

A Song to my Beloved Exhibition

Roksolyana Pidhainy Benoit's enchanting collection of artistic works capture the love, joy and serenity that can be found in everyday life, transforming seemingly ordinary moments into extraordinary

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

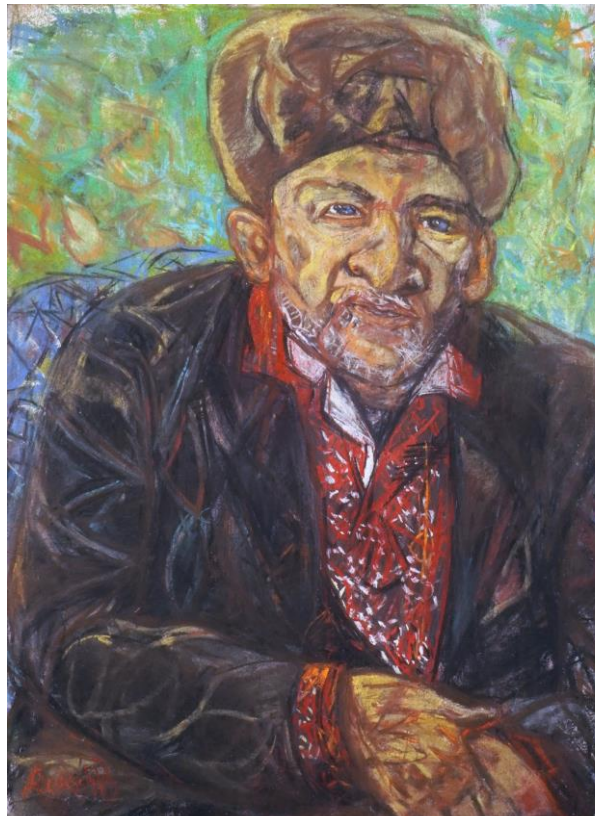


Roksolyana Pidhainy Benoit, *Provence II*, soft pastel on paper

On display at the Taras Shevchenko Museum is a wondrous collection of artistic works by Roksolyana Pidhainy Benoit, a Toronto-based artist who has been deeply inspired by her Ukrainian culture and legendary artists such as Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas and Rembrandt. Working primarily in soft pastel on paper, her vibrant paintings, which are blended to perfection, instantly captivate. “Her palette is lively and bright. Whether she’s depicting a portrait or a still life, she manages to capture the emotional content of her subject, bringing

everything to life,” explained John A. deSouza, a writer whose latest book of poetry on the war in Ukraine is entitled *Hidden*.

As Benoit shared, “My first love and abiding passion is portraiture. A portrait is a window into the state and the soul; a dance between the artist and the subject.” At the opening reception, which was held on May 4, 2025, Dave Martinyuk was instantly drawn to ***The Old Kozak***, which Benoit had painted to honour Taras Shevchenko and the father of Roxolyana, the Sultana of the Ottoman Empire. “It resonates with historical significance, embodying a moment in time and the strength of a people. The facial expression is calm and a sense of resoluteness comes across in the eyes. It’s beautifully rendered.”



Roksolyana Pidhainy Benoit, *The Old Kozak*, soft pastel on paper

Claudia Rosa was struck by ***Provence I*** and ***Provence II***, which are evocative of still life paintings by Cézanne, the renowned French post-Impressionist painter. “There’s a real beauty and yet an endearing simplicity to these two paintings. The colours burst to the fore and you can literally taste the sweetness of the peaches on a hot summer day.”

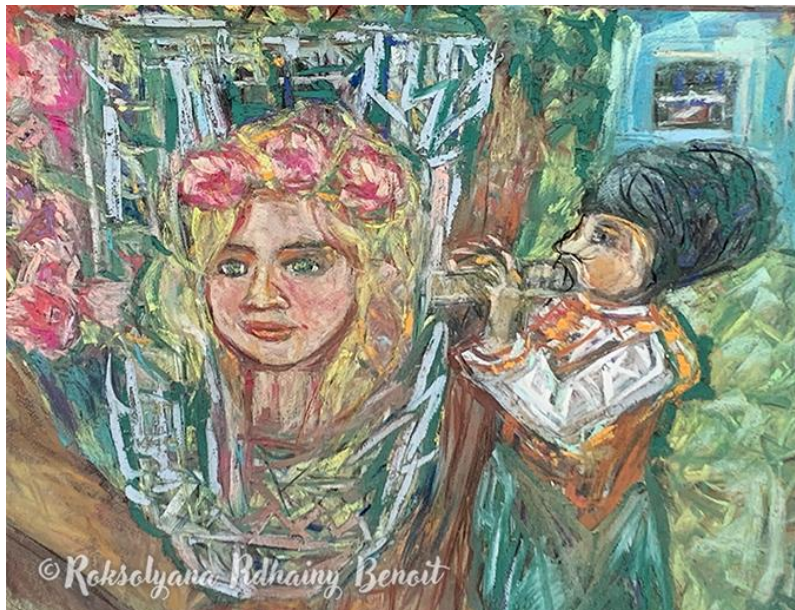
Colour theory, which encompasses aspects such as colour harmony, colour mixing, how colours interact and more, has always been something Benoit has excelled at. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU), she completed a degree in fine arts; specializing in drawing and painting.

Greg Damery, one of Benoit's professors, commented on the characteristics of her signature style. "At first, the colour impulses one experiences is the level of vibrancy. Sometimes, lines act as boundaries between forms, whereas others are of near value colour shifts, acting as a calm release between areas. At other junctions, complimentary colours pulsate subliminally needing no other definition."



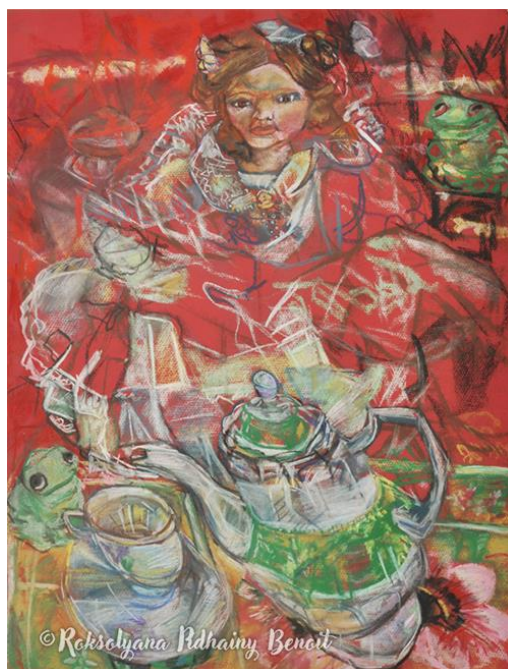
Roksoliana Pidhainy Benoit, *Provence I*, soft pastel on paper

Benoit's artistic works reveal a convergence of influences. She spent her formative years in Canada and the United States, as her father was a professor of Ukrainian history in various universities. At home, her mother built a loving and nurturing environment, which fostered curiosity, inspiration and creativity. "Sacred themes of family, home, hearth and the bond between mothers and daughters all figure prominently as Benoit creates a compelling blend of the intellectual-historical traditions of her father with the emotional, at-home traditions of her mother," said Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, director of the Taras Shevchenko Museum.



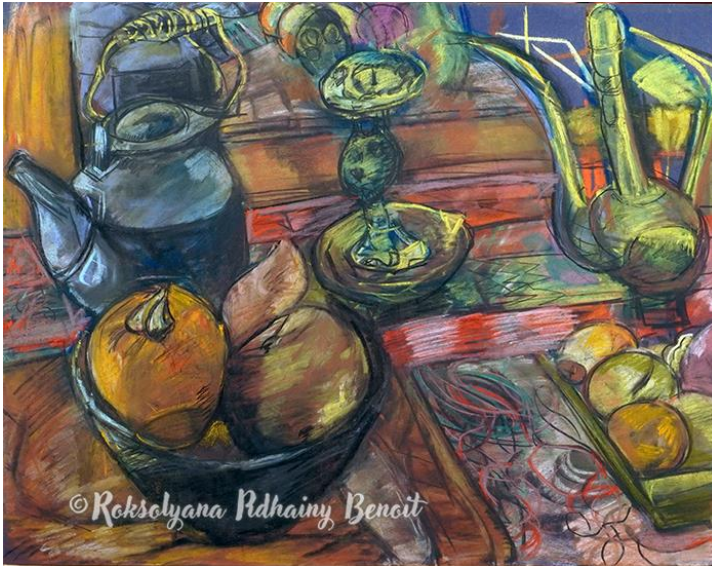
Rokhsolyana Pidhainy Benoit, *The Song of Rusalka*, soft pastel on paper

Halyna Kostiuk, an art critic, author and member of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada delivered the keynote address at the opening reception. According to Kostiuk, a notable aspect of Benoit's artistic works is her meticulous attention to detail. Her confluence of knowledge of various artistic mediums and her unbridled imagination have resulted in paintings, which have a dreamscape-like quality. Examples include *The Song of Rusalka* and *A Doll's Tea Party*. "Form is immensely important to the artist. Her experience with sculpture helps her fully see each object in its three-dimensional perspective, so when she arranges them for still life paintings, she does so in a way where the entire composition benefits."



Rokhsolyana Pidhainy Benoit

A Doll's Tea Party, soft pastel on paper



Rokhsolyana Pidhainy Benoit
Ottoman Afternoon Still Life
 (From *Roxolyana* Series),
 soft pastel on paper

Elizabeth Jackson Hall, an artist and friend to Benoit since their days at OCADU, also spoke at the opening reception. In reference to Benoit's background and extensive travels abroad, she mentioned that historically, Ukrainians have been dispersed around the world by choice or necessity. With scores of people fleeing since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this remains the case.

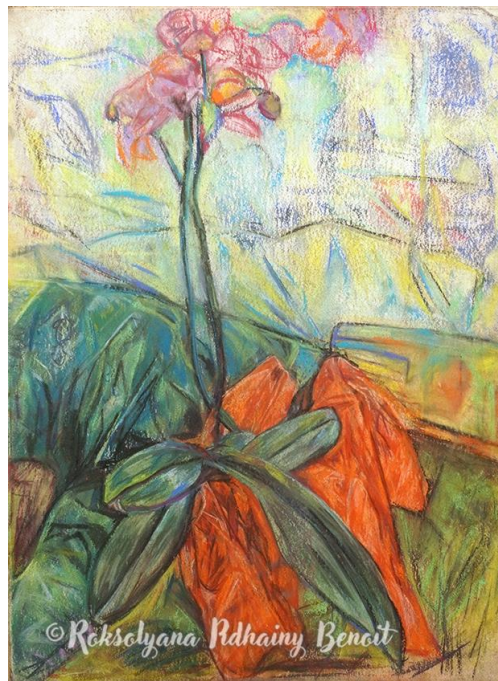


Rokhsolyana Pidhainy Benoit
Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent,
 Ottoman Empire (1494-1566)
 (From *Roxolyana* Series),
 soft pastel on paper

According to Hall, being a wanderer and explorer are themes, which are manifested in Benoit's artistic works, which often demonstrate how cultures collide. "You'll find subjects from all over: the Turkish still life; harem scenes or studies of her ongoing exploration of the

life of her namesake, Roxolyana.” Examples include: *Ottoman Afternoon Still Life* and *Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent*, both from the Roxolyana series.

In addition to a successful opening reception, a spotlight was also placed on Benoit’s artistic works with a tour and “Meet and Greet” events. Visitors had an opportunity to direct specific questions to Benoit and to hear more about the techniques she utilizes. With so many people inspired by Benoit’s imaginative creations and wanting to learn more, a pastel still life workshop she held also generated interest.



Roksoyana Pidhainy Benoit, *Orchid Among Textiles*, soft pastel on paper

Seeking to honour her heritage and make a difference in the lives of Ukrainian women who have lost their husbands and children in the war, Benoit has designated her framed chalk oil pastel painting, *Orchid Among Textiles* for auction. The starting bid is \$600 and the funds will go to Maple Hope Foundation. The winner will be announced when the exhibition closes.

Basking in the glow of her second solo exhibition at the museum, Benoit has been heartened by the outpouring of support and the widespread interest her show has been garnering. “This has been a deeply meaningful experience for me and I’m truly honoured to be exhibiting in this museum once again.”

With summer on the horizon, Benoit is looking forward to spending more time in her studio, which is always a bustling hub of ideas and undertakings. “I plan to work with models as I continue to develop my Roxolyana series, in addition to working on some children’s book illustrations. I’d also like to seek inspiration in folkloric stories and fairytales.”

And while Ukrainian culture is a central focus for her, she’s also interested in exploring other cultures and broadening her perspective. “I think it would be incredible to delve into Palestinian and Persian culture.”

The “A Song to my Beloved” art exhibition can be viewed at the Taras Shevchenko Museum
until **May 30, 2025**

Phone: 416-534-8662 Email: shevchenkomuseum@bellnet.ca

Gallery hours: Mon, Tues, Weds, Fri: 10 a.m.-4p.m., Thurs: 12-7 p.m.,
and weekends by appointment



About Ayah Victoria McKhail

Ayah Victoria McKhail is a Toronto-based journalist who is passionate about arts and culture reporting. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, such as the Literary Review of Canada, the *WholeNote*, and newspapers affiliated with the East Coast’s SaltWire Network.