Музей Тараса Шевченка
Торонто, Канада

Taras Shevchenko Museum
Toronto, Canada

BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER

A solo exhibition by Andrii Palval

Capturing the infinite beauty and wonderment of birds, themes of fantasy, flight and freedom converge

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

Triptych "WISDOM", acrylic and oil pastel on canvas

With North America's bird migration season for autumn in full swing as our feathered friends head southward in search of warmer climes, Andrii Palval's dynamic art exhibition showcasing an array of birds landed at the Shevchenko Museum on September 27, 2026. By merging figurative and symbolic imagery, the visual artist and muralist explores themes of memory, migration, identity, human relationships and collective experiences. As Palval explains, "The language of art is an international language of communication. It has the capacity to transmit various meanings, which can lead to several interpretations. Although I provide subtle clues on what I'm seeking to express, my art initiates a thoughtful dialogue, where I encourage viewers to use their imagination."

That's exactly what Paul Osadchuk found himself doing as he perused the artistic works on display at the opening reception. As a photographer who has travelled around the world marvelling at nature's magnificance, he was intrigued by Palval's fascination with ornithology, which is the scientific study of birds and his subsequent artistic rendering of this subject. In reference to the acrylic and oil pastel on canvas paintings ***Peacock***, which is based on a mural in St. Catharines, Ontario and ***Cassowary***, his attention was drawn to the vibrancy infused in each painting. "The artist uses bold colours to highlight what he's trying to convey. Clearly, the birds have distinct identities and personalities, which he brings to life. Each painting zooms right into focus, bringing you up close and personal with the birds. Through the gaze of an eye, a mood is set and every painting strikes a different tone."

PEACOCK, ***Mural created in St. Catharines, Niagara Region, Ontario***

The person behind – or more accurately in front of the paintings – often at dizzying heights when he's working on murals, is Andrii Palval. Born in Kharkiv, Ukraine, he fled the ongoing war with Russia in March 2022. His own journey took him to several European countries before finding sanctuary in Canada. Currently, he lives in St. Catharines with his wife and three children.

Palval's artistic vision is deeply shaped by his Ukrainian heritage and his experiences of travelling and working abroad. Throughout his exhilarating career, he has participated in solo and group exhibitions in countries spanning Asia, Europe and North America, in addition to undertaking personal and commissioned projects in various countries.

CASSOWARY, **acrylic and oil pastel on canvas**

NIGHTINGALE, **acrylic and oil pastel on canvas**

Always eager to bring the concepts he has envisioned to life, the artist has left literal pieces of himself in the cities he's touched down on with the murals he's created. Thematically, Palval's own story of displacement and living between cultures has enhanced his own sense of dignity, resilience and strength. These characteristics resonate in his artistic works. "Over time, I've reflected on the infinite freedom of birds to fly to any given place and start anew. In comparison, with people, oftentimes, there are several barriers to overcome, whether bureaucratic, financial, or otherwise. Yet these experiences overlap, because ultimately, we all find ourselves trying to adapt and acclimatize to life a new place," he says.

In the exhibition, one of the most spectacular paintings on display is ***Chukar Partridge***. Using acrylic paint and spray paint on canvas, it features Pakistan's national bird. It's based on

a mural Palval created in Lahore, the capital and largest city of the Pakistani province of Punjab. The partridge is depicted with its head held up high, exuding a sense of grace and resoluteness.

CHUKAR PARTRIDGE, **acrylic and spray paint on canvas**

Similarly, ***Nightingale/Usignolo (Italian)***, ushers in a sense of enchantment. Using acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas, Palval recreates the sense of wonderment, which can be felt in the mural he completed of this magnificent bird in Aielli, Italy. The mountain village is known for its Tower of Stars, a medieval 14th century watchtower, which serves as a public astronomical observatory and planetarium. The mural pays homage to the nightingale as the only bird that sings under the stars, and symbolizes the village's illuminated nocturnal sky.

A triptych entitled ***Wisdom*** is also featured in the exhibition. Using acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas, the three panels provide a bird's eye view on owls in all their astute glory. As Palval shares, "This represents a mural I created in the heart of Waterford, the oldest city in Ireland. It can be found on the wall of a grocery store and its primary viewers are the Franciscan nuns from a monastery nearby."

One of the most memorable aspects of the opening reception is that it included a slideshow presentation delivered by Palval. He provided an excellent overview of his expansive portfolio and answered questions related to his longstanding artistic practice from the engaged audience members.

Mural "Hetman Skoropadsky" in Kyiv, Ukraine

Mural "Taras Shevchenko" in Kharkiv, Ukraine

The indelible imprint the artist has left on Ukraine was apparent, as many of his murals grace the walls of several Ukrainian cities, including in his hometown and nearby in Chuhuiv, where his rendering of figures of tremendous cultural and historical importance serve as a testament to their enduring legacy. Portraits of the following luminaries are particularly significant: Yuri Gagarin, a famous pilot and cosmonaut; Andriy Kuzmenko, a beloved singer who fronted the rock band *Skyrabin*, and whose creativity extended into the fields of literature, television and the performing arts; and Illia Repin, a renowned artist.

Murals bringing Ukraine's military history and current war into focus also formed a part of Palval's presentation. They include a portrait of Hetman Skoropadsky in Kyiv. A revered figure, he played a pivotal role in shaping Ukraine as a state in 1918. Two portraits of soldiers who fell in the line of duty just a few months apart in 2022 can also be seen in Stryi. Memorialized are: Taras "Hammer" Bobanych and Vladyslav Palenychka.

To Palval, holding a solo exhibition at the Shevchenko Museum has been a wonderful experience and a momentous milestone in the country he now finds himself in. “It has been incredible to see the level of interest my show has generated. Hearing visitors’ feedback and how my art has impacted them has been deeply meaningful.” Buoyed by the outpouring of support, he wholeheartedly intends to forge ahead. To him, there’s a profound sense of liberty that comes with being an artist: to imagine; to feel; to think; and to create. Always aspiring to new heights, clearly, the sky’s the limit for Andrii Palval.

The “Birds of a Feather Flock Together” exhibition and sale can be viewed at the Taras Shevchenko Museum until **October 30, 2026.**

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Gallery hours: Mon, Tues, Weds, Fri: 10 a.m.- 4 p.m., Thurs: 12-7 p.m.,
and weekends by appointment.

About Ayah Victoria McKhail

Ayah Victoria McKhail is the Shevchenko Museum’s visual arts reporter. She’s passionate about capturing stories about the artists who enrich the museum with their art exhibitions. In 2012, she travelled to Kyiv, Ukraine. Highlights include visiting the National Art Museum of Ukraine, Independence Square, and the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves.