

A VIEW ON ART IN THE CONTEXT OF TIME

I meet the Rector of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts Mikhail Borozna quite often: either at the event in a museum, or at the opening of the exhibition in a gallery. As a rule, in most cases we managed to have a talk, exchanged opinions, albeit briefly, on cultural issues.

At one of these meetings, I received an invitation from the rector to visit the academy. To come to a kind of housewarming party. The point is that a major renovation has just been completed there, which lasted no less than a decade. I remember having a thorough professional conversation with the rector in the Academy in August 2012. At that time, the construction had just started and Mikhail Borozna had to apologize, interrupt our conversation

and solve various economic issues. This is not the case now. There was a clear feeling of inspiration with which the rector gave a tour around the renovated Alma Mater, where now, indeed, there are excellent conditions for students and teachers. It is not without reason that the partners from Moscow — the branded Institute of Cinematography — came to Minsk for a week to feel the excellent atmosphere here, with their Belarusian colleagues.

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harmoniously into the renovated interior. He told the story about the foreign guests who admired the paintings they saw on the walls of his office, and were sure that they had been made by mature authors. How surprise they were when the rector said that they had been painted by a freshman.

That was the favorable background against which our current conversation with the rector of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts was taking place.

— *What, in your opinion, are the main events of the last ten years in the life of the Academy of Arts?*

— For the Academy staff, the main event is that we have returned to Alma Mater. There are events from professional life that are no less important. Among them, first and foremost, is our participation in the Ribbon of Time exhibition at UN Headquarters in Geneva. It took place last year in April on large exhibition space — the space that reflects not only the nature of the UN's work, but also contains a huge collection of art. And on this platform, the Academy was granted the honour of making a large retrospective exhibition which showed the work of teachers and students

over several decades. As a result, not only the academic school was presented there, but also what can be called contemporary art. These include media projects, animation, installations, posters and photographs, experimental works. The opening of the exhibition was attended by UN Director General, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei, and the Rector of the Academy of Arts, as the organizer of the exhibition on the Belarusian side. This event has probably been the most significant in recent years, which allows us to see retrospectives, the dynamics of many

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processes both in fine arts and design, and in the development of the creative philosophy itself, which is cultivated at the Academy of Arts. This event is undoubtedly a landmark, testifying to the recognition of our school. We are grateful to the Belarusian UN Office in Geneva, the headquarters, for the opportunity to organize such a large-scale exhibition.

— *You have been working as a rector for 10 years now. Reasonable time to gain experience. Do you feel that the rector is a significant figure in the academy?*

— Frankly speaking, I feel that the rector is the same unit as everyone else. It is like in the activities of any expert council. The chairperson of the council has only one vote but two opportunities to speak: at the beginning and at the end. That's why he or she has more opportunities to speak out. But then again, the rector is part of the team. The way he or she behaves is the most important thing. I have been working at the academy since September 2, 1992. This is without my student and postgraduate years. That's why, on the one hand, nothing has changed for me, even in terms of my previous and present-day experience. On the other hand, it is a very long way. Not just these 10 years, but the last 20 years, 25. It's a very long way. I remember what the curriculums, programmes were like, what was taught at the lectures before, the uniformity of requirements we had. Now we see a wide range of opportunities for students and teachers: to speak



their own language, the sensual language of art, to defend their principles, their views, even their philosophical convictions. Before everything was limited. But now I see how much has changed: there is mobility, there are different activities for teachers and students, a lot of information. It used to be limited, we looked through some catalogues awe struck, but now the Internet allows us to quickly penetrate into a wide variety of information resources. And the Academy demonstrates its tolerance to everything that is part of our platform of values: humanitarian and moral. Therefore, I see a good dynamic of opportunities for young people in their creativity, in their pedagogical skills.

— *You have already noted that you were represented internationally on the high podium of the UN, figuratively*

speaking. In general, are the Academy's international relations with other organisations significant? To what extent are international communications necessary today for students and teachers?

— Extremely necessary, because it is part of our international activities. For life, it is crucial to feel equal in the global community and sometimes to be the leader, to have a clear idea of what to improve in order to compete, for example. This is one thing. The second is educational and ideological work. Students need to feel that they are involved in huge space, not confined to the walls of their alma mater. They, as well as their teachers and many free creative people, must feel belonging to a community as wide as possible. There are scientific contacts — for analytical work. And in order to analyze themselves, it is always im-

portant to have a context that is not confined to the Minsk ring road. I would like to emphasize once again that we have very broad scientific contacts. This, by the way, helps in adapting and correcting curricula. We are in constant contact with many managers and employees of higher educational institutions in Eastern Europe. And not only in this region. It is always interesting. Figuratively speaking, the Academy was traditionally formed through polemics. For example, in the 50s and 60s of the last century, at the educational establishment, which had a different status at that time, there were teachers who represented completely different schools: Kyiv, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Lvov, Prague, Warsaw

and Vilnius. And it was in the polemics that a unique art school was formed: both theatrical and fine arts. This kind of polemics is still needed today. Debating is extremely important for development. It is not just a matter of reporting — it is a vital necessity, a desire. When a teacher, having received an international prize, having given a master class or having exhibited his works abroad, comes back and shares his or her experience with students, I see the glint in the eyes of the teacher and the desire of students to challenge themselves.

— *By the way, are there any international students at the Academy today?*

— Yes, there are. Their panorama is quite interesting. There are students from

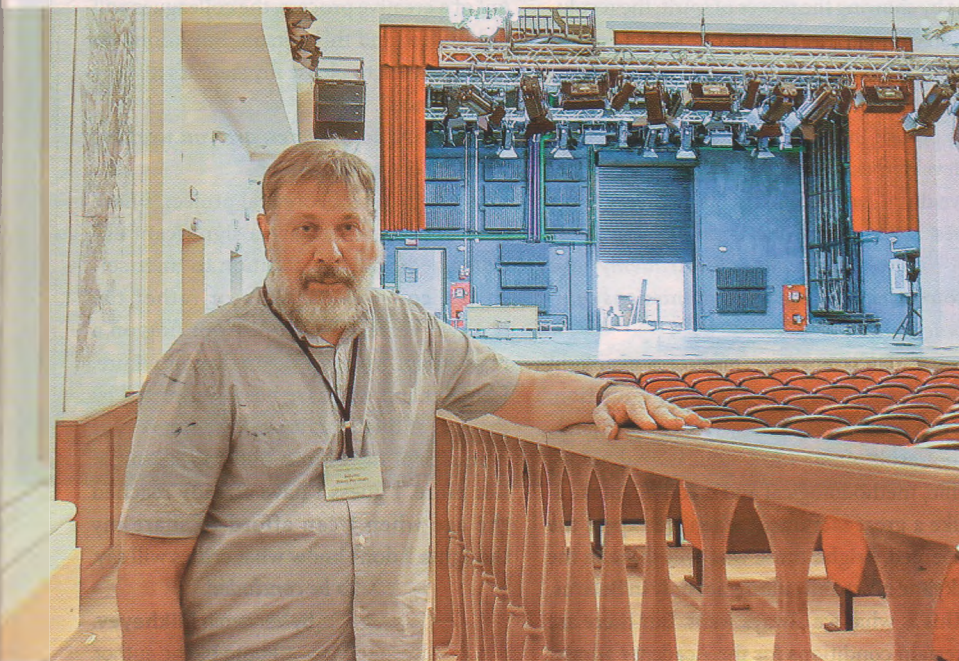
the United States who are studying to be film artists. There are two Danes. One guy is studying to be a painter. And the girl is a graphic artist. This is Matilda Lutson. She is one of our leaders, she knows that the Belarusian school of graphics is very strong. Matilda Lutson is showing very interesting results. And at the “Time Ribbon” exhibition in Geneva at the Palais des Nations, she exhibited her works together with Belarusian students. I think that is right. If the Academy has such an international student-body, we offered her, and she participated in this exhibition with a great desire. Of course, we have representatives from Lithuania, Russia, and China. In recent decades this panorama has included representatives from many countries.

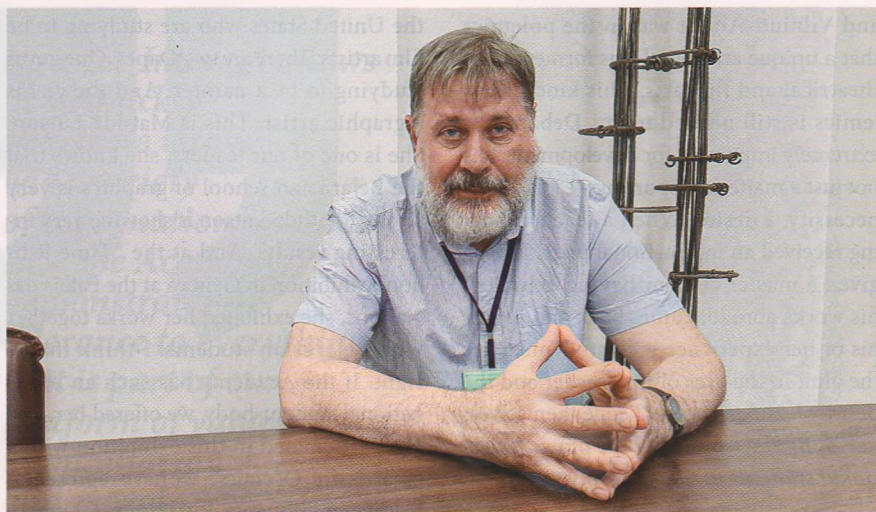
— *Do you think it was a conscious choice for them to go to the Academy of Arts in Minsk?*

— Absolutely. It is connected with the fact that since the Soviet time the rating of our Academy, then — theatre and art institute, has been very high. And since then there has been an opinion, or rather belief, that we give a high-quality education, there is a school with good traditions and techniques. We have our web-site, we post a lot of information on the events which take place in the Academy. And many people see for themselves that nothing has been lost, that this is a great platform for education. I am sure if we could have a bigger dormitory — there would be more foreign students.

— *Tell me, how do they communicate with their Belarusian peers? Do they socialize, or do they keep themselves to themselves?*

— No, they are as sociable as our students. People of art — wherever they are, they are all alike. As a rule, both artists and actors are always sociable and speak a lot. Although they understand well that one has to work hard and intently. This, by the way, is also a requirement of our Academy. After all, we don't train artisans here. The tasks that we set require a high level of concentration, both strength and ability, as well as time. Young people are all the same. Especially since today's youth have no language or linguistic problems.





— *And how would you characterize this year's graduates?*

— Every year they are different. There are wonderful graduates from the theatre faculty. I believe that the performance "Quiet Flows the Don" in the Belarusian language is a significant achievement of our theatre school. There were interesting works at the faculty of screen arts. I can sincerely say that every year it is more and more interesting. Although there was concern for everyone: how will the pandemic affect the performance, will it cause any damage to the graduation works? But I want to say: we didn't notice it. On the contrary, at the Department of Graphic Arts, for example, there were simply stunning works. As for the monumental department, a feature of recent years was very vivid: most of the works were aimed at decorating the Academy itself. Over the last three years we have significantly changed the sterile look of the head office. After the renovation, we have transformed the local environment into what is needed to educate artists and actors, directors and operators. We have saturated it with aesthetic objects — paintings, complex technological materials. These are stained-glass windows and mosaics. And there are also hostels, which are also interestingly decorated. I will take the liberty of saying that no hostel in the city has such artefacts as ours. However, we have experience of fulfilling orders for other regions of Belarus. For example, in one of the churches in the Bykhov District of the Mogilev Region, Anton Bielski painted more than

800 square metres as his graduation work. As a result, he received a special prize from the President. In the Volozhin District, Minsk Region, the mosaic altar for the Orthodox church was made by Polina Omelyanovich. She was also awarded the special prize of the President of Belarus. But for the last two years we have been focusing more on the Academy itself. Not for advertising, although there are people who ask us to organize excursions. But we are doing something for ourselves, not for this purpose. Because to train specialists means to us to educate them. And how can we educate them? With the help of books, by personal example. As well as by showing the power of spirit, the revolution of creativity that reflects the time of this generation. And with their attitude to work, our students prove that they have something to protect in terms of their spirituality, their development. Their words "We were doing it, we did it, we have left it!" I believe, are the best result of our educational work.

— *What hopes does the Academy have connected with the latest admissions campaign?*

— There are two important events in the calendar year: intake and graduation. Everything else is a daily job. Graduation is the result of our work: educational, scientific, methodological and creative. Intake is like a great sacrament when we expect the talented, bright, those who will shine in the skyline of art and culture not only in Belarus. This is what we always want. But there are certain conditions for the Academy admis-

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sion campaign, i.e. everyone should have equal rights, nothing should prevent anyone from manifesting oneself. You know, almost everyone who applies is convinced that this is their calling in life. Time will show.

— *Do you have any time left for your creativity?*

— Yes, I do. In the evenings. A day consists of 24 hours. At work, I do my work. I don't do creative work, but I think. I think about it for a second, a minute, at lunchtime. Life forces me to do more creative work on holiday, at weekends and late at night. And without it, I think the head of the Academy has nothing to do in it. If he is out of a creative process, the colleagues will not understand this person. But I don't do creative work to please my staff. It's just my creative need.

— *If it's not a secret, are you working on some art project now?*

— Yes. It's a theoretical project. I have several books that have a significant encyclopaedic part in addition to their scientific component. Now, or rather the last two years, I have been working on a manuscript which is theoretical in nature. I hope that it will have been completed by the end of this year. It is a very impressive manuscript in volume, 300 pages long, if not more. I guess I have already reached the age when I can afford to share my thoughts. I don't know what critics will say.

To be concluded.

By Veniamin **Mikheyev**.

Photo by the author.