

Vulokh Retrospective Covers 60 Years of Abstractionism

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While Igor Vulokh may not be one of the best-known Russian artists among Western audiences, Muscovites are certainly acquainted with his work — in recent years he has held major exhibitions at the State Tretyakov Museum and other Moscow centers. However, the retrospective of his work now on display at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, or MMOMA, on Petrovka has been the first opportunity to gather works from all periods of the now-deceased artist's long career.

Vulokh, a Kazan native, showed artistic potential from a young age and first developed his talents at the Kazan Art College in the mid-1950s. After graduation, he moved to Moscow, even then the artistic center of Russia, and applied to the prestigious Surikov Art Institute. Like many creative young artists, Vulokh was rejected from the Surikov Institute, yet quickly made connections in the Moscow art scene.

Over the next four decades, Vulokh continued to work and paint in Moscow, developing into a

powerful force in the nonconformist art scene and creating a recognizably abstract style. His paintings from this period are remarkably unique — looking at his canvases, with bright zones of color melding together in arrangements that almost look like real landscapes, one is tempted to brand his work as "Rothko-esque" or "Pollock-ian" and pass him off by somehow equating him with another, more famous artist.

Yet Vulokh defies such easy definition. In this retrospective, we see his abstract landscapes develop over time, gradually moving further and further away from realism and taking on brighter colors and sharper lines. In many works, Vulokh experiments with the three-dimensionality of his work, layering paint in areas to make high ridges in the canvas, creating a literal landscape to match the one depicted in two dimensions.

While many artists are considered recluses, Vulokh had many friends, and his collaboration with people like the poets Gennady Aigi and Tomas Transtr mer resulted in some of his most unusual works. At the MMOMA exhibit, the stark black and white illustrations that Vulokh created for Transtr mer's work are presented in a separate, dark space, along with a recording of Transtr mer's poems being read.

Vulokh's retrospective truly covers the full scope of the artist's life, showing the great changes in his work after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the artist had the opportunity to travel widely and exhibit works all over Europe. Vulokh himself even makes an appearance in a video recording at the retrospective, and his presence alone make the exhibit worth a look.

The Igor Vulokh retrospective will run until Nov. 24 at MMOMA at 25 Petrovka, metro Chekhovskaya, Trubnaya.

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