

Artist of the Month

July 2004

BY KELLY BOLER

Society, according to Vadim Bora, is looking for sane behavior, something he has no particular intention of providing. For instance, don't walk into his gallery, look at a painting you don't understand and ask, "What is it?" If you do, he will inform you of the obvious. "It is canvas, oil, and a frame." He will say this even if it is impolite. "I have no time to pretend anymore."

Don't assume that because you are prepared to buy a piece that you can show a lack of respect for Bora or his work; it is not beyond him to turn around and refuse to sell the piece at any price. While some might see this as an arrogant attitude, it is more to the point a reaction to what Bora sees as a trend to treat his gallery like a department store, and his paintings and sculpture as consumer goods. "You don't work for the money," he says. "If it is sold, good. If not, better. If you think about money it will kill you."

Not that he has any objection to money per se. He is the first to admit that capitalism has been good to him, the same capitalism that he was warned about as a boy in Russia.



Vadim Bora "Sleeping Reader" charcoal on paper

"When I was little what I saw [about America] was propaganda. Pictures of

people lying down next to the trash can." While he was a worldly 39-years-old when he first came to the States, he was still not sure what to expect.

"Everything was mystery," he says, and he felt it was all upside down, although there were things he could understand.

"I am from the South, too," he says. "It's an absolutely different mentality, from the Muscovites to Caucasus, from North to South."

There was never any doubt he would be an artist, and in school his teachers saw to it that the only thing he had to do was focus and practice. His father, however, like fathers every-

where, needed a little convincing. . .

where, needed a little convincing; he underestimated how different and how driven his son was.

Bora tried to explain it to him. "He was a military man, so I told him, give me five years and I will be the sergeant, the major, the captain, the general of art." Today his pieces are in collections and museums all over the world.

Bora refuses to be managed, and he refuses to be typed, which allows him to create in a staggering amount of different styles. He is perfectly aware that some followers of the art world find this unsettling, but, "Why should I be the same?" he asks. "I am doing everything so that you

won't recognize me. Otherwise, I would be like an actor who plays the same piece over and over. What actor plays the same part over and over? Art is a game. Part of the game is to be able to swing from one image to another."

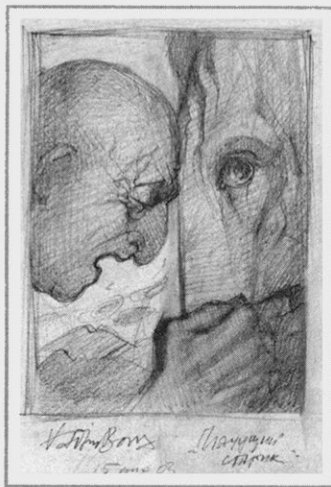
A perfect example of

this is a series of provocative pieces on display at his studio. Some of the pieces are paintings and some are sculpture, but all are interpretations of a single vision. It is the simplest of gates, two posts topped by a lintel to form the merest of frames and contain or support a wide variety of characters. One is an idyll, a boy playing on a perfect afternoon, another is a nightmare, a blind man entreating the sky. There is an enigma, a nude couple standing on either side of the gate, turned away from each other, and in every piece, there are the birds.

Bora is not entirely sure himself what the birds are or where there come from, but it has something to do with the fact that they can fly away and leave the world of gravity. Like the gate, they have something to do with the eternal dream of home, something that lives in the belly as well as the underside of the mind. It is the door between worlds, between dreaming and waking, living and dying, day and night. "The subconscious was part of the universe," he says, "part of the universe, something from nothing and made nothing from everything."

Partly because he is able to turn such an ephemeral inspiration into dozens of visceral, almost brutally physical worlds, he is always at work, and has to be known to forget to eat for days at a time, "like a camel," he laughs. But he is impressed with the fact that, "An artist's life is very short. Not physically short, but the strength between your health and creativity, a very strong connection, that healthy time is quite short."

One of his creative heroes is Renoir, who, crippled by rheumatism, kept working from his wheelchair by taping brushes to the back of his



Vadim Bora "Crying Old Man" graphite on paper

hands. "People who keep on going. Keep painting. Keep doing art. These guys are my heroes."

With heroes like Renoir, Vadim Bora will continue to speak his mind, create work within a scope that makes some people uncomfortable, and, in short, refuse to deliver sane behavior. "You have to be tough. But if you know what you are doing, go do it."

Information box:

These images are studies and drawings from the artist's notebook in the new exhibition: "Drawings: The Narrative" at Vadim Bora Gallery in the Haywood Park Hotel, July 1- July 31. A collection of 15 years of drawings, sketches, and character studies. Visit the gallery at 1 Battery Park in the Haywood Park Hotel. Phone: (828) 254-7959, or check out his web site at: vadimborastudio.com.