Meet the Artist

Alexander (Sasha) Gassel immigrated to the US from the Soviet Union in 1980. He was born in Moscow, USSR in 1947 and graduated from Moscow Institute of Arts and Graphics in 1970 with an MA in Fine Arts. From 1970 to 1980, he worked at the Grabar Center for the Restoration and Preservation of Art in Moscow, restoring and copying medieval tempera paintings and collecting and assessing icons that were, at that time, being removed from churches across Russia and brought to Moscow for conservation and display.

Influenced by this experience, Gassel began to create his own original paintings. His style was derived from icons and from his discovery of the suppressed early 20th century masters of Russian painting. He describes surreptitiously seeing the works of Chagall and Malevich in storage areas of Soviet museums. At that time, it was absolutely forbidden in the Soviet Union to exhibit contemporary religious paintings.

Gassel immigrated to the United States in 1980 with $10 in his pocket and no knowledge of the English language. He was not allowed to bring any of his artwork with him because by law no religious art could leave the country. He found work as a draftsman for a railroad company and painted on weekends. Eventually, he had an exhibition where he sold enough paintings to quit his job and once again work as an artist and icon conservator full-time.

Painted Poetry

Alexander Gassel: A Retrospective

February 11–May 23, 2021

This upcoming retrospective of more than thirty paintings by Alexander Gassel brings together a diverse set of artworks, some of which will be paired with excerpts from his short stories. An ethereal, poetic aesthetic permeates both, simultaneously offering an in-depth look into Gassel’s experience while stimulating the viewer’s imagination. He is an experienced storyteller in word and image, whose oeuvre will be showcased in the first exhibit organized by MoRI’s new curator, Lana Sloutsky.

Thematically, his compositions combine ancient icon painting techniques with Biblical, mythological, modern, and deeply personal narratives. Harmonious, elegant, and moving, Gassel’s works consistently garner international attention and appear in many public and private collections, including that of the Vatican.

Using an ancient technique: egg yolk tempera, he makes his color pigments by grinding natural stones and minerals, such as malachite, cinnabar, or lapis, into powder, which he then mixes with egg yolk. The artist often applies gold or silver leaf to the paintings. Based on traditional Russian artistic values, his new artworks often employ a surrealistic combination of different civilizations’ details. Ancient symbols are joined with contemporary subjects, reflecting his new life experience in America.

Gassel is also the longtime icon conservator at the Museum, a position to which he brings a wealth of experience, an eye for detail, and an exemplary work ethic.
From the Director's Desk

Dear friends,

As the pandemic continues to govern what we do in our daily and working lives, the Museum’s decision to reopen provided some sense of normality for our visitors. The Friday, Saturday, Sunday 11 AM to 5 PM schedule has proved to be popular, and we appreciate the substantial number of visitors who come by to show their support.

The team has created three fantastic temporary exhibitions; *Playground*...
Virtual Cooking Class with Chef Olga Kharina

Saturday, January 23, 2:00-3:30pm EST
Members $15, Nonmembers $22
Limited to 15 screens—families or groups are welcome to cook together.

In partnership with Plate Nextdoor, a web platform that brings people together to explore culinary traditions around the world, Chef Olga Kharina will lead a virtual cooking class that’s perfect for the winter months. In this class, participants will learn to make Russian honey cake (medovik) and hot mulled wine. Honey cake was developed in the late 19th century by a young chef for the wife of Alexander I and later gained popularity in the Soviet Union. Participants will receive an ingredient list, instruction sheet, and Zoom link shortly after registration.

Two Virtual Film Screenings and Discussions with the Director

Members $6, Nonmembers $12, registration required by Thursday, February 11, and Thursday, March 4, respectively. Links to the discussion and films will be sent the morning of the program. Russian with English subtitles.

OSCAR
Saturday, February 13, 11:00-1:30pm EST

In Search of a Lost Paradise
Saturday, March 6, 11:00-1:30pm EST

Join director Alexander Smoljanski for a two-part film series and discussion of two of the most famous Russian artists: the leader of the Soviet artistic underground, Oscar Rabin, and his wife, painter Valentina Kropivnitskaya. The project consists of two films - In Search of a Lost Paradise (52 min) and OSCAR (90 min). Smoljanski will lead a discussion and Q & A with participants after the films.

In 1974, both painters organized an open-air art exhibition, which the KGB smashed with bulldozers. This was the most effective act of civil disobedience in the USSR after Stalin’s death in 1953. The story spans three decades of the Soviet history and documents their successful attempts to confront the regime with paints and brushes. Together the films illustrate the power of non-violent resistance, the borders of compromise, and people who tried to preserve internal freedom in a country that wasn’t free. It is a refugee success story: a story of love, art, and human dignity.

Virtual Contemporary Russian Literature Book Group

Free. New members always welcome. Contact Amy for information. aconsalvi@museumofrussianicons.org

Sunday, January 17, 1:00-3:00pm EST

Sunday, March 21, 1:00-3:00pm EDT
March’s book: The Railway by Hamid Ismailov.
Virtual Artist Lecture:
Pysanka: Symbol of Renewal

Saturday, March 20, 1:00-2:00pm EDT

Members Free, Nonmembers $8, registration required by Friday, March 19. The Zoom link will be emailed to participants the morning of the program.

Lesia Sochor, the artist behind Pysanka: Symbol of Renewal, will explore the concept of the egg as the embodiment of the life principle that is associated with mythical and religious ceremonies from earliest pagan times. In addition to a historical overview of pysanka, Lesia will examine the deep-rooted symbolism, and will discuss how the pysanka, an echo of the past, was the catalyst for a decade long exploration of paintings acknowledging her roots and contemporary self.

The Curator's Corner

Dear MoRI Members and Friends,

It is an honor to write this first “Curator’s Corner” report. I plan to put one together for each newsletter to update you on my projects, discoveries, and plans. My hope is that these short narratives will help you get to know me and deepen your understanding of MoRI and its collection.

As many of you know, I began my position in September and am happy to report that the past few months have been as productive as they have been fun. Our extraordinarily creative and dedicated team and I have put together a fantastic lineup of temporary exhibits, organized an upcoming international conference on collecting Orthodox material culture, and forged many new collaborations, all while constantly thinking about how to expand and deepen our collection.

As is the case with all other cultural organizations around the world, COVID has presented MoRI with many challenges. At the same time, we see this difficult period as one of innovation and opportunity. The overarching goal is to make MoRI interesting, relevant, engaging, and accessible to as diverse of an audience as possible. I wish I could meet each one of you in person, but this report and a very warm virtual handshake will have to do for now.

I hope that you and your families have a happy, healthy, and art-filled 2021!

Lana
Current Exhibitions

PLAYGROUND OF THE AUTOCRATS
Works from Anne Bobroff-Hajal
Through January 24
Anne bobroff-Hajal’s colorful polyptychs portray—whimsically—the fiery struggles of individual human beings within vast social systems, as shaped by the landscapes in which those humans live.

Anne Bobroff-Hajal, Peter the Great, 2010

Pysanka: Symbol of Renewal
Through May 9
Maine-based contemporary artist Lesia Sochor’s paintings are narratives told in paint that are prompted by personal experiences. This series is inspired by the beautiful tradition of intricately decorated Ukrainian Easter egg painting.

Lesia Sochor, Fertility, 1995

Miniature Masterpieces
Russian Lacquer Boxes
Through March 28
This exhibition features more than 100 lacquer boxes from the villages of Fedoskino, Palekh, Khouli, and Mstera. The papier-mâché treasures are decorated with miniature paintings of folk scenes and fairy tales lacquered and polished to a high sheen. Made possible through the generous gift of lacquerware from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.

Anne Bobroff-Hajal, Peter the Great, 2010

Travel with the Museum to Croatia & Its Islands
Small Ship Cruising on the Adriatic Coast
October 19 — October 30, 2021 • 12 Days • 19 Meals
Wander along medieval walls, marvel at enchanting waterfalls, and relax on sunny islands. From Zagreb to Dubrovnik, set out to experience the best of Croatia and the Adriatic Coast.

Highlights of the trip include: Zagreb, Stone Gate, Šibenik, Cathedral of St. James, Krka National Park, Split, Diocletian’s Palace, Choice on Tour, 7-Night Adriatic Cruise, Trogir, Bol, Hvar, Biševo Blue Cave, Vis, Korcula, Mljet National Park, Slano, and Dubrovnik.

Learn more and view a recorded webinar about this trip at www.museumofrussianicons/travel-with-the-museum. Contact Melanie Trottier mtrottier@museumofrussianicons.org with questions.
ABOUT
The Museum is located at
203 Union Street
Clinton, MA 01510
978.598.5000
www.museumofrussianicons.org

Hours:
By reservation: Call 978.598.5000
Friday–Sunday: 11AM–5PM
Closed Monday–Thursday

Admission:
FREE for Museum Members!
Adults $12
Seniors (65+) $10
Students (with ID) $5
Children (12–17) $5
Children under 12 FREE

FREE admission with reservations
on the first Sunday of the month!

Face-coverings are required.

Plan Your Visit
The Museum is open Friday–Sunday,
11:00am - 5:00pm by reservation.

Three time slots are available:
11:00am - 1:00pm
1:00pm - 3:00pm
3:00pm - 5:00pm

For reservations on the day of your visit,
please call the Museum between 10:00-
11:00am. For future reservations, call
anytime. 978.598.5000.