



Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Golden Gefilte Fish*, 2008
acrylic on canvas, 15 x 12 inches

Folkways and Fantasies of Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern

February 27 – March 9, 2016

Reception for the artist: Saturday, February 27
from 7:00-9:00pm

Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern will give an artist
talk on Saturday, February 27 at 7:00pm.

The Ukrainian Institute of America

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NEW YORK — Art at the Institute is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by **Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern**, entitled *Folkways and Fantasies*. Organized by Walter Hoydysh, PhD of The Ukrainian Institute of America, it will open on February 27 and continue through March 9, 2016. Employing deceptively simple Jewish folk and religious scenes as his foundation, Petrovsky-Shtern's works chronicle and illustrate complex embodiments of real human celebration, drama, tragedy, and survival. The exhibition is Petrovsky-Shtern's first with The Ukrainian Institute of America. An opening reception together with a presentation by the artist will be held on Saturday, February 27 from 7:00-9:00pm.

Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern turns for inspiration to Russian icons, Ukrainian naïve art, Japanese wood engravings, Flemish genre paintings, as well as ideas and imagery from Judaism and Hasidic folklore. Through a distinct use of simple color palettes, for example, yellow, green and blue, his fairy-tale series conjures fantastic plays with village characters, plants and animals, interspersed with decorative Ukrainian folk motifs. By keeping his color, form and narrative devices to a minimum, Petrovsky-Shtern delivers an impactful graphical experience, affording the viewer a direct admittance to his pictorial and symbolic representations.

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Other painted series depicting circus performances, icons and nightmares use a starker, near monochromatic palette, in form—red, black and white. They deliberately revisit early twentieth century Soviet propaganda posters, as designed by El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko, and Vladimir Tatlin, among others. This choice of format appeals to the artist’s rejection of official state art forms and, at times, anti-semitic positions. The austere silhouetted cut-out aesthetic reconstructs the emotionally charged horrors lived during the Stalinist pogroms and state-induced Holodomor climaxing in 1932-33. The artist’s cast of players introduce a dark performance of grim occurrences witnessed through a childlike lens—here, uniquely through Jewish eyes—further magnifying an existential threat.

“In my paintings I grapple with ideologies and illusions, myths and utopias, seeking to free my characters of the totalitarian pressure of beliefs and myths,” notes Petrovsky-Shtern. “Absolute freedom is unattainable, yet it is still possible in the moments when we question myths, hence freeing ourselves from them—rediscovering ourselves as fragile humans, whoever we are ideologically, religiously, politically, socially or culturally.” He states that all humankind survives tragedy and adversity, at some point; his art is a continual study and reminder of “this deeply embedded apocalyptic sensibility.”

Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, where, at an early age he learned art with Ukrainian satirist David Miretsky. He studied Spanish philology at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and later, Latin American studies at Moscow University, where he completed his doctoral studies, before pursuing rabbinical studies, spending time at a yeshiva in Jerusalem. In 1996, Petrovsky-Shtern came to the U.S. to study Jewish history at Brandeis University, earning a second doctoral degree. In 2003, he joined the History Department faculty at Northwestern University, where he currently serves as the Crown Family Professor of Jewish Studies. He is the recipient of the 2008 Northwestern University Distinguished Teaching Award and the 2011 American Association of Ukrainian Studies Book Award. In addition to numerous published articles and essays, Petrovsky-Shtern is also the author of *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827-1917: Drafted into Modernity* (2009), *The Anti-Imperial Choice: The Making of the Ukrainian Jew* (2009), and, *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (2014). Johanan Petrovsky-Shtern’s paintings have been exhibited at The Ukrainian institute of Modern Art (Chicago), Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership (Chicago), and The Ukrainian Museum (New York).



Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Exodus*, 2012
acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 inches

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About Art at the Institute

Celebrating its sixty-first year, Art at the Institute is the the visual arts programming division of The Ukrainian Institute of America. Since its establishment in 1955, Art at the Institute organizes projects and exhibitions with the aim of providing post-war and contemporary Ukrainian artists a platform for their creative output, presenting it to the broader public on New York's Museum Mile. These heritage projects have included numerous exhibitions of traditional and contemporary art, and topical stagings that have become well-received landmark events.

The Ukrainian Institute of America, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the art, music and literature of Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora. It serves both as a center for the Ukrainian-American community and as America's "Window on Ukraine," hosting art exhibits, concerts, film screenings, poetry readings, literary evenings, children's programs, lectures, symposia, and full educational programs, all open to the public. Founded in 1948 by William Dzus, inventor, industrialist, and philanthropist, The Ukrainian Institute is permanently housed in the Fletcher-Sinclair mansion at 2 East 79th Street and Fifth Avenue. The building is designated as a National Historic Landmark and protected as a contributing element of the New York Metropolitan Museum Historic District.

Exhibition hours: Tuesday to Sunday, 12-6pm, or by appointment.

For further information: Please contact Olena Sidlovyh, Executive Director, at (212) 288-8660 or mail@ukrainianinstitute.org.

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