



left, Ordinary Morning for Gathering Curiosities, oil on canvas, 46" x 32"

above, Scene of Pastoral Yoga in Orange County, oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

Dreaming Reality

written by Debra Usher

If you took the work of Dali and married it to a Degas or Botticelli, the offspring would be a work by Ilya Zomb. There is a sense of mystery and dream-like curiosity which infuses these paintings and leads you to question – are they real or are they just a fantasy?

"I am often asked how I classify my art," Ilya muses, "or to what style it belongs. I strongly disagree with the labels 'Surrealism' or 'Fantasy Art'. I use the term 'Pseudo-Realism'. Every situation depicted in my paintings is possible, in spite of how unreal it might seem at first glance."

But somehow other thoughts are called to mind. There is a sense that the symbolism in

these paintings may echo the baroque symbolism of a Caravaggio, for example. A deeper meaning below the surface that is not quite attainable, which is often the way of dreams. Despite comparisons lingering at the reaches of consciousness, the one thing that separates the work of Ilya Zomb is that it truly is unique. Springing forth from the imagination and dreams of one man, it is depicted on canvas so that you too can find meaning and pleasure in the work.

The process is that of traditional multilayered oil painting, which Ilya sees as a slow painstaking process. "In my earlier works," he says, "I created texture with a palette knife. Today it's mostly brushwork. Each painting takes months to complete and starts with an idea in the head, then the idea in a sketch, a final drawing, then I transfer the drawing to canvas, and work, work and work, layer after layer of paint, defining details."



Two Baskets of Oranges, oil on canvas, 40" x 38"



top, Half Pound of Sour Cherries, acrylic on canvas, 22" x 28"
bottom, Day's Subtle Movement, acrylic on canvas, 38" x 50"

From There to Here

Born in Odessa, in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Ilya always had an artistic eye for his environment. "Odessa is a beautiful city," he points out, "and an important Black Sea port, with great cultural traditions and one of the oldest art schools in Russia. Odessa is now part of the Ukraine."

Although a traditionalist in the methods and mediums, it is obvious even from casual examination that the subject matter and style of Ilya Zomb veers from the ordinary. In essence, this is what took him from the Ukraine to Canada.

under Gorbachev. No one could predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, and I was not convinced the socialist establishment would ever change. My family and I decided to emigrate. Even though I grew up and got educated and had my first exhibitions in the USSR, I consider myself an American artist."

The humble beginnings certainly paved the way; Ilya warmly remembers the elementary school art teacher who first noticed his passion for drawing and advised Ilya's parents to enroll him in Art school. He then went on to spend four happy years learning the basics and being surrounded



above, Still, oil on canvas, 18" x 34"



right, Observing the Metamorphoses of Painted Lady, oil on canvas, 38" x 28"

"I attended Art School for youth, and then graduated from Odessa State Art College in 1979," Ilya recalls. "Ten years later, I immigrated to the United States and settled in New York. My artistic career started in the Soviet Union under an atmosphere of oppression and lack of freedom of expression; there really was only one style of art which was officially ruled and recognized – that of Socialist Realism. At that time, all exhibition venues were under strict censorship and controlled by the government. I got opportunities to exhibit my work only when Perestroika began

by like-minded and inspirational individuals. In the same way, he feels lucky to have had such believing parents, who followed the advice and continuously supported his artistic endeavours.

Being an artist is all that Ilya has wanted since he was eleven years old. He jokingly says that it is all he wants now – his life has reflected this single-minded goal, and circumstances have guided him forward. "An important person to my American beginning was Arkadij Goshchinski, whom I met in New York in 1990. Since we met, he has been a big fan and supporter of my art.



left, Interplay of Casual Objects, oil on linen, 17" x 23"

above, Equilibrium Above the Rocks, oil on canvas, 23" x 19"



left top, Through Sundown Rays, oil on canvas, 24" x 28"
left bottom, Aquatic Still Life, oil on canvas, 17" x 23"

above, Morning Through Magnolia Pods, oil on canvas, 36" x 36"

At the time Arkadij owned a successful Bagel café on 57th Street in Manhattan, near Carnegie Hall and several TV studios, where he organized small exhibitions for emerging artists, primarily Russian-speaking. At that café, my paintings attracted the attention of Lisa Young, who offered her patronage in organizing further exhibitions. With her involvement I had several solo exhibitions that proved important for my career. This eventually led to my partnership with Susan Snyder and Oliver Caldwell of Caldwell Snyder gallery. Since 1999, I have had seven solo exhibitions with them."

The Strength of Values

Sun, water and sky. These are the influences that first spring to mind when Ilya is asked why he paints. There is a strong correlation between what he sees in the world as he journeys through it and

what he feels. Distill the visuals, filter them through the feelings, and add imagination. Then capture it on canvas. That is the plan. Over the years, Ilya has had his taste in art shift from early 20th century to Italian and Northern Renaissance. The more he considers these works, the more fascinated Ilya becomes with the virtuoso craftsmanship and elegant composition he finds there.

"When I travel or just walk outdoors with my wife Svetlana," says Ilya, "we collect various odd objects, like seashells, feathers, old glass bottles, pinecones, seedpods – anything at all which seems interesting – and bring all that stuff to my studio. Some of them later appear in my paintings. Then there is my studio, which gives me peace and quiet and allows me to focus. I listen to music when I work; sometimes it is classical and opera, sometimes classical rock or





previous spread, *Tranquility of Long Island's Shore*, oil on canvas, 40" x 60"
above, *Balance Above the Waves*, oil on linen, 34" x 62"



above, Sociable After Hours, oil on canvas, 19" x 23"



right, Delaware Water Gap, oil on canvas, 24" x 20"

jazz. All the while my dog, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel named Thalia, keeps me company. I have depicted her in my paintings several times."

That companionship is something very important to Ilya. At another period in his life, he had a pet rabbit called Vasilij (Basil) who lived in his studio and kept him company as he painted. Vasilij is present in a few paintings as well. But one day he died, and Ilya found himself quite lonely at the studio without him. "My son Pavel convinced me to go to a pet store just to look at rabbits," Ilya explains. "I think it was just to cheer me up, and I went without any intention of buying one. At the store there were puppies, and a talkative sales person. While my son was looking for parking, the clerk and I talked about different dog breeds and by the time my son finally parked and joined me at the store, I was a proud owner of Thalia. I had never owned a dog before and we left the store and got into the car in a state of disbelief and bewilderment of what we just had done."

Finding Meaning

Ilya is very philosophical about what the viewer sees in his paintings. He knows why he put what he did in the image, but that does not mean you will see the same thing. "You tell me what you see," he comments. "You can find similarity with other artists, you can find uniqueness... the meaning that I put into the work is all there for you to see. You have to find your own version of the story. When I paint, I have to be satisfied with the result. It's not easy because I am a strict judge and have no pity for myself. In the case of a commission, I also have to satisfy a client which is a double responsibility. However, I don't say no to commissions. My motto is: I paint for myself, but I don't collect my own paintings."

Ilya Zomb is represented by:

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