

THE MASTER'S NAME

Yuri Yegorov holds a special place in our city's culture. "Why do I need a title if I already have a name?" N. Altman used to say, his words having become an artistic aphorism. Yegorov has a title, and he's not the only Odessa painter to have honestly earned an honoured name. And even so...

For half a century, the vectors of the Odessa art field gravitated toward Yegorov. The secret, seemingly, was in the integrity of his artistic personality, one where creativity defines everything: painting is the meaning of life, and life should be worthy of painting. This condition dictates the code of honour – a set of unwritten rules revered by artists. A person is responsible for their God-given talent, and a gift can't be used for free - it is worked off through endless labour.

A gift requires service and defying so is immoral. The strong relationship between ethics and aesthetics - to the point of their confluence, even substitution – is typical of the Russian spiritual tradition. This too was characteristic of Yegorov.

Starting in the early 1960s, artistic youth who today hold a firm place in Odessa painting gathered around him. Yegorov "didn't influence" anyone and "didn't teach" anyone. From him they learned independence, they learned to be themselves in their art.

It was in this environment, with Yegorov's strong analytical mind, that the idea of the Odessa school appeared and attempts were made to formulate its tenets. As such, Yegorov is not only a prominent example of the Odessa school of painting, but also its first theorist.

Having had opportunities to remain in Moscow or Leningrad, Yegorov preferred the less prestigious, but closer in spirit Odessa. Formed against the backdrop of the "austere style", the master's figurative language matched the energy and fulness of the land. Yegorov felt close to the Mediterranean world, to antiquity, he understood the world as a body, as matter. He appreciates its volume, weight and elemental forces. There hasn't been a critic who didn't point out that Yegorov paints the elements. More precisely, he paints the body of the element, and afterwards the scenes – landscapes, commonplace objects in a still life, girls on the seashore – seem to acquire the capacity and motion of life itself.

Yegorov creates by echoing the action of nature. Using his own matter – oil painting – he builds a Universe whose plasticity and colour have the power and subtlety born of the body of the sea and weightless mist on the horizon.

Here man and the environment love one another. There are no fissures or conflicts between them. Tanned Mediterranean Venuses and sea waves pulsate, breath in unison... their contact elastic and gentle as an embrace.

Yegorov was the first to equate viscous oil paint with the dense substance of the sea. The leaden mass rolled easily and heavily from canvas to canvas, bending the horizon into an arc. The wave in Yegorov's painting is at once the wind and sea, the clash and union of elements, the rolling

forces of a living body of water. “Yegorov’s sea” became a concept and image that entered our culture. The artist’s name bonded with the elements, forming an alloy.

What’s more... And here we shall resort to comparison: many folk songs do indeed have an author, whose name is known only to a few experts, or sometimes has been forgotten completely - but not by virtue of ingratitude. Not by any means. The song was so liked that it became EVERYONE’s. It became the people’s. High anonymity is the best praise of an author whose name has vanished among the people.

The pattern of interwoven ribbons is Yegorov’s device. It merged ripples on the surface of the water and rays of sun refracting in the water column; the wavy, rousing silhouette of the female body. Born out of easel painting and embodied in monumental works, this form wandered through the paintings of different artists. But the issue is not about borrowing, it is the precision of the discovery. The “ribbon pattern” is archetypal in the same way as the archetypal Achaean “oncoming wave” is code for the birth of love, the birth of Aphrodite... The “ribbon pattern” fascinates like the lines of Pasternak, the waves echo the rhythm as they fall one atop the other. It is the code and sign of our land. Yegorov found it a visible name. He NAMED our Odessan world. And what he found became common domain.

Yegorov’s creativity has an organic nature. The same way you can tell the age of a tree from its rings, periods of storm and onslaught, high and beautiful maturity left their mark on the painter’s works. Today an old master stands before us. Flowering complexity have given way to true simplicity. Yegorov’s latest canvases are simple, like the insinuating landscapes of Bugaz that have no variety of colours, but where the air, thickening over the sandbars, captures the soul and doesn’t let go.

Yegorov’s familiar motifs repeat, gaining epic significance. It seems that girls with tanned legs will always walk on sand, and the shore will sway like a deck... And the horizon rolls, carrying with it a sunny space with a gleaming path on the great surface of the sea.

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