

Roksolyana Pidhainy-Benoit

It's a warm and sunny autumn afternoon in October, and Roksolyana Pidhainy-Benoit, the beautiful, blonde-haired and hazel-eyed artist with the sun-kissed glow radiates a sense of passion and enthusiasm as she discusses her art work.

Born in Newmarket, Ontario, to parents of Ukrainian origin, the precocious child was raised in both Toronto, Ontario, and Auburn, Alabama. Her father, Dr. Oleh Pidhainy, taught Ukrainian history at various universities, while her dynamic mother, Mrs. Mary Pidhainy, worked both inside and outside the home and was the anchor in a household of five children.

With a love for the arts that began to flourish in her formative years, it was only natural that Roksolyana chose to pursue studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), where she specialized in drawing and painting; graduating in 1997.

She counts renowned masters such as Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas and Rembrandt

van Rijn as having a profound effect on her work as an artist. However, she's also been influenced by the legendary Ukrainian poet and artist Taras Shevchenko, in addition to William Kurelek, the Alberta-born artist who achieved much acclaim and was also of Ukrainian origin.

Growing up, she wholeheartedly embraced the richness and uniqueness of the cultures and societies she was exposed to. However, culturally, she identifies herself as Ukrainian, noting that she honours the country's customs and traditions when celebrating holidays, such as Easter and Christmas with her husband Stephen, her nine-year-old daughter Sophia and their extended family.

Her cultural connectedness to Ukraine also manifests itself in the kitchen, in addition to having a substantial impact on her work as an artist. For example, she enjoys gathering vegetables from her mother's garden in order to make a variety of soups, such as potato, leek, chicken, and turkey.

A connection to the Earth is an integral aspect of Ukrainian culture, and she embodies it. It's only natural, then, that she would choose to depict borscht, which is essentially a beet-based soup, in her art work. For example, in her drawing *Hommage to Borsht*, a medley of vegetables can be seen. The warm tones and interplay of bold and subtle lines emanate richness and authenticity.

This might leave spectators wondering if she can cook it as delicious as she drew it.

"I still leave making borsht and *varenyky* (dumplings) to my mother," she smiles.

Fittingly, her drawing *Mother's Kitchen* continues on the soulful theme of hearth. A cooking scene is illustrated, complete with a pot full of vegetables, a cutting board and a ladle. Lively and vivid, the colours burst to the fore.

However, her ultimate passion lies in portraiture. "A portrait is a window into the state and the soul; a dance between the artist and the subject," she says.

For example, her father appears in *Old Cossack*. With a pensive look on his face, his eyes are cast downwards. He has salt-and-pepper hair and the fine lines on his forehead indicate a life well-lived.

Ultimately, she values the infinite possibilities of art as a creative form of self-expression. "What's most appealing and inspiring about it is that you can take aspects from your own culture and that of others and meld them into something uniquely your own."

That's precisely what she's done, and with the mesmerizing kaleidoscope of colours that's notable in all of her works, their sheer magnitude and brilliance are sure to be cherished.

— Ayah Victoria McKhail

Reflections, an exhibition and sale of pastels by Roksolyana Pidhainy-Benoit, continues through November to December 15, 2017, at the Taras Shevchenko Museum.

Featured is a stunning collection of 18 pastels drawn between 1997 and 2017.

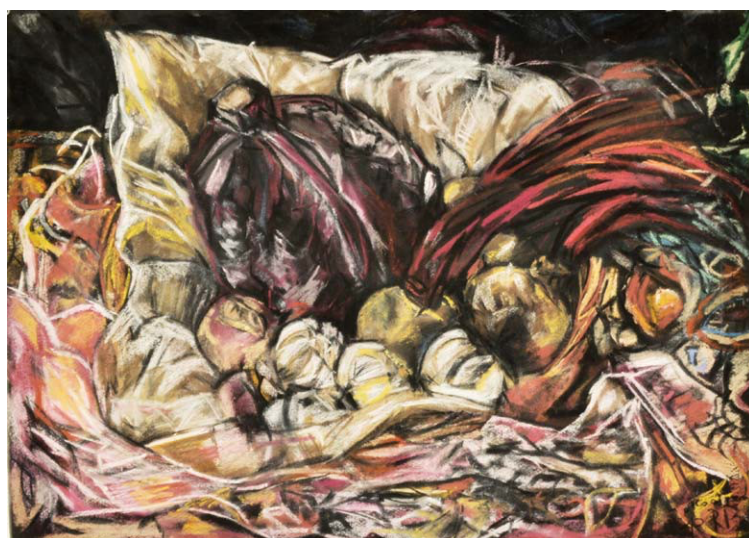
This is the first solo show in Canada for the artist, who has participated in various group shows.

Her works are located in private collections across Canada and the USA.

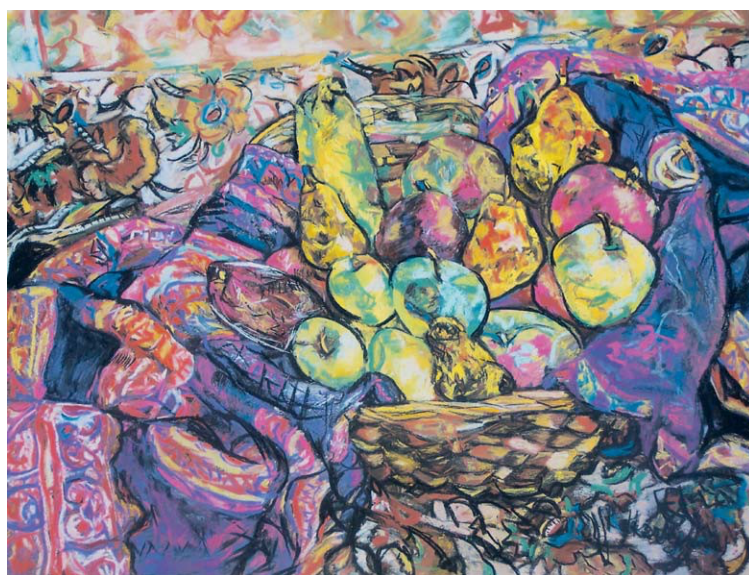
The museum is located at 1614 Bloor Street West in Toronto (between the Dundas West and Keele subway stations).

The Museum's "admission is free policy" remains in effect, and covers *Reflections*.

For Shevchenko Museum hours of operations, see the ad at left on this page.



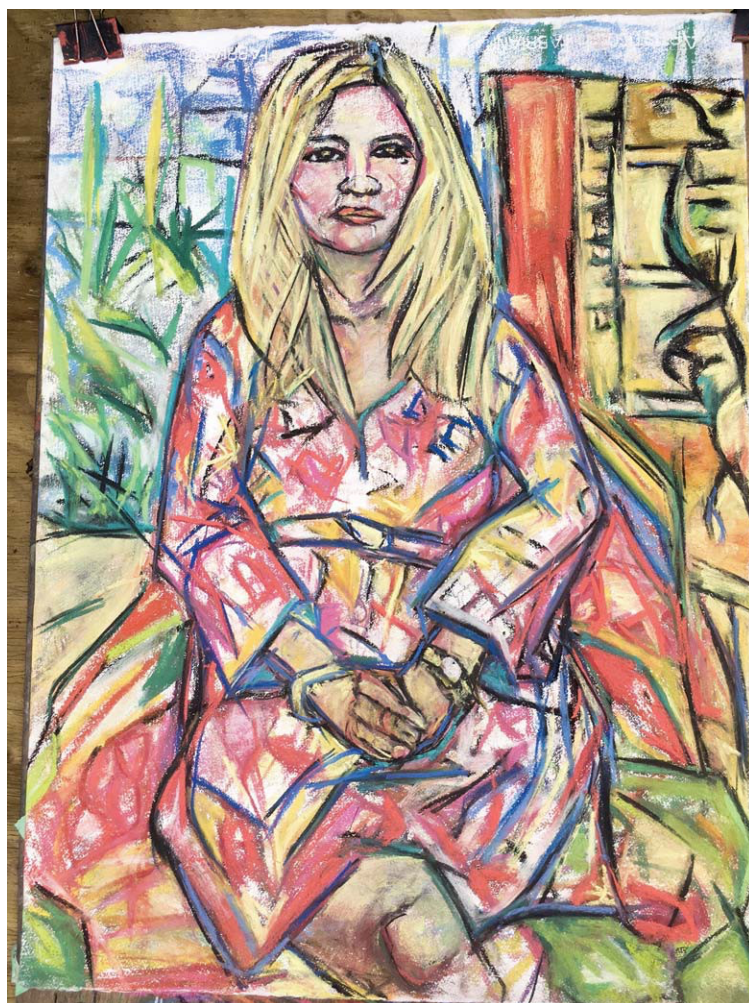
In *Hommage to Borsht*, a medley of vegetables, the warm tones and interplay of bold and subtle lines emanate richness and authenticity.



Apples, Pears is another of the still-life compositions in which the artist displays her strong use of colour.



Mother's Kitchen is a cooking scene, complete with a pot full of vegetables, a cutting board and a ladle. Lively and vivid, the colours burst to the fore.



An Evening Out, like the other paintings shown on this page, is done in pastels.