

Promenades Exhibition



Portrait of Vasyl Kondratuk by Borys Plaksij, 1991, oil on canvas

A dazzling collection of Vasyl Kondratuk's vibrant and whimsical artistic works usher in a world of wonderment at Toronto's Taras Shevchenko Museum

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

In a symbolic tribute to the life and legacy of Vasyl Kondratuk, an exhibition and sale of paintings was opened on May 1, 2022. The highly-anticipated event took place following several pandemic-related delays and the artist's untimely passing last December. As Dima Kondratuk, the artist's son shared, "My father had been looking forward to this day, as we had been planning it for at least two to three years. Today, we honour his memory; my father is truly loved and remembered. He'll always be with us through his art." The artist's widow, who was the love of his life and muse, Mila Kondratuk, also captured the bittersweet mood. "My husband would've been so proud to be here today. I know he'd want everyone to enjoy seeing his art."



Vasyl Kondratuk, *The Game of Chess*, fragment, oil on canvas mounted on wood

Kondratuk's captivating artistic works, on display at the Shevchenko Museum, are emblematic of the infinite possibilities for creativity that arise from the power of unbridled imagination. According to Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, the museum's director, there has been a palpable desire to pay homage to the revered artist and the exhibition continues to generate widespread interest. "The public is invited to enjoy the artist's paintings of exquisitely attired individuals, rendered in the style of Art Deco and captured for a moment in time, as they promenade along the backdrop of Italian Renaissance façades."

The exhibition also features a magnificent panel, *The Game of Chess*. An extraordinary work of art, it showcases two women seated at a table. One woman has her hand on the other woman's arm and there's a red and beige checkered chessboard in front of them. They're flanked by four people, their gazes ranging from intense to mysterious.

Belonging to the private collection of Peter Louch and Ping Djang Louch, who were friends and colleagues of Kondratuk, it has been generously donated to the museum for the duration of the exhibition. In the event a willing buyer comes along, proceeds from its sale have been earmarked for humanitarian relief and reconstruction in Ukraine. Otherwise, it will be returned to the original owners.

Although the evocative artistic works on display can reveal stark contrasts and contradictions, a sense of harmony has been magically manifested with every brushstroke. As Pogoryelova explained, such characteristics are particularly awe-inspiring. "The play of movement with quiescence; juxtaposition of the surreal with the representational; the integration of historical eras; the strong compositions; and the bold, dramatic application of colour, all contribute to



Vasyl Kondratuk, *Angelique*, oil on canvas

a unique and original body of work imbued with theatricality, elegance, mystery and intrigue.”

Such observations resonated with Lorette Luzajic. As the artist took in the splendour of *Angelique*, an oil painting which depicts a statuesque angel with a cunning look in her eyes, she was enthralled. “I love the playful juxtaposition of classic and renaissance techniques with saucy and contemporary motifs, like the knee high, pointy stiletto boots. It’s audacious to have an angel clad in such footwear. There’s an element of surprise that’s playful and fun.”

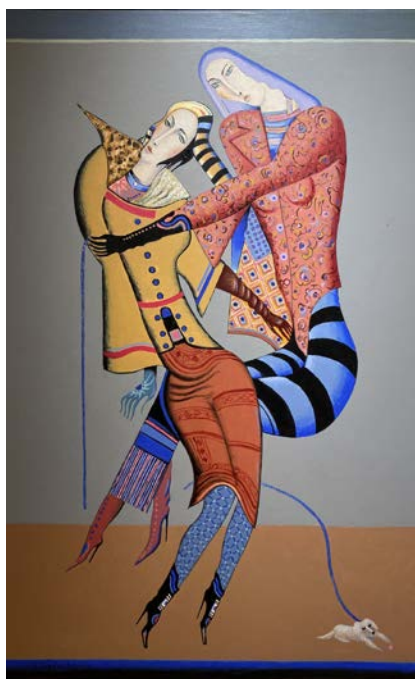


Vasyl Kondratuk, *Spanish Guitar*, oil on canvas

Luzajic was also drawn to *Spanish Guitar*, which features a voluptuous woman with long red hair and bangs. Clad in a sleek black jumpsuit and thigh-high brown pointy stiletto boots, she's playing an acoustic guitar. "This painting reminds me of Joni Mitchell", she said, referring to the Canadian American singer-songwriter.

The kaleidoscope of colours in *Cha-Cha* also had Luzajic mesmerized. Showcasing two women and a dog, she likened the interplay of colours and patterns to the intricately-designed and decorated Ukrainian Easter eggs, *pysanky*. "I like the circles and stripes which appear on the outfits. There's a richness to the texture."

Iris Sopinka, a retired French teacher who volunteers at the Shevchenko Museum and is an amateur art collector, was equally enchanted by the entire exhibition. "The paintings feature very precise lines, which indicate meticulousness and perfection. Beautiful and elegant women are the focal feature, and that makes me feel like I'm put up on a pedestal. The poses are very feminist, so I see myself being represented."



Vasyl Kondratuk, *Cha-Cha*, oil on canvas

Lana Matskiv, an accomplished artist and avid art collector who is a member of the Ukrainian Association of Visual Artists of Canada and the Women's Art Association of Canada, delivered the keynote address at the opening reception. Among the many highlights was her classification of Kondratuk's artistic life. "Any artist is constantly on the road to self-discovery

and in this sense, I want to put Vasyl Kondratuk into the category of avant-garde; someone who was always ahead of himself and his time.”

She also said of his enduring legacy, “Artists never die, but when they pass, they leave us with a sense of scarcity. This is it; Kondratuk’s artistic input is done. Today, we know what kind of an artist he had become by the end of his journey of self discovery. The best definition of an artist was made by Salvador Dalí. He said, ‘A true artist is not one who is inspired, but one who inspires others.’ Ladies and gentlemen, here is Vasyl Kondratuk, who is taking us on the promenade of inspiration.”



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 Magazine, and newspapers affiliated with the East Coast’s SaltWire Network.