

# Friends of Nukus Museum



Quarterly Newsletter No. 13

July, 2010

1. The last four Newsletters have focused on four important events during the last very special year in the life of the Nukus Museum: No. 9 (July 2009) commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Igor Savitsky's death on July 27, 1984; No. 10 (October 2009) celebrated Marinika Babanazarova's 25 years as the Museum's Director and his chosen successor; No. 11 (February 2010) featured the premières of the film "*The Desert of Forbidden Art*", directed by FoNM member Amanda Pope and Tchavdar Georgiev—the first full-length (80 minutes), professionally made documentary about the life of Igor Savitsky and the history of the Museum; and No. 12 (April 2010) highlighted the opening on May 18 of an exhibition of graphics and paintings by the *Amaravella* group of *cosmist* artists that continues through mid-November.

2. This Newsletter, by contrast, reverts to two perhaps mundane but nevertheless critically important issues affecting the Museum's short- and longer-term activities: *first*, the emergency that led to the closure of its original old building last February; and *second*, the large number of graphics and paintings—some of international, even masterpiece caliber—that require restoration, in some cases urgently before they deteriorate irrevocably. Both relate directly to the *raison d'être* of the Friends of Nukus Museum—to raise awareness about and to help mobilize financial and material support for the Museum's research, restoration, and community outreach activities (*cf* paras. 13-14 below).

3. **Museum Emergency.** Last February, during an exceptionally severe Nukus winter, the central heating system of the Museum's original old building froze, and then broke down. Conditions deteriorated to the point that some of the Savitsky Collection's most precious paintings were at serious risk of permanent damage and the only practicable solution was to close the building and evacuate its most valuable contents to temporary storage space in the

new building. As a result, the old building is now closed and will likely remain so probably until early 2011. The estimated total cost of refurbishing the heating system, a new electronic security system, linoleum floor covering, roof and wall repairs and painting, and other building materials is about UZS 68.6 million, or about \$40,000 at an average of the official and current market exchange rates. As of June 30, the Karakalpakstan government had committed UZS 20 million, or 30%, for the heating system and the German Embassy in Tashkent UZS 14.7 million equivalent, or about 20%. Meanwhile, a Gazprom-related contractor working in the Aral Sea area has delivered materials in-kind valued at about UZS 11.4 million and, as reported in earlier Newsletters, the FoNM Board committed €1,000, or 3%, from 2009-10 membership dues. Work is in progress and, according to the latest information from Marinika, proceeding well. However, there remains a **financing gap of UZS 20.3 million, about \$11,800** at average exchange rates—for the electronic security system, linoleum floor covering, new labeling and signage, and for the labor and materials needed to re-hang the paintings and other permanent exhibition items that had to be evacuated. In reality, the availability of these remaining funds will determine when the building can re-open—if they can be mobilized quickly, it could be as soon as the upcoming 2010 fall visiting season; if not, not until spring, 2011. FoNM members able and willing to help, directly or indirectly—in addition to their annual membership dues—are invited to get in touch with Marinika as soon as possible.

4. **Painting Restoration.** Following the success of the Museum's multi-year (2005-09) project, under which over 100 paintings were restored—financed *inter alia* by Mr. Kees ter Horst, the Germany Embassy in Tashkent, the Friends of Nukus Museum, and *Restaurateurs sans Frontières*—of which about 80 were on display at the *Masterpieces Restored* exhibit-

ion during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2009, the FoNM Board asked Marinika and her staff earlier this year to recommend priorities for painting restoration during the next 2-3 years. They replied with two groups of five paintings—the first comprising important but seriously damaged works by Lysenko, Popov, Shigolev and Umfitsev with an estimated total cost for restoration of about \$45,000, and the second comprising works by Shigolev, Sandomirskaya, Smironov-Rusetsky, and Umfitsev with an estimated total cost of \$14,100.

5. The technical complexity, labor and time needed for restoration of the first group—in particular, the Popov and Lysenko paintings—will probably require expertise and especially materials from abroad to supplement the limited resources currently available in the Museum’s restoration department. Moreover, the estimated \$45,000 cost is obviously way beyond the very limited resources available from annual FoNM membership dues. In other words, this is effectively a major art restoration project meriting consideration by (e.g.) an arts philanthropist, a multi-national company with interests in Central Asia, or an international foundation for both technical and financial support. Given the Museum’s increasing international visibility—thanks *inter alia* to the support of embassies and international non-government institutions based in Uzbekistan and elsewhere in Central Asia, foreign media coverage, VIP visitors to Nukus, and, most recently, the *Desert of Forbidden Art* documentary film—this may now be a viable proposition. Besides, Marinika’s upcoming visit to the United States (cf. para. 10 below) will also provide opportunities for exploring prospects for cooperation and assistance. Against this background, mini-reproductions of the first group of paintings and thumb-nail sketches of their artists follow below.

6. **Sergei Shigolev** (1895-1943) graduated from Vladimir Real School and from 1918-20 worked at its Museum of Natural History. In 1920, he entered Moscow University where, from 1921-23, he attended Shalyapin’s Theatre Studio and, besides working as an actor, also

made sketches of masks, costumes, and theatrical characters. After joining the *Amaravella* group in 1927, he participated in their exhibitions in New York and Chicago and in their final show in Moscow in 1929. In 1933, he began to make animated cartoons. His *A Smile* (below) is a 61 x 50 cm oil on cardboard that requires an estimated **\$4,000** to restore.



*A Smile*  
Sergei Shigolev  
(1895-1943)

7. **Vladimir Lysenko (1903-1950s)**—perhaps best known for his (and the Museum’s) iconic *Bull* painting—lived in Tashkent from 1918. In the 1930s, he participated in the first Republican Exhibition of Fine Art Workers of Uzbekistan, presenting a large number of his paintings. In 1935, however, he was arrested and disappeared from view. Following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, his works were exhibited in Novorossiysk and Krasnodar in the late 1940s. In 1951, he returned to Tashkent, where he was rehabil-



*Composition*  
Vladimir Lysenko  
(1903-1950s)

itated in 1953. His *Composition* (above) is a large 280 x 200 cm badly damaged, fragile oil on canvas, whose very challenging restoration is estimated to cost **\$25,000**.

**8. Vladimir Umfitsev (1899-1964)** is one of many Russian artists for whom Uzbekistan became a creative home. Born in Barnevka village in the South Urals, he studied painting and drawing in Omsk (1916-1919). In 1918, while attending Klementyev's Art Studio as 'just another realist', he happened to attend David Burlyuk's lecture on *futurism*. Thereupon, he became a *futurist* and settled on his creative credo—"New Content needs New Forms." In 1923, in search of both, he left for Turkestan which at first struck him as one huge carnival—of bright colors, unusual architecture, exotic clothes. He met many other artists living in Uzbekistan at that time, including such well known figures as Isupov, Nikolayev (Usto-Mumin), Volkov, Burc, Kurzin, and Korovay. His painting *To the Train*—together with *Musicians*—a permanent Nukus Museum favorite, combined the most daring experiments of the young artist: perspective, form and mixed technique. His two works below—*Composition*, a 63 x 76 cm water color (below) and *Tobolsk*, a 42 x 52 cm oil on cardboard (upper right)—are each estimated to require **\$3,000** to restore.



*Tobolsk*  
Viktor Umfitsev (1899-1964)

#### Other News from and about Nukus

**10. Marinika to visit the United States, October 3-23.** Subject to her receiving the necessary exit and entry visas, Marinika will visit the United States from about October 3-23—for the first time in several years. Her immediate purpose and main objective is to attend the **Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America (TSA)** from **October 6-9** in **Lincoln, NB**, where she has been invited to contribute to a panel discussion on Central Asian textiles. Thereafter, she will go to: **New York City** for a presentation at Columbia University's Harriman Institute, **October 12**; **New Brunswick, NJ** for a presentation at Rutgers University's Zimmerli-Vorhees Art Museum, **October 13**; and to **Washington, D.C.** to attend a symposium at the Textile Museum, **October 15** and the opening of an exhibition *Colors of the Oasis—Central Asia Ikats*, **October 16**. While in Washington, D.C., she will also attend a public screening of "*The Desert of Forbidden Art*" at the National Gallery of Art, **October 17**, together with Amanda Pope and Tchavdar, the film makers.

**11.** FoNM Chairman David Pearce plans to accompany Marinika in New York, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. and to arrange meetings for her with individuals and institutions potentially interested in developing collaborative relations with the Nukus Museum, in hosting an exhibition from the Savitsky Collection, or in offering financial and/or technical assistance. David also plans to arrange a reception for FoNM members residing in the Washington, D.C. area during the weekend of **October 16-17**.



*Composition*  
Viktor Umfitsev (1899-1964)

**9.** Unfortunately, nothing is known about the life and works of **Sergei Popov (1901-33)**. However, his beautiful *A Sailor and Woman*, a 162 x 108 oil on canvas (next page), is one of five works by this artist that Savitsky found and obtained from the Zagorsk Archive of Art Values (near Moscow), where politically incorrect paintings from the Tretyakov and other Moscow galleries and museums were 'exiled' and stored for safe keeping during the period of 'socialist realism' and Stalinist repressions. In fact, the Zagorsk Archive became known as a special prison for art.

Finally, Amanda Pope and Tchavdar are making plans to accompany Marinika to Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH for a film screening and related seminar and for a visit to the Cleveland Art Museum, **October 18-20**.

**12. The Desert of Forbidden Art**—fans of this film, featured in full in the February, 2010 Newsletter, and visitors to its website<sup>1</sup> will be aware that, besides screenings at numerous festivals around the world—most recently in Israel (Tel Aviv) and China (Beijing)—it has also received two prestigious awards: (a) the Best Documentary Feature Award at the Palm Beach International Film Festival last April; and (b) the CINE Golden Eagle Award, widely recognized as a symbol of excellence in professional, independent filmmaking for over 50 years, whose previous winners have included Ken Burns, Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese. Finally, earlier this month, it was announced that the film will have its US television premiere on the Emmy Award winning Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series “Independent Lens” during the upcoming 2010-11 season. The actual broadcast date is expected to be announced in September, but will likely be in April or May, 2011. Stay tuned—or visit the website for further details!

**13. FoNM Membership Dues.** Later this month, Friends will be receiving invoices for the new FoNM membership year 2010-11. For the record, last year’s 2009-10 membership dues financed *inter alia*: (a) a modest upgrade of the Museum’s information technology facilities (laptop computer, color printer, and a high-speed DSL internet connection); (b) the printing of four souvenir postcards (500 copies each) for sale in the Museum’s gift shop; (c) language and other training for Museum guides and staff; and (d) a €1,000 contribution to the emergency repairs needed in the Museum’s old building reported elsewhere in this Newsletter. In the preceding year, 2008-09, FoNM membership dues financed the restoration of nine paintings

**14.** During 2010-11, we intend to match at least this level of support to the Museum—a new project being the installation of the soft- and hardware required to create a digital archive or inventory

of the entire Savitsky Collection. In addition, we intend to finance the printing of five more souvenir postcards (500 copies each) as well as the re-printing of the best-selling *Bull* postcard (500 copies)—for sale in the Museum’s gift shop, with all proceeds going to the benefit of the Museum. In the circumstances, we hope that all Friends will renew their memberships accordingly. In this context, and responding to inquiries from several Friends, we intend commencing 2010-11 to offer the option of Life Membership for a one-time payment of €1,000. Two friends have already indicated their intention to avail themselves of this opportunity. Additional details will be included in upcoming membership invoices.



*A Sailor and Woman,*  
Sergei Popov (1901-33)

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<sup>1</sup> [www.DesertOfForbiddenArt.com](http://www.DesertOfForbiddenArt.com)