

FREEDOMNESS Exhibition

A new exhibition with a topical theme generates widespread interest

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

If you've ever wondered what 'freedomness' is and the centrality of this concept in the lives of artists, you now have until September 16, 2024 to find out at Toronto's Shevchenko Museum. As Yuliia Sarancheva, who attended the opening reception explains, "The unique experiences of each artist has led to the creation of art that's distinct in style and imaginative in scope. This exhibition is full of intrigue."

The Vytik art collective's fourth exhibition, it was co-curated by Iryna Kolotylo, an art manager; Marta Kolotylo, an art teacher; and Violetta Skrypnyk, an art historian. Evoking the vision of 13 Ukrainian artists, inspiration is derived from Olha Kobylianska. A feminist, she's one of Ukraine's most celebrated modernist novelists. Influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, particularly around notions concerning the power of inner strength, her words, "To have such freedom as to be your own goal/achievement," are finding resonance among an entirely new generation of artists. They include: Maria Antoniv, Pavlo Baiandin, Mariia Charuta, Stacy Chu, Marta Kolotylo, Yana Litus, Oleksandra Lytsak, Nestor, Sasha Q, Margaryta Savina, Anastasia Spivak, Bridget Puhacz and Petro Zolotoverhy.

As Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, the museum's director elucidates, "Kobylianska's words are a rallying call. She implores people to aspire toward an empowering type of freedom in their lives, and to have the courage to dream of a liberated future. Essentially, 'freedomness' heightens an individual's artistic development. Once attained, it ushers in a sense of contentment."

Marta Kolotylo's *Freedom* encapsulates this. "In this new series of works, I've merged my two passions: graphic design and working with children. The pieces are presented in a geometric, minimalist style, adhering to a specific colour scheme. At the same time, they evoke the essence of children's alphabet blocks, where each letter or image holds its own distinct meaning."



Marta Kolotylo, *Freedom*

Since arriving in Canada from Bukovina, Chernivtsi, Ukraine in the autumn of 2022, the tenet behind the letter 'O' has resonated with her the most. It stands for, "Openness: Welcome new experiences and perspectives with a receptive heart."

Bridget Puhacz's oil on canvas painting, *Slope* embraces the sense of openness that comes with being in nature. A colourful winter scene with people skiing, the idea came to her

when she was on a ski lift. “I noticed how light was coming through the branches of the trees and hitting the snow. “To me, freedomness can be found in the uninhibited nature of people of all ages, who are finding a way to express themselves by engaging in recreational activity with the goal of being free.”

Puhacz’s other featured works include *Love Letter*, an oil on canvas painting of a fictional landscape, and intaglio prints of her paternal grandparents, Leonard and Irene, who met at a Ukrainian Church and who were proud to see their granddaughter’s work being showcased at the opening reception.



Bridget Puhacz, **Slope**, 2024, oil on canvas



Bridget Puhacz, **Love Letter**, 2024, oil on canvas

Maria Antoniv's acrylic on canvas painting, *Moving Forward* is a strikingly beautiful piece, which features a flowing panoply of flowers. The texture is lush and a sense of dynamism bursts to the fore. "This piece is 'freedomness.' There's flow with the colour and with the form. The colour green is prominent, as it's representative of life and growth. Freedom doesn't have boundaries."



Mariia Antoniv, *Moving Forward*, 2024, acrylic on canvas

Angus Chong was drawn to the palpable sense of continuity in the painting. "It looks very chaotic; a lot is happening. It struck me that we're never really in the present; that we should stop in life to look around; to find beauty and to seek freedom."

A salient theme, it colours Mariia Charuta's imagination. Her fantastical acrylic on canvas painting, *Helping Him Out of His Shell*, is about friendships. It explores the concept of breaking free from the clutches of people who take advantage of others. It's also about defining boundaries on her own terms. "I treat my art as a diary. The more open you are in your art, the better it is."



Mariia Charuta, **Helping Him Out of His Shell**, 2024, acrylic on canvas

Iris Sopinka, a retired French teacher who volunteers at the Shevchenko Museum and is an amateur art collector, was instantly drawn to this painting. "It strikes me as being a real focal point. The kaleidoscope of colours is mesmerizing. It compels me to engage with the painting and to discern its meaning."

Charuta's willingness to push boundaries in all spheres of her life has led to the creation of art that's spellbinding. Each painting is analogous to a mystery novel. She engages viewers by

offering subtle clues about the meaning and interpretation of each masterpiece. One's compelled to think deeply and about what she's revealing, and what she might be withholding.

The intensity of Charuta's art was on full display at *Confessions Unasked For*, her first solo art exhibition, which was held at the She Said Gallery earlier this summer. Also curated by the Vytik art collective, it featured paintings such as *I Want*, *The Feeling Inside*, and *Paradise, Corrupted*, garnering widespread fascination.

As Skrypnyk reflects on the resounding success of the Vytik art collective's exhibitions, she's buoyed by the momentum, which continues to build since its founding in February 2023. As she looks toward the future, consistency will be the main focus. "We'd like to continue with curating shows, both group and personal exhibitions. We think our next project will be a group photo exhibition. We're planning to announce an open call." She also mentions she's looking for sponsors and partners for upcoming projects and that the collective is open to collaborating with other communities.

At the opening reception of *Freedomness*, Skrypnyk was beaming. She notes how grateful she is to Pogoryelova for allowing the collective to hold the exhibition at the Shevchenko Museum. She also mentions how appreciative she is to Olha Turko, the museum's assistant curator – and an artist in her own right – for helping with the installation.

For Margaryta Savina, who utilizes a variety of techniques such as batik, macrame, fabric painting and mixed media, being part of the exhibition, has been a meaningful experience. Using cord on canvas, *Ocean* and *Wheat Fields* are on display. Crediting the renowned Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh and the venerated Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai as being sources of inspiration, her creations pay homage to her beloved homeland.



Margaryta Savina, **Ocean**, 2024, cord on canvas

“Its breathtakingly beautiful scenes are seared in my memory. The landscape in Ocean is something I had been envisioning for months, whereas the landscape in Wheat Fields evokes my heritage; it’s a strong motif in Ukrainian culture and art. Ukraine is with me all the time in Canada.”

To Savina, freedom is something she continuously strives for. “Freedom for me is the courage and bravery to live my life, choosing my path, to dream, to try, to take reasonable risks even when it’s scary.”



Margaryta Savina, **Wheat Fields**, 2024, cord on canvas

The Freedomness exhibition will continue until September 16, 2024 at the Shevchenko Museum:
1604 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario.

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

Phone number: 416-534-8662

Email address: shevchenkomuseum@bellnet.ca

Website: www.shevchenko.ca

The Vytik art collective has also organized a Freedomness art program. Several of the artists whose works are featured in the exhibition are facilitating art workshops in Ukrainian and English. The program will culminate in a curatorial tour by Violetta Skrypnyk and the artists.

To stay updated on the latest events, please visit: www.shevchenko.ca/events

For more information and to register, please email: vytikartcollective@gmail.com

Or check out their Instagram page: [vytik_art_collective](https://www.instagram.com/vytik_art_collective)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/vytikartcollective



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.