



Alexander Gutyrya, SEVEN, acrylic on canvas, 32" x 36"

SEVEN, Alexander Gutyrya's dynamic collection of paintings and sculptures evoke fascination and intrigue

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

From October 16 to November 30, 2022, Toronto's Taras Shevchenko Museum showcased a bold and vibrant collection of artistic works by the celebrated Ukrainian Canadian artist, Alexander Gutyrya. "My artistic works embody the sense of time in which they were created. They encapsulate my thoughts and feelings as I experienced them and how they evolved. Thematically, I sought to manifest this for the exhibition," he explained.

Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, the museum's director, who curated the exhibition, was first captivated by Gutyrya's artistic vision following a visit to his studio where he held an exhibition several years ago. "I was intrigued by the way in which he expresses his sentiments through colour and texture. His magnificent use of colour is particularly stunning, so I was eager to place a spotlight on his artistic works."

According to Dr. Halyna Kostiuk, an art critic, who delivered the keynote address at the exhibition, such characteristics personify Gutyrya's distinct style, in addition to exemplifying

how it has developed over the years. “Gutyrya’s style has shifted toward an emphasis on colour and the broader usage of different textures; his palette has become bolder and more valorous. Most notably, he has started to use cold and hot hues in close proximity to one another more often.”



Alexander Gutyrya, SUN, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 50"

A common thread running through Gutyrya’s artistic works is his design aesthetic. Featuring strong patterns, motifs and an overarching sense of harmony, the techniques he utilizes are reminiscent of the art of tapestry-making, which was taught to him by his paternal aunt, Antonina Petko, who worked as a weaver in the Poltava region of Ukraine.

According to Pogoryelova, Gutyrya’s masterful use of mixed-media and adeptness as a painter has resulted in the creation of artistic works, which are both awe-inspiring and thought-provoking. “Employing wood, sandstone, mammoth ivory, marble, natural coloured stone and bronze in sculpture, and oil and acrylic on canvas and wood, Gutyrya imbues his images with spiritual and symbolic meaning in his exploration of the deeper workings of the psyche, humanity’s connection to the land, and the human condition itself.”

Reverberating with unique energy, SEVEN proved to be a fitting title for the exhibition, given the number’s symbolic association in numerology, cosmology, mythology, philosophy and religion. Combined with a palpable sense of mystique prevalent in Gutyrya’s artistic works, the synergy was powerful.

A resounding success, the exhibition generated tremendous interest from people near and far. Furthermore, ever since Ukraine became a main focus in the news following Russia's invasion last year, there has been a surge of interest among the broader public to learn more about Ukraine's rich history, language, culture and people.



Alexander Gutyrva, FAMILY, acrylic on canvas, 34" x 42"

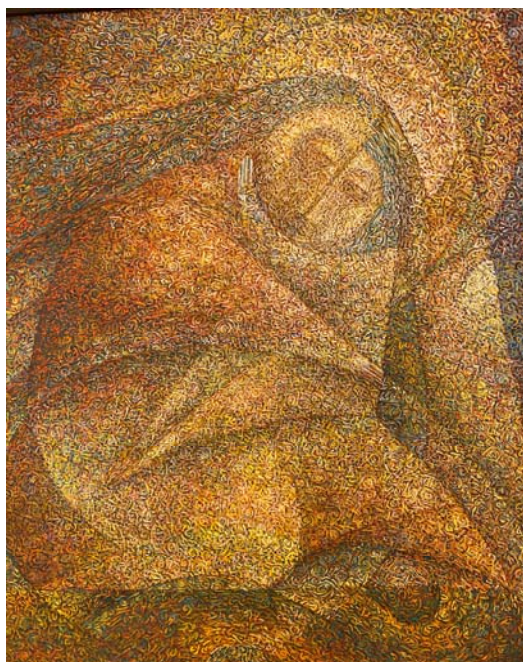
Alexander Gutyrva was born on February 17, 1966 in Bakhmut, Ukraine. In 1985, he graduated from the Donetsk College of Applied Arts with a major in Ukrainian Decorative Arts. As an emerging artist, he was catapulted on a path to success by a rare opportunity to hold his first exhibition at the Donetsk Regional Art Museum. Since then, his artistic works have been displayed in solo and group exhibitions throughout the world, in addition to being sold at auctions.

Gutyrva has also completed public art commissions for sculptures in both Ukraine and Canada. His distinguished artistic works are also showcased in prominent collections dedicated to the preservation of Ukrainian culture. His wooden sculpture, '*Silence*' can be found at The National Art Museum of Ukraine in Kyiv and his carved wooden plaque, '*The Feast*' can be viewed at The Ukrainian Museum of Canada in Vancouver, B.C. Five of his oil paintings also grace the walls of Ivan Franko Homes, which provides accommodations and care for elderly Canadians of Ukrainian descent in a culturally-sensitive environment in the Greater Toronto Area. His artistic works have also made their way into private collections in Ukraine, Finland, Hungary, Germany, Italy, France, the United States and Canada.



Alexander Gutyrya, *WIND*, wood, oil, 40" x 26" x 5"

Immigrating to Canada in 2004 and with a career spanning decades and continents, Gutyrya's artistic works continue to leave an indelible impression on people the world over. Standing in the midst of his creations at the exhibition, Iris Sopinka, a retired French teacher who volunteers at the Shevchenko Museum and is an amateur art collector, was instantly transported to Italy when her eyes fell on the oil painting, '*Mother*', which depicts an obscured silhouette of a voluptuous woman crouching down. "In Agrigento, Sicily, there are five well-preserved Greek temples, which feature tiny mosaics on the ceilings and walls. The intricate designs embedded in this mesmerizing painting remind me of such extraordinary details," she reminisced.



Alexander Gutyrya, *MOTHER*,
oil on canvas, 31.5" x 39.5"

Roman Zuzuk, an artist, was particularly drawn to '**Mood**', an oil painting depicting five colourful and distinctly-shaped stalks, with rich and lush textures as well as '**Moving Forward**', an acrylic painting bursting with a kaleidoscope of colours. "They radiate with a fresh and positive energy," he said.



Alexander Gutrya, MOOD, oil on canvas, 40" x 60"

Maria Antoniv, an artist, graphic designer and president of the Literary and Artistic Association Canada Branch (LATCA), which is a collective of artists, musicians and writers who collaborate on opportunities to present their work, while undertaking philanthropic endeavours to support Ukraine, found the sculptures especially compelling. "Unique and stylized, they're all very strong pieces. '**The Journey**' breathes of life and freedom," she shared, referring to a fantastical piece distinguished by its strong brushstrokes and sharp lines, which was created with wood and done in oils.

According to Dr. Kostiuk, Gutrya's sculptures evoke the profound legacy of Alexander Archipenko, a Ukrainian American avant-garde artist, sculptor and graphic artist, who was inspired by the pioneers of cubism, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Referring to '**The Journey**', which she noted was exquisite and brimming with allegory, she articulated her analysis, "A fish-ship points to the artist's complete trust in God and His guidance. A sailor – the artist himself – stands confidently at the stern of the ship and travels the ocean of art."



Alexander Gutyrya, JOURNEY, acrylic on canvas, 50" x 40"

Navigating her way through the exhibition, Roksolyana Benoit, an artist, was struck by the depth and magnitude of Gutyrya's ingenuity and sensed the influence of Ukraine's ancient Trypillian civilization, abstract art and cubism. "The sculptures are bold and contain strong geometrical shapes. And while some paintings feature soft and subtle tones, many are marked by colours that are rich and very impactful."



Alexander Gutyrya, MOOD IN SPACE (diptych), acrylic on canvas, 48" x 72"

Pausing for a moment in front of the acrylic painting, '*Mood in Space*', which dazzles with glimmers of bright light, evoking the opulence of stained glass, she added, "Gutyrya maintains an air of mystery about him, so perhaps he wants people to think about what his art means to him, or to come up with their own interpretation. Either way, his work is beautiful; it's strong and powerful."



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.