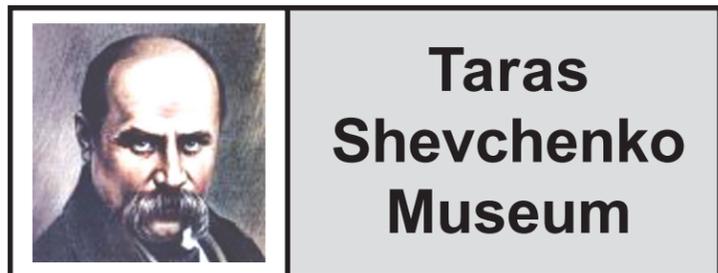


— Photo: Jerry Dobrowolsky



## Taras Shevchenko Museum

### Soushko Exhibition

— Photo: Wilfred Szczesny

On Saturday, October 29, 2011, art enthusiasts flocked to the Taras Shevchenko Museum in Toronto for the opening of a special art exhibit and sale by Ukrainian-Canadian artist Larissa Soushko.

Soushko's passion for the arts developed in her formative years growing up in Odessa, Ukraine. Her father, Vasilij Soushko, was a graphic artist; painter; poet, and journalist who served as a war reporter during the Second World War. Returning to Odessa in ailing health, he died at the age of 33, shortly after witnessing humanity at its worse.

Yet the legacy he left behind was a powerful one, and he instilled a passion for the arts in his daughter. In fact Soushko recalls, at around the age of eight, watching her father paint, mesmerized by his every move.

In the Soviet Union, high school students were encouraged to pursue music or the fine arts, and Soushko honed her skills in painting and drawing. "Based on my experience, embedded in Russian and Ukrainian culture is an immense appreciation and understanding of the arts. Today,



LARISSA SOUSHKO

that tradition continues."

While Soushko would later study architecture at the prestigious Moscow Architectural Institute, she was able to draw parallels with her many creative interests. For example, her eye for detail, her knowledge of structure, and her penchant for aesthetically-pleasing designs were complementary.

Today, she is a successful artist, and her paintings have been exhibited in various galleries around the world in addition to gracing private collections from East to West, including in Ukraine, Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, the United States, and Canada.

She's also a poet who has had seven books of poetry published. With themes ranging from love to sorrow, her most recent compilation, entitled *Selected Poems*, was published in September, 2011.

And in between all that, she still finds time to challenge anyone to a game of chess, noting she's an avid player.

Soushko's art work is reflective of neo-impressionism, which sees artists drawn to modern urban scenes, landscapes and seashores. For example, in her painting entitled "Resting Yachts", yachts can be seen on an idyllic lake on a lazy summer day. The colours blue, lavender, and

white are interspersed with shades of pink and the light hues convey a sense of warmth.

While she derives inspiration from Toronto and its environs, she has a particular penchant for Muskoka.

"There's a feeling of serenity there, and everything from the azure sky to the trees and lakes are strong motifs for me."

She finds Canadian winters especially intriguing. "I'm drawn to the stillness that's associated with the season and the beauty of crisp, white snow."

This is expressed in her art work. For example, with a painting entitled "Snow Path", which incorporates subtle shades of white, cream, pink, and blue, one could visualize a path being created by people careening through the freshly-fallen snow.

Admiring the painting was Marie Prociw. Crediting her late husband Jerry Prociw, who was also an artist of Ukrainian descent, with enhancing her love for the arts, she points to how such a piece can offer viewers a glimpse into Soushko's personality. "While a degree of strength is palpable, I feel there's a sense of humility that emanates from this painting, which is characterized by her delicate use of colour and her blending techniques."

Peggy Nash, M.P. for Parkdale – High Park who recently announced her candidacy for the federal New Democratic Party (NDP) leadership, also found Soushko's art work to be appealing. "The paintings make our natural surroundings come alive, and we're given a sense of the seasons that are reflected. The texture is rich and it's evocative of nature, which is multidimensional. They're truly wonderful paintings."

Sculptor Oleh Lesiuk, who is also the President of the Ukrainian Association of Visual Artists of Canada and the Vice-President of the Ukrainian Canadian Art Foundation, found the sense of optimism conveyed in Soushko's paintings most captivating. "The colours can range from bold to subtle, yet the interplay and what's depicted by the landscapes or flowers has a positive impact on people. Soushko is a highly respected and celebrated artist in the community."

It's a sentiment shared by Lyudmyla Pogoryelov, the museum's Director and Curator of the exhibition, which features 20 oil paintings. "I've always been amazed by Larissa's talent. The paintings are warm and intimate, and they reveal her impressions of Canada through a unique lens that resonates with viewers."

For Soushko, having her work exhibited at the Taras



Marie Prociw examines two of the 20 paintings in the exhibition which will continue to December 30.

Shevchenko Museum is especially momentous. As an artist and poet, Shevchenko's cultural and historical significance have had a profound impact on her.

She also notes the influence Shevchenko had on her father's life as an artist. "My father created a very beautiful portrait of Taras Shevchenko in graphics. It was prepared as a show piece to apply for membership in the Union of Soviet Painters, yet he died shortly thereafter."

Upholding Shevchenko's legacy has always been important to Soushko, and during events to commemorate his life in Ukraine, she would often translate from Ukrainian to Russian, the works of other prominent Ukrainian figures of political, cultural, and literary significance, such as Ivan Drach and Dmytro Pavlychko.

With everyone from children to senior citizens admiring the collection, the event was a resounding success. Soushko was heartened by the immense show of support and favourable remarks she received throughout the reception. "I'm very thankful to all those who attended. I'd also like to extend my gratitude towards the museum's staff and volunteers for managing the event so well. I paint from the heart and it's very meaningful to be able to share my work with so many people."

The exhibit and sale will continue until December 30, 2011, at the Taras Shevchenko Museum.

(A special "thank you" to Victoria Kravchyna, who acted as an interpreter from Russian to English during my interview with Larissa Soushko.)

— Ayah Victoria McKhail

— Photo: Jerry Dobrowolsky



Taras Shevchenko Museum Director Lyudmyla Pogoryelov officially opened the exhibition with comments about artist Larissa Soushko and the artists' work.



Visitors to the official opening of the Soushko exhibition also had an opportunity to view the rest of the Taras Shevchenko Museum, and to enjoy refreshments.

### Welland Orchestra at Heidehof

— Photo: Krystyna Sigala



The Welland Ukrainian Mandolin Orchestra of the AUUC, conducted by Rudy Wasylenky, appeared in concert at the Heidehof Home for the Aged in St. Catharines on Wednesday, October 26, with a program which accented German selections in the orchestra's repertoire. The audience often sang along, as well as tapping, clapping, nodding, and even conducting, clearly enjoying the show.

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