

## LET ME DREAM Exhibition

Created with Ukraine in her heart, the title of Tetiana Tytarenko's exhibition is both an invitation and a message interspersed in her paintings. She seeks to encourage people to allow themselves to dream, especially those who might think it's too late or that they're not "qualified" to be creative.

By Ayah Victoria McKhail



**LET ME DREAM**, acrylic on canvas

As you find yourself enraptured by the wondrous beauty of Tetiana Tytarenko's paintings on display, such as *Spring of my soul* and *The gift of being there*, which were done in acrylics, you just might be surprised to discover that her foray into the world of art was actually by happenstance. "For most of my life, I worked as a hairdresser. I owned a salon with my business partner, and had never painted or thought I had any talent for it."



***SPRING OF MY SOUL***, acrylic on canvas



***THE GIFT OF BEING THERE***, acrylic on canvas

But all that changed one day nearly 10 years ago when she found herself inspired to create a unique gift for the love of her life, Dmytro Tytarenko, whom she would eventually marry. The catalyst? His birthday was approaching and she was keen on giving him something meaningful. “That’s when I got the idea to paint a picture for him; something I had never done before.”

Tytarenko’s idea spurred the first of many visits she has since made to an art store. “I bought a canvas, some acrylic paints, and found a reference image online.” The reference image was a landscape shaped like a guitar; a fitting tribute to her other half, who’s a musician.

The experience was transformative. “Something happened in the process; I fell in love with painting. I started watching YouTube videos to learn a range of techniques, and I experimented with different paints and tools. Basically, I just kept going.”



***WHEN THE SKY TURNED  
TO GOLD***  
acrylic on canvas



A dream she would've once considered beyond her wildest imagination, on June 14, 2025, her solo exhibition opened at the Shevchenko Museum. "I honestly never imagined that one day, I would have an exhibition at the Shevchenko Museum. It feels like an important step in my journey as an artist. Dreams are where everything begins."

The paintings on display are culled from three specific series: *My Land*, *Unbreakable*, and *The Roots of My Wings*. "In the latter series, I tried to reflect on what shaped me; both as a person and as an artist. These works are rooted in memories, emotions, and the simple moments that gave me the courage to imagine more for myself."



**SMELLS LIKE RAIN AND MEMORIES**, acrylic on canvas

According to Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, the museum's director, Tytarenko's sense of unbridled imagination, which is palpable in her paintings, has resulted in the creation of works, which have a deep sensorial quality. To her, as one absorbs the vitality of Tytarenko's creativity, particularly with the landscapes, one can practically sense their own physical presence in the dazzling scenes, which were rendered in acrylics. "You can feel the gentle breeze that lightly bends the grass and flowers in *Let me dream*, the smell of the soil and grass in *Smells like rain and memories*, and the incredible colour of the sky in *When the sky turned to gold*."

Tytarenko has found inspiration in the works of other self-taught painters who have left behind a profound legacy, such as Frida Kahlo and Vincent van Gogh. The influence of revered Ukrainian folk artists such as Kateryna Bilokur and Maria Prymachenko is also evident in her works. The flowers in *Warm evening with you* (oil on canvas) are reminiscent of Bilokur's

delicate grace, whereas the striking motifs in *Blooming heart* (acrylic on canvas) conjure up those found in Prymachenko's works. "What inspires me the most is not just their art, but their personal stories; the way they followed their unique vision despite the challenges they encountered or their lack of formal training. These kinds of stories give me hope and energy to keep going on my own path."

Tytarenko also shares her journey on her YouTube channel. "I've been deeply touched by the messages I receive from people who say that my story inspired them to start painting or explore their own creativity, even if they never thought they could."

And like so many great stories where dreams have a way of becoming reality, Tytarenko's path, both personally and professionally, has had many twists and turns. Born and raised in Lozova, Kharkiv *oblast*, Ukraine, Tytarenko lived there her entire life before taking up residency in Poland in 2019. In August 2022, just months into the tragic war, which continues to grip her homeland, she, Dmytro and their two sons, Akim and Avdiei, arrived in Canada, settling in Hamilton, Ontario.



**BLOOMING HEART**, acrylic on canvas

In addition to forging ahead with her career as an artist, a feat that began in earnest in 2020 when she opened her online shop on Etsy, joined the Saatchi Art online gallery, and began participating in art-related events, fairs, festivals and exhibitions, Tytarenko has also established herself as a musician. This also happened serendipitously. "Back in Ukraine, Dmytro had a band called *Dyadya-Dima*, where he performed his own songs and music. After we relocated, we didn't have any fellow musicians around, so he invited me to join him by playing simple

percussion instruments like the djembe drum and shaker.” In Poland, the couple performed as a trio with Serhiy Pinchuk, a bassist. However, since arriving in Canada, they’ve been performing as a duo. Their pop/rock band is called *Nezisvitu*.

As Tytarenko reflects on how exhilarating it has been to discover her creative potential, both musically and artistically, she’s particularly awe-struck by the widespread interest her art has been generating. Her first exhibition in Toronto, *The Roots of My Wings*, was held at Ivan Franko Homes from April 26 - May 24, 2025. *Let Me Dream* has been building on that success and the sense of elation has her beaming. “It’s a great honour for me to show my work in a space that holds such deep cultural significance to the Ukrainian community.”



**WARM EVENING WITH YOU**, oil on canvas

Pogoryelova is pleased to have the Shevchenko Museum play a role in elevating the art of newcomer artists from Ukraine. Acknowledging that many of them fled to Canada with very little and certainly no art supplies, she mentioned that a significant number of them are currently supporting themselves by toiling as wait staff, cleaners and construction workers, whose devotion to art is expressed whenever time permits.

She also underscored the cathartic role art plays in their lives. She noted how therapeutic it has been to help them heal from the trauma of war and the sense of isolation and loneliness that has ensued after being separated from family. “That’s why it’s so important to give them the space to showcase their art. Their works reveal their feelings; touching the souls of others who are experiencing the same sentiments.”



Pogoryelova's words struck a chord with Tytarenko. "Millions of us are living in exile, separated from our loved ones and unable to return home. Through this exhibition, I want to offer visitors a sense of that longing, but also the warmth of home. I hope that when people come, they feel the embrace of family, the tenderness of a mother's love, and the feeling of belonging."

The "Let Me Dream" art exhibition can be viewed at the Taras Shevchenko Museum  
until **July 11, 2025**

Phone: 416-534-8662 Email: [shevchenkomuseum@bellnet.ca](mailto:shevchenkomuseum@bellnet.ca)

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

**The exhibition will culminate with a special live performance by *Nezisvitu* at the Shevchenko Museum on July 11, 2025 at 7 p.m. Admission is free, yet donations are much appreciated.**



#### 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.