

Becoming an artist is a painful process which demands of the artist intensive will-power, daily emotional and intellectual effort. It is no easy thing, amidst the care and concerns of everyday life, to continue along the path one has chosen, to preserve integrity of intent, breadth of mind and, most importantly, not to betray fundamental principles. Fame, renown are not easily attained.

Leonid Efros is an honest and sincere man who believes in his own destiny. More than once has faced the challenge of remaining true to himself or undertaking work alien to his own creative aspirations, and with unwavering conviction he has ways made what he believed to be the only right choice.

He combines respect, tact and consideration for the views and opinions of those around him with unswerving adherence to his own convictions, fundamental principles and artistic criteria. These and many other qualities reveal that Leonid Efros is a man of great personal culture.

In art he is distinguished by an innate sense of taste, which manifests itself both in his behaviour and his way of life. While he does not scorn the mundane, he is able to exist as it were above daily concerns, carrying out everything with ease and elegance.

Efros is also a very trusting and open-hearted, but this is by no means the naivety of a foolish man. Rather it reflects his integrity, the sincerity of an intelligent man possessing the ability to penetrate to the essence of things, and who is in harmonious union with nature in the broadest sense of the term.

When speaking of his work, Leonid Efros often seeks to express his ideas through poetry, in which the technical process of firing appears as some kind of ritual activity or mystery. The result of this sacred ritual is enamel – a fusion of glass paint, metal and the soul of the artist, bound together by fire. Like the alchemist of old whispering his incantations over his phials, so also the enamelist often faces the unexpected, the miracle of a new discovery.

The art of enamelwork is to some extent elitist. It requires long and detailed study, presupposes that the spectator is able to appreciate the technical mastery of execution. In our hustling, bustling, automated world, this is an art which encourages us to savour the refined pleasure of that which requires close and detailed attention. It is an art which encapsulates the minutely painstaking work of the artist, his individuality, something highly personal and intimate. Yet enamel miniatures were and are found inside private houses, and the miniature portrait was traditionally intended to be kept in memory of someone near and dear. Such miniatures require long scrutiny, they can be held in the hand, warmed by the body, and this sensation lends a particular attraction to this art form.

In his enamelwork, Leonid Efros seeks to expand the artistic and plastic possibilities of traditional enamel, primarily in form. He combines the miniature with three-dimensional elements. Overcoming the resistance of this viscous material which does not wish to obey the laws of three-dimensional space, the artist succeeds in producing a three-dimensional form (The Figure).

In another decorative composition, A Horse for the Fieldmarshal, the stylised cartouche ornamenting the panels and in particular the head of the horse with its finely-modelled ears, express not only an experiment, but the desire to master the material and make it obedient to the artist's will. Even the image structure of enamel portraiture is subjected to reappraisal, Efros depicts not a concrete historical personage, but a "character" who brings together the features of an 18th century man. His subjects, particularly historical personages, often seem like actors playing a role and brought together by a play called "History". Such is the composition Heroes of the Patriotic War of 1812. This approach preserves a distance between the artist and the subject, the model for whom was provided by someone long-departed.

This clear desire to find his own solution to specifically artistic problems of working in enamel allows us to speak of a certain easel-type style in Efros' work. Moreover, in many of his works he seeks an interior in which to set his model (The Maly Hermitage. Natasha in the Pavilion Room. 1987), the colouring of the interior being handled with the same detail. Efros deliberately set himself a more difficult task by attempting to "include" an emphatically contemporary figure within a classic interior. This, however, also serves to expand the bounds of the miniature genre, so that the artist no longer concentrates only on the portrait itself, as was traditionally the case with enamel portraits.

Leonid Efros also devotes a great deal of attention to the expressive possibilities of combining various techniques in one work. For example, in Portrait of A. V. Suvorov (1986) and Portrait of Voltaire (1984) he makes use of both painted and decorative enamel.

Leonid Efros is continually seeking new means of artistic expression. He has ambitious plans for the future, and we hope that his presentiment of his calling and artistic success will prove well-founded. Those who know and believe in him are sure it will.

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