

Üma

michel andreenko

and ukrainian artists in paris



The current permanent collection exhibition highlights twentieth-century artist Michel [Mychajlo] Andreenko (1894-1982) and work by a selection of his contemporary



Alexis Gritchenko [Oleksa Hryshchenko], *Untitled (A street in Spain)* (1934), Oil on canvas, 18 x 11.33", Gift of Mr. Bohdan Kowalsky

Ukrainian peers, with whom he crossed paths during his near 60-year residency in Paris, from his

arrival as a refugee in 1923 until his death in 1982. These include Alexis Gritchenko [Ukr.: Oleksa Hryshchenko] (1883-1977), Sophia Zarytska [-Omelchenko] (1887 or 1903-1972), Severyn Borachok (1898-1975), Mykola Hlushchenko (1901-1977), Mykola Butovych (1895-1961), Mykhailo Moroz (1902-1993), Andriy Solohub (1922-2010), Liuboslav Hutsaliuk (1923-2003) and Themostocle Wirsta (1923-2017). Andreenko exhibited with some of these artists repeatedly, others once, or not at all. They were friends, acquaintances, and professional colleagues whose work and lives intersected - through a complicated network of exhibitions, cultural/national affinity, and professional support, over a long period of extremes. War, displacement from home, loss of possessions, property, and economic security were experiences they shared in common, just

as several of these artists were born early enough to have lived through both the first and second World Wars, such as Andreenko, others only the second. Among the older, Gritchenko, Zarytska, Borachok and Hlushchenko

exhibited with Andreenko multiple times before World War II, while Butovich and Moroz, only once in Lviv in 1931. Solohub, Hutsaliuk and Wirsta arrived in the 1950s and were colleagues and friends. This exhibition offers a glimpse into their own artistic styles, some slightly similar, but most quite different, ranging from street and landscape scenes representationally interpreted by Gritchenko to those by Hutsaliuk and Solohub, visualized through both painterly and geometrically oriented abstractions. Moroz's landscapes focus on broad strokes of pigment capturing the effects of light. Expressive color characterizes the work of Wirsta as well as Hlushchenko, yet their interests, technique and subjects are vastly apart. Wirsta's bursts of bright expressive color and textured brushwork seem to thoughtfully evoke the music he often played while painting. Hlushchenko's abstracted interpretations of flowers depart far from their original subject, drawing our attention rather to the movement of his delicate brushstrokes across the picture plane, and only slightly suggesting a bud, a petal perhaps through a gentle touch of color. Butovich is represented by his late career watercolors of witches, based on Ukrainian folklore, boldly colorful and evocative in their

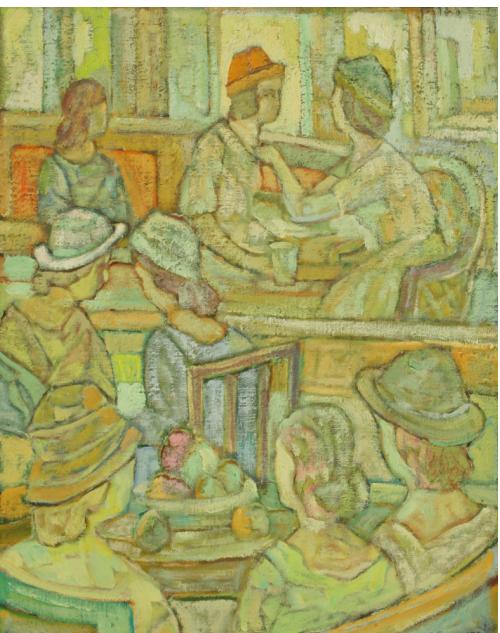
abstraction. Different styles by the same artist, are also presented, such as Zarytska's bending erratic abstraction of a figure hung alongside two intimate, monochromatic green forest landscapes, as well as Borachok's fauvist still life displayed next to a café scene of a social realist bent. Andreenko himself is represented by two abstract works, an undated oil and late period lithograph from 1977, emblematic of the geometric forms and compositions with which his modernism became distinguished.

Andreenko, like numerous artists from Eastern Europe, gravitated towards Montparnasse, generally situated in the 14th arrondissement or district in Paris' Left Bank. The area had a history as an artist neighborhood since the mid-19th century, when French artists clustered there, and over time, attracted others. Private art schools or académies run by artists were commonly available, among them the noted Académie Colarossi and nearby Académie Grande Chaumière. By the late 19th century, Americans were more apparent, and in the 20th century, up until the 1930s, foreigners made up some 30 to 40 percent of the district's artists.¹ To give it further perspective, Paris alone was reported home to some 40,000 artists in the 1920s.² One

¹ Mary Blume, "Marie Vassilieff: A Splash of Montparnasse Color," *The New York Times*, Oct. 3, 1998.

² Vita Susak, *Ukrainian Artists in Paris, 1900-1939*, Kyiv: Rodovid Press, 2010, p. 97. Susak's volume provides the most complete study on the subject to date.

could live and rent studio space in Montparnasse cheaply, albeit many of low standard, without running water or electricity. The complex La Ruche [the Beehive] was one example. The brainchild of French sculptor Alfred Boucher (1850-1934), it was constructed of remaining structural elements



Seweryn Boraczok [Severyn Borachok], *Women in Café* (1960s). Oil on canvas, 20 x 16", Gift of Mr. Bohdan Kowalsky

from 1900 World's Fair pavilions in an effort to provide artist housing.

Rooms to some tenants, as Vita Susak noted, resembled elongated coffins, and the corridors often shared with mice and rats, with roaming cats to catch them.³ Alexander Archipenko, who lived there for a year, from 1908 until 1909, himself struggling for money, described it as "living inside a Gruyère cheese".⁴

After World War I, the largest influx of artists came from the former Russian Empire and Eastern Europe, primarily refugees, among the over 45,000 displaced by World War I.⁵ Many were poor or impoverished, having lost belongings, income and family, and found the generosity of neighborhood café owners such as those at La Rotonde, comforting, where patrons could pay their bill with artwork, often displayed and then returned once monetary payment became available. It was into these general circumstances that Andreenko would have likely found himself when he arrived in December of 1923. His extensive art training in a variety of media and in theater served him well in finding work as an art restorer, stage decorator for theater, ballet and film, in addition to creating

³ Ibid, p. 29.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Maria Rubins, "Introduction: Russian Montparnasse as a Transnational Community," in *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hounds-mills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK; New York, NY: 2015, p. 1. Numbers of refugees are probably higher, and official papers only designated citizenship, not cultural membership. Thus, one's government papers would have likely identified those arriving from the former Russian Empire as Russian, denoting their citizenship within the Empire, however, this did not mean they were Russian. They could be Russian, but also Ukrainian, Georgian, Lithuanian, etc. Eastern Europeans outside the borders of the Russian Empire, are also excluded.

art. In 1925, he participated in the “Exhibition of 33 Russian Artists” at Café de La Rotonde, which included paintings and sculptures by Hlushchenko, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, and Sergei Charchoune (1888-1975) among others. Charchoune, a noted Russian Dada poet as well as a painter, would become one of Andreenko’s closest friends. In 1926, Andreenko sent work to the International Theater Exhibition in New York, and the following year, through the organizational efforts of Mykola Hlushchenko, participated in the “All-Ukrainian Exhibition for the 10th Anniversary of the October Revolution,” in Kharkiv-Kyiv-Odessa.

Opportunities of course, presented themselves at different times for different artists. Alexis Gritchenko, about eleven years older than Andreenko and established before World War I, had arrived in 1921 and by 1923 had sold 14 works through his new gallery dealer to millionaire Albert C. Barnes, a chemist who had come to Paris on an art buying spree for his new museum, the Barnes Foundation, in Merion, Pennsylvania. Gritchenko continued to have a number of solo exhibitions as did Hlushchenko, who had arrived

in 1925, after graduating from the Berlin Academy of Art a year earlier. A Soviet citizen, he worked as “chief artist for trade and industrial exhibitions mounted by the Soviet Union abroad,”⁶ and advocated for socialist aims in Paris. He hosted numerous



Liuboslav Hutsaliuk, *Untitled (Abstract)* (1952), Oil on canvas, 21.5 x 28.75", Gift of Mr. Bohdan Kowalsky

gatherings at his studio which included artists and dignitaries, as well as many Russian and Ukrainian emigres. His networking skills and organizational aptitude benefitted Ukrainian artists in sending their work to Lviv for the major 1931 exhibition at the newly formed Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists or ANUM in addition to others. However, his placement in Paris worked to his advantage as a Soviet agent, a position he held through his residency there until

⁶ Susak, p. 122.

1936, when he returned to the Soviet Union.⁷ Unlike Andreenko, Gritchenko or Hlushchenko,



Mykola Butovich, *Ukrainian Witch* (1960), Watercolor on paper, 14 x 11", Gift of Mr. Bohdan Kowalsky

Severyn Borachok arrived in Paris in 1924 with the idealism of

a student. He was joined by his peers from the Krakow Academy of Arts in Poland which he began attending in 1920. Called the Kapists, abbreviated for the Paris Committee of Relief for Students Leaving for Artistic Studies in France in Polish, they focused on colorism and especially its development in the work of French artist Pierre Bonnard. Borachok distinguished himself as a colorist at that time, particularly in the Neo-Impressionist idiom.⁸

Mykola Butovych and Mykhajlo Moroz, arrived in Paris in 1928 but didn't stay long. Butovych was pursuing a dream, wanting to try the "artistic mecca" and see what would develop professionally,⁹ having been awarded a two-year stipend from the Ukrainian Scientific Institute in Berlin, while Moroz had been awarded a Metropolitan Sheptytsky scholarship from Lviv to pursue his art studies with fellow artists Sviatoslav Hordynsky

⁷ The full details of Hlushchenko's activity have yet to be made public, however, it appears he was recruited officially in 1926 and assumed the name 'Yarema'. See Oleksandr Skrypnyk, "The Famous Ukrainian artist and Intelligence Agent Mykola Glushchenko reported to Stalin of Hitler's Preparations for War against the Soviet Union as far back as June, 1940," Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine, <https://szru.gov.ua/en/news/publications/the-famous-ukrainian-artist-and-intelligence-agent-mykola-glushchenko-reported-to-stalin-of-hitlers-preparations-for-war-against-the-soviet-union-as-far-back-as-june-1940>.

⁸ Susak, p. 168.

⁹ Oleksandr Fedoruk, Mykola Butovich Zhyttia i Tvorchist, Kyiv-New York: M.P. Kotz, 2002, p. 63.

(1906-1993) and Vasyl Diadyniuk (1900-1944).¹⁰ Although the artists knew each other in Paris, little is documented of those exchanges. Butovych's experience there was mixed. He sold a painting at the 1928 *Salon d'Automne* entitled *Dance*, and had worked on a series of sketches of scenes of Paris, for transfer to etchings.¹¹ However, his expectations of the city were met with disappointment, primarily from lack of funds and the realization that most artists needed to take on commercial, art industry related jobs, even forging antiquities to make ends meet.¹² Montparnasse was filled with artists, some successfully selling work from street displays, yet for Butovych, the art itself catered to what was fashionable, and generally lacked inherent substance or soul.¹³

Throughout the 1920s, the number of Ukrainian artists in Paris grew, of which we've seen some examples above. Just as Moroz was taking classes at various schools in Paris, such as the Académie Julian, and the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts et Métiers, Sophia Zarytska arrived with her artist husband, Petro Omelchenko (1894-1952) in 1928. They had met in Prague where they both studied at the Ukrainian School of Plastic Art, and the Prague Academy

of Arts before moving to Paris. Others also arriving via Prague, although not represented in this UIMA exhibition, included Vasyl Khmeliuk (1901-1986), in 1928, and Mykola Krychevsky (1898-1961) in 1929, also via Prague. Vasyl Perebyinis (1896-1966) had moved in 1927, having studied briefly with Krychevsky's uncle Fedir at the Ukrainian Academy of Arts in Kyiv in 1918. Ivan Babij (1896-after 1949) moved to Paris in 1925 by way of Berlin, becoming a very successful portraitist, and three years earlier in 1922, Mane Mané-Katz (1894-1962), who became known for his paintings of Jewish life. As more Ukrainian artists appeared on the Paris scene, a sense of needing to organize an association offering economic and cultural support grew among some of the artists. In 1929, the Association of Ukrainian Artists in Paris was established, with Andreenko a board member. Activities were divided among theater, cinema, plastic arts, music and dance. Andreenko consulted for the theater section, however, the organization was short lived and disbanded in 1931.¹⁴ A more effective association emerged in 1930, with its first exhibition in 1931, as the Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists (ANUM) in Lviv. Many of the Parisian residents were members or participants in the exhibitions, which lasted

¹⁰ Metropolitan Archbishop Andriy Sheptytsky (1865-1944) was head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church from 1901-1944. In addition to his tenure there, he was an active and dedicated supporter of Ukrainian cultural endeavors, including art.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 64.

¹² Mykola Butovych, "Monparnass," *Mystetstvo/L'Art*, Vol. I, (Spring 1932), p. 22.

¹³ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁴ See Susak, pp. 178-179.

until the association disbanded in 1939. The first exhibition was a massive undertaking, organized by Sviatoslav Hordynsky with the assistance of Hlushchenko and Perebyinis and others.¹⁵ It featured 116 works by 42 artists – Ukrainian



Sofia Zarytska [Omelchenko], *Untitled (Male Figure)* (nd.), Oil on paperboard, 15 x 12", Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Adrian Kesala

artists working in Paris, as well as prominent French, Belgian and Italian artists, such as Picasso, Chagall, Severini, Gromaire, Modigliani, and Derain.¹⁶ Among the Ukrainians from Paris, were Andreenko, Gritchenko, Hlushchenko, Zarytska, Perebyinis,

Khmeliuk, Perebyinis, Krychevsky, Borachok, Moroz and Mykola Butovych. Some had already exhibited together in Paris, at Galerie Hirshman that spring, with the exception of Gritchenko, Butovych and Moroz, and the addition of Babij and Mané-Katz. The exhibit was multinational and included Severini who had been associated with the avant-garde Italian Futurists before World War I, among others less known today. The activities of ANUM seriously promoted their members, through regular exhibitions – there were fourteen in all, “six monographs, a collection entitled *Ex Libris*, and five issues of *Mystetstvo (Art)*,”¹⁷ an art magazine featuring timely articles and criticism, on a range of European artistic developments of the day. The first issue, for example, featured notable avant-garde artists, Emil Nolde, George Grosz, Franz Marc, Pablo Picasso and others, in addition to articles on Ukrainian 17c graphics, art conservation practices, a translation of De Stijl artist and theoretician Theo Van Doesburg’s 1918 “Notes on Monumental Art with Reference to Two Fragments of a Building”, and enamel work by artist Maria Dolnytska. Two figurative sculptures of composers by Evhen Archipenko, Alexander Archipenko’s brother, were also included.¹⁸ Andreenko, Hlushchenko, Gritchenko each had monographs published, and

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 183.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 182-187 for details of this exhibition and subsequent activity of ANUM.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 181.

¹⁸ The issue is downloadable at <http://uartlib.org/zhurnali/mistetstvo-lart-1-1932/>.

the latter two, solo exhibitions as well. The success of the 1931 exhibition led to another in 1932, with a prequel in Paris at Galerie Marseilles before its Lviv National Museum venue in winter of 1933. Andreenko exhibited with fifteen of the 'Paris group of Ukrainian Artists' featured there, with Borachok, Hlushchenko, Hryshchenko, Krychevsky, Petro Omelchenko and his wife Sophia Zarytska, Vasyl Khmeluk, his wife Marie Antoinette-Chaperon and Sophia Levytska, all of whom were shown with a group of artists from France and Italy including Severini, Andre Lhote, Raoul Dufy, and others. As before, Ukrainian artists were paired with French and Italian, and the cooperative arrangement among national groups met with



Themistocle Wirsta, Paris (nd.), Acrylic on board, 11 x 14.25", Gift of Drs. Daria and Jaroslaw Myndiuk

favorable reviews in Lviv,¹⁹ where the interrelationship of European artistic developments was affirmed.



Mykhailo Moroz, Catskill Mountains (1963), Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 ", Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Adrian Kesala

The 1930s gradually saw a diminishing of exhibition activity overall in Paris, as the impact of the 1929 American stock market crash and subsequent Depression drastically reduced travel, tourism, and the availability of funds to buy art, not only for wealthy American travelers of the 1920s, such as Barnes, but worldwide. Andreenko himself moved to a smaller apartment on Rue Vaugirard, workable also as a studio, in an effort to downsize his expenditures. He shifted his work from geometric abstraction towards representation, bearing affinities with Surrealism. The changing political climate of Europe and ensuing outbreak of World War II with Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, overturned daily life not only during the war years themselves, but during reconstruction in the years that followed, well into the 1950s. Andreenko successfully hid

¹⁹ Susak, pp. 185-186.

his wife Rikla, who was Jewish, in their apartment from Nazi's and their sympathizers in Paris during the war, others like Wirsta, whose family left their western Ukrainian home in Bukovina for Romania, kept moving from one location to another, attempting to stay



Andriy Solohub, *Boats*, (1950), Oil on canvas, 20 x 28", Gift of Mr. Bohdan Kowalsky

steps ahead of incarceration and death, before peacetime became a reality. Solohub was taken to work in German labor camps before resettlement in a displaced persons camp in Salzburg in 1945, and Hutsaliuk, after fighting in the war and becoming wounded, moved to multiple displacement camps before moving to Munich in 1946.

It was out of this context, similar to Andreenko's own during World War I, that many artists found their way to Paris - Wirsta and Solohub in 1950 and Hutsaliuk by 1955, having emigrated first to

New York in 1949. He became a U.S. citizen and enrolled at the

Cooper Union School of Art where he graduated in 1954. He spent the following year in Paris until 1956, returning in 1958-59, taking a studio on Rue Vaugirard, where

he divided time working there and New York. Unlike Hutsaliuk, Wirsta and Solohub made Paris their final home. Both continued to study art after they arrived while also establishing themselves economically, a phenomenon common to refugees. Wirsta retold of his early days of painting Parisian landmarks from the sidewalk, such as Notre Dame, in the hope of making a sale to someone passing-by, and of taking work as a decorator for film, and other jobs.²⁰ His work was figurative primarily at the time, and he was interested in sculpture as well. His commitment to engaging with the art of his day however, particularly modern art and its contemporary developments, led him to abandon figuration for abstraction, beginning in 1957-58. Solohub enrolled at the National Academy of Fine Arts, continuing art studies he had begun in Salzburg. Andreenko himself, continued his Vanishing Paris series, but also travelled extensively in Spain in 1955 and then Northern Europe in 1957,

²⁰ Jean-François Drouard, Wirsta, Itinéraire d'un Peintre, Paris: Editions P.I.U.F. et le groupe Reflets, p. 87

immersing himself in his work in what became a very productive period. During that time, and certainly by 1956, he had returned to non-representational painting.

Andreenko's work was included in a number of museum exhibitions in Western Europe focusing on non

Michel Andreenko and Ukrainian Artists in Paris is curated by Adrienne Kochman, in anticipation of the exhibition *Michel Andreenko:Revisited*. A survey of his career—from theatrical set designs and non-representational work of the 1920s, surrealistic naturalism, his *Vanishing Paris*



objectivity and early 20th century abstract art, as well as stage design, all of which were being reappraised by Western scholars in the 1960s and 70s. He also had several solo gallery exhibits. In 1964, he published his first story, 'Mice' in the Munich-based Ukrainian journal *Suchasnist [Modern Times]*, increasingly devoting himself to writing – on the artist and the importance of honing his craft, his European travels from an artist's perspective and short story fiction. He passed away in 1982.

Mykola Hlushchenko, *Untitled* (1965), Monotype on paper, 14.5 x 21", Gift of Mr. Bohdan Kowalsky

series of the 1940s-1950s and return to non-representation in the mid-1950s will be represented through the largest collection of his work in the United States, loaned by Drs. Alexandra and Andrew Ilkiw. The exhibition, postponed a year due to the pandemic, will open in Spring 2021. A catalogue is already available through UIMA.

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Front cover: Michel [Mychajlo] Andreenko-Nechytailo, *Untitled* (1962), Lithograph on paper, 20 x 25", Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Mychajlo Holowaty

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