

Yefim Rudminsky: a legacy of style and beauty

Noted Ukrainian architect leaves behind treasure of art work

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During his life he was known as a brilliant architect.

Yet after his death, the public found out something surprising about renowned Ukrainian designer Yefim Rudminsky: In a period spanning five decades, he had created a more than 1,000 works of art.

Today art critics debate which of Rudminsky's legacies is greater: his contribution to the nation's architecture or the vast amount of Ukrainian visual art that he created.

Perhaps a better question is not which is better, but rather, how did he manage to do both so well.

"Yefim did not sit idle for a minute, he hated wasting time, precious time," recalls Rudminsky's wife Klavdia. "He always had a pencil in his hand, sketching whenever he had a free moment, every day, all of his life."

When Rudminsky died of a heart attack in 1994 at the age of 57, he left behind a wealth of art — sketches, paintings and even postcards.

Now his wife is working just as hard to ensure that her husband's efforts were not in vain. She wants to make sure the public sees the work that he spent five decades creating.

It is no easy feat. So far this year, she has organized five exhibitions. At one point, 300 of Rudminsky's pieces were on display in three exhibit halls around Kyiv.

Still there are hundreds of works that be framed and named.

PASSION FOR CREATION

Rudminsky was an extremely versatile artist. In one recent exhibit, there were five halls containing Rudminsky's works from different periods representing each decade since the 1950s.

"It looked like an exhibit of five different artists," Rudminsky said. "Visitors would come up to me and ask, 'And whose works are in the other halls?'" she recalled.

In his diary, parts of which Rudminsky has published, Rudminsky confesses that he couldn't help but create something all the time.

"Artistic activity for me is the means of existence," he wrote. "Long ago, I became ready for a six-square-meter room with only an easel and a drawing board. The rest is vanity."

That's why Rudminsky felt relieved when among her husband's notes, she found a piece of paper with Rudminsky's own classification of his creative work. On it, Rudminsky distinguished seven different series.

"Faces, Images and States" is a collection of portraits and his latest work, portraits in landscapes.

Rudminsky characterizes the series as "openness and exposure; a meditative state; immersion in the world of poetry, music and special mood."

With this quote in mind, Rudmin-

sky's self-portraits are especially interesting. Most of them are painted in dark hues, and the faces show the expression of an observer, standing quietly and silently, watching and patiently waiting to discern something.

"I've always envied artists who are able to see and realize what they've seen," Rudminsky wrote in his diary. "It's more complicated for me. I'm rather involved in 'sorcery' and contemplating what has come out of it."

But his other series show Rudminsky not as a sorcerer, but rather as someone able to feel the ties between past and present generations.

Unlike the self-portraits, most of which are done in a half profile to create the illusion of being peeped at, Rudminsky's selection in the "Nameless Prophets" series portray the character as grieving at their futility.

But Rudminsky saw them differently. "They look inside of themselves, touching the mysteries and puzzles of the existence. And if you do meet a straight, reproachful look, there is

always a bit of concern and inner pain."

The "Dedications" series is what Rudminsky called "memories of the deceased."

"Babi Yar" is a dramatic series, but none of the pieces depict the atrocities of the massacre. Rather, these are the last thoughts of a dying person, "serene visions and dreams in the kaleidoscope of thoughts that soothe pain and despair of reality," he wrote.

The "Fantasies" series is vast and includes paintings of architecture, architecture in landscapes and simple landscapes.

Rudminsky loved the city, and it's evident in his paintings of buildings that they were painted by the hand of an architect: He didn't miss the smallest architectural detail, yet he still painted in a soft, unobtrusive manner.

In a separate Odessa series called "Caryatids," Rudminsky focuses on architectural decorations, which he enlivens and endows with a personal story.

Some of Rudminsky's most impressive city landscapes are his "Evening City Symphony" and "Kyiv — Courtyard at Night on Gorkogo 57."

The first painting looks like Maidan Nezalezhnosti, with its yellow lighting and circle of buildings reflected in a fountain pool. The mass of lights implies the operatic solemnity, and the uneven outline of the buildings and their shimmering reflections, shows both the moving rows of bows in the orchestra, and of sound diagrams on graphic equalizer.

But Rudminsky's latest landscapes, created in pastels, are the most masterful. His soft transitions of color and tiny details, which are extremely hard to draw with pastels, are astonishing.

Rudminsky also left behind a curious collection of so-called "Letters Without Words." These are actual letters that Rudminsky sent to his family whenever he was away. A lazy writer, he would draw or paint his impressions on the back of a postcard rather than write a message. Rudminsky has gathered about 120 of such postcards, each of which is a finished artwork.

A PRESTIGIOUS CAREER

Rudminsky was born in a poor Jewish district in Podil in 1937, shortly before World War II. As a small boy,



Rudminsky painted this self-portrait in 1992. (Photos courtesy of Klavdia Rudminsky)

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— Architect Valery Sopilka

he sketched tanks and battle scenes in his school notebooks during classes.

After the war, while attending secondary school, he began attending the artistic studio of Abram Balazovsky, a famous Soviet theatrical artist and one of the first art directors at Ukrainian Republic Television. Balazovsky was not only Rudminsky's first tutor, but also his spiritual teacher.

They became lifelong friends, and Balazovsky bequeathed part of his art collection to Rudminsky.

In 1997 Rudminsky organized a joint exhibit called "Master and his Student."

Throughout his life Rudminsky was often in prestigious company, even during his early years. In fact, Mykola Gluschenko, one of the best Ukrainian painters of the 20th century, noticed Rudminsky when he was still a young man. In 1954, Gluschenko noted and praised Rudminsky's work and recommended him to Kyiv State Art School.

In 1956 Rudminsky entered Kyiv Art Institute's architecture department, and upon graduation began to work at the Design Institute.

Rudminsky designed the sanitariums Yuzhny in the Crimea and Verkhovyna in the Carpathians. His last creation was the Russian Embassy in Kyiv, a light and stylish house, transformed from a heavy Stalin-era building.

"[Rudminsky] had a rare gift: the understanding of the ways architecture can influence people," writes Borys Kucher, renowned Ukrainian architect and Rudminsky's colleague.

"In the period of complete neglect of both architectural ideas and forms, [Rudminsky] created objects unique for their time."

It wasn't just his individuality that attracted attention.

"He loved nature with the eyes of an

artist and with the heart of a man," wrote another colleague, Valery Sopilka. "With his buildings, he entered nature carefully, as [if bearing a] gift, and the nature gratefully accepted it."

Rudminsky also created a number of architectural projects that won various contests, but those designs were never built.

One such project was the memorial to the Babi Yar massacre in Kyiv. "The Road of Victims" — a strip of scarlet flowers in the middle of a black stripe of ploughed ground leads to the ditch where the massacre took place. Along the road, human-height lumps of stone symbolize the crowds of people who had walked down this fatal road. The ditch surrounds the square with museums, and the chief symbol of the memorial — a Jewish menorah with seven floodlights facing the sky — is mounted in the center.

Although the project took only second place at a contest in 1991, architects unanimously call this creation the peak of Rudminsky's architectural work and the best representation — unsurpassed in terms of creativity for the memorial.

People remember Rudminsky as a restless worker, who constantly searched for perfection.

"He has tried all possible forms and techniques," recalls Klavdia.

YEFIM RUDMINSKY'S WORK ON DISPLAY

Scientists' House, 45 Volodymyrska, 60 pieces are on display until July 16. The hall is open daily except Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Odex Plus gallery, Pecherska Lawra, Building 20, 2nd floor, 80 pieces are on display until July 25. The hall is open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.



The marble staircase at the Russian Embassy in Kyiv. Rudminsky transformed the Stalin-era building into a stylish structure.