

# Creative work and life style becoming real phenomenon

*Breath of the Universe* exhibition at National Art Museum dedicated to centenary of People's Artist of Belarus Vitaly Tsvirko

By Victor Mikhailov

It's surprising and rare to hear such universal praise of an artist. However, such is the case with Mr. Tsvirko. Even those more used to blowing their own trumpet have nothing but sincere admiration for his work and name him as one of their own guiding stars, inspired by his lifetime of creativity. Regardless of their personal success, they view him as the ultimate master.

"I'm lucky to have once been a student of Vitaly Konstantinovich Tsvirko," says People's Artist of Belarus Leonid Shchemelev, whose 90th birthday exhibition was recently hosted by the nation's foremost gallery. "A wonderful artist and teacher, he opened my eyes to the world. Mr. Tsvirko avoided public speaking but his paintings were more eloquent than words in relaying his thoughts and feelings. Of course, I'm no art critic but, when it comes to my teacher, Mr. Tsvirko, I have a great deal to say. I'm grateful to him and admire him as an artist and a person. When you study for a long time, you have many 'teachers' but only one will be a real Teacher: the one who teaches you the essence of life and guides you in your vocation, understanding your role as an artist and your measure of responsibility. Mr. Tsvirko was such a teacher for me. Being a great artist, he taught me not only professional skills but humanity, love for our native nature which he felt sharply and loved passionately."

Other Belarusian artists agree, saying that Mr. Tsvirko was and remains unequalled as a master of landscape art. The *Breath of the Universe* exhibition features over sixty of his paintings and watercolours, from the National Art Museum, from the Belarusian Union of Artists and from Mr. Tsvirko's family. So great is his influence that landscape art in Belarus is divided into 'before' and 'after' Mr. Tsvirko. He is revered as an innovator, a pioneer in creating lyrical landscapes — unknown previously in Belarusian art. In this genre, Mr. Tsvirko revealed his talent most fully, showing the essence of Belarusian nature and making philosophical reflections. He was able to capture the heart of each motif, using wonderfully vivid techniques to create epic canvases celebrating the beauty of his native land. Many of his landscapes have become classics of Belarusian painting: timeless in their story-telling and original in composition, palette and expression, while reflecting the age in which the maestro lived and worked.

This outstanding artist laid the tra-



Vitaly Tsvirko's epic *Insurrection of Fishermen on Lake Naroch*, painted in 1957, steals the limelight

ditions of Belarusian landscape painting today. As a bright, talented, energetic man, Vitaly Tsvirko distinguished himself brilliantly as a teacher, shaping so many students who later made their own unique contribution to the development of domestic art. Probably, without Mr. Tsvirko, the Belarusian school of painting would not be what it is today, distinguished by his students: Leonid Shchemelev, Dmitry Aleinik, Boris Arakcheev, Nikolay Kazakevich, Georgy Poplavsky and Ivan Rei.

"He was passionate about everything," says Mr. Shchemelev. "Somewhere in the late fifties in Moscow, paintings from the Dresden Gallery were on display for the first time. People queued all night to see these masterpieces of world art. Incredibly, Mr. Tsvirko managed to arrange for us (a group of students from Minsk) to travel to Moscow to see the exhibition for free for a week. It was unforgettable and, of course, our great respect for this wonderful man remains."

Mr. Tsvirko was born on February 14th, 1913, in the village of Ra-

Anatoly Tychina) soon realised Vitaly's talent. They began to give him private lessons, greatly influencing his creative personality, as did Belarusian writer, poet and playwright Kondrat Krapiva.

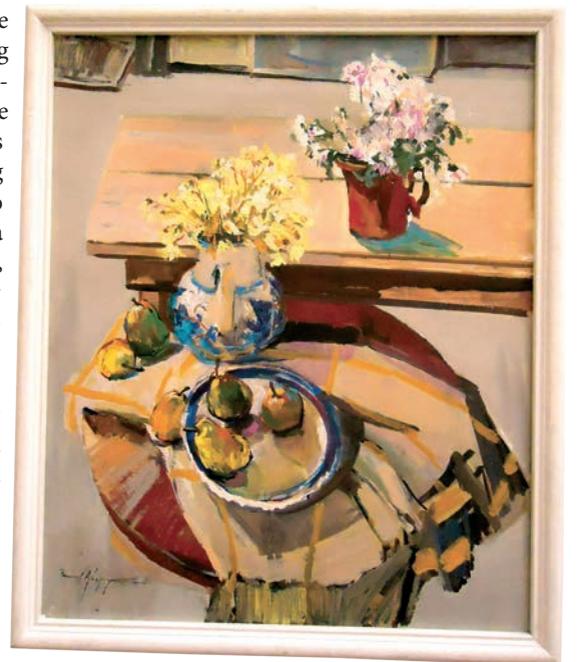
Mr. Tsvirko's early works were inspired by the Gomel Region's rural charm: its colours, melodious landscapes and poetic motifs, which left their imprint on his young heart. In his post-revolutionary village, young people sought to make their dreams come true. For Vitaly, this led to the unexplored world of art and a place at the Vitebsk Art School, from which he graduated in 1932. He took part in an art exhibition in Moscow in 1935, whose success led to him gaining entry to the Moscow Surikov Art Institute.

During the Great Patriotic War, the Institute was evacuated to Samarkand and it was from there that he received his Diploma of Higher Education, in 1942. Despite all difficulties, this was the period in which he formed his artistic temperament and spiritual integrity, defining his creative personality and attitude to art. His works, painted

tal of Belarus, where he began painting on military-historical themes. After the war, he taught in his own style, including taking students into the countryside in a casual atmosphere, awakening their souls to the true beauty of the Belarusian countryside. "Only by being alone with nature, can you hear its heart," said Vitaly Tsvirko.

In addition to landscape works, the latest exhibition includes his still life canvases: experimental pieces from the 1980s. He painted the tranquillity and serenity of nature's bounty, as well as the poetry of everyday items, which embody eternal truths. In fact, Mr. Tsvirko was a master of watercolour, tempera and oil painting, although he preferred the latter. At the same time, watercolours were the perfect medium for his creative temperament, allowing a fluidity and freedom which suited his imaginative originality.

His rich creative legacy is most vivid in his historical paintings and in the quiet lyricism of his heroic landscapes. His *Prisoners are Led* and *Rural Teacher* are part of the history of domestic art. For many years, he worked on a large canvas entitled *Insurrection of Fishermen on Lake Naroch*, dedicated to working people's struggle for liberation in Western Belarus. His most famous work on a wartime theme is probably *Unconquered*, which shows the courage of a Soviet soldier: his nobility and beauty of soul. In memory of the great struggle seen in wartime, he painted a triptych called *Sacred Stones*, capturing the ruins of Brest Hero Fortress, which symbolises the ultimate in bravery and self-sacrifice from those terrible years of the Great Patriotic War.



V. Tsvirko. Still life

Today Mr. Tsvirko's works are held by the National Art Museum and by the Tretyakov State Gallery in Moscow, as well as by other museums across the Russian Federation. They are found in the Belarusian Union of Artists' Gallery, at the Museum of Modern Fine Art in Minsk, at the Belarusian State Museum of Great Patriotic War History, and at local history museums throughout Belarus, as well as in private collections in Belarus and abroad. The National Art Museum holds the largest collection: 156 works.

The Director of the National Art Museum, Vladimir Prokoptsov, calls him a 'national genius, who made a special contribution to Belarusian art'. He believes that, across his various genres of painting, Mr. Tsvirko was an innovator and a classic Belarusian epic landscape painter. Vitaly's daughter, Tatiana, asserts that his personality was 'hugely optimistic and sunny'. Speaking at the opening of the exhibition dedicated to the anniversary of her father's birth, she noted, "Emotional, generous, helpful and very hard-working, he was in love with Belarus, its people and nature; he considered himself to be a very happy man."



At Pripjat. Trees Shed their Leaves. 1966

devo, in the Buda-Koshelevo District, to a family of rural teachers. His father was fond of Russian artists Perov, Repin and Kramskoi, so the walls of his home were hung with reproductions of their works. Soon, his family moved to Minsk and, in school, his teachers (Belarusian painters Mikhail Stanyuta and

during the war in far Uzbekistan, went on show in Moscow in 1944, alongside those of other Belarusian artists: *Samarkand*, *Uzbek Yard-keeper*, *Uzbek*, and *Morning. Kishlak*.

In 1944, after the liberation of Minsk from its Nazi occupiers, Vitaly Konstantinovich returned to the capi-