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Aleksander Titovets presents "Past and Present"

By Kristie Landing
Ella Walton Richardson Fine Art Gallery

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"I have done nothing. I have not built a house or made bread," insists Aleksander "Sasha" Titovets, a featured artist at the Ella Walton Richardson Fine Art Gallery downtown. Titovets had just opened his solo exhibition at the El Paso Museum of Art in Texas when grabbed for a quick interview. The exhibition, entitled "Past and Present" is a rare retrospective of the living artist, whose graciousness seems to increase at the rate of his popularity. Born and raised in Russia, Titovets and his wife Lyuba relocated to El Paso in the early 1990s, where they currently reside. His accomplishments are varied and include group and solo exhibitions, art competition awards and the honor of painting First Lady Laura Bush in 2007 for the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery. "Past and Present" runs from Sept. 5 through Dec. 7 and features nearly 30 of Titovets' works from the past 30 years.

The night of the opening, nearly 460 visitors crowded “Past and Present” to witness the artistry of Titovets, a testimony to his widespread appeal. Organized by curator Christian Gerstheimer, the exhibition contains treasures borrowed from collectors around the country, including six sketches that date back to Titovets' college years. Gerstheimer remarked that the collectors contributing to the show were like “family” — eager to support the artist and share the wealth. The exhibition is structured thematically and features not just the Southwest, but Russian landscapes, Greek allegories and biblical references can also be viewed. Gerstheimer's favorite work? Ironically, it is “Charleston Evening,” because it “seems to have a narrative.”

Despite his humility, or perhaps because of it, Titovets admits that the show is an educational and astonishing experience for him. “‘Past and Present’ is unique because it demonstrates to me how I have developed — I have used concepts that ultimately teach me about myself. Over the years, some themes become deeper and some I might come back to later.”

Arising from his introspective nature, Titovets' definition of theme departs from subject and encompasses such universal concepts as love and faith. In all that he does, the artist strives to “paint what is behind the canvas,” meaning that a landscape is more than just a field – it can go so far as to address human feelings and emotions.

When conversing with Titovets, it is clear that success has come to him as an organic byproduct of passion for his art form coupled with years of persistence. While many of his works are crowdpleasers, the intent, he explained, is never to impress. Yet, nothing is as joyful as hearing a viewer's impression of his work. The day after the opening of “Past and Present,” Titovets received an email from a teenager who had attended the event on a whim, but ended up staying the entire evening. It read, “For Mr. Aleksander Titovets, I want to thank you for making me fall in love with life again. I say life because when I made contact with one of your paintings, I immediately fell in tune with it. So much emotion put into each one, it's so beautiful.” Titovets has not brought us food nor shelter, but what he has done is paint from the “inside out.” If for nothing else, his works have allowed a disillusioned teen to feel what it is like to truly be alive.

