

Hidden Gem Alert: The Museum of Russian Art

BY MALIA BRAIDEY

LOCATED RIGHT OFF OF 35W in south Minneapolis, the Museum of Russian Art was, in my opinion, the perfect place to spend a rainy fall afternoon.

Walking into the museum, you're met with the warm and friendly energy of the ticket saleswoman, who quickly shows you her deep knowledge of the museum and its history. After hearing her guidance on how to experience the museum in the best arrangement, I stepped down to the first exhibit of the museum—the Permanent Collection Gallery.

Entering this space felt warm and inviting, as you're met with large-scale canvases painted in a variety of styles. While it was partially intimidating to be confronted by life-sized paintings of the people of Russia, especially the resounding presence of Nikita Khrushchev (a former Premier of the Soviet Union), I found most of the pieces surprisingly comforting with their soft pastels and intense amount of detail. It truly felt as though the scene painted was unfolding in front of me, which is, in my opinion, a rare experience in the world of visual art. Others within the exhibit felt similar, as I overheard one of the visitors saying that she felt as though a particular piece of a girl within the woods "felt real," especially as she backed further away from the painting. Seeing as some of them were original artifacts from the Soviet-Era, the quality of these pieces was a sight in itself, as they had

looked as if they had just recently been painted.

Going up the stairs to the main floor, you walk into one of the temporary exhibits, focused on the works of Alexey Brodovitch. Known for his graphic design and artistic influence in Russia, France, and the United States, the bold colors and abstract ideas of this showcase were certainly eye-catching.

This exhibit also included a variety in the presentation of his pieces, as there were framed pieces on the walls, showcased three-dimensional pieces scattered throughout the floor, and even a slideshow of his works within the magazine *Harper's Bazaar* from the 1930s to the 1950s. The digital presentation includes a seating area, where you can really take in the talents of Brodovitch in a comfortable fashion.

The main floor was also home to my personal favorite portion of the museum—the Fireside Room. This room provided a secluded and intimate view of a revolutionary art form of Russia—the Palekh Box. Flashing with golden details, these boxes immediately draw the eye, and it's a wonder how one can create something so small, yet so beautiful.

Many of these boxes depicted important portions of Russian History, telling a story among its panels and enrapturing the viewer.

Following the stairs up to the final floor, I was met with the last temporary exhibit of this season—"E.O Hoppé And The Ballet

Russes". This selection included numerous photographs from the collaboration of the notorious photographer E.O Hoppé and the Ballet Russes dance company of Russia, some of which were seen for the first time in this museum. These were also accompanied by a video presentation, showcasing computer-generated videos of Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina, two well-known performers for Ballet Russes in the early 1900s. This floor of the museum includes an open middle, allowing guests to peer over the railings of the exhibit into Brodovitch's exhibit. In my opinion, this allowed the exhibits to flow coherently into one another, unifying the two.

As I know little about Russian history, especially in regards to art, I feel as though this museum gave me the opportunity to learn a lot of new and interesting things. The atmosphere felt comfortable and provided my lacking attention span with a variety of things to focus on, allowing me to stay engaged throughout the duration of my visit. The gift shop, located on the top floor, also has an arrangement of different items for purchase—from unique pieces of jewelry to Russian fortune-telling cards. It's definitely on my list of underrated places in Minneapolis, and if you're looking to learn something new or see some interesting art, I'd definitely recommend taking a visit!



The Museum of Russian Art. Photo Credit: Malia Braidey