria (Greek for 'She who shows the Way'), Tenderness and probably the image of Mary alone. Historical evidence can be traced to the 6th century, when Byzantine historian Theodore the Stoudite described the Empress Eudocia, wife of Emperor Theodosius the Junior, sending an icon of the Virgin as a gift. It was painted by Luke the Evangelist, and was sent to her husband's sister, Pulheria (who was later canonised). The icon travelled from Jerusalem to Constantinople in 450 AD.

The most widespread image of the Virgin is called Hodegetria — rooted in the name of a Constantinople church: Theos Odigos (the Church of Leaders). Military leaders would pray there before battle. The Virgin is depicted with



Exhibition of icons at National Art Museum is great cultural, educational and spiritual event

her baby son on her left arm; Jesus gives his blessing with his right hand and holds a scroll in his left.

Later icons received names in compliance with their appearance or places where they had worked miracles: of Kazan, of Krakow, of Minsk, of Zhiroviichi, of Boruny and so on. The half-length image of Mary with her son on her right arm is called (in Greek — 'the All-Holy'). Icons of this type on show are from Pochayevo, Jerusalem, and the Rocks, and are of the Three-Handed Virgin and of Our Lady of St. Theodore.

The Eleusa icon (in Greek — Showing Mercy) was formed in Byzantine in the 11th century, depicting the Virgin with Jesus pressed against her cheek. The exhibition showcases the Virgin of Zhiroviichi (1751). In addition, images of the Virgin in complex compositions include the Virgin Life-Giving Spring, the Virgin Joy of All Who Sorrow and the Virgin of Bogoliubovo (in veiled form).

Many Belarusian icons illustrate the main events of the Virgin's life: Kissing Joachim and Anne. The Annunciation of Anne; the Nativity of the Virgin; the Presentation; and the Annunciation. Repeating themes allow us to compare Byzantine and Western European traditions, all of which have a degree of compliance with the canon.

Belarusian masters often used engravings to inspire their works, as seen in those from 1642-1649: the Nativity of Christ; the Worship of the Wise



Icon depicting the Virgin Mary

Men; the Holy Family; and others. Gilding and silver plating also played a significant role in Belarusian icon painting of the mid to late 18th century. A gilded ornamented background (moulded and fretted) was popular, with clothing frequently gilded and silver plated. Metal and wood were used for the construction, decorated with flowers and leaves. The ornamentation allows each to be dated in many cases. The current

show includes a metal cased Baroque 17th century Virgin Hodegetria icon.

Thanks to the systematic work of the museum restorers, the number of Belarusian icons being brought back to public viewing is ever increasing. New subjects, themes and techniques are becoming apparent. Eleven icons revived by restorers are being exhibited for the first time. As a result of the restorers' complicated work, the museum's iconographic collection has been enriched with sacred images of the Virgin of Krakow, of the Virgin of Boruny, of the Virgin Shkaplernaya, and the Seven Arrows Icon, and tiered icons such as Presentation, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Nativity of the Virgin and the Assumption of the Virgin.

The icons at the exhibition are evidence of her image's particular importance for Belarusian art culture and for the whole Christian world.

Interesting motifs on eternal theme of adoration and love

By Diana Kurilova

Chagall Museum in Vitebsk reflects female perception of love

In September 2011, the Vitebsk museum celebrated its 20th birthday. In fact, it implements projects beyond those relating to Chagall's creativity. This year, the museum showcased artists from Latvia, France and the USA. Now, the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk has launched its new *Illusion*

of *Disappearance* international project, displaying works by 14 artists, from five countries. "This is a new event for the museum but we hope it will become an annual exhibition," noted Director Lyudmila Khmelnitskaya at a press conference. "Only female artists are taking part, since the project aims to show that serious art is not just the realm of men."

The *Illusion of Disappearance. I Love You* show explores the theme of love. "On one hand, it's a

banal title, as these English words can be translated by anyone. However, 'I love you' is serious and multi-faceted phrase: simple yet deep," explains Vitebsk artist Victoria Krupskaya, a curator of the exhibition.

The show brings together female painters from Belarus, Russia, Latvia, Germany and France, using various techniques. Each brings her own understanding of love: for parents, men, a child, creativity and for our native home.

Beauty of Slovak nature

By Alina Grishkevich

Slovak Paradise exhibition by young painters on show at House of Friendship

In summer, Slovakia hosted an open air workshop for young artists from Minsk, Polotsk and Novopolotsk. Upon their return, the youngsters then drew a series of works inspired by the picturesque Slovak countryside.

As the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Slovakia to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Marian Serwatka, notes, in recent times, Belarusians have learnt much about Slovakia. "We've given lec-

tures about the Slovak language at the Belarusian State University, while assisting in publishing the *Short Grammar of Slovak Language* textbook, the Belarusian-Slovak phrase book and a monography on Slovak folklore," the diplomat explains. In addition, Belarusian TV has screened over ten documentaries on Slovak spas, resorts, aquaparks, ski centres, architecture and folklore.

The exhibition of paintings from Slovak Kovačica has helped to show more about the country, in addition to works by master Andrej Smolák, and watercolours and sculptures by Ludmila Cvengrosova.