

COLOURS OF UKRAINE Exhibition

As renowned artists who excel at creative storytelling, Liubov Senchuk and Karina Voloshko unveiled a striking collection of visual narratives, welcoming visitors into their magnificent world of wonder

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

The 71st season of Toronto's Shevchenko Museum heralded a brilliant start. From October 22, 2023 to January 19, 2024, it was enlivened with a monumental exhibition, which encapsulated the essence of Ukraine and exemplified the spirit of unity among its people. Two visiting artists, Liubov Senchuk, who was born in the village of Hrushiv, on the outskirts of the legendary city of Lviv in the west, and Karina Voloshko, who was born in the historically significant city of Kharkiv in the east, took viewers on an enchanting odyssey into the heart of their beloved country in all its glory.

As Larissa Stavroff, a cultural worker at the Shevchenko Museum, who served as the master of ceremonies described, "Rendered with love and reverence for ancestral traditions, the more than 60 paintings in this exhibition reflect Ukraine's natural beauty, its people, culture, and customs, while exploring the worlds of spirituality, emotion, and the human psyche."

Lana Matskiv, an artist who delivered the keynote address, concurred. "There's harmony, and these canvases elevate you to feel the balance and beauty of the world as God has created it for us through the eyes and exposed souls of the artists who painted them."

According to Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, director of the Shevchenko Museum, who curated the exhibition, along with Olha Turko, assistant curator, it was memorable due to a variety of factors. It spawned several successful workshops delivered by the artists, which were sponsored by Rosa, a Ukrainian manufacturer of fine art materials. It also inspired visitors to write poetry based on the artistic works that resonated with them. This culminated in a poetry night, where heartfelt readings were conducted. "Everything went exceptionally well. We received a tremendous amount of positive feedback from both Torontonians and tourists alike. The exhibition was a great success due to the unique and captivating artistic works that were displayed, which were both traditional and modern."

It's precisely these characteristics that Yaroslav Hradowy found intriguing as he made his way through the exhibition. As someone who was born in the village of Stara Yahilnytsya, which is in the Chortkiv district of Ternopil in western Ukraine, Voloshko's oil on canvas painting, **It Snowed**, which features a picturesque glimpse of a snowfall from inside a rustic home, had him feeling nostalgic. "It reminds me of old times and the snowfalls we had. The artist has done a remarkable job of capturing the overall ambiance, which I recall so well, despite the passage of time, as I immigrated to Canada 30 years ago. Even the keys hanging on the panel are reminiscent of the characteristic charm I remember from those homes."



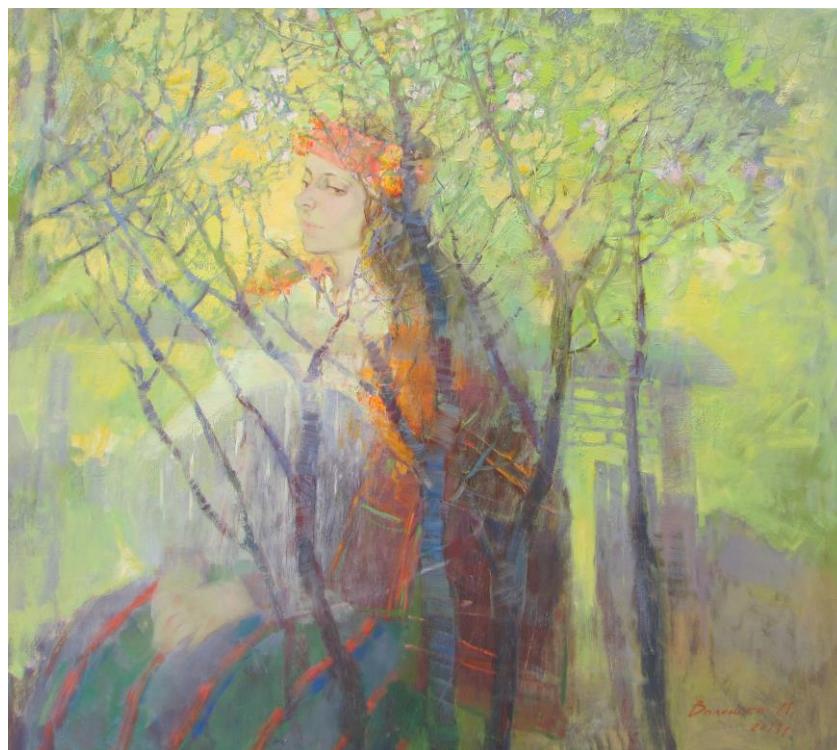
Karina Voloshko, **It Snowed**, 2018, oil on canvas

Andrii Olimpiiev, a grade 12 student who was completing his placement at the Shevchenko Museum, found himself drawn to Senchuk's oil on canvas painting, **The Tumbleweed** (diptych). An annual plant that breaks off at the stem base when it dies and forms a tumbleweed, it scatters its seeds as the wind rolls it along. There's a palpable sense of movement and flight in the painting, but those aren't the only characteristics he noticed. "I really like the overall design, which is very abstract. The colours are beautiful and harmonious. Also, the texture is rich and layered, so it really stands out."



Liubov Senchuk, **The Tumbleweed** (diptych), 2015, oil on canvas

The Illusion of Happiness, an oil on canvas painting by Voloshko, beckoned Tamara Zayachkowski. Evocative of a forest nymph, it features an ethereal-looking woman with long, flowing dark hair. Ensnared amid trees, there's a fleeting sense to it. "The painting has an ephemeral quality to it. The woman blends in with nature, so it compelled me to take a closer look."



Karina Voloshko, **The Illusion of Happiness**, 2011, oil on canvas

George McKetton found the composition of Senchuk's oil on canvas painting, **Young Ukrainian Girls**, stunning. Depicting the silhouettes of six girls wearing what appears to be embroidered blouses standing in a circle, the brushstrokes are lush and ooze with vivacity. "An overall sense of joy and unity is conveyed," he mused.



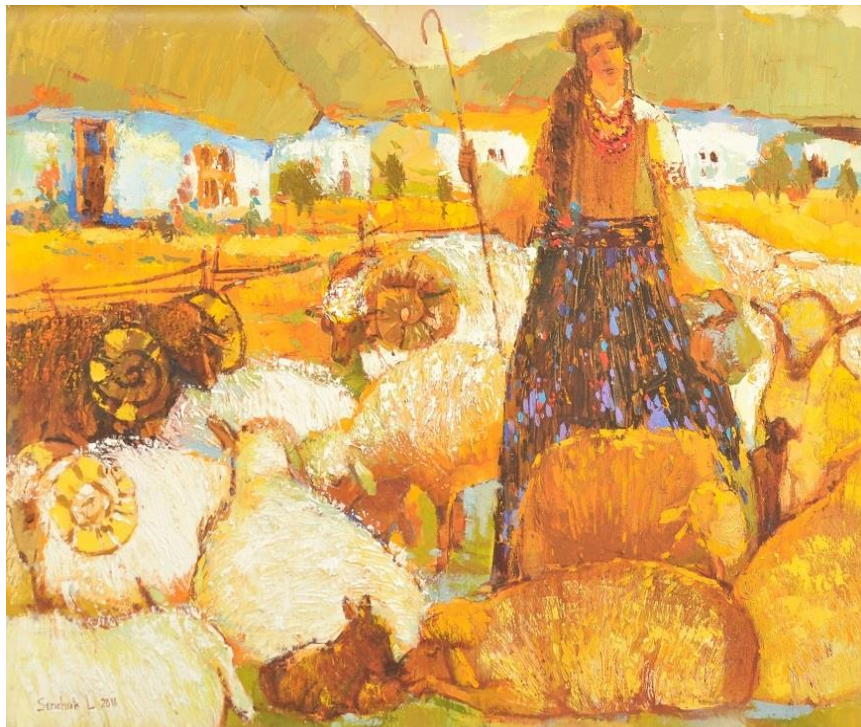
Liubov Senchuk, **Young Ukrainian Girls**, 2008, oil on canvas

Nataliia Petrenko-Litvinova, an artist, found the landscape in Voloshko's oil on canvas painting, **A Small Farm**, appealing for several reasons. Capturing the serenity of winter, it features rolling hills, a range of trees and someone careening through a path of snow. Noting artists often struggle to convey dusk, she was impressed with Voloshko's outstanding skills. "By using very few colours, a subtle mood is construed. When you absorb the magnitude of such a painting, a whole picture and indeed, an entire world is created, so you can daydream and literally be transported to that place."



Karina Voloshko, **A Small Farm**, 2016, oil on canvas

Another oil on canvas painting, which was a focal feature at the exhibition is Senchuk's **Summer**. Depicting an overarching woman encircled by farm animals, there's an endearing quality to it. The painting, along with *Between Two Worlds*, were generously donated to the museum in 2018. Significantly, *Summer* graces the cover of the catalogue for *Picturesque Ukraine*, an exhibition of contemporary Ukrainian art, which was held the same year.



Liubov Senchuk, **Summer**, 2011, oil on canvas

When Senchuk and Voloshko addressed visitors at the exhibition, they were humbled by the palpable sense of admiration permeating in their midst. Speaking through Iryna Lozynska, an interpreter, Voloshko expressed her profound sense of gratitude for an opportunity to have an exhibition in Canada. “This has been such an incredible milestone and it’s truly wonderful to see people discovering our artistic works. These paintings capture scenes of beauty through everyday experiences. Seemingly ordinary moments become extraordinary. Drawing from tradition, we’re inspired by our respective surroundings and the many shades of colours in our midst. The power of art allows us to savour these moments and to share them with everyone.”

Senchuk mentioned Ukrainians have a long history of capturing the beauty of nature in art. This figures prominently in the national identity of Ukrainians, in addition to serving as a powerful means for cultural preservation. “Although we’re from different parts of Ukraine and our vantage points vary, this is what unites us. Our heart beats in unison.”

Such sentiments resonated with Oleh Lesiuk, an award-winning artist and sculptor who addressed visitors at the exhibition. Lesiuk is also the president of the Ukrainian Association of Visual Artists of Canada; a member of the Sculptors Society of Canada; and the National Union of Artists of Ukraine. Additionally, he serves as the vice-president and art committee chair of the Ukrainian Canadian Art Foundation. “These artists, one from the east and one from the west represent a united Ukraine where borders don’t divide us. Ukraine is a country full of talented people and the creativity of these artists manifests this reality. Their artistic works are the embodiment of all that is beautiful and truly sacred.”



About Ayah Victoria McKhail

Ayah Victoria McKhail is a Toronto-based journalist who is passionate about arts and culture reporting. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, such as the *Literary Review of Canada*, the *WholeNote*, and newspapers affiliated with the East Coast’s SaltWire Network.