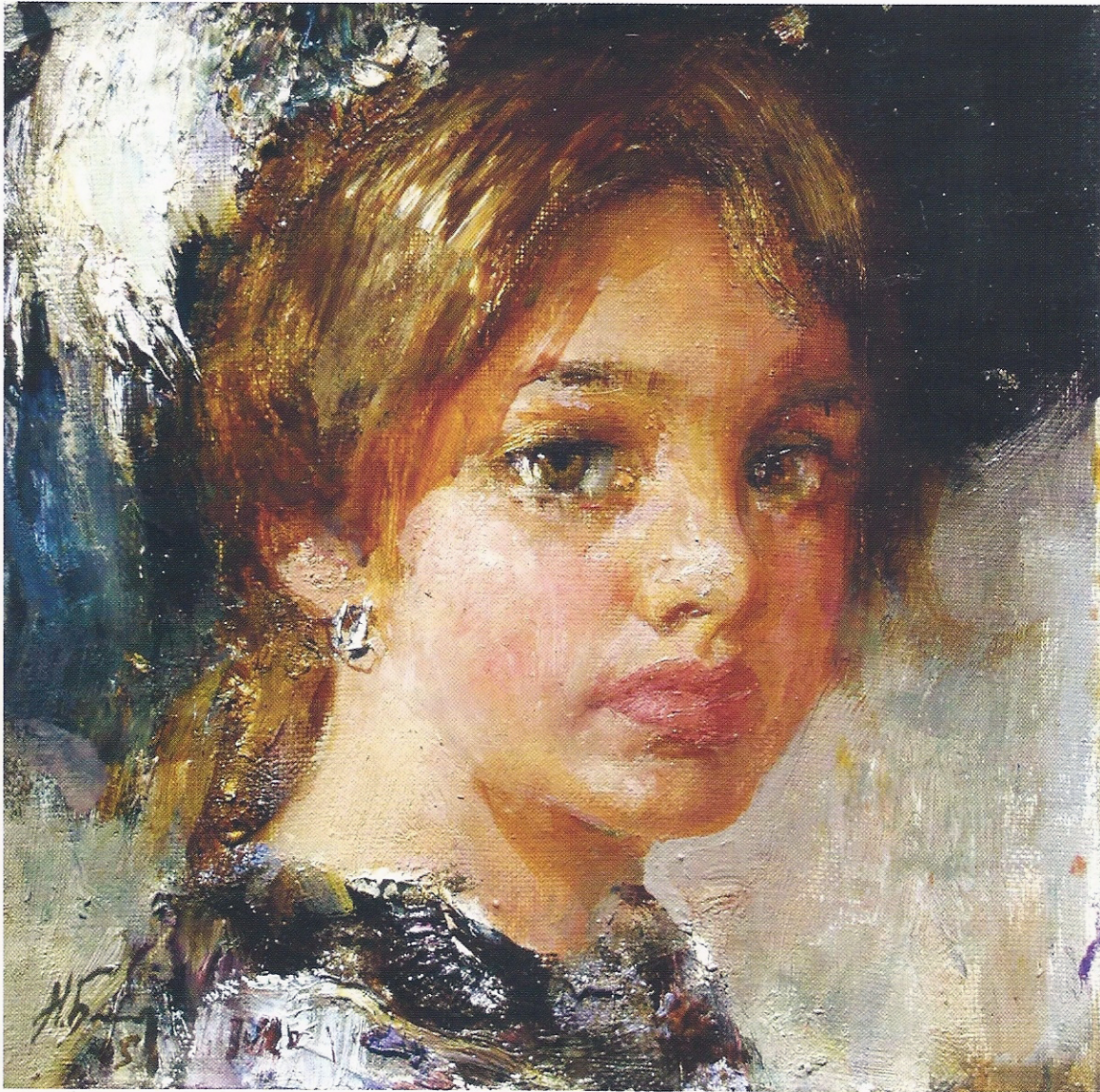


# The Spirit of Paint

Nikolai Blokhin's landscapes, still lives and portraits capture the essence of their subjects.

BY BENJAMIN ROSE



*Portrait of Anna, oil on linen, 10" x 11"*

*Paintings that speak to people and have strong emotional and evocative qualities raise them to the level of greatness.*

NIKOLAI BLOKHIN

Greatness, indeed, characterizes the works of young Russian painter Nikolai Blokhin. His highly evolved oil paintings

demonstrate the artist's comprehensive training, refined eye and exacting command of his medium. His landscapes, still lives and portraits stand as masterworks of formal composition, layered, complex surface and flawless execution.

Rooted in the rich foundations of western art—from Classical idealism, to Renaissance perfection, bucolic Romanti-

cism to formal Impressionism—Blokhin employs the very best historical models, tracing a seamless path of artistic greatness through each stroke of his brush.

Born in St. Petersburg Russia in 1968, Blokhin began his path of artistic expression in his early childhood. Formally trained in specialized art schools and the vaunted St. Petersburg Academy, Blokhin



exhibits the flawless technique, draughtsmanship and control of an academician. At a youthful 37, he continues to push the paint, utilizing his skills in a fresh and innovative manner while remaining true to his training.

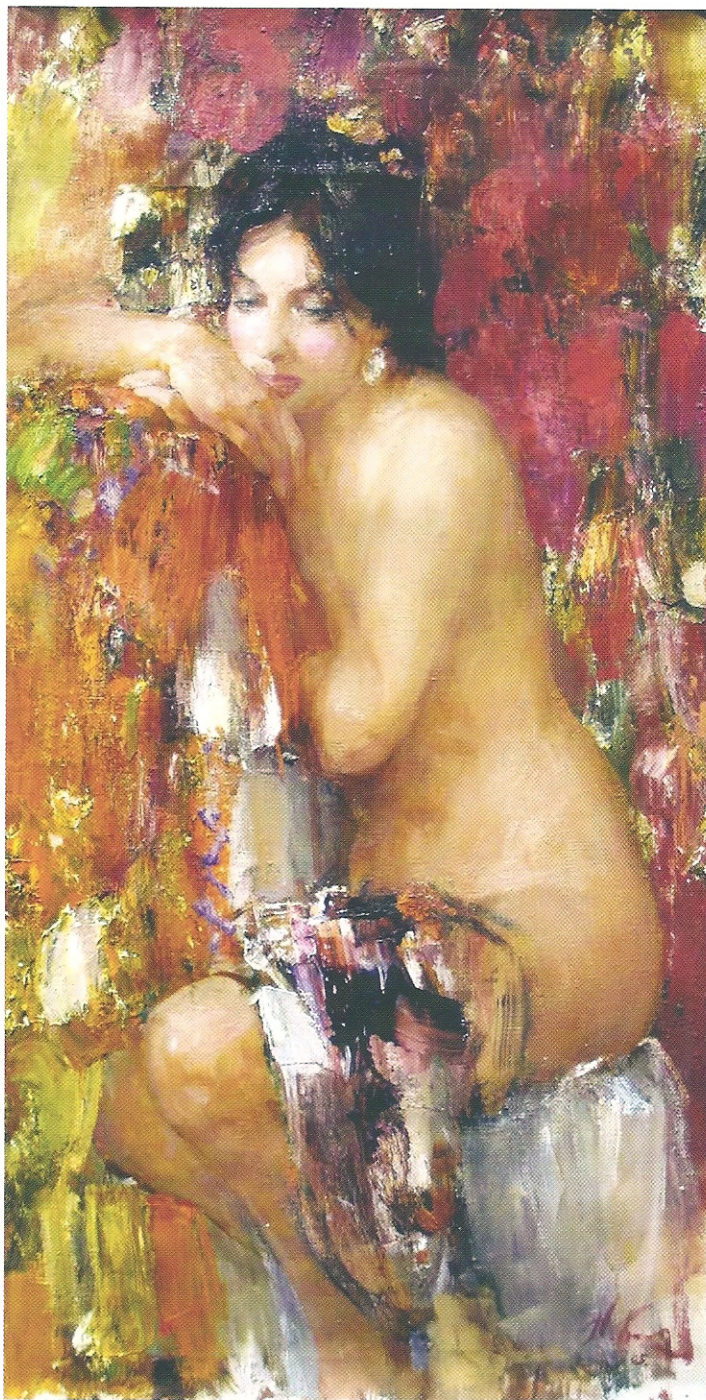
The works of Nikolai Blokhin embrace the national consciousness of Russia and its rich artistic history. In the twelfth century, Russia formalized the Byzantine icon as a central motif of its Christian belief. Unique to the Russian icon is its emphasis upon luminosity, compassion, tenderness and serenity. This influence can be traced in Blokhin's work: the contemplative mood, the searching but averted eyes, the warmth of the people he portrays.

The formality and rigor of his subjects echo the porcelain figures of Russia's aristocratic past. From the Russian Impressionists of the late eighteenth hundreds, Blokhin employs the formal focus and painting techniques of Konstantin Korovin and Mikhail Vrubel. The artist's work further recalls Ilya Repin in his incisive portrayal of character with confident, free brushwork. From the famed Russian expatriate and Taos legend, Nicolai Fechin, Blokhin makes use of broad slashing palette-knife strokes and bold, pure color. And like the renowned Russian composer, Rachmaninov, he throws off artistic fashion and trend for timeless melody and poetic harmony.

Blokhin's dedication to art is boundless. Balancing the demands of his professional career and studio work, he finds time to teach young artists at the Repin Institute of Painting. Passing on the traditions and techniques of his trade, the artist contributes his knowledge and experience to a community of young initiates. Named for the most celebrated nineteenth century Russian painter, Ilya Repin, (to whom Blokhin might favorably be compared), the institute continues to instruct with the vitality and intensity of its namesake.

Blokhin's own work, however, expands broadly upon the realism of Repin. Painting in a variety of formats and subject matters, the artist achieves works of surprising vigor and intelligence.

He renders stunning landscapes that capture the very essence of natural light. With the eye of an exacting realist, and quick, impressionist strokes, the artist drapes pure color upon the canvas. Up close to the work, the viewer's eye can discern the thick swatches of paint that contain the very motion and energy of the subject they represent. Turner-like, the artist extracts the gestures of the waves, sky and earth in flawless intimations of light and drama.



*Contemplation*, oil on linen, 32" x 61"





*The Ballerina*, oil on linen, 62" x 34"



*Harlequin in Love*, oil on linen, 62" x 32"

In relief of his highly figurative landscapes and portraits, Blokhin also excels at loose and dynamic still lifes that model forms with suggestive grace. From bouquets of flowers to vessels of elegant contour and proportion, the artist's interpretations of this timeless form exhibit a level of abstraction and gestured freedom that push the work to new heights.

Blokhin depicts depth of space in his paintings with a deft hand while exhibiting a remarkable sensitivity to the paint itself. The still life becomes an expression of painterly concerns, from the modeled foreground, to amorphous shapes in mid-plane, to pure abstractions of impasto paint in the background. Indeed, it is in the often overlooked backgrounds and details of Blokhin's work that we find the artist pushing academic painting to new boundaries. Pure abstraction, frank acknowledgement of the two-dimensional surface and the freshness and possibility of the paint itself become evident in

the dynamic brushwork that frames the imagery.

Despite his mastery of other forms, Blokhin's portraits truly capture the expansive vision and talent of the artist. In these works, light, form and paint come alive in virtuosic displays.

The portraits, beneath the thick application of paint, exhibit the dexterity of the artist's draughtsmanship. The skillful contours of his drawing remain as architecture beneath the paint, structuring the composition, imparting a strong foundation for loose brushwork and retaining a strong sense of the precise and exquisite clarity of line. Blokhin's practiced drawing recalls the very best draftsmen in the history of art: Michelangelo, Titian, Ingres.

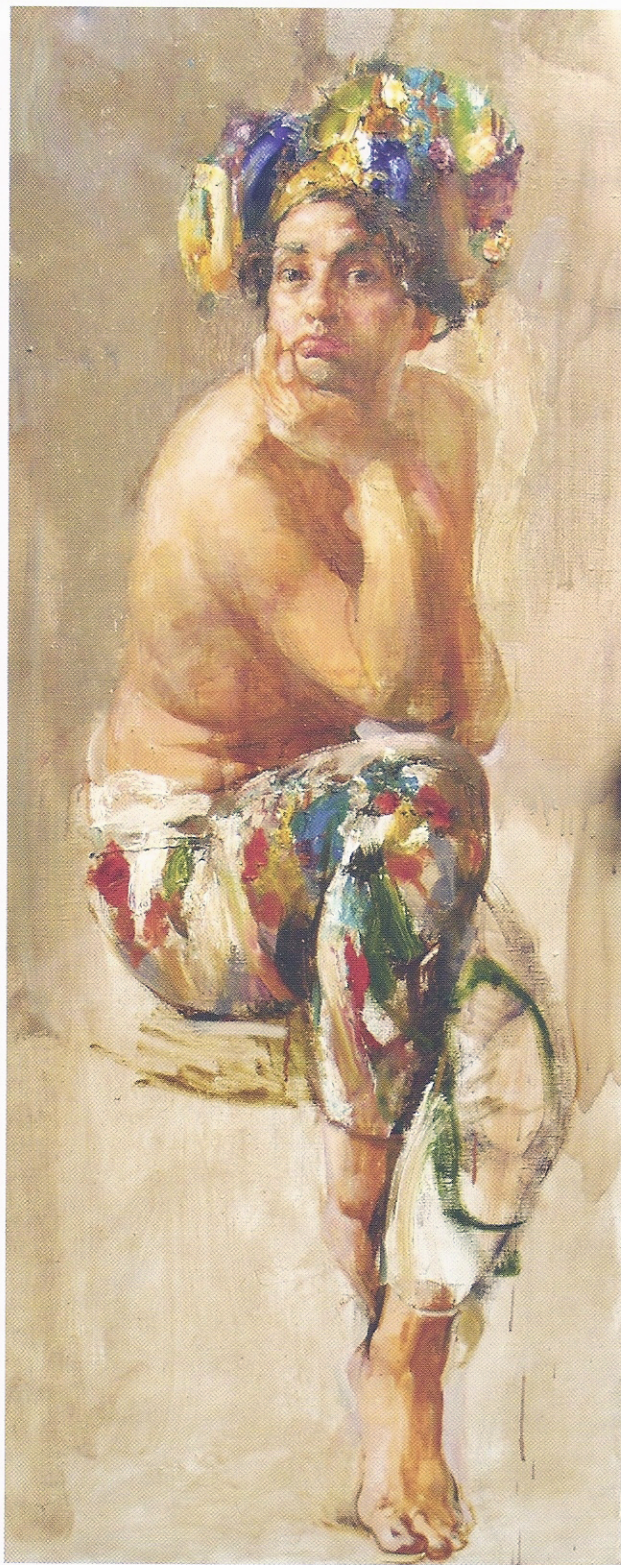
From this line-work, the artist builds the surface of the canvas in loosely applied brushwork. He blocks in hues and forms with multiple layers of paint. While retaining the vigor, fluidity and motion

of his initial painting gesture, Blokhin begins to develop forms. Working in classical pyramid compositions, he brings out the volumes and values of the subject matter.

Blokhin's portraits embody the baroque richness of Velasquez in their depth of space, expert rendering of textures and materials and in their illustration of the optical qualities of light. And with theatrical and ecstatic lighting reminiscent of Caravaggio, the artist exposes the splendor and romance of his subject.

Blokhin seamlessly entices all these influences together with his own unique voice to create a new artistic expression that stands atop the Russian and International art scene. As such, he has amassed a variety of accolades throughout his career. From the reception of the "Young Artist of the Year" designation from the Russian Academy in 1996, to the Grand Prize in the Metropolitan Museum of New York's portraiture competition in





*Male Harlequin, oil on linen, 59" x 30"*



*The Heirloom, oil on linen, 58" x 24"*

2002, the world is just beginning to take notice of the young artist. Among countless other awards, The Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia's foremost cultural Museum, recently added Blokhin's work to their prestigious collection. In May, the Russian parliament and Vladimir

Putin will award Blokhin with the highest honor: the title of his country's premier artist, "The Pearl of Russia."

*Nikolai Blokhin is represented by The Downey Gallery located at 225 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87501 and*

*112 San Francisco, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501. Hours in both locations: 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday-Saturday, and 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Sunday. The gallery is open by appointment to collectors. Phone: (505)982-6701, Fax (505)982-0544, Email: info@downey-gallery.com.*