

YURI KHYMYCH: FREEING THE IMAGE FROM EVERYTHING SUPERFLUOUS

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Yuriy Khymych worked with architecture all his life: he studied it as a scientist, depicted it as an artist. As a teacher he taught students to see, understand and love it. After all, one can truly understand only things they love. He had a keen sense of architecture: be it a temple or a monastery, a street or an entire city. He could create a sense of unique ambience in the picture, which is special in any place. This ambience accommodates the state of nature, air, light, mood, and the gaze of an artist who saw architecture from an unusual angle. The fact that Khymych had his own perspective and a special angle was mentioned by numerous researchers of his work.

Yuriy Khymych (1928-2003) belongs to the generation of artists who entered into art in the post-war years. Like many of his generation, he caught the wind of freedom coming “from under the boulders” and responded to its call. But having withstood the trends of time, the ebb-and-float of various artistic trends, he remained true to himself, his own sense of beauty and understanding of life, which are deeper than any ideological restrictions. Khymych became aware of his vocation early, he chose his own path and followed it despite everything, leaving the historical changes that disturbed and divided the country in a way almost unnoticed. Perhaps due to this, he was able to paint so much as might suffice for several artists.

The creative path of Yuriy Khymych was quite smooth and, one might say, successful. He had a lot of exhibitions: since the 1950s, Yuriy Khymych’s solo exhibitions have been successfully held in Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Lithuania, Hungary, the USA, and Finland. His works were published in magazines, albums, postcards, he was granted many awards and titles: Honored Artist and Architect of Ukraine, member of the National Union of Architects of Ukraine and the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, Honored Artist, honorary member of the Academy of Architecture of Ukraine. Khymych’s works are kept in the National Art Museum of Ukraine, the Museum of History of Kyiv, art museums of Russia, the Baltic states, Poland and other countries, as well as in private collections of diplomats William Green Miller (US Ambassador to Ukraine in 1993-1998) and Carlos Pascual (US Ambassador to Ukraine in 2000-2003), His Beatitude Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan), businessman Vadym Novinsky (Ukraine, now deacon of the UOC-MP), president of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010), Natalia Yaresko (Ukraine), Krystyna Matsiv (Canada), Monica Frank (Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Ukraine in 2001-2005) and others. His triptych “Independence Day” decorates the Capitol –the House of Congress in Washington.

And yet Khymych has not been fully appreciated and studied. A lot has been written about him, he is considered a classic of Ukrainian fine art of the twentieth century, but in fact the artist’s work is still waiting for its researcher.

Childhood and Youth

Yuriy Khymych was born on April 12, 1928, in the city of Kamianets-Podilskyi, Khmelnytsky region, his father was an engineer, his mother was a teacher. It so happens that as a child, Yuriy and his family moved from place to place, but in every place, he discovered something important for himself, and each new place was a step towards his main vocation.

Yuri was only a year old when the family moved to a village of Chervone, Zhytomyr region, in 1929. Having grown up a little, the boy took up a pencil. In his memoirs, he wrote: “I used to draw, like all children, whatever I wanted and the way I wanted it: on leaves and in the margins of books. For some reason, my favorite character was a man on skates, or rather, on a skate, because this man had one leg. Therefore, I used to draw for myself, until my father brought me to the librarian of the Sugar Factory, Mykhailo Zarembo, who made brilliant copies (and even with oil paints!) of classical paintings, in particular “Zaporozhtsy” by Repin, “Ninth Wave” by Aivazovsky, and many more works by popular Russian, Ukrainian and Western European Masters. I still remember his apartment, covered with paintings literally from ceiling to floor, the smell of turpentine, boiled oil, brushes and pencils in cups. I stood there, fascinated. The friendly host gave me a piece of paper, pencils, and asked me to draw something. Thus, my first studies¹ began.

The very first touch of art deeply impressed the child’s soul and will be remembered for a lifetime, having sown a seed, which will then grow into a mighty tree that bears beautiful fruit.

In 1934, Yuriy and his mother fell ill with malaria, and they were advised to move. They settled in the village of Martynovka, near Kaniv, Cherkasy region. There was no mentor here but beautiful nature around: a large pond, deep ravines, cliffs, hills, all this was imprinted in the memory of the boy, who was sensitive to beauty and knew how to see it. In Kanev, Yuriy used to take an active part in school life, he developed a love of literature, music, tried to compose poems.

On the eve of the war, Khymych’s family moved to the town of Obodivka, Vinnytsia region. But in the summer of 1941, my father was mobilized to the front, so Yuriy and his mother were evacuated. Along with the most necessary things, he took an album and pencils with him, and on the way, he made sketches from memory: landscapes of Ukraine, its houses, gardens that now seemed so far away.

For four years – from 1941 to 1944 – Yuriy and his mother lived in Borisoglebsk, Voronezh region. Once again, Khymych was granted a chance of an amazing meeting by providence.

“And here, in Borisoglebsk, I had a lucky chance. In the House of Pioneers, I met a person who determined my life destiny – an artist, my favorite teacher, a sensitive person, a

¹ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych (manuscript of 1990-2000, kept in a private collection).

talented teacher Mykhailo Ilyinsky, who laid the basis of my drawing literacy, art culture, introduced me to high art and prompted me to create the first works from nature, and taught composition. Sometimes you would come to his house and he would also buy you a cup of milk. Drawing classes advanced quickly. First, they were still lifes, and then a human head and stature. We were drawing each other. There were about ten of us in the circle. We were good friends. But as for the fanaticism in drawing, I was probably the leader – I devoted all my free time to drawing.”²

Mykhailo Ilyinsky was a talented artist, teacher, graduate of the Leningrad Repin Institute of painting, a student of Ivan Goryushkin-Sorokopudov (1873-1954), who, in turn, studied under Ilya Repin. Thus, a thread stretched out from Ilyinsky to Khymych, connecting him with the Russian classical school of painting. By the way, he kept his reverence for Repin as artist for the rest of his life.

Ilyinsky did not just teach drawing in the House of Pioneers, without exaggeration, he was the heart of the cultural life of Borisoglebsk at that time. Here is the testimony of an eyewitness: “Mykhailo Ilyinsky had a workshop – a kind of “museum- hangar”, where those who loved and wanted to paint gathered. He was often visited by students of the country’s leading art universities –Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv – the young people whom he once taught painting. And I joined such a serious company. It was a blessing to learn from him. He wrote memoirs about his teacher; he told me so many interesting things that you can’t read in books and I liked to come to him even for no reason, when I wasn’t drawing, because talented young people always gathered around him, he united this team.”³

In 1945, in the year of the great victory, Yuriy graduated from school, moreover, with a gold medal, his graduation work was in verse, which was especially distinguished by teachers.

With the end of the war, it became possible to return to Ukraine. At the same time, Khymych’s father was discharged from the frontline, and the family was able to reunite again. They were allocated a room in a communal apartment, where fifteen other families lived. However, everyday difficulties were then common, and people lived in hope for the best. Yuriy’s caring parents did everything possible to ensure that their son could learn and develop. Moreover, the boy was an all-rounder: he played musical instruments, composed poems, created beautiful drawings. It was difficult to determine which talent was the key one for him. But a chance helped. Once Yuriy showed a series of his watercolors to a well-known artist in Kyiv, academician Oleksiy Shovkunenko, and he strongly advised the young man to study at an art university. In the same year, Khymych entered the Architectural Faculty of the Kyiv Construction Institute, to which he was accepted as a medalist without exams.

² From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

³ E. *Legchanova*. Halyna Mamrovskaya: “I want children to stop by my works.” URL: <http://cultinfo.ru/journal/2018-vesna/galina-mamrovskaya-ya-khochu-chtoby-u-moikh-rabot-ostanavlivalis-deti/> (accessed: 11.07.2021).

At the institute, his teachers were real professionals – Joseph Karakis, Yakiv and Mykhailo Steinberg, they nurtured Yuriy’s love of painting and architecture. Since then, architecture became the main character not only in his works, but also in his entire life.

According to the artist, the lessons of Mykhailo Steinberg, whom he considered his main teacher, were especially beneficial for him. Yuriy learned these lessons for the rest of his life. But, as Eastern wisdom says, “The teacher comes when the student is ready.” This student, ready not only to perceive but also to learn, was Yuriy Khymych.

The artist shared his memories of student years: “I must say that the Department of Drawing and Painting at the Architectural Faculty was quite strong. Professor of painting Mykhailo Steinberg, a man of a singular character and brilliant pedagogical talent, stood out against the general background. All his instructions were not given from a position of strength, but as a convincing display of own work. And his artwork was beautiful. Most of them featured architectural motifs combined with prominent figures. The technique was watercolor, although he also had an impressive command of oil. A great master of generalization, he turned an ordinary motif into something epic and monumental. This way, the most seemingly simple still life looked monumental and complete. It was from him that I borrowed something of that manner in which the line acquires great significance. Watercolors were combined with charcoal drawing or an active pencil usage. Later, I traced a similar approach in the works of Lanceray, Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Dobuzhinsky, Benois, Bilibin, Lukomsky, whom I always loved and even adored.

It was under the influence of these masters that I began to develop as an artist, and despite numerous technical disciplines on the curriculum, painting and drawing classes were my main activity. Even purely architectural assignments were solved through the prism of their design in watercolors or ink – romantically, with clouds, weather conditions and so on, which were given a lot of attention”⁴.

Another fragment of memoirs shows how sensitive Yuriy Khymych was, in particular, to art: “A qualitative leap forward in my work occurred in 1948 during an internship in Leningrad. It was there, in the museums, that I saw the original artworks by the masters I mentioned: Benois, Lanceray, and Bilibin. The majestic architecture of famous ensembles, especially at white nights, captivated me and sunk deep into my heart. For the most part, I sketched the ensembles – either embankments with palaces, or dilapidated buildings of Tsarskoye Selo, or backstreets of St. Petersburg in the Kryukov Canal area, and the like. When I brought the works and showed them to Steinberg, he was overjoyed and began to praise me excessively. It’s been a long time, but even now I look at these works of mine with pleasure, too.”⁵

Khymych recalled his student years with joy, because he benefitted a lot from them, but he was also a student with whom it was easy and nice for teachers to work: as a fertile ground, he absorbed everything he was taught. Innate sense of color, precise drawing, musical gift of

⁴ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

⁵ Ibid.

composition and bright personality – all this distinguished Yuriy Khymych among his fellow students and helped him become an outstanding artist in the future.

His course mate, academician of architecture Anatoly Ignashchenko, remembers: “I studied together with Khymych. His student work was somewhat reminiscent of the early Roerich, Bilibin, but he went his own path. It was obvious that a new talent has arisen, not yet strong, but still a talent. Once I was painting sketches, painted an alley after the rain in the Botanical Garden. Suddenly Khymych approached me. It turns out that he was doing sketches there, too. We looked at his works: he was painting at the same time, in the same place as I was, but his watercolors were a class above. Thus, everything was decided: I became an architect, and Khymych became an artist.”⁶

It won't be to the point to call Khymych's works, both of those years and later, architectural graphics, which most architects usually have a good command of – his case is somewhat different. His works are full-value paintings, although most often he used the materials that are typical of graphics: paper, watercolors, gouache, ink, and sometimes tempera. The artist's gift is clearly visible already in Khymych's student works: vibrant watercolors, in which one can feel the freshness of colors even today.

⁶ V. *Platonov*. Yuriy Khymych: portrait on the backdrop of domes. URL: https://zn.ua/SOCIUM/yuriy_himich_portret_na_fone_kupolov.html (accessed: 11.07.2021).

Army. Postgraduate studies. Academy

The institute was followed by the military service. Khymych was dispatched to build the main base of the Black Sea Fleet. For many, this would be a significant obstacle to creativity, but not for Khymych.

That is how he described it: “Five years passed, and my studies at the institute were completed. The outstanding scientist Stepan Kolotov wanted to enroll me at his Department of Descriptive Geometry, so that I could defend a thesis in the field of drawing to become an architect. Mr. Kolotov belonged to the pre-revolutionary cohort – a highly intelligent person, very well versed in art, who showed us, a small group of students, reproductions of works by various artists, analyzing them, and examined our works, commenting on everything and making recommendations.

Thus, the post-graduate studies worked out the best way possible. But the military enlistment office intervened, and I, like many other students who received the rank of engineering officer while studying at the institute, was enrolled to the army and sent to construction site. I was appointed foreman in the city of Sevastopol – and therefore my dreams were left behind, as well as my parents who wept together with me at parting. What was awaiting ahead? Still not knowing what was coming, I took a few albums, paints, and pencils with me. I put on my father’s greatcoat, and in the summer of 1950, I went to Sevastopol, where I started working on a construction site. What I did immediately– literally on the first day, I began to sketch landscapes of Sevastopol. And regularly, throughout the entire period of military service, all my free time (free again) I did not part with pencil and paints.

I was fortunate (again) to be sent to this city – it was warm. I’ve been out in nature all year round. In the evening it was the Black Sea Fleet studio. I made my first friends, mostly among soldiers and sailors who studied in art universities, as well as architectural artists.”⁷

Sevastopol was the first real test of the artist’s pen. Khymych devoted all his free time to creativity: he painted landscapes – the sea, the city, as well as portraits of people, and often went to Bakhchisarai for sketches. The marine air, the amazing nature of the Crimea developed a special sense of freedom in him, his brush stroke acquired virtuosity, richness of color and its most subtle nuances.

There is a story associated with this period that resembles a popular joke, but apparently it took place.

After returning from Sevastopol, Khymych called Mykhailo Steinberg, as he was willing to show his work to the teacher.

“Drop in, Yura, and bring sketches. Even right now. I’d love to see them.”

“It won’t work. I want to invite you to my place.”

⁷ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

“You are much younger than me, Yuriy, and it is much easier for you to reach me. Besides, you have not visited me for a while and will be able to see my new paintings.”

“Unfortunately, it will be difficult for me to do this. The sketches I painted during my service weigh more than forty kilograms. I even had to hire a baggage handler at the train station to carry my sketches to a taxi.”⁸

Everything accumulated could not be kept under wraps, and the first exhibitions and first reviews followed, making the name of the young artist widely known.

In 1952, Yuriy Khymych's works were presented at his first solo exhibition “Sevastopol – Bakhchisarai” in the House of Architects in Kyiv. A year and a half later, another of his exhibitions opened – “Ship Side” with views of Sevastopol. In 1953, an exhibition of Khymych's watercolors “Monuments of Crimean Architecture” was held in the House of Architects in Kyiv.

The media wrote a lot about the young artist's works, and they received a high rating evaluation of great masters, in particular, Tetiana Yablonska, Mykhailo Deregus, Oleksiy Shovkunenko.

However, not everything was serene. The artist himself recalled the mixed reaction to his first exhibition in 1952: “I gave there several watercolors depicting Sevastopol, under the general name “Sevastopol sketches”. These were bright, sunny works that depicted the streets and squares of the city with new architecture, remnants of ruins and crowds of people. Just some ordinary sketches. And once the newspaper “Krasnaya Zvezda” published an article by graphic artist Bibikov, which struck me. I was impressed, because my name stood out. But how? “...Against the backdrop of the entire exhibition, which breathes realism, the formalistic trickery of Lieutenant Khymych causes general bewilderment” and so on in the same way. I was very upset and didn't know where to go.

When a couple of weeks later another article by the famous artist Yar-Kravchenko appeared in the magazine “Ogonyok”, where, on the contrary, he praised my work as masterfully done, major, etc., I understood that criticism is like a prostitute – you can talk about one subject in one way or another. Since then, I used to encounter such opposing opinions about my work. So, I developed a kind of shell of thick skin. And I worked almost without responding to various reviews – both in the review books that were at exhibitions, and in periodicals, etc. As Pushkin said in his famous “Monument” poem: “Accept indifferently praise and slander and never challenge a fool.” And then I received a letter from Voronezh from a friend of my Borisoglebsk youth, Valery Shaposhnikov, where he quoted Dante as saying: “Follow your own way, and let people say what they like.” Of course, it's nice to hear positive reviews and unpleasant to hear negative ones. But the main thing is to keep working no matter what.”⁹

⁸ A. Steinberg, E. Mishchenko. On the eve of a global catastrophe. URL: <http://loveread.ec/contents.php?id=52275> (accessed: 11.07.2021).

⁹ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

Anyway, the young artist was noticed, and the President of the Academy of Architecture of the Ukrainian SSR Volodymyr Zabolotny invited Khymych to work at the Academy. The latter accepted this offer with great enthusiasm.

The Academy of Architecture had just organized a division for studying the history of Ukrainian art, and Khymych was offered the position of an artist there. Simultaneously, he studied at a post-graduate school. The work was interesting: his duties included collecting materials on the history of Ukrainian art, sketching architectural monuments, interiors, copying monumental wall paintings of the most outstanding monuments, expeditions to Ukraine. He later recalled: “It was then that the most significant stage in my life began. I was young, energy was overflowing. I was busy doing what I loved and was sketching incessantly and tirelessly to the point of calluses on my palms.”¹⁰

One of the researchers of Khymych’s artwork also quotes his words about this period: “There’s nothing better for me than painting, and here comes the task: paint architectural monuments, make documentary and artistic sketches of the historical buildings’ interiors, copy wall paintings and frescoes, collect materials on the history of Ukrainian Art. It wasn’t a job but a real grace sent by providence. I didn’t write my thesis – I ‘painted it through’.”¹¹

In fact, Yuri Khymych presented a series of research sketches under the research issue “Decorative and Artistic Means in the Interior of Public Buildings” as a final work to complete his postgraduate studies. This work was accepted, a certificate of completion of postgraduate studies was issued, but without defending his thesis, of course, he could not receive the scientific degree of Candidate of Sciences.

However, the artist did not regret about it. He wrote: “I didn’t become a Candidate of Science, but I painted extensively and with strong motivation, and I think I achieved a lot in the non-dissertation area.”¹²

For ten years – from 1954 to 1964 – Yuriy Khymych worked at the Academy of Architecture of the Ukrainian SSR. First as a junior researcher, and since 1957 as a senior artist of the Department of the History of Ukrainian Art. Engaged in artistic recording of architectural monuments and interiors of historical buildings, Khymych constantly visited architectural sites and made their field survey. By his own confession, he benefited a lot from this work. He was forever inspired with love for the historical past, came to understand that ancient culture is not a vanishing model, but an eternal revelation that will never lose its relevance. Exploring ancient monuments, copying monumental paintings, Khymych entered into a dialogue with the past, a living dialogue in which he discovers eternal beauty, the spiritual dimension of culture, and the highest sense of artistic creativity. He understood that even a copy could become not just a take of an external shape, but an insight into the essence of things. This is how ancient icon painters worked, for whom art was a form of ministry, austerity, prayer, and gratitude to the Creator. For

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ V. Platonov. Yuriy Khymych: portrait on the backdrop of domes.

¹² From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

Khymych, sketching monuments and copying murals was not a mechanical job – he delved into the creative process of medieval masters who created unique temples and amazing frescoes. He made copies of the paintings with particular zeal, seeking to capture through them the rhythm of a painter’s brush movement and the logic of paint application, to feel the painter’s inner motivation and respond to it. It was a truly creative process. Thus, as the doctor of art history Hryhoriy Logvyn noted, “Khymych’s copies, although technically accurate, can be called artistic interpretations.”¹³

In these works, Yuriy Khymych can be compared with the outstanding Russian artist-restorer Adolf Ovchinnikov (1931-2021). They were people of the same generation and, I would say, had a common inner zeal. Ovchinnikov was starting out in the same post-war years, devoting his entire life to studying and copying medieval art. For over sixty years, he worked at the Ivan Grabar all-Russian art Scientific and Restoration Center and during this time made hundreds of copies and reconstructions of old Russian, Georgian, Syrian monumental and easel paintings. Both of them – Ovchinnikov and Khymych – were not just researchers of historical and cultural monuments, they were discoverers of the world of medieval art unknown to many at that time – the beautiful, great, and meaningful world.

While exploring architectural monuments, Khymych learned a lot from ancient art and was quite ready for serious monumental work. Unfortunately, as in those days it was impossible to paint churches, and Soviet interiors and Khymych’s paintings were hardly compatible, he was not craving for this either. Nevertheless, his copies of ancient frescoes can be considered as independent works that have their own artistic and academic value.

The copies made by Khymych were repeatedly displayed at exhibitions, in particular in the Lviv State Museum of Ukrainian Art in 1964-1965, more than a hundred works of the artist were presented at the exhibition “Monuments of Architecture and Monumental Painting of Ukraine”.

However, perhaps the largest exhibition was held in 2018 in Kyiv in the hall that is part of the St. Sophia Cathedral estate, unfortunately, after the death of Yuriy Khymych. The exhibition was dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the artist. The exhibition showed his copies of wall paintings of wooden churches in Galicia, which he performed while working at the Academy of Architecture, as well as other works. The exhibition, prepared by the National Reserve “St Sofia of Kyiv” together with the capital’s Gallery “KalitaArtclub”, was curated by gallery owner Tetiana Kalyta, art critic Svyatoslav Yarynyh and artist Mykhailo Khymych, the author’s son. Tetiana Kalyta said at the opening of the exhibition: “Making copies of the wall painting, he performed a scientific task and, of course, could not make any changes of his own, on the contrary – it had to be an accurate reproduction. But we can’t help but see and feel the artist’s presence in every work: his breathing, his gesture, his own plasticity.”¹⁴

¹³ Spoken message by Yu. Khymych.

¹⁴ L. Goncharenko. Yuriy Khymych. The mysterious path of talent. URL: <http://www.golos.com.ua/article/301090> (accessed: 11.07.2021).

There were many exhibitions of Yuriy Khymych both during his lifetime and after his death. But every time it turns out that what the artist has created is almost ungraspable, and we are constantly discovering new facets of his talent.

During his years at the Academy, Khymych made business trips to almost all of Ukraine, in particular Crimea, Chernihiv, Lviv, Uzhgorod, Drohobych, visited the Polish cities of Krakow, Lublin, Vistula, copied numerous frescoes, mosaics of St. Sofia and interiors of other temples of ancient Kyiv, where the works of Ukrainian masters are present. This work resulted in hundreds of paper sheets with images of ancient cities and historical sites, numerous copies of wall paintings.

These works are interesting and authentic as works of art and at the same time valuable from a scientific perspective, given that the monuments in the Soviet Union were not only protected, but also often destroyed. Well aware of this, Yuriy Khymych sought to capture the historical appearance of ancient cities, where the new buildings were intensively erected, and, as a result, the landscape was being changed by industrial construction.

Yuriy Khymych was not only an artist who observed and recorded reality, but also an active defender of cultural monuments. Now they would say that he took a stance of active citizenship. This is clearly evidenced by one episode. In the early 1960s, Yuriy Khymych and his colleague Serhiy Kryzhitsky were on a business trip to Transcarpathia, where they were supposed to find a list of monuments that would receive state protection, and make sketches of churches that were doomed to demolition. In Khrushchev's time, the anti-religious campaign became widespread and many ancient temples were ruthlessly destroyed, so the researchers only had time to record them for history. But Khymych and his colleague did not want to put up with this situation. Upon returning to Kyiv, the artists prepared a report in which they proved that real masterpieces of wooden architecture, which the country should be proud of, were doomed to destruction, that these unique cultural monuments were worthy to be preserved. And, oddly enough, their call was heard – wooden temples were saved from destruction. To date, many Transcarpathian churches are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List as significant monuments of world culture.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for other monuments that Khymych depicted while traveling around the country. Many places in the former Soviet Union already looked completely different: cities being rebuilt, ancient temples demolished, nature destroyed by man. But the paintings by Khymych still exist, allowing us to see these places the way he saw them and captured them for future generations. Perhaps his efficiency is partly due to this: he wanted to leave behind as much of the beauty that he saw and loved as possible, realizing that nothing lasts forever, and time and people ruthlessly destroy any priceless inheritance.

Becoming a Master

From an early age, incredible efficiency and thirst for creativity were Khymych's inherent traits, which was also noted by his teachers. He stated in his memoirs: "Perhaps the main thing is still work, inspired work and incessant work, which is the basis of skill. Sole talent without labor is not a talent. The work to the point of absorption in it – perhaps this is the work that nurtures skill and craftsmanship."¹⁵ He really worked hard, tirelessly, was constantly in search, and even having found something, he never remained satisfied with his achievement but moved on.

In 1957, the Central House of Architects of the Union of Architects of the USSR in Moscow hosted the exhibition "Monuments of Architecture of Ukraine", where more than a hundred watercolors by Yuriy Khymych were exhibited. The exhibition was a great success: the artist was referred to as the best watercolorist of the Soviet Union. But Khymych was absolutely not going to repose on his laurels – any exhibition for him was only an incentive for further work.

It is interesting to look over the early watercolor series by Yuriy Khymych, which were created during his student years and upon graduation from the Institute. Already in the watercolors of the 1950s, the hand of a master is obvious: brilliant command of watercolors, a technique where the deceptive simplicity is achieved by high accuracy of brush strokes on paper.

Khymych was very impressed by St. Petersburg, then Leningrad in Soviet times. It was at that time and still remains a mecca for artists: the Hermitage, the Russian Museum, temples and palaces, bridges and channels – everything in the city was imbued with art.

Khymych told about his very first trip to Leningrad as a student: "In 1948, we, architectural students, were dispatched to Leningrad for the so-called "internship in finishing works". I was appointed in pair with Serhiy Filatov, who, like me, was infected with a bacillus of visual arts. So, we got registered for the site (it seems that a military institution was being restored). We agreed with the local foremen that we would not interfere with them and, having emotionally familiarized ourselves with the works, did not appear there again. At the end of the internship, we made some reports using textbooks, having spent all our time on museums and sketches (drawings, watercolors) of architectural monuments of this city-the former capital of the Empire. Needless to say, the sights are refined, strict, and classic. And white nights on top of that. We returned to the hostel around one or two o'clock in the morning. And museums – I got acquainted with the works (based on reproductions) of Benois, Dobuzhinsky, Bilibin, Ostroumova-Lebedeva, other painters of "Mir Isskustva" (World of Art) and partly under the influence of what I saw I worked, laying as a basis an energetic drawing and further work in watercolors.

¹⁵ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

I was more captivated not by the ceremonial St. Petersburg with its St. Isaac's Cathedral, but, so to speak, by the "peripheral" areas of the Kryukov Canal, Sennaya Square, in the suburbs of Leningrad, especially Pavlovsky, etc. Works made over forty years ago have survived by now. These are mostly quarter-sheet watercolors, still somewhat restrained in color and even somewhat timid, but quite poetic works that I could still exhibit today. When I brought all this to Kyiv and showed to Mykhailo Steinberg, he praised them very much and said that I had got to a whole new level in watercolors and drawing mastery."¹⁶

After the first meeting with Leningrad, there were others to come, and during each one Khymych insatiably painted this city, as if he wanted to absorb it, to depict every corner of it. This resulted in a series of watercolors dated 1949-1957. A subtle, vibrant, in some places almost monochrome scale conveys cold humidity of the air and the strict aristocratic character of the city. Leningrad of white nights almost evanesces on a paper sheet, but how monumental and unshakable is the architecture that asserts the victory of man over the elements of nature and at the same time finds harmony with it. Reflections on the water of channels, openwork grilles of cast iron fences, curved bridges and slender buildings, all these convey the artist's fascination with the beauty of Northern Venice. Of course, here you can see the influence of the artists of the "Mir Isskustva" (World of Art), but at the same time one can clearly hear Khymych's own voice, notice his stringent take and light hand.

Before 1957, he produced a series of watercolors titled "Central Asia (Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent)", in which the character of painting was completely different, because nature was different, culture was different, and the perspective of the artist who perceived Central Asian exotics with interest became different.

Let's turn again to Khymych's memoirs, where he refers to his trip to Central Asia: "In Bukhara and Samarkand in August there was a great heat wave of 45 °C in the shade and 60 °C in the sun. It was hard, I lost appetite. I felt increasingly thirsty... and the water was muddy. The watercolors dried out very quickly. I had to work hard. Accordingly, I managed to do a lot. For all the time, only one day was gray, for the rest of time it was relentless heat. But I managed to see the real Central Asia. Exciting motifs, ethnic architecture, people in ethnic clothes – all these were inspiring and all these together overruled both heat and lack of appetite, and I was working on and on incessantly."¹⁷

The result of this trip was a wonderful series of vivid sketches of landscapes of ancient cities – Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent. The colors are bright, the sunlight and shadow sides of streets and buildings are contrasting, hot earth and sky seem red-hot, and only the blue domes of madrasas and mosques seem cool. People and donkeys move as if in slow motion, and all this spectacle fascinates with some inner magic, you want to watch it all over again. The vividness of color, the sketchiness of the drawing, the impressionism of color palette in this series attests to Khymych's gradual but confident making as a master of watercolors.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

As for many artists, the Khrushchev Thaw became for Yuriy Khymych the time of discovery, search and experiments. While in the early period he was fascinated by the artists of “Mir iskusstva” (World of Art) – Lanceray, Benois, Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Dobuzhinsky – with their refined color, vibration of the light-air ambience, spatial compositions, etc., at that time he was discovering the French painters – Cezanne, Matisse, Derain. Albert Marquet became his favorite. Under their influence, Khymych came to generalize the shape outlined by a black contour, the planeness where space is concentrated, to bold combinations of local contrasting colors. However, not being essentially an imitator, Khymych did not become an epigon of the French artists, he was inspired by them, but did not follow them closely, his works always present an individual view, a personal statement.

In the 1960s, Khymych was in active search for his own artistic language that could convey his passionate and at the same time deeply contemplative attitude to life. This can be traced in a series of watercolors in Kyiv (1960s), Lviv (1962) and Bakhchisarai (1964).

The Kyivan series is often called post-impressionistic, since after the subtle watercolors of Sevastopol, Leningrad, and Central Asia, the artist finds a new way of expression: he uses rich color, concise drawing, and brutal forms. The image is created by the pulsating energy of color, powerful silhouettes, and plasticity of lines. The new language allowed him to convey his beloved Kyiv in a new way: the stone bulk of St Sofia against the background of a burning sunset, the impregnable monolith of the Golden Gate, the Pechersk Lavra towering over the Dnieper in its grandeur – these images are stunning and memorable. And most importantly – they are surprisingly fresh, bold and original, even avant-garde, at least for that time.

The landscapes of Lviv are more delicate, the artist seems to tread carefully through the streets of the ancient city, to carefully explore and discover its richness: the Old Church, the Town Hall, Rynok (Market) Square, the Gunpowder Tower, medieval houses, paving stones, narrow streets. The city in the works of Khymych appears so near and dear, so hospitable. In this series, the color palette is soft, slightly subdued, as is the tint of the stone in which Lviv was built. But there are works in bright colors, in particular, colorful houses standing close to each other as in a festive round dance. It seems that the artist changes the angle every time to see the street in its characteristic disguise – this is what creates a moving dynamic within the series.

Khymych fell in love with Lviv at a first glance, he depicted it multiple times. He wrote about his work in this city: “I remember the first time I came to Lviv. Very early, when the sun began to rise, I went out into the square in front of the Bernardine Cathedral and looked around. I was so impressed by this building that I was standing for a long time and could not get enough of it, and there is the Church of the Three Saints, Rynok Square, the Cathedral Church – all of that being so robust, so refined, so unequalled. I got so carried away with my work that I went to lunch or breakfast with irritation, because precious time was spent on it. Sometimes, sipping soup or some kind of borscht, I even carried a spoon past my mouth and touched my ear, and then only caught myself and ate correctly, according to the rules.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid.

In 1964, Khymych created a series of landscapes of Bakhchisarai, and it also has its own special character. These works are imbued with warm Crimean sun. Bright sonorous colors create a festive mood. The elegant palace of Bakhchisarai looks like it comes from the fairy tale “One Thousand and One Nights”. Sharp minarets rise above the roofs of houses stuck to the mountains above which extends the eternal sky. And all of them vibrate, talk among themselves, as in an oriental bazaar. People roam the streets. They do not seem to be our contemporaries, but people from the distant past, from the time when the life of the Crimean Khanate was in a full swing and Tatars, Greeks, Karaites, Turks lived here, who created this whole multi-voiced, multilingual, colorful world. Khymych was able to create that kind of an ambience in his paintings that the viewer, being deeply immersed in it, at least for a while imagined himself inside the created picture.

One can say that the works of the 1950s and 1960s laid a deep foundation for Khymych’s special, vivid, imaginative style. In his early works, the artist was attracted to the classics, then to impressionism and post-impressionism, in some years he returned to realism, but already enriched with the discovered energy of color and plasticity of form, the ability to build an image in such a way that he does not go into details and trifles, but shows the main characteristic and individual thing. “In order for an artwork to succeed, one must strip it of everything superfluous without regret,” Yuriy Khymych told his students. And this ability to cut off all the excessive in the name of the main things can be called the artistic credo of the master.

The merit of Yuriy Khymych was also that he raised a powerful layer of architectural and historical themes. He did not just paint landscapes – he painted a living history, touching the very nerve of the culture of the place where he stayed – Kyiv or Leningrad, the Crimea or the Russian North.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the country, then the unified Soviet one, was developing interest in history and native antiquity. For decades, this interest was held back by ideology, and at a time when ideology weakened, curiosity about history spread to wide circles, especially the intelligentsia. At this time, Vladimir Soloukhin wrote his “black boards” – a story about ancient icons, Andrey Tarkovsky shot his film “Andrey Rublev”, Sergey Parajanov – “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors”. Folklore expeditions traveled to the North, archaeological expeditions to the South, and collectors hunted for antique church items. Artists painted landscapes with temples and huts – this was becoming a trendy subject in the artistic environment. But once in this mainstream, Yuriy Khymych not only does not merge with it, he stands out vividly, remaining the one he was: original, authentic unique. His interest had nothing to do with trends, it was deeper and stronger: the artist went on when many of his colleagues did not think about it, and remained faithful to his theme even after this surge subsided.

It should be noted that ideological officers did not welcome Khymych’s interest in church architecture, claiming that his works were undermining of Soviet foundations, being close to religious propaganda. More than once, his paintings were removed from exhibitions, in which too much emphasis was laid on the past, while the contours of the “bright future” were not obvious. Critics could not find in the artist either the pathos of a Communism builder or the

romance of Komsomol labor detachments, or the style of social realism, and this aroused suspicion.

The most famous case of this kind is the exhibition “Russian and Ukrainian Architecture of the XI-XVIII centuries” (watercolor, gouache), organized in 1966 in Kyiv under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR and the Kyiv State Museum of Russian Art. This exhibition presented about two hundred works not only by Khymych, but also by other artists, and these were mainly ancient cities and temples. A few days after the opening, the exhibition was closed as ideologically harmful at the request of party members.

Against the background of official Soviet art, Khymych’s works, of course, looked alien – in his ideological and artistic search, he clearly was not in line with his party comrades’ vision. No, Khymych was not a dissident, he just lived in his own world, which did not interfere with the Soviet ideology. He was interested in history, culture, beauty, and memory. He devoted all his time and all his talent as an artist and as a researcher to them. But, unfortunately, the reality of that time was dire, and therefore not everything turned out as he wanted. In particular, the album of architectural monuments of Ukraine, on which Yuriy Khymych worked during ten years, was never published for the said ideological reasons. But, despite everything, the artist continued to work: critics came and went, and the tasks and goals set by him remained.

Don't remain satisfied with what's been achieved

Already as a young man, Khymych fell in love with watercolors and brilliantly mastered this technique. The subtlety, transparency and awe of his watercolor landscapes is amazing. The light haze of the crowns of young trees, the looseness of the snow, the roughness of the stone wall – all this, so accurately expressed by the artist's brush, is almost noticeable in his paintings. His early Sevastopol and Leningrad sketches, landscapes of Samarkand and Bukhara inherit the best traditions of the Russian watercolor school of the XIX – early XX century. Quite deservedly, he is considered the best watercolorist of the Soviet period.

But Khymych was interested in trying different techniques. And he was always happy to discover everything new. He wrote about this in his memoirs: “When I was working at the Department of Drawing and Painting at the Kyiv Construction Institute, I had a friend – a new teacher, Oleksandr Borovykov. He is also a very talented artist who graduated from the Art Institute. Once he showed his unusual works – monotypes. But unlike the well-known oil paints, which are created with the help of oil paints, they are watercolors. This is a rather complicated technique, when an artist draws what he likes with watercolors on a solid substrate on a soap emulsion. Since the surface is smooth, fancy ideas are evoked. All this is dried up, covered with wet paper, and then printed.

As always, I got carried away with this business. Moreover, this is the work to be done in the workshop, and not from nature. You think more thoroughly about what you have to do, and, accordingly, the sketch turns into a complete piece. This technique is peculiar of architecture as a subject, first of all when you depict old cities with shabby buildings, fortresses, and so on. Entire series were created using this technique, such as “Wooden Architecture of Kyiv Region”, “Lviv”, “Finland” and others.”¹⁹

Continuing to experiment, Khymych once turns to gouache. This was quite unexpected and not very clear to many of his colleagues. Usually, professional artists are not very fond of gouache, considering the expressive range of this technique more limited than of watercolors. Although, for example, in the early twentieth century the artists of “Mir iskusstva” (World of Art) perfectly used gouache. But Khymych found his key to gouache and raised it to an incredible height. It was in the early 1960s.

Here is what the artist wrote: “Once, while traveling across the Pskov region, I tried to depict white temples watercolor technique during white night. It turned out to be quite good, but weightless. White architecture, which seemed to dissolve on a light background, lost its weight (and it is also very weighty in real life, this Pskov architecture). I began to mix gouache whitewash into the watercolors, it appeared to produce a good effect, and I started working with gouache. And as my passion for this material became more and more overwhelming, I worked

¹⁹ Ibid.

more and more with it. < . > Here the so-called “table paper” appeared on sale (colored on one side, white on another side; spongy paper good for gouache), and I gradually switched from watercolors to gouache, and even on this loose paper. It started working out a little. I’ve been mastering this technique for ten years. I achieved easiness of work. It was difficult at first, but gradually it became smoother.”²⁰

Gouache had remained Khymych’s main artistic instrument for many years. It ensured faster work than watercolors, which was in line with his temperament. The coating property of gouache made it possible to achieve a greater concentration of color, structured shape, draw not only with a brush, but also with a stalk or any other item as necessary.

Initially, Khymych was influenced by his older friend, artist Serhiy Otroshchenko, with whom he traveled a lot to different parts of the Soviet Union. Otroshchenko also worked in gouache, loved generalized forms, boldly developed color ratios and built spatial plans. Especially interesting are his landscapes of the Russian North. But very quickly Khymych “overtook” his friend and developed his own style. The works of his Northern series make an amazing impression: temples grow out of the ground like mushrooms, the huts of the city of Mezen look like giant ships; intricate, tower-shaped wooden temples built without a single nail soar into the sky. Freedom and power are conveyed by these works of Khymych, painted vividly, energetically, expressively.

Khymych was born in Ukraine and lived here all his life (excluding several years of evacuation). He loved his land, the Ukrainian nature – southern, generous, loved the ancient architecture of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Transcarpathia. At the same time, he got a deep feel of and loved the Russian North, its inconspicuous beauty, its endless expanses, high skies, wooden temples and huts. Here is how he described his work in the North, in the Arkhangelsk region: “It was summer and there were white nights. And there were sights of wooden architecture. And there was the city of Kargopol, a city that, compared to others, was little visited by tourists and travelers, who often spoil that virginity, the cleanliness of places. For comparison, for example, in Venice or Amsterdam, there is no place for a needle to fall. So they say, as I personally have been neither to Venice nor to Amsterdam. But Lviv, or our Lavra, or St. Andrew’s descent, are overcrowded. Thus, near the city of Kargopol, which itself looks like an open-air museum, where stone temples are adjacent to wooden houses, there are two ensembles of wooden architecture – Saunino and Lyadiny²¹ <...> Lyadiny is thirty kilometers away. A small bus made scheduled trips there. As soon as we got into it, it started raining heavily. The roads are washed out, puddles are all around, dark clouds in the sky. But as soon as we arrived, the rain stopped. And it was about three or four pm. And now churches, bell towers, barns, buildings reappear. Everything looks richly dark against the background of the remnants of rain clouds. We are short of time. Twenty-four hours ahead. We set immediately to depict what we were seeing, which

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Now, respectively, the villages of Kiprovo and Gavrillovskoye in the Kargopol District of the Arkhangelsk region of the Russian Federation.

was very impressive. Here we found a storage room – a shed in which one could hang the finished work for drying up.

There was no need to choose the locations. From every point, an impressive picture was seen. And then there was the white night, such a magical twilight that can make a fabulous thing out of any ordinary object. Therefore, we (me and the artist – a wonderful artist – Serhiy Otroshchenko) got so carried away by the process that we didn't notice how morning came. Then the weather completely cleared up and we worked until the time when the same bus new flight arrived with a new flight, and we got on it exactly one day later, returned to Kargopol and only had dinner there. And then we went to bed. There were many such episodes in my life"²².

To draw so passionately day and night, one needs to be a passionate artist. Khymych was that kind of an artist.

Preferring gouache to all other techniques, Khymych, however, did not limit himself to it. He also used pastels: this is what we see in the Sevastopol series of 1983. He also made attempts at printed graphics. There were also pencil drawings: the Sevastopol cycle contains several hundred pencil drawings; the Lviv series contains ink and felt-tip pen drawings. His drawings in white wax chalk on black paper are beautiful: Khymych covered a sheet with black gouache, and then drew silhouettes of buildings on this velvet black. There are several hundred monotypings – Russia, Lviv, Kyiv; grisaille – a beautiful series on Kamianets-Podilsky.

But most importantly, no matter what Khymych painted – Kyiv or Lviv, Crimea or Armenia, Rostov or Moscow, Kyiv-Pechersk or Trinity-Sergius Lavra – he not only improved the once found style, by which we instantly recognize him, he always tried to create something new and got the best of a technique used – whether it was gouache, watercolor, monotyping, etc., and even more.

The same can be said about his choice of theme or place – Khymych would create everywhere with amazing freedom, originality, and skill. He painted famous places and historical monuments, as well as unknown abandoned corners, finding that unique image that can be called the “genius of the place”, his soul. The architecture in his paintings is not only inscribed in nature – it is its continuation, an organic part, without which it is impossible to imagine this or that corner of the Earth. Nowhere in his works architecture leaves the impression of either theatrical scenery, neither they are “elegant”. The pulse of life is perceptible in everything: the composition is built boldly, dynamically, the buildings are presented from an unusual angle, the streets meander whimsically, and the sky leans against the ground. Between Heaven and Earth, between man and the buildings he created, an intense dialogue is evolving, in which the viewer is also engaged.

It would seem that an artist, who has been painting landscapes with architecture for sixty years, should exhale, change the theme, and the viewer should just get bored with him. But this is not happening. Creativity is the way to go, and along the way Khymych is constantly discovering something new. Therefore, starting with a thorough description of the world,

²² From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

beautiful in every detail, which we see in his early watercolor pieces, the artist follows the path of focused attention and generalized form, relieving the artistic primary elements from all the mundane diversity: a color spot and a line, and through them – the Earth, the sky, man, building as reference points of the universe. It is no coincidence that in some series Khymych comes almost to abstraction, turning the landscape into pulsating compositions that, in their coloristic tension, seem to be about to sound. But still, he never crosses the line of figurativeness, nature is of great value to him. Khymych is not an abstractionist. Abstraction is impersonal, while for him the character, the appearance is important – the appearance of a city, a building, of nature. After all, as already mentioned, he painted not just architecture, but “portraits of buildings”. I would say – and portraits of countries. An example of this is the series titled “Armenia”, which Khymych created in 1971.

His Armenia has a pronounced national character, which integrates energy and softness, epicism and subtle lyrics. The vivid colors of this series by Khymych evoke the works of Martiros Saryan, a classic of Armenian painting. But we will not find direct allusions and even more so borrowings here. They have rather a common degree of coloristic tension. Saryan said: “Color is a real miracle! In combination with sunlight, it creates the inner content of the form, expresses the essence of universal existence.”²³ That’s what Yuriy Khymych could have said. His Armenia is as vibrant, sunny and shrill as the sound of a duduk.

Many researchers noted the talent of Khymych as a colorist. And this is true: along with the perspective, it is the colorway that makes his work unique. But it is impossible not to notice that the artist “dispenses” color differently in different series: the color in his Armenian series is bright, hot, and in the St. Petersburg series it is restrained and cool. Moscow and Zagorsk (Soviet name of Sergiev Posad) are depicted in a festive and multi-colored scale, and Lviv is designed in strict colors, close to the gray stones of his houses and the paving stones of his streets.

We don’t often see people in Khymych’s paintings. They appear either to enliven and convey the color of the place, or to set the scale. And sometimes as a sign of the presence of man in the world which lives its own life. This may seem strange to some of us, but for Khymych, such an awareness certainly made sense. No, he didn’t ignore people, and he also has portraits in his artistic inventory. But, observing life, he saw it in his own way: buildings, temples and entire cities were for him not a habitat for people, but an independent part of a huge world in which special non-utilitarian relations exist between the realities, as expressed in a combination of volumes, silhouettes, contours, a dialogue of colored masses, the rhythm of lines.

However, people still appear in his works, in particular in the early Sevastopol and Central Asian series. And in the Moscow series, Khymych depicts a lot of people on the streets – this is also part of the portrait of the capital, the turbulent life of the capital seems to splash out on his paintings, and people make an irreplaceable and organic part of the image of Moscow. Looking at the paintings of the Moscow series, you almost hear the hum of a big city, living

²³ Martiros Saryan: Color is a real miracle. URL: <https://vstrokax.net/kultura/martiros-saryan-tsvet-eto-istinnoe-chudo/> (accessed: 12.07.2021).

brightly, dynamically, at a tense pace. But when Khymych paints, for example, the Novodevichy Monastery or certain Moscow churches, there is silence, time seems to slow down. And the bright colors here do not shout but sing.

Industrial landscapes are quite rare in Khymych's work. They certainly are available. In the early Sevastopol watercolors, we see the port, construction cranes, in the series "Along the Dnieper" the industrial landscape prevails. But this is the exception rather than the rule. Architecture as a creation of human hands is closer to him than the world of machines, construction cranes, high-voltage towers and the like. Khymych remained a man of culture, and treated civilization with caution. It is no coincidence that when traveling around the city, he preferred walking, although in his native Kyiv, of course, he could use the metro, since the city is large and it is not always possible to quickly get to the other end of it. No, Khymych was not a retrograde, he simply felt that culture and art, like nature, are part of the original idea of the world, while civilization often destroys this idea.

The peak point of Yuriy Khymych's work falls on the 1970s and 1980s. At this time, the full potential of his talent was revealed. But his later works are also astounding, their energy does not fade but pulsates powerfully. Young people could envy him: in a similarly bold manner he worked with the form, his color was sonorous, his line was elastic. As he was getting older, long-distance trips were no longer up to his ability, so he focused on the image of Kyiv, which he loved and knew well, which he had drawn before and was ready to draw over again.

The artist's son recalls: "My father constantly wandered around Kyiv. He lived on minimal funds, so he did not use transport (except for the metro) and even more so taxis. He moved slowly, his hands behind his back, holding a canvas bag with an unassuming breakfast or a change of shoes. When he met friends on the streets, he used to plunge into half-an-hour talks with them. Now I understand that these trips were for him preparation for work, its cherishing – despite the fact that it itself was done almost lightning fast. Towards the end of his life, he often said that before you start working, you need to fully imagine the whole process from beginning to end, down to the smallest details. When he became very old and weak, he complained that he would soon die, because he could not make a drawing at one time, without a break for rest. The most terrible sin was for him the "forced character" of the work, while the greatest virtue, respectively, freshness and compositional accuracy."²⁴

²⁴ M. Khymych. City keys About the artist Yuriy Khymych: Memories of my Father, Artist Yuriy Khymych (1928-2003). URL: <https://antikvar.ua/klyuchi-ot-goroda-himich/> (accessed: 12.07.2021).

An artist. A teacher. A thinker

Yuriy Khymych created almost all his works en plein air, he loved nature, peered into it as if he wanted to penetrate beyond the limits visible to an eye. When we look at his paintings, even a familiar place seems to be seen for the first time, because Khymych saw it differently from us. And he could go back to the same places many times, and write them differently every time. Thus, in his native Kyiv, which he seemed to know by heart and where he could walk with his eyes closed, he returned to his favorite places over again and painted the same streets and the same monasteries and temples again. From his paintings, people study the city, as he is sitting again opposite St Sofia and painting it for the hundredth time. Khymych depicted St. Sophia church in various states: in the morning, at noon, at dusk, in summer, autumn, winter, under snow and surrounded by flowering trees, and so on. His images of St Sophia at different times of the day and at different times of the year can only be compared with Claude Monet's series of paintings "Rouen Cathedral", which the French artist painted at different times of the day. "I love St Sofia because it has an ageless soul," Khymych used to say. This can only be said about a living being. St Sofia was alive for him and adored by him. Perhaps this is the whole secret: the artist loved what he painted. He looked at nature, at architecture, at people with a loving look. Oscar Wilde wrote: "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder." But using the example of Khymych, you understand that not just in the eyes, but in the eyes of a person full of love – a person who loves life and the whole universe.

Khymych's favorite place was the Crimea, and he often went there and painted it at different times of the year. The Crimean series includes several hundred works, he worked on them in the 1970s and 1980s. These are works of the artist's mature period. The works make an amazing impression: the artist managed to capture eternity. Time seemed to have stopped. Mountains, usually painted in intense blue, are not so much an element of the landscape as metaphysical symbols, witnesses of eternity. Everything else – trees, houses with tiled roofs, people – are signs of a fleeting time: everything changes, leaving an invisible trace in the universe, and mountains stand, towering over the fleeting bustle of life.

There were places to which the artist returned more than once, and which he saw differently every time. Of course, the place changed, and he himself changed, and therefore the new works did not repeat the previously written ones: everything changed – mood, approach, angle. It is worth noting that for Khymych, the angle was extremely important: it was not just the point from which the artist looked at the object of his attention – it was his special optics. It is the angle that usually makes the composition of the work spectacular and builds the dynamics of the image. Even still lifes are created by the artist in the same way – finding a special perspective, building an internal space in which objects are not mechanically placed or randomly combined with each other, but are in interaction, in an active dialogue.

The artist's son Mykhailo Khymych recalls: "He was constantly painting, and when he worked at home, and not on expeditions, most often put several objects on the windowsill and played this simple plot against the background of the window in every possible way. He could also turn around in the other direction, take some of the things placed around the room, and, having built something out of them, quickly draw. Then it turned out that these still lifes were not made in a hurry at all, but were well-thought-out monumental compositions."²⁵

Many people tried to simulate Khymych's style, because his manner seemed so fascinating, so expressive and understandable. But it seems understandable only at first glance. For all his decorativeness and laconism, his manner is not superficial, but unique, therefore much of it remains a mystery. For example, it is not clear how a flat image can produce a spatial effect. It is not clear how architecture – whether it is a temple or a peasant hut, or a city estate – becomes a living image, retains its originality, I would say, individuality, its personality. Khymych himself said that he draws portraits of buildings. And this is true: in his paintings we see portraits of cities, temples, monasteries, villages. This is similar to how Adam gave names to animals, discovering and exploring the world just created by God. Khymych also discovered the world, he looked at it as if he had seen it for the first time. And from this primeval nature arose an image that was precise, unique, and vivid in its originality.

Khymych was able to pass on his love for creativity, for history, and for ancient architecture to his students. Almost all his life he was a lecturer in universities. In 1964-1985, he taught at the Kyiv Civil Engineering Institute (since 1971 as an associate professor, later as Professor of the Department of Drawing and Painting), since 1984 he was a teacher at the Kyiv State Art Institute (since 1991 as a professor). Over the years of teaching, he had developed his own program and a scientific and methodological guide on the specifics of teaching drawing and painting at the Faculty of Architecture. But in addition to the theories and techniques that certainly helped in teaching, the main thing in teaching was his work. Khymych's students reflected on the secrets of art, watching how the teacher works.

Khymych demanded a lot from students, but with respect, because he knew what creativity, work and talent were. If one quality is missing, everything crumbles. And he tried to discover talent, inspire creativity, teach how to work. He maintained a warm relationship with many of his students even after they completed their studies. They were grateful to him for his invaluable lessons, just as he was grateful to his teachers who helped him become the one he became. It is no coincidence that at the end of his life Khymych wrote not without pride: "My students work quite successfully as chief architects of cities, artists, restorers, and art historians. Many of them have well-deserved titles, are laureates of state awards. I have developed quite pleasant, even friendly relations with them."²⁶

While teaching others, Khymych never stopped self-study and self-development, and was constantly in search. And this dynamic of moving forward is clearly visible in his numerous

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

series, in each of which he searches for and finds new expressive means, a special way of presentation, a new compositional and coloristic solution.

Yuriy Khymych traveled a lot. According to his son, “He was a kind of record holder for the number of trips across the territory of the USSR and neighboring countries.” The artist wrote in his memoirs: “During my vacations, I traveled (with friends and alone) outside of Ukraine. It was at this time that exhibitions were held in the prestigious halls of Kyiv, Lviv, Moscow, etc. For the exhibition [at the Central House of Architects] in Moscow, I was awarded an artistic business trip to Central Asia (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva), and for exhibitions in Kyiv I was granted trips to Central Russia – Pskov, Novgorod, as well as to the Baltic states, etc. Frankly speaking, during the Soviet era, the travels, especially by rail, were cheap, and therefore, it was no problem to travel at your own expense, say, to the North, to Karelia or to the Arkhangelsk region, or to the South, to Georgia or Armenia. I was thrilled to work there. Yes, and on the October or May Day holidays (five days each) I was alert, and while my friends were sleeping, I got up in the dark, grabbed my painting accessories and painted, painted – in any weather, but always with joy and inspiration.”²⁷

Khymych traveled across the Soviet Union, visited foreign countries (Poland, Finland, Hungary) and worked everywhere, bringing a lot of landscapes from all trips. But as the artist wrote: “Of course, most of works were done in Ukraine. A lot has been done, and the further you go, the more you become convinced that there are probably no such regions in the world as ours in terms of beauty: diversity of nature, cultural monuments, which, however, are united by high spirituality and aesthetic unsurpassability.”²⁸

On all trips he used to take brushes, paints and a sketchbook, which was soon replaced by simple plywood, to which he attached a piece of paper when drawing. With such plywood, it is easier to travel, and you can cover yourself with it if it rains. Oh, how much this plywood has seen! If things could talk, this plywood could tell hundreds of stories that happened to Khymych during his plein-air.

The artist himself wrote about his equipment in his memoirs: “At first it was like everyone else: a sketchbook, paper glued on tablets, and so on. But I painted a sheet or two, and had to glue paper again. Time passes. Boards take up a lot of space. I got along with sheets and drawing pins, instead of tablets, just two plywood sheets. Thus, I had a whole supply of paper. And more water – a liter – and a small vessel – a quart or a cup. Paints, brushes, pencils and even breakfast – all placed in a small suitcase. Equipment for a day or two, as much as you need. Later, when I switched to gouache and a **whole sheet**, I carried with me one board, a backpack with paints, brushes and pencils, and a large bottle with water. I worked right on the ground, placing the board horizontally. I attached a sheet of paper onto it and painted this way. The finished work, after drying, was rolled up, and together with the rest of the sheets, a kind of bobbin was made, which was wrapped in oilcloth. I took up to a hundred of such sheets. I had to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

be confident that all these were transported from place to place without damage. Yes, and it's convenient – a backpack on your back, a board in one hand, rolled up paper in the other, that's it.”²⁹.

And here is another quote about the equipment from Mykhailo Khymych's memoirs of his father: “He had a suitcase with iron corners, where paints were put in glass and iron cans – similar to those used to paint fences. During the journey, my father threw away the empty cans and each time noted that the less paint is left, the more luxurious the painting turned out... my father's brushes deserve special comments. Having seen them during a visit, a famous French architect asked what they were. These were strange objects, more like stumps of sticks with something resembling bristles at the end. My father used them very rationally until they were completely erased.”³⁰

All this shows that for Khymych, the main thing in life was creativity, he paid full attention to it, here he improved and reached virtuosity, everything else was secondary.

It is well known that Khymych worked very quickly, one might say swiftly. He could stare into the distance for a long time, as if studying the area, absorbing it into himself, and then instantly ‘grasp’ the site with a few strokes of the brush, correct something and finish the piece, and now the image was born. Every line, every spot of color was put precisely and unmistakably, they seemed to come through autonomously in the space of the sheet, and the artist, as a conductor, integrated them into the overall harmony.

Often, when he painted his landscapes, people crowded around him, fascinated by the miracle of birth of a picture on a piece of paper, and not just a picture, but a transformed world, because Khymych saw much more than a person who looks at the city or landscape from that very point.

It would seem that when an artist is so immersed in his work, people might be a nuisance for him. But no, Khymych always communicated with the people who surrounded him when he painted his landscapes. He was asked questions and he answered them willingly.

There were a lot of unexpected meetings and interesting interlocutors on his way. He was always open to communication.

The artist's son notes: “My father had an amazing ability to communicate with people – they were attracted to him, and he did not drive them away from him. I would call him a light extrovert. When he was painting a house or a street, for some reason the locals were very happy about it, often taking out food to my father, inviting him to their house, asking about everything. It was a kind of endless communication... now, perhaps, we can say that it was a sort of sermon. And besides, about an hour after a ready-made work appeared before the people's eyes. By the end of the day, my father was usually very tired. He believed that if the day ended without

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *M. Khymych*. City keys About the artist Yuriy Khymych.

physical fatigue, then it was a matter of idleness – on such days he was dissatisfied with himself.”³¹

The artist himself wrote in his memoirs: “Wherever I traveled, the locals treated me favorably. When you hear – those people are good and those are bad – it is mostly the issue not with those people [discussed], but with those who communicate with them. Treat them well, and they will be grateful to you and help you in any way they can. And they helped him – they gave shelter, they offered a plate of borscht, and a cup of milk, and even (this was in Dagestan) took out a carpet and covered the ground on which he was sitting and working.”³²

Khymych often met people at his exhibitions. He was curious not only how his work was perceived by the audience, the people themselves were of interest to him, and he enjoyed communicating with them. Many people became his friends after such conversations.

The artist wrote in his memoirs about one meeting: “During an exhibition at the Museum of History of Kyiv, destiny brought me together with the US Ambassador, Mr. [William Green] Miller, who obviously liked my works. I am eternally grateful to him for his positive feedback on my work. There were many friends among Ukrainians from the diaspora, critics, artists, writers. I am grateful to everyone for their warm attitude towards me as an artist.”³³

And here is how Mr. Miller recalled these meetings: “For more than four and a half years, I visited Yuriy Khymych many times in his apartment near the University Botanical Garden, and over a cup of tea with a peanut muffin or a plate of delicious borscht, together with my wife Valentina and surrounded by their beloved cats, I looked through hundreds and hundreds of his paintings with great pleasure.”³⁴

Some curious cases also took place. For example, during the trip to Finland, which the artist mentioned in his memoirs: “It happened this way: the international magazine ‘Soviet Union’ published several of my works under the general title ‘Always Modern’, and an article about me was written by Iryna Holovan, an employee of St Sofia of Kyiv Museum³⁵. A Finnish citizen, Onni Johannes Niinikoski, the director of a typewriter factory, who, as it turned out, was an outstanding connoisseur of art, was subscribed to this magazine. He commended my work, wrote a letter to the editor of the magazine and expressed a desire to invite me to his place. The vehicle started spinning, which mostly delayed my departure, but eventually permission was granted, and I went to Finland in September 1969. I took a board, a roll of paper, gouache, and a new backpack with me, and for about three weeks I lived at Onni’s place, drawing on the streets of Helsinki, Porvoo, Turku, etc. Caring hostess Ilona Helvi put a huge sandwich in my case. I had my breakfast, then dined on the spot with this sandwich, and late at night I had a dinner at home. After breakfast, Onni would take me to the right place in the car and return to work, and

³¹ Ibid.

³² From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ V. Platonov. Yuriy Khymych: portrait on the backdrop of domes.

³⁵ We are referring to the edition: I. Holovan. Always modern // Soviet Union. 1968. № 4.

in the evening, I would take the bus home. And so it happened every day. Wonderful hosts, wonderful country! As a result, an entire series of works was created, which I exhibited in Kyiv, at the Society for Relations with Foreign Countries.”³⁶

Unfortunately, according to Soviet laws, all works created by Soviet artists were a national treasure, and the artist had no right to sell them or give them away (although many did) on his own, and therefore Khymych could not leave any of the works created in Finland to the hospitable host as a sign of gratitude. Then Mr. Niinikoski asked the artist to leave him his old suitcase as a souvenir, which was not subject to the ban by the Ministry of Culture of the USSR. And to this day, this suitcase of Khymych remains in Finland as a memory of an artist from Ukraine. So unexpectedly, Yuriy Khymych’s suitcase became a valuable artifact. And it is a vivid evidence of how ascetic Khymych was in everyday life and personal life. He used a minimum of things, he did not have a separate workshop, he worked in the open air in the summer, on trips, and in the winter – at home.

Here is how his son recalls it: “The room where we lived was very small – 12 square meters. The walls were filled with pots and icons that my father brought from his trips – often they were burned or damaged, withdrawn from destroyed iconostases. In the middle of room was a patch of free space – just a couple of square meters. My father would sit right on the floor and paint. When the work was finished, he poured half a glass of water on the floor and rubbed it to do a quick cleaning. The sheets were drying in the next room, where the old grandmother lived – they were placed somewhere on the cabinets, and cats ran over them, of which we had a full apartment.”³⁷

And also: “The way he dressed was very unassuming – today they would say ‘like a homeless man’, except that he was not dirty. For example, he could buy two pairs of the cheapest shoes, and if one pair cracked on top, and the second on the sole – he walked the streets in shoes with a whole sole, and near the institute he changed his shoes into a pair with a whole top, which was with him in a canvas bag. “So that no one can see,” he said.”³⁸

Presumably, Khymych could be perceived as a kind of eccentric artist with plywood instead of a sketchbook, with erased brushes that turned almost into a musical instrument in his hands, in old shoes and with a canvas bag, while he liked to talk to people, answered their questions even during his plein-air. He was constantly on the road, on trips, in creativity, in reflection. By all that he reminds of the Ukrainian philosopher Hryhoriy Skovoroda, who also wandered around the world, composed poems and talked to people about the meaning of life. Like Skovoroda, Yuriy Khymych could say: “The world tried to capture me, but didn’t succeed.”

Of course, unlike Skovoroda, Khymych was neither loner nor hermit, he had a beloved family, of which he also writes in his memoirs, a large circle of friends and students. He belonged to the generation of the sixties, who overlived their time, but even entering a

³⁶ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

³⁷ *M. Khymych*. City keys About the artist Yuriy Khymych.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

completely different era, preserved the integrity and purity of relations, as well as perception of life, in some ways romantic, in some ways sober, but not cynical, as in subsequent generations. They had ideals, and they lived their lives with their visor open.

Khymych's son shares memories of his father's friends: "This was the group of people who are usually called the Sixtiers. Those who gathered in our apartment or whom we visited, made part of an interesting, as they now say, subculture – they constantly communicated, exchanged ideas, showed each other their works, passed them over on and on. I never heard these people talk about, say, clothes and stuff."³⁹

Actually, the reason for being of Khymych and the people of his circle was in creativity, which cannot be commercialized, which is created not for sale, but for the soul, because the artist does not know how to live in any other way. Creativity does not depend on recognition, on awards and titles, it exists not for fame, but as the air to breathe. The artworks created by Yuriy Khymych are the real wealth he accumulated during his life. In his memoirs, which were written at the end of his life, the artist shares his reflections about this: "Sometimes I look through the works. Either when friends come, or alone. It is very interesting to contemplate oneself as someone who is no longer there. But there is something that reflects a drop of life. Therefore, looking at the painting, you remember what happened at that time, who you talked to, what you talked about. A kind of diary. Ten, twenty, forty years ago. Everything comes back to life. It becomes sometimes sad, sometimes very lyrical, and sometimes fun. This is due to the spiritual mood that is always present and which brings things back to life when you review the work."⁴⁰

The artist remains true to himself, even when he does not paint landscapes, but he still looks at the world with his own special gaze: "Sometimes, in my declining years, I would take fishing rods, go somewhere out of town, sit on the bank of a pond and look at floats for twenty hours. There are reeds, grass around, willows are hanging over the water, ducks splashing... and then the float jerked to the side... unforgettable moments. While sitting, you think about a lot of things. The creative process essentially continues. And the leisure becomes active..."⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ From the memoirs of Yuriy Khymych.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Successor of Great Traditions

Yuriy Khymych is a well-known and recognized artist. He earned high-profile titles, had many exhibitions during his lifetime and after. His works were published in albums, books, on postcards. They are kept in numerous museum and private collections. His students work in various fields of architecture, restoration, as painters and graphic artists. But “the big one is visible at a distance” and, perhaps, only today, almost a hundred years after its birth, can we truly appreciate his level and understand what place he occupies in the history of art.

Through his immediate teachers – Mykhailo Ilyinsky in childhood, Mykhailo Steinberg in his youth – Khimich received an impetus coming from the masters of the XIX-XX centuries. His fascination at an early stage with the artists of “Mir iskusstva” (World of Art), and later with French Post-Impressionists, also testifies to his integration into the artistic processes of the twentieth century, being actively involved in the search for new artistic expression and imagery.

Yuriy Khymych is often compared to Nicholas Roerich and Ivan Bilibin, many parallels being found in their work – open color, generalized forms, and sharp angles. But this is where their similarity ends, because it is superficial. In my opinion, Khymych is more diverse than Roerich, he is subtler and deeper, he is more cheerful and life-loving. For Roerich, both nature and architecture are part of a cosmological myth, in which the main thing is not the word, but silence, which is quite understandable, given the Eastern roots of Roerich’s teaching. “Only in the greatness of nature, far from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, can you hear the voice of silence. Only in nature can one realize the greatness of the cosmos,” Roerich wrote.

For Khymych, as the heir to Christian culture, from time immemorial there was the Word that created the world according to the laws of beauty and harmony; for him the human response to this Word is important, which is expressed in culture, in particular, in architecture. He listens sensitively to this primary beauty and harmony, entering into a dialogue with it. Khymych was not a churchly man, never declared his faith, although in the 1970s the search of God came to the surface in the circles of the intelligentsia, and Khimich could not but know this. The artist always revered any culture – Ukrainian, Russian, European, which grew up on Christian soil. He never acted as a Soviet patriot, he generally looked and thought outside of the box of any ideologems, and therefore one can hardly find Soviet realities in Khymych’s paintings. He perceived all that as superficial, temporary, unworthy of attention, he was always concerned with the eternal things – the beauty of nature and the beauty of architecture, in particular church architecture. Despite the contemplative attitude, the world is not silent for Khymych, and the artist maintains a conversation with this world.

Khymych is likely to have more in common with Bilibin, at least in terms of aesthetics and attitude to the Christian heritage. But Bilibin is a storyteller, and his landscapes are perceived as illustrations for fairy tales or scenery for performances. They are fantastic, invented, even if they are based on a specific place. For Khymych, loyalty to nature is important. He does

not invent, does not fantasize, he simply looks at the world and seeks to convey in colors its image – generalized, concentrated and transformed to a certain extent, an image in which the secondary is hidden and the main thing is revealed.

His image of architecture is always unique and unexpected, as researchers often note, he does not paint a landscape, but a portrait of a building or a city. At the same time, analyzing Khymych's working technique, we can rightly speak not only about the portraiture, but also about the iconicity of many of his images. What is it? First of all, it is a special perception of reality, expressed on a paper sheet in a generalized or concentrated form, revealing the connection of the visible and the invisible, the external and the inner things, the temporary and the eternal things. Whatever the artist focused on – the landscape, the temple, the street, the city – he tried to grasp its essence, a kind of spiritual core, to show the image as a bundle of form and energy, as a microcosm in which the macrocosm is reflected. As in the icon, the image of Khymych turns out to be transformed and therefore unexpected, this image is a revelation. In the icon, the main thing is not a halo, but a glance in the perspective of eternity, which raises us to a new level of being, leaving us face to face with the Creator of the universe. Khymych's credo "to paint, freeing the image from everything superfluous" is virtually the method of iconographic creativity: the iconographer does not squander for trifles, but focuses on the main thing, on what is higher and deeper than everyday life, in the temporary things he sees the eternal, every detail becomes a sign, a symbol of another reality. Khymych also creates an image that reveals the world in its beauty and uniqueness, novelty and eternity at the same time. Local color, contour, silhouette, a special angle that creates an indirect perspective – all this connects the artistic language of Khymych with the iconographic one. Did this occur to the artist himself? I am not sure. But his attitude to the world, his desire to plunge into the essence of phenomena and images, his love of beauty and truth – all this led him to the fact that the world he depicted takes on the features of iconicity.

What is the value of Yuriy Khymych's legacy? First of all, in the bright personality and power of his artistic talent. He created his own unique world, in which the beauty of the man-made (architecture) and the non-man-made (nature) are combined in some amazing harmony, diverse, multi-faceted, and in each series it reveals itself in a special way. Of course, behind all his work, not only artistic, but also scientific, pedagogical (and he approached everything creatively) work, there is an outstanding personality – a thinker and contemplator, a poet and a tireless hard worker, a person who all his life collected great treasures of culture, beauty, spirit and generously shared them – with students, friends, connoisseurs.

In the general context of culture, Khymych is a bridge between the art of the early twentieth century and its teachers – and already the XXI century, in which its students work and its connoisseurs live. Khymych adequately continues the tradition of his great predecessors, first of all the painters of "Mir iskusstva" (World of Art) – Lanceray, Benois, Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Dobuzhinsky and others, who influenced his early work, as well as their talented teachers – Yakov and Mykhailo Steinberg, who provided a strong basis for him. Of course, Khymych also absorbed the French art of the XIX – first half of the XX century – impressionists and post-

impressionists, primarily Cezanne, Matisse, Derain, Marquet. Despite this, Yuriy Khymych did not become an imitator who only reproduces the achievements of his predecessors, he was acutely modern in all periods of his work, spanning six decades. Even today his works do not seem a sign of the past – they can surprise the modern viewer as well.

Most of Khymych's creative biography dates back to the Soviet period. But it does not fit into the framework of Soviet art. It is quite obvious that he was not offended by either social realism or the "austere style" of the Sixtiers, and it is also impossible to attribute him to underground art. He incorporated the achievements of international art, being at the same time deeply rooted in the national culture of Ukraine, which was very akin to the artist. Of course, his work was influenced by the processes that inspired many artists of his generation: the passion for medieval art, the Russian and Western avant-garde, creative experiments in the field of artistic language and new expressiveness etc. Nevertheless, Yuriy Khymych is a unique phenomenon, bright and authentic, it is a separate planet in the large galaxy of world art of the second half of the twentieth century.