



SERGEI CHEPIK

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Churchill famously called Russia a 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.' True? Only a Russian could say. But look at the work of the great Sergei Chepik, and it's tempting to conclude that these vast and complex works could only have emerged from a vast and complex country.

Chepik was born in 1953 into a family of artists, with a painter father and sculptress mother. It was clear from an early age that Chepik was a prodigious talent, and this being the height of Soviet Russia (Stalin had died in the year the artist was born), he was fast tracked into the elite of the state education system. That meant St Petersburg and the Repin Academy of Fine Art led by Andrej Mylnikov.

It was to be a rigorous apprenticeship, in which painterly technique and an appreciation for the history of art was drilled into the young Chepik. These lessons never left him. Even today, nearly forty years on, you can see echoes of this instruction in the fabulous detail of Chepik's work, and its many allusions to the greats that have come before him.

After graduating in 1978, Chepik was absorbed into the heart of state-sponsored art world. He became a member of the Union of Young Artists of Leningrad, using this opportunity to travel across his country and try to perfect every genre – from landscape to portraiture to crowd scenes to still-life. This period produced some of the powerful work of his early life and his admission to the USSR Union of Artists. But it also opened his eyes to the creative restrictions imposed by the Russian régime. In time, the party began to disapprove of Chepik's choice of subject matter. Even the bureaucrats in charge of state machinery could see that Chepik's masterpiece, *The House of the Dead*, could be read on another more allegorical level. The 1987 canvas was banned from exhibitions.

Chepik's time in Russia was coming to an inevitable end (it wouldn't be long before the same could be said of the Communist Party). And so this titan of Russian painting – a man who can rightly be placed in the pantheon of Russian greats – moved to Paris in 1988 with no luggage other than his canvases, his father's easel, and his forbidden masterpiece. Months later, *The House of the Dead* would win a gold medal at the Salon d'Automne.

So began the second great chapter in the artistic life of this visionary painter. Chepik absorbed everything the French capital could throw at him. Over the next two decades the Russian would look out across the city while looking back to the giants that came before him. He painted Notre Dame as obsessively as Monet painted Rouen. He documented the seedy hinterland of the same Pigalle nightspots that Manet and Toulouse Lautrec had visited a century before. He depicted harlequins as Picasso had done. He even travelled south to Arles, in the footsteps of Van Gogh, to find inspiration in the town's bullrings.

And in parallel to these works were the monumental religious paintings that hark back to the mystical renaissance work of El Greco. This is not fashionable work. It's a million miles from a video installation. But it's utterly breathtaking. Try feeling awe and wonder before some video footage on a loop. Although these religious studies are far from straightforward, asking difficult questions of the viewer, they were made the subject of a major exhibition 'I am The Way, The Truth and The Life' at St Paul's Cathedral in 2005.

Chepik gave his first solo show at the Catto Gallery in 1998, and has been a regular fixture ever since. A Chepik exhibition is a bona fide event at the Catto, and a rare opportunity for British art lovers to see these magnificent canvases up close. The new show doesn't disappoint. How extraordinary a painting is *Midsummer Night's Dream*? It's a phantasmagoria of action, at once joyful and faintly sinister on a scale William Shakespeare could never have conceived. Elsewhere, *Les Gardiens De Notre-Dame 2010* revisits two familiar obsessions – the great cathedral and the gargoyles that decorate it. It's another Gothic marvel.

In *Black Venus*, Chepik traces a line from Titian through Manet in his depiction of a reclining nude with a confrontational expression – and notice the African masks that inspired Picasso staring out at us with similar defiance.

But if you come to Hampstead in search of a truly spiritual Chepik experience take some time out to stand before the eight panels that made up *Quo Vardis 2011*. Monumental in every way. The artist may ask 'where are you going?' but I suggest you don't move a muscle.

Front Cover: **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, Mixed Media on Canvas, 175 x 165 cm

Facing Page: **The Joyful Bicycle**, Mixed Media on Canvas, 100 x 100 cm





THE LIGHTS OF PARIS

Above:
LE PONT NEUF, 66 x 93 cm

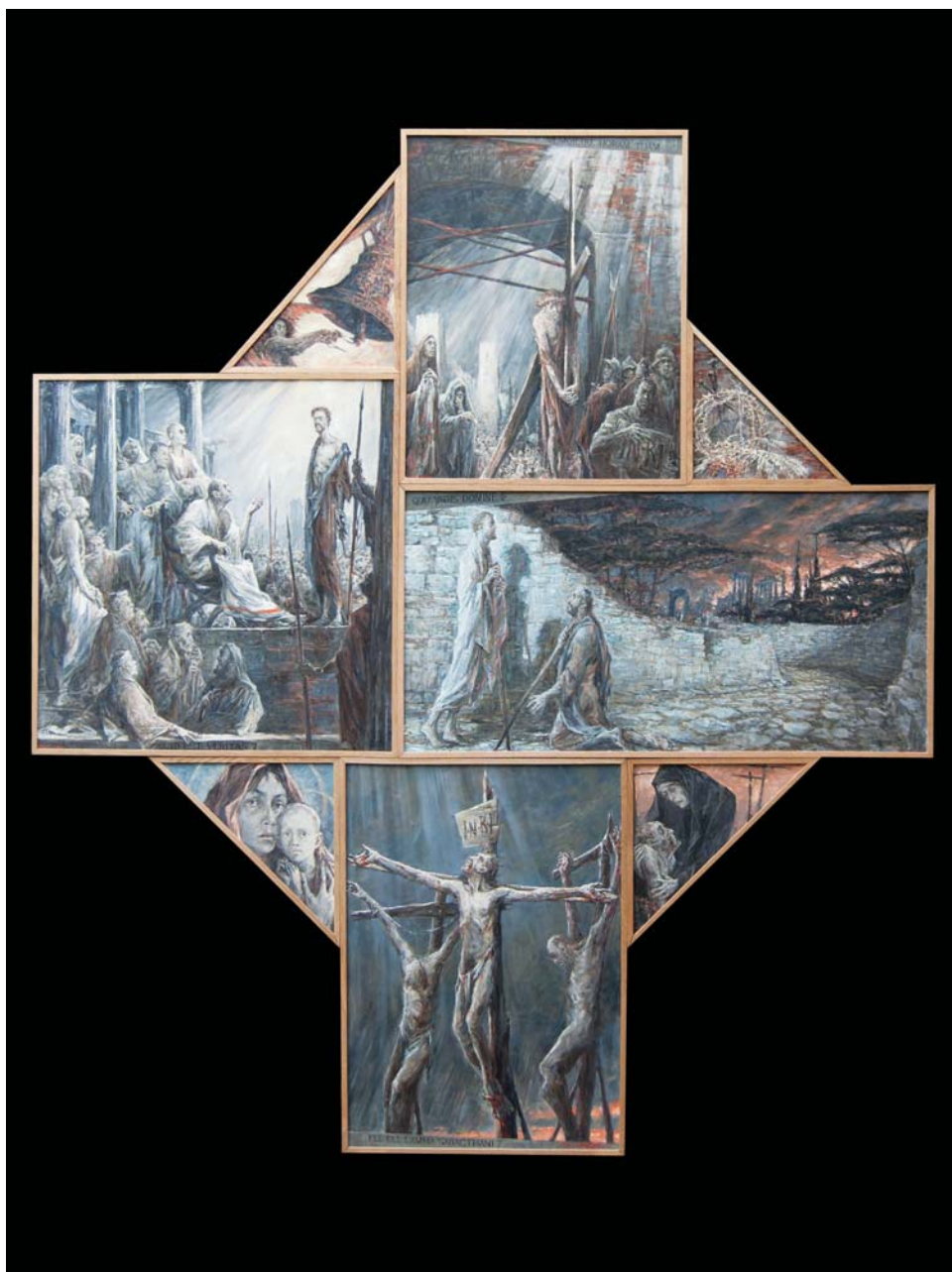
Opposite Left:
L'ANGE DE NOTRE-DAME, 120 x 40 cm

Opposite Right:
LA VICTOIRE DE CHATELET, 120 x 40 cm

All work Mixed Media on Canvas



QUO VADIS 201 I
Mixed Media on Canvas
240 x 250 cm



FINITA LA COMEDIA 2009-2011

Mixed media on Canvas

130 x 98 cm



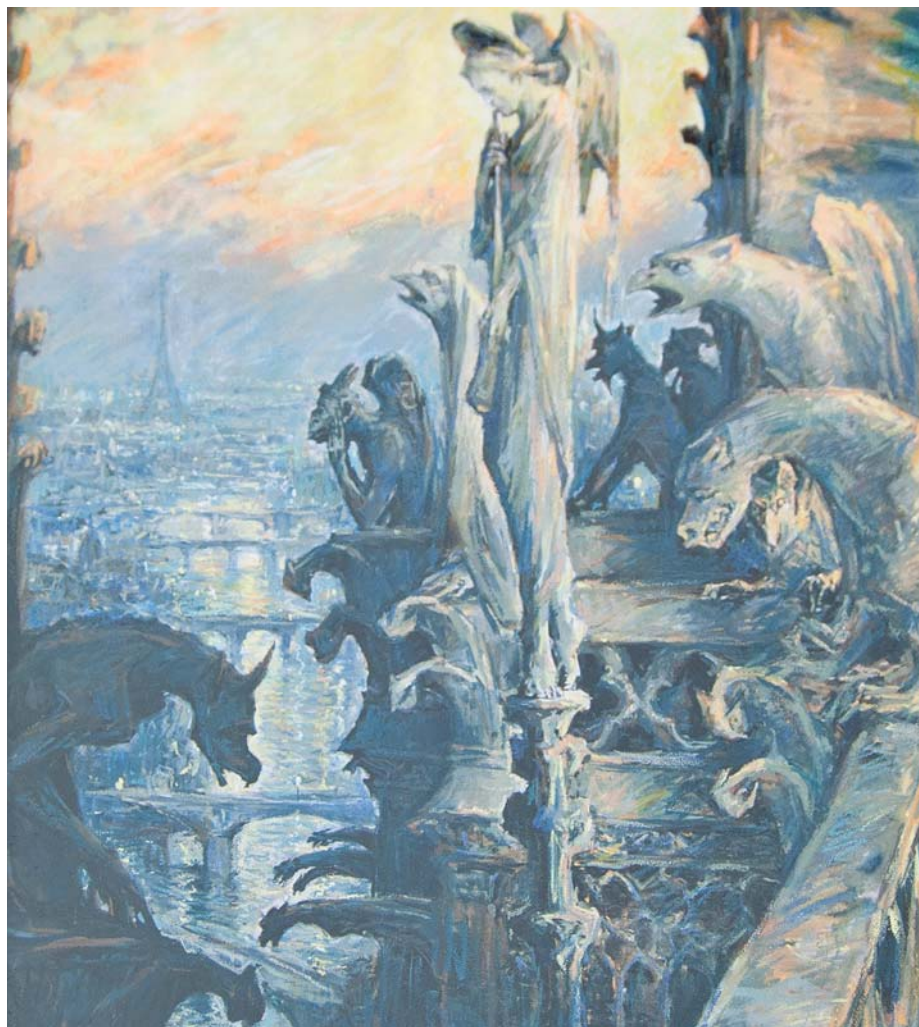
LES GARDIENS DE NOTRE-DAME

Mixed media on Canvas

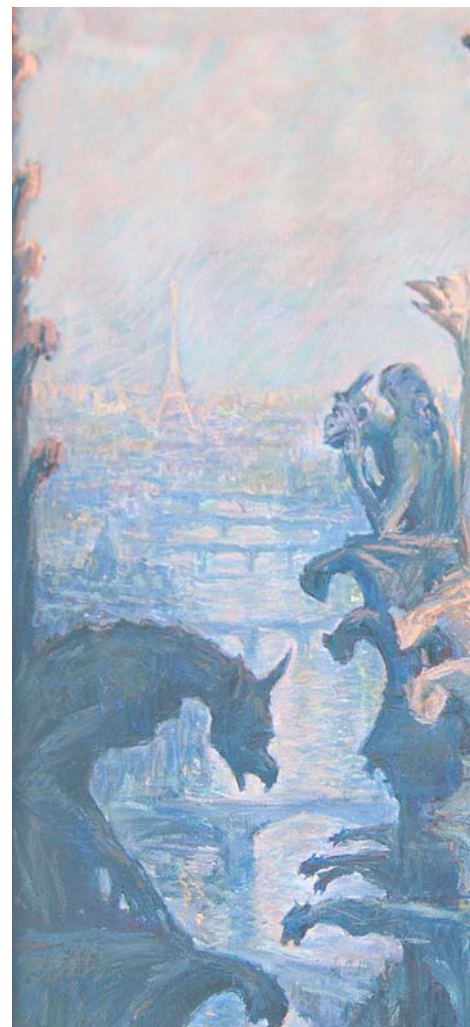
116 x 89 cm



HOMAGE TO MONET



LE MATIN



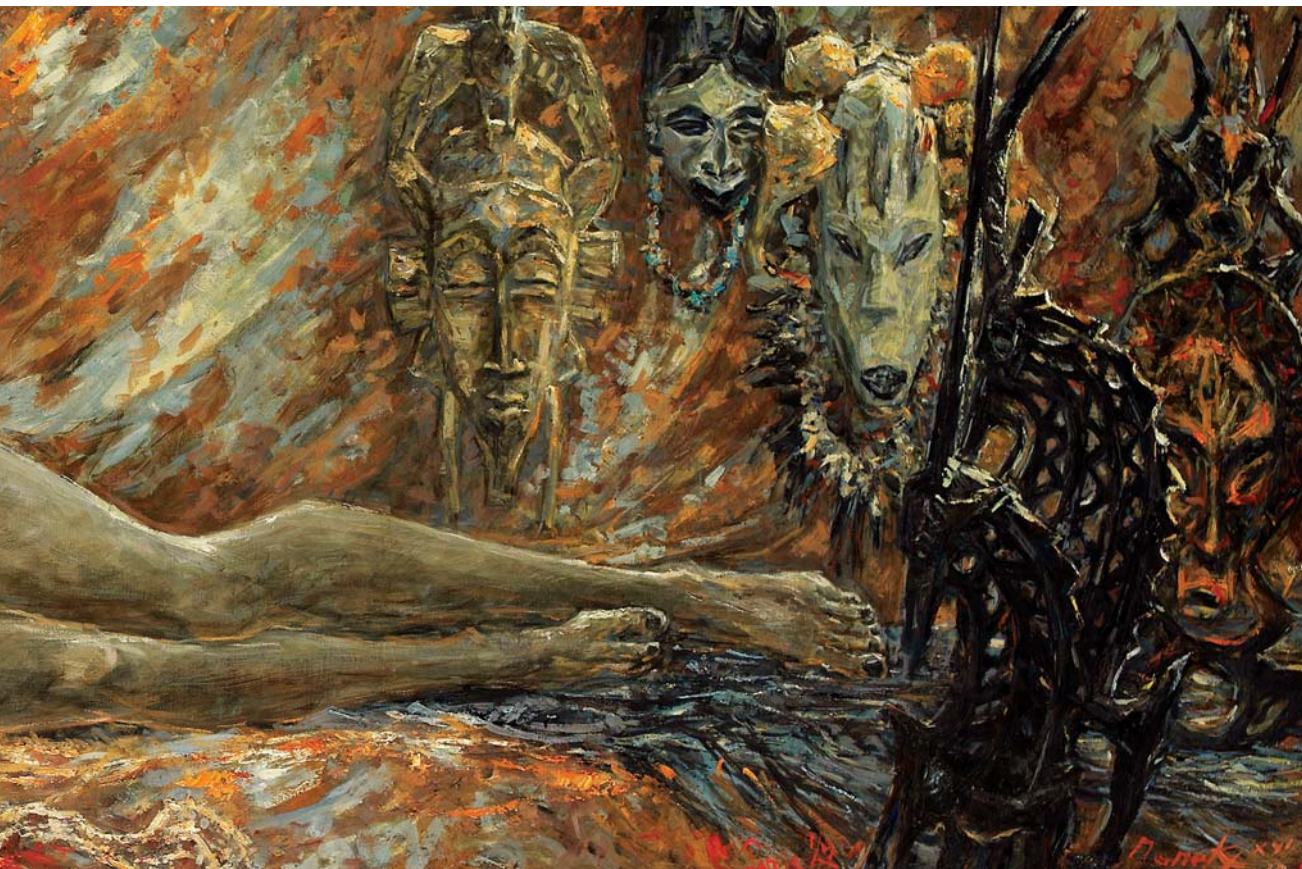
LE SOIR

All work Pastel on Paper, 72 x 58 cm



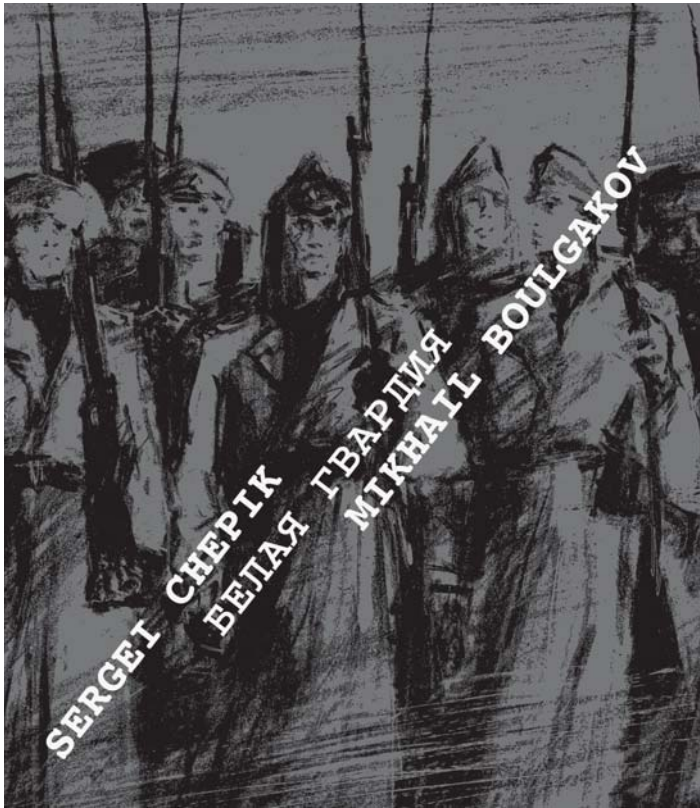
LA NUIT





THE BLACK VENUS 2010-2011

Mixed Media on Canvas
70 x 210 cm



THE WHITE GUARD

by BULGAKOV

*Illustrated by
Sergei Chepik*

Most of the original drawings made by Chepik to illustrate Bulgakov's famous novel *The White Guard* will be displayed and Chepik's new art book presented during this 2011 exhibition.

“Writing and painting amount, in the end, to the same thing; the same creative gesture, the same knowledgeable hand at the service of a paramount eye which dictates line and colour. In its great wisdom, the Russian language expresses exactly this as it employs the same verb,

pisat' for both actions; whence the rich relationships between pen and brush, writer and artist. The spell cast by a picture has been at the origin of numerous novels and poems as Balzac, Gogol, Wilde, Proust and indeed many others knew so well. In the same way, paintings are inspired by the written word, and the ongoing dialogue between word and image can engender works of value highly prized by lovers of literature and collectors of art books alike. These “duets” may be born of the ideas of the time, of a friendship, or – more prosaically – at the request of a publisher. One has only to look to the symbolists or the surrealists to find examples. Sometimes the illustrator is from another time, and seems drawn as if by a magnet to the text: Botticelli to Dante's “The Divine Comedy”; Kupka or Matisse to the Song of Solomon; Chagall to Gogol's “Dead Souls”; Dali or Picasso to Cervantes' “Don Quixote” ... to name but a few.

The reasons behind these surprising love stories, these secretive but sometimes predictable couplings raise valid questions: why such elective affinities? Why him and me? What profound relationship with this writer do I celebrate with every brushstroke, the painter might ask. What inherited gene links us through the ages? Why do I feel the challenge to immerse myself in the spirit of the Other? Is this pure emulation or a natural accompaniment which perpetuates the talent of the author? On questioning Sergei Chepik in his Montmartre studio, surrounded by the forty magnificent lithographs dedicated to "The White Guard", and on delving into the text, one discovers the story of the painter's passion for his illustrious compatriot Mikhail Bulgakov, and indeed their artistic union. [...]





detail, extracted and enlarged as if with the aid of opera glasses until we can read the feelings and emotions on each face; faces that are wells into the soul without which the epic saga cannot reach us. It is in this subtle movement from the whole to the detail that we find Chepik's pictorial representation of the contrapuntal form of the novel: the apocalyptic in contrast to the intimist; the

Chepik has responded to this invitation, honoured guest at this, the end of the 20th century, accomplishing the feat of bringing to life in pictures the world of Bulgakov to which he is drawn by a shared vision and in communion with the writer's soul. [...]

Here, he outlines the main features to tell the story of individual figures or more often, crowds or soldiers; there, he underlines a





illustrations to the story of “The White Guards”. But let us put aside that somewhat specious notion, and say simply that Bulgakov’s excellent novel is now further illuminated by the warm light of gratitude; an instinctive homage and an offering of friendly understanding from a painter to a writer.

*From the Foreword to the book
written by Professor Jacques Catteau*

history of the catastrophe of a nation set against the tragic destiny of individuals.

The dream that became words for the writer now becomes colour, shape and form for the artist, with the same ease, the same fluency, the same happy success as ever. Looking at the lithographs, one might even say, paradoxically, that it is Bulgakov’s quotations that now furnish the written



ROMA



PIAZZA DI SPAGNA

Pastel on Paper
42 x 86 cm



Top:
COLISEUM
 Pastel on Paper, 24 x 85 cm

Bottom:
FORUM AT NIGHT
 Pastel on Paper, 26 x 83 cm



ARLES



LES ARENES D'ARLES

Watercolour
20 x 35 cm



LE THEATRE D'ARLES

Watercolour
20 x 35 cm



LA BELLE DU CARNIVAL 2003
Pencil, Ink, Watercolour and White on Paper
39x 27 cm



NOCTURNE 2008
Pencil, Ink and White on Paper
27x 22 cm



PORTRAIT OF MARIE-AUDE ALBERT 2011

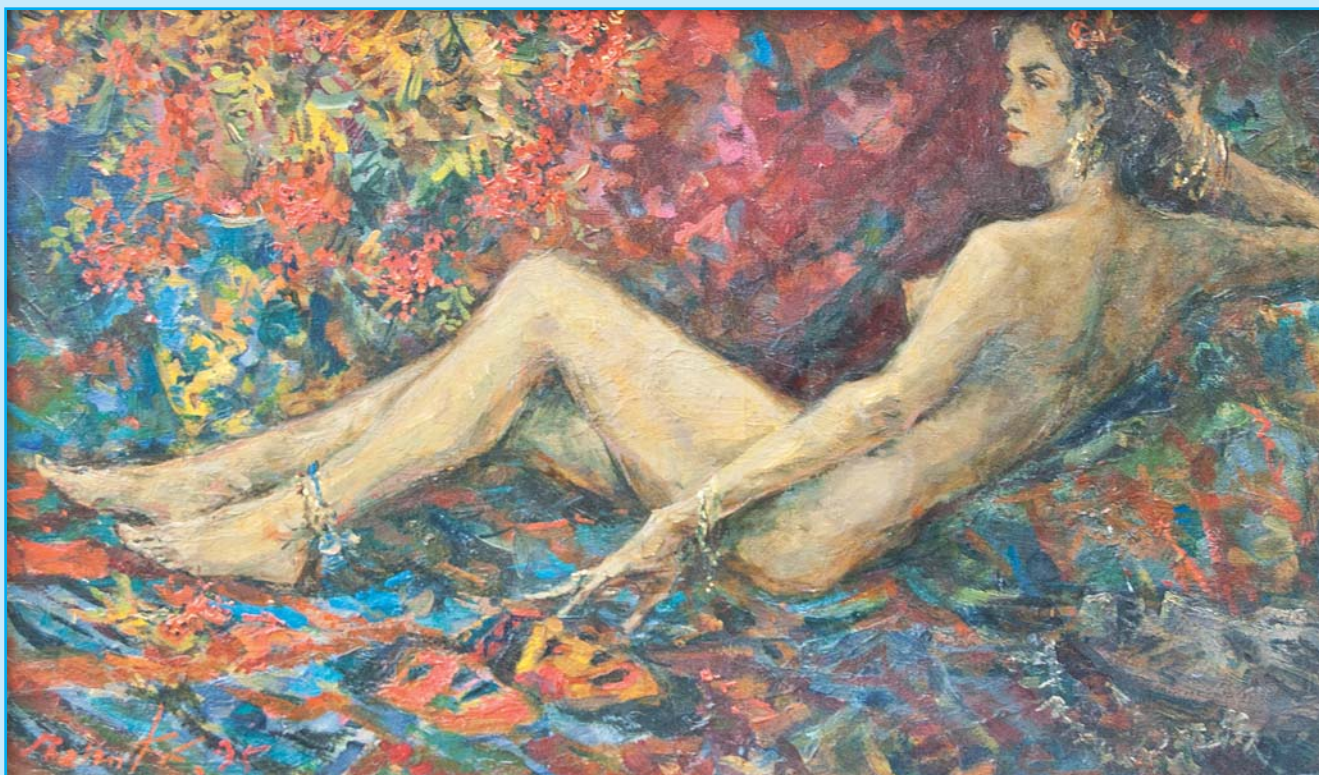
Mixed media on Canvas
73 x 100 cm

CHRONOLOGY

- 1953 Sergei Chepik was born in Kiev, on June 24, the son of the painter Mikhail Chepik and the sculptress Ludmila Sabaneeva.
- 1961-1971 Studied in Kiev at a secondary school specializing in arts.
- 1971-1973 Studied at the Shevchenko Art Institute in Kiev.
- 1973-1978 After his father's death, Chepik left Kiev forever and moved to Leningrad.
Studied at the Repin Art Institute in Leningrad (The former Academy of Fine Arts of Saint-Petersburg).
- 1978 Brilliantly graduated from the Repin Art Institute and entered the Union of Young Artists of Leningrad.
- 1978-1981 Carried on his studies in Professor Mylnikov's studio and worked on his first important works.
- 1981 Became a member of the USSR Union of Artists.
- 1978-1985 Various group exhibitions of young Soviet painters in the USSR and abroad.
- 1985 First Solo Exhibition "Russian landscapes", House of the Union of Artists, Leningrad.
- 1986 Meets Marie-Aude Albert, a French teacher temporarily working at the University of Leningrad.
First Retrospective Exhibition "Paintings, graphics and ceramics", Youth Palace, Leningrad.
- 1987 Finished *The House of the Dead*, his second masterpiece after *Petrushka* (1984-1986).
- 1988 Chepik emigrates to Paris.
The House of the Dead (1987), which was banned from being exhibited in Leningrad, is awarded the Grand Prix at the Salon d'Automne in Paris and is acquired by the Roy Miles Gallery in London, which opens its exhibition space on Bruton Street to Chepik.
Group Exhibition "Russian Paintings", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
- 1989 *The Tree* (1982-1984) receives the Monaco City Award at the Monte Carlo International Exhibition of Contemporary Art.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris.
Group Exhibition "Russian Paintings", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
- 1990 Solo and Retrospective Exhibition, Roy Miles Gallery, London. Chepik received public acclaim and the exhibition was sold out. The Daily Telegraph wrote: "An unknown Russian genius has come to light".
Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher congratulated Chepik at the House of Commons.
- 1991 Group Exhibition "Russian Art 1930-1990", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
Solo Exhibition of watercolours "Travels through France", Roy Miles Gallery, London.

- 1992 Chepik marries Marie-Aude Albert.
Is elected to become "Sociétaire of the Salon d'Automne".
- 1993 Major Solo Exhibition "New Works", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
Solo Retrospective Exhibition, Salon de l'Ecole Française, Château de Croissy, Croissy-sur-Seine, France.
Solo Retrospective Exhibition, Prieuré Saint-Maurice, Senlis, France.
Paints the portrait of Baroness Margaret Thatcher and finishes that of Nureyev a few weeks after his death.
Salon d'Automne, Grand Palais, Paris.
Group Exhibition "Christmas Show", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
- 1994 Major Solo Exhibition "Recent Works", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
In disagreement with the policies of the Salon d'Automne, Chepik leaves it.
- 1995 Solo Exhibition "New Works", Roy Miles Gallery, London.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Chapelle Saint-Léonard, Croissy, France.
Publication and presentation in London of a first monograph: *Sergei Chepik, works, 1970-1994* by Marie-Aude Albert.
- 1996 Solo Exhibition of watercolours, Roy Miles Gallery, London.
Solo Exhibition of graphic works, Galerie Guiter, Paris.
Group Exhibition "Hommage au nu", Galerie Guiter, Paris.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Chapelle Saint-Léonard, Croissy.
- 1997 Solo Exhibition, Galerie Guiter, Paris.
- 1998 Solo Exhibition "New works", The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
- 1999 Exhibition "*Golgotha*", The Catto Gallery, Cork Street, London, then at St John's Church in Hampstead and then at the Château de Gruyères in Switzerland.
Solo Exhibition, The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
Retrospective Exhibition at the Russian Embassy in London with the 1999 masterpiece *Russia Crucified*.
- 2000: Solo Exhibition "Chepik in Venice", The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
Solo Exhibition, Salon de l'Ecole Française, Chapelle Saint-Léonard, Croissy.
- 2001 Solo Exhibition "Chepik's Moulin Rouge", The Catto Gallery, Cork Street, London.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Chapelle Saint-Léonard, Croissy.
- 2002 Solo Exhibition, "Show" Galerie Popoff et Cie, Fbg St Honoré, Paris.
Golgotha is exhibited at Saint-Paul's Cathedral, London.
Group Exhibition "Parfums de Femmes", Manège, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France.
Russia Crucified is exhibited at the Paris Salon d'Automne.
Solo Exhibition, The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
A project for St Paul's Cathedral in London is discussed with the Dean, the Very Revd Dr. John Moses and Chepik works on sketches for four large panels illustrating the Life and Passion of Christ.

- 2003 Solo Exhibition, "New works", The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Chapelle Saint-Léonard, Croissy.
Chepik works on the project for St Paul's Cathedral. The sketches having been accepted by the Dean and Chapter, Chepik starts the work on four large canvases. *The Virgin Mary* (or *The Nativity*) (165 x 240 cm) and *Resurrection* (165 x 240 cm) are completed by December.
The Apocalypse of St John is exhibited at the Paris Salon d'Automne.
- 2004 Chepik paints *The Public Life of Christ* (430 X 240 cm) and *The Passion* (430 x 240 cm).
Group Exhibition "Masques et Miroirs", Manège, Saint-Germain-en-Laye.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Eglise de la Madeleine, Paris.
Solo Exhibition "War and Peace", Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris
- 2005 Inauguration on January 24 of four canvases, entitled *I am The Way, The Truth and The Life*, by the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, the Very Revd Dr John Moses in the presence of Baroness Thatcher .
Solo Exhibition, The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
Salon de l'Ecole Française, Eglise de la Madeleine, Paris.
- 2006 Solo Exhibition, The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
Realisation of forty illustrations for Bulgakov's novel *The White Guard*. Publication of a second monograph: *Sergei Chepik: From Red square to the Moulin Rouge, works 1994-2001* by Marie-Aude Albert.
- 2007 New cycle of religious paintings: *The Redemption, The Last Supper*.
- 2008 Solo Exhibition of religious works "Epifania", Centre Culturel Français, Milano.
The Last Supper is exhibited for the first time.
Solo Exhibition "Tauromachie", Chapelle Sainte-Anne, Arles.
Publication by Vita Nova Publishers in Petersburg of *The White Guard* with Chepik's illustrations.
The forty drawings for *The White Guard* are exhibited at the Mikhail Bulgakov's museum in Moscow.
Publication of a third monograph: *Epiphania, the religious paintings of Sergei Chepik* by Marie-Aude Albert and Sergei Chepik.
Solo exhibition "New Works", The Catto Gallery, Hampstead, London.
- 2009 Solo Exhibition "La FERIA", Galerie Arte Viva, Paris-Levallois.
Solo Exhibition "Bulgakov's White Guard", Springfield University, USA.
Solo Exhibition "New Works", The Catto Gallery, Hampstead.
- 2010 Group Exhibition "Homo Sum", Slavinsky Art Gallery, Saint-Petersburg.
Solo Exhibition "Religious works", Notre-Dame Church, Auvers sur Oise
- 2011 Solo Exhibition "Walking in Paris", Galerie Arte Viva, Levallois.
Solo Exhibition "Epiphania", Atrium, Paris.
Publication of a fourth art book *Chepik, The White Guard of Bulgakov* with the forty drawings for *The White Guard* and a foreword of Professor Jacques Catteau.



SMALL ODALISQUE 1995
Oil on Canvas, 33 x 55 cm

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EXHIBITION DATES: 10th - 30th NOVEMBER 2011