

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## EXHIBITION OF SOVIET CHILDREN'S PAINTINGS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PICTURE HOME FRONT ACTIVITIES

From fabled Samarkand and the far away province of Uzbekistan--the Florida of the Soviet Union--come pictures which mirror the life and interests of the child artist, aged six to fifteen, in a country fighting for its existence in total war. These watercolors and drawings, approximately one hundred in number, are being shown for the first time in this country from September 20 through November 19 at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, in collaboration with the Art Committee of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc. Although most of the pictures comprising the exhibition, Soviet Children's Art, have been painted or drawn in the Uzbek region, particularly in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, the young artists are not only native Uzbeks but also come from other parts of the Soviet Union, some of them evacuated from the front lines, particularly from Leningrad and Moscow.

In sending the pictures here, the children themselves chose as spokesman an Uzbek boy of fourteen, Iga Yusupov. In the name of the Uzbek children, Iga, a pupil at School No. 98, Tashkent, wrote a letter to "Dear friends, American children," describing his native land and the work and play of the children there. He tells of an excursion trip in June 1941 to the ancient city of Bokhara, made by a group of the young artists, headed by their teacher. The children spent their morning hours in Bokhara drawing pictures of the tombs and minarets erected at the time of Genghis-Khan and Tamerlane. Then, on the morning of June 22--

"....when we were still sleeping in our room at the tourist center, I was awakened by a loud call. It was my friend, bending over me and shouting right in my ear: 'Wake up, Iga! Our country's at war! The German fascists have attacked our country!'

"At first I thought he was fooling me so that I get up quicker. But I learned it was true - war. From that day onward our life greatly changed. Uzbekistan is thousands of miles away from the front. But we do everything we can so that the front feels we are near and closely bound with it."

The eight sections into which the exhibition is divided express graphically the activities, mental and physical, which engage

the thoughts and energies of these children. The sections are: We Love our Country, The Red Army Defends Us, We Work on a Collective Farm, Uzbek Fairy Tale, We Will Help the Front, We Care for the Wounded, We Build, We Will be Heroes.

The pictures show tanks being unloaded from trains that are barely larger than the tanks themselves; people seated in an outdoor cinema; the heads of children with farm implements just showing above the enormous wheels of an Uzbek bullock cart; flowers taken to soldiers in a hospital; men at work on a canal; and a very graphic presentation of Fighting on the Black Sea by a Jewish boy of nine evacuated from Moscow. This little boy, Yulik Labas, is passionately absorbed in the war; no other themes are portrayed in his work. From early morning he waits for the communiques of the Soviet Information Bureau. As soon as they are received, he starts to illustrate them. One eight-year-old Russian girl, Masha Elkonina, has turned for inspiration to an Uzbek fairy tale and portrays the legendary hero, Farkhad, vanquishing a lion, and looking with love on Queen Shirin who gallops romantically over a tulip-covered valley on her white steed.

Many of the pictures by the Uzbek children show, both in their rich colors and filigree-like designs, a kinship with Persian art. Yet in these pictures the exotic atmosphere of the East is combined with many of the very practical aspects and objects of the Western world such as an interior with a definitely Western sewing machine; a locomotive drawing loaded cars beyond a delicately patterned orchard with boys and girls picking fruit; a parade of children laden with the booty of a successful scrap drive marches past richly ornamented buildings and bazaars.

A return to Iga's letter will round out the picture. He continues:

"Our brothers and fathers--Uzbeks--are fighting for their country shoulder to shoulder with Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians and those who remain at home spare no strength nor effort in working for victory, at the factories and mills and on the fields. And we school children are also doing our bit. We go out to the collective farms and help the farmers to pick cotton and grapes and harvest the wheat. I always overfulfill my standard output--if I'm given two rows to cultivate before noon, then I finish three. And the other boys work just as well. We know that every sheaf is another blow at the fascists, and that's why we take no notice of the terrific heat.

"In town we collect scrap metal--old cans, metal tubes and any old metal which can go to forge arms. We go round all the houseyards and knock at the doors and ask for scrap metal and we carry sacksful of it to the delivery point. One day we were very lucky--the mistress of an apartment brought us out a big metal spring-mattress from a double bed. This was a real

find for us.

"Some of the children help to look after the wounded in war hospitals, others give a hand in domestic work to the housewives in servicemen's families, others are engaged in the industrial workshops at schools and enterprises, while others are out on the fields helping to combat agricultural pests and blights.

"But we would be poor artists indeed if all these affairs interfered with our school lessons. No, our government takes care that we steadily continue our lessons at school and engage in our favorite art. We have a Children's Art Training Center in Tashkent. This is center for all the children who dance, sing, draw and write poetry or stories. I bring all my drawings here to show to the teacher who is in charge of our group. At this Center I met children from all parts of the country--from the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia. In Tashkent now there are many children who have been evacuated from areas temporarily seized by the cursed fascists. I am very friendly with these evacuees. They tell me all about towns and villages which I've never seen. They tell me about fascist bombs and of how they used to stand on duty on the roof and put out the fires caused by these bombs. Some of these children were lucky enough to be reconnaissance scouts in guerilla detachments and derailed enemy troop trains. Most of their parents were the victims of the fascist hangmen and torturers. One little girl told me how a German threw her year-old little sister into a well. He took her in his arms and swinging her as though in a lullaby--he flung her to the bottom of the well. The Germans threw a lot of children into this well, even infants... And the well was a very deep one, she told me....

"What I'm interested in most of all today is the war, and most of my drawings are about the war. I depict the deeds of our valiant fighters, officers and partisans. I draw tank attacks and bayonet fighting. I show how one of our soldiers fights and kills a lot of Germans. How a young boy, who is reconnaissance scout, falls into the hands of the Germans and how they torture him. But he stands proudly, refusing to betray his comrades.

"We all enjoy seeing American films, especially with Charlie Chaplin playing; we read about America--Cooper, Mark Twain, Longfellow. All of us read and reread the adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. One of my chums, a Russian boy from Kaluga, writes very nice poetry. He is learning English at the Children's Art Training Center and is trying to translate the poems of Edgar Poe.

"But what interests us most today are the war communiques, and I suppose the same applies to you. Please write and tell us what you are doing to help the front. I'll wait for a letter with an American stamp to come.

"Greetings to you, and may the great day of victory come soon!"

When the exhibition closes in New York it will immediately be sent on a tour of the country. Its first stop outside New York will be Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y., and it has already been scheduled for showings at the Munson Williams Proctor Institute, Utica; the Art Institute of Zanesville, Ohio; and the Hackley Art Gallery, Muskegon, Michigan.