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# PORTRAYING INNER BEAUTY

Nikolai Blokhin's paintings capture the essence of the human spirit

BY EMILY VAN CLEVE



*"Anna," oil on canvas*



What makes portraits great? For many viewers, outstanding portraits demand to be noticed and leave us yearning to know more about the subjects. Russian artist Nikolai Blokhin creates portraits so enticing and rich with luxurious, loosely rendered brushstrokes that careful study of each painting becomes a joyful and exuberant experience.

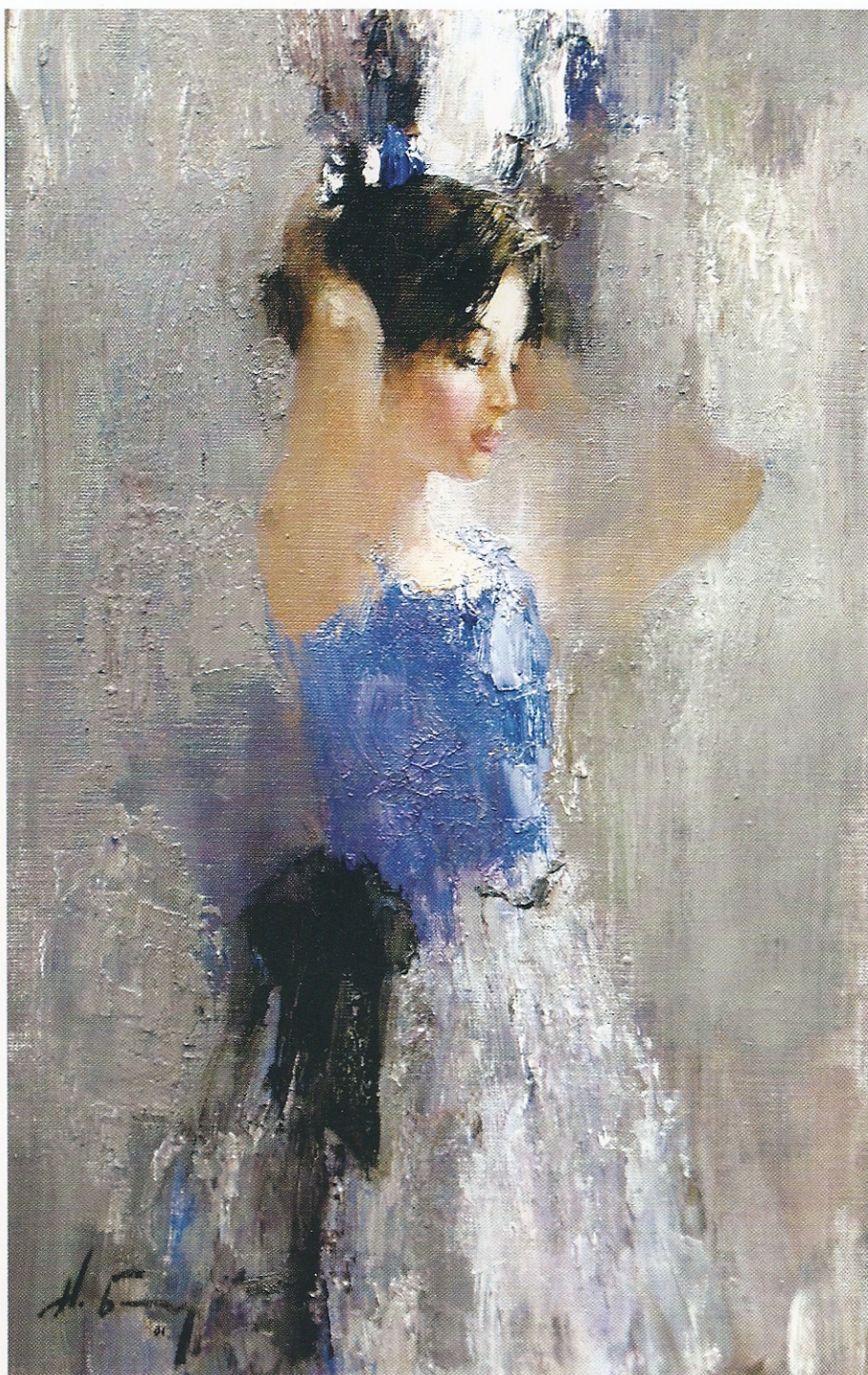
"I try to penetrate the person and capture his or her soul on canvas," explains Blokhin through a translator during a phone call from St. Petersburg to Santa Fe. "The eyes and how they look are the most important part of the portrait."

Blokhin wishes with all his heart that he could express his thoughts in English. Although it takes a translator to verbally communicate with him, the paintings speak volumes about his passionate feelings. His constant search for artistic perfection is reflected in the almost two dozen canvases that sit unfinished in his St. Petersburg studio. He may work on three or four of them at one time. There's one painting that was started three years ago but now faces a studio wall. "I turned it around so I wouldn't look at it for at least a year," he says. "It needs a fresh look. I think I will finish it now."

Older people with faces weathered by the passage of time, beautiful young women filled with hopes and dreams and mischievous children bursting with youthful vitality and innocence are subjects of his remarkable portraits.

Blokhin sent a magnificent painting of a harlequin with a little girl to Julie and Dennis Downey, owners of the Downey Gallery in Santa Fe. An art collector who was visiting the gallery viewed the piece and fell in love with it. "The harlequin was bent down and had his arms surrounding the beautiful little girl wearing a red dress," Dennis Downey remembers. "He had a devilish look in his eyes, and it was hard to tell if the little girl was scared or delighted by being firmly locked in his embrace. The collector noticed that the harlequin looked like Nikolai. We realized that it was a self portrait and the little girl was his daughter."

Although Blokhin was formally trained in Russia and taught to paint in the style of his teachers, his own style emerged and developed through the years. Born in 1968, he attended arts schools for gifted children before enrolling in St. Petersburg Academy of Art. Postgraduate studies were continued under the tutelage of a professor at the Academy. Today, Blokhin spends four hours a day teaching young artists at the Repin Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in St. Petersburg and the



*"Anne," oil on canvas*

rest of the day and evening painting in his studio.

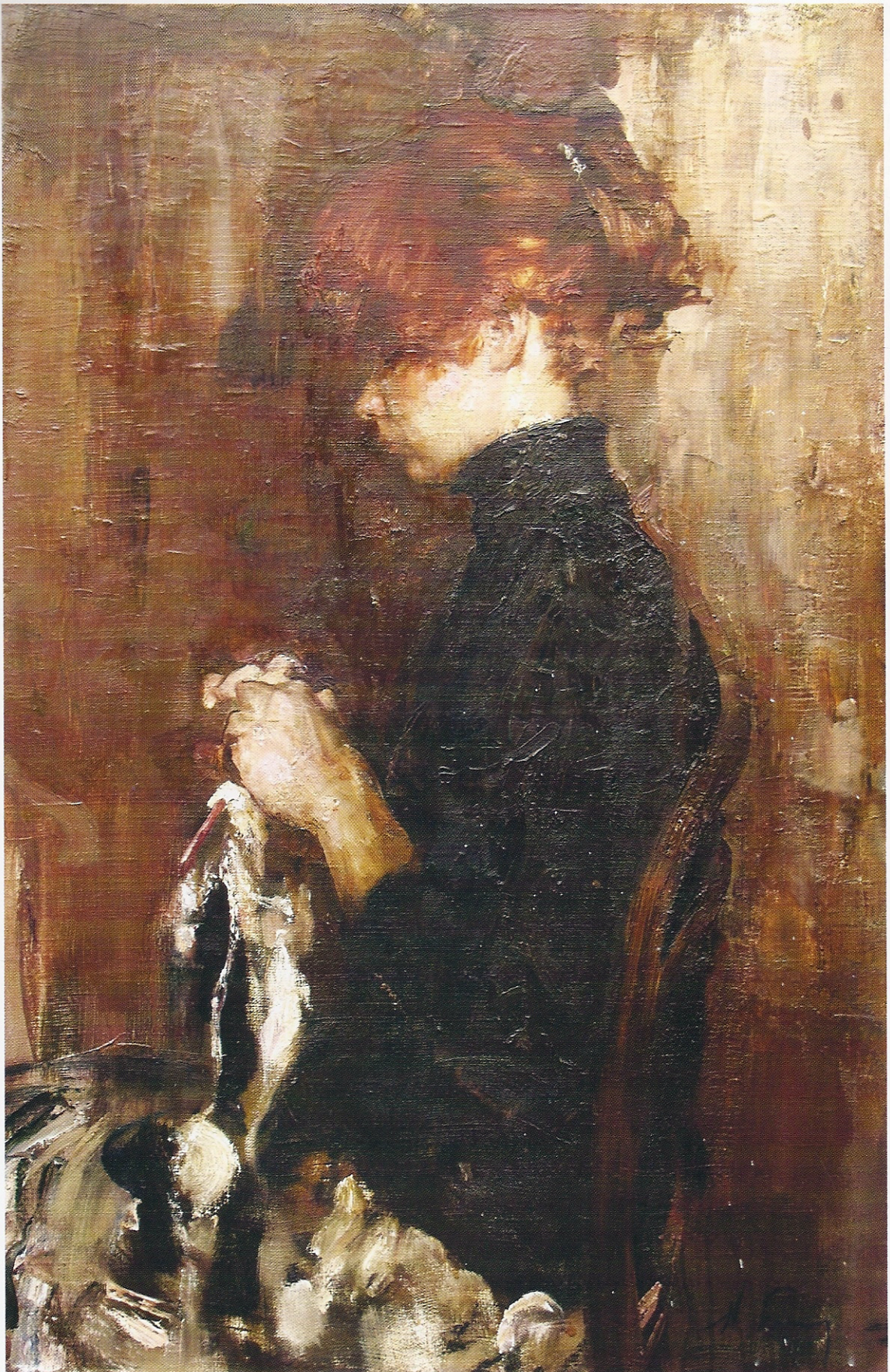
Never content to continue working in the same way, he changes color palettes according to his mood. "I've been painting with more vivid colors lately," he explains. "I just like brighter colors right now."

One of his most recent and exciting projects involves painting the portrait of famous Russian cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev,

who also has worked on projects with NASA. He also paints exquisite still lifes and landscapes.

Blokhin's paintings are part of many museum and private collections and have been recognized by museums, galleries and art societies as works of exceptional beauty. Among his many honors are the Grand Prize Award in the 2002 International Portrait Competition of the



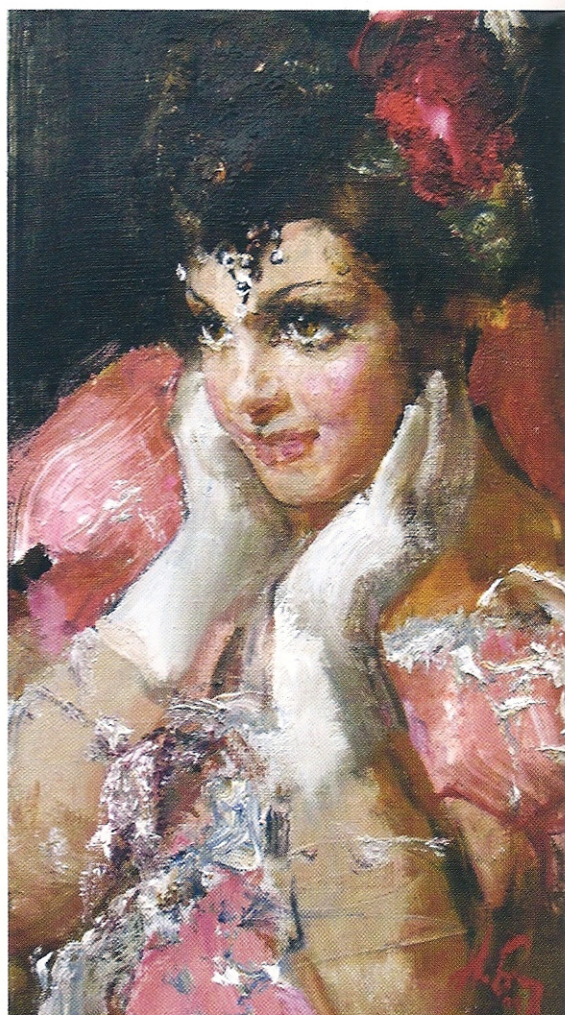


*"Knitting Girl," oil on canvas*





*"Beautiful Profile," oil on canvas*



*"Moulin Rouge's Dancer," oil on canvas*

American Society of Portrait Artists at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Best of Show in the 2004 International Portrait Competition of the Portrait Society of America.

"Of course, a winning portrait has to demonstrate great technical and compositional skill on the part of the artist," says Edward Jonas, the Vice Chair of the Portrait Society of America and one of the competition's judges. "But most of all, paintings that speak to people and have strong emotional and evocative qualities raise them to the level of greatness."

*A special exhibition of Nikolai Blokhin's paintings will take place at the Downey Gallery from July 15 through August 1. The opening reception is on July 15 from 5 to 7 p.m. The Downey Gallery is located at 225 Canyon Road. Hours: Monday through Saturday 10-5; Sunday 11-4. Phone: (505) 982-6701; Fax: (505) 982-0544; E-mail: [info@downey-gallery.com](mailto:info@downey-gallery.com).*



*"Lilac," oil on canvas*