

# GORBAN



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Oil Paintings

24-143

All the paintings are oil on canvas unless otherwise stated.  
Black and white drawings are on paper.



## FOREWORD

### Michael Gorban

Galit Semel – Art Curator

Using meticulous technique and the highest precision, Michael Gorban creates a realistic sense that incorporates childhood memories and forgotten places from the Ukrainian village he once lived in. His handprint is distinctly recognizable on the canvas. He consciously uses and applies color in a premeditated manner to guide the observer's sensitivities. The way he sees and observes communicates a keen and amazingly powerful realism.

This book presents three main series on which Gorban worked between 2002 and 2008, and which continue his earlier series on similar subjects: windows – through which landscapes are seen, musical instruments, and empty chairs. The three subjects seem to be intertwined in most of the paintings, and comprise another distinguishing feature in the artist's handprint.

Room interiors, still lifes and landscapes have been the most predominant subjects addressed in Western art since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The subjects of the painting are primarily presented visually in the center of the picture. Gorban does not depict dramatic events, nor are these paintings imbued with any national-social-political-religious meaning. They are introspective, sometimes devoid of movement, almost without human figures or vehicles, bearing many meanings reflecting the artist's sensitivities and his responses to life and reality. Some naïve charm, harmony and sentimentality are

evident, as stylized narrative descriptions merge with nature and human reality.

A lyrical atmosphere pervades the paintings, and a sense of silence and calm envelopes them. These paintings are far from being conceptual, heroic or lofty. They direct one's attention to the poetic in the mundane. Gorban displays control over composition, relationships between objects, rhythm, and color harmony. He paints the reality of longing that belongs to the emotional and spiritual world, while emphasizing a color scheme extracted from nature, light, and the myriad tones of his childhood haunts. Beauty and exceptional colors in a pleasing, intimate harmony are revealed in each painting, creating a symphony of gradually changing hues at sunset or sunrise.

#### Windows Series

The window in art, starting with mythology and ancient art, through Christendom in the Middle Ages, and up to the modern world until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has gained the status of a classic subject. Its tremendous visual power comes from its ability to broaden the gaze, while also bordering it and framing the view like a picture. Windows have a dual perspective: looking from the inside out – a panoramic view, and from the outside in – a kind of voyeurism.

The window motif, woven throughout Gorban's work, carries a personal, autobiographical outlook, through which he



expresses in different ways his approach to the complex connection between the inner and the outer. The reciprocal relations between the warm, protective inside environment and the threatening outside world, between the suffocating closed space and the expanses of dream and passion, and on a higher level between body and soul, have won innumerable creative treatments. Especially in Romantic Germanic painting, the window opening from the room to the landscape expresses the ideal, metaphorical yearning, and spiritual passion, whereas in French painting the window opening to the outside world strengthens the intimate atmosphere prevailing in the painting. In Gorbunov's work, the outside is not an "intruder" on the inside. The inside/outside relations always maintain a balance.

The window symbolizes many other

contrasts: light and darkness (the metaphorical counterparts of which are good and evil), open and closed (life and death), wholeness and fragmentation, presence and absence. The windows denote the eyes, the spaces between external, physical reality and internal, emotional-spiritual actuality, while the window shutters alternately summon and reject the glance seeking to penetrate inward. The window is also considered representative of the feminine, in an approach epitomized in Freud, for whom the room is the woman; and the openings – whether window or door – are the female genitalia<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the window serves as a true measure of the openness, freedom and security we feel in our environment. This subject taken from daily life is suffused with multiple hidden and complementary meanings.

Description of reality is influenced by an artist's thoughts, feelings and imagination. Gorbunov, in his paintings, looks at reality, but edits it for his own needs, while accenting the qualities of the artistic medium. The window actually becomes a mirror distortedly reflecting reality. According to Gombrich, the nature replicated in art always reflects the artist's soul and tendencies, and therefore also his moods<sup>2</sup>.

Gorbunov does not imitate nature; he retains its character and uses it as raw material for self-representation based on personal experiences, thereby reflecting a manipulated reality that is filtered and reorganized through the artist's subjective eyes. He thereby shows us less of external reality and more of himself, while expressing the world as seen through the personal filter of thought, imagination or emotion. Reality becomes personal expression. Paul Gauguin said, "When I want to see, I close my eyes," meaning that his inner reality is the impetus for describing outer reality. Pablo Picasso also claimed, "I paint forms as I think them and not as I see them."

Since painting is not objective, the artist's presence in paintings of this kind is paramount. Gorbunov's clearly elicited handprint shows spectators only the parts of reality most significant in his eyes. Rather than producing a facsimile, Gorbunov prefers to present his interpretation of reality, in order to adapt it to his own views. Albert Camus, in his essay "The Rebel," quoted Nietzsche as saying, "No artist tolerates reality." Camus added, "The artist builds the world anew, at his own expense<sup>3</sup>."

The painting's composition is the result of highly complex thought that includes actions that are at once conceptual and practical, rationalistic and intuitive, conscious and unconscious. In this process, the artist organizes, adds, removes, alters and

completes the form, location and color of details, in order to transfer reality onto the canvas. The conscious choices of segments of reality have special significance and become a symbol representing not only themselves but also bearing new meanings within the new connections and combinations.

The sights seen through the window, reflected through the artist's emotional mirror, express his soul, his imagination and his world. The work is perceived as a means of conveying the subject, with a conscious use of painting techniques such as line, color, physicality, composition and the like. Gorbunov, who paints mostly from the inside out and not the opposite, infuses new meaning in the painting when the windows are covered, closed or slightly opened and the entrance of light is blocked. The various meanings of what is inside are explored, as well as the form of light infiltration or the casting of its shadow. The light that breaks through the window is sometimes swallowed up by the gloom pervading the room, or falls on different surfaces and intensifies the shadows.

### Music Series

Most of the interior pictures present still life near the window, on a chair or table near the window, and on the windowsill itself as well. The interior is intimate and serene, despite the lack of human presence. Sometimes a person seated on a chair and playing an instrument appears in a landscape painting. At times an empty chair is seen next to the person playing.

The inanimate objects in the paintings, such as musical instruments, fruit, flowers, pages, ballet shoes, a paint palette, vases, and so forth, delineate the human space according to which man asserts his humanity, in relation to the



memory of his uses of that space, while the different objects describe moments in the unfolding of time at home. Presenting still life, with its qualities of intimacy and closeness, next to landscape, characterized by the sense of open space, movement and remoteness, juxtaposes interior and exterior, flat and textured, free and confined. The formalistic solution of juxtaposing the two subjects appears in

how they are situated in space. The latent power in those inanimate objects implies something beyond their existence and the poetic nature of day-to-day reality.

Paint and the paintbrush are like Gorbunov's musical instruments. The atmosphere the paintings transmit and their colors are painted like music. The music evoked through the visual noise is imagined to be a jazz improvisation.

### Chairs Series

The empty chair motif is especially prominent in Gorbunov and integrated into many of his paintings. In some of them the empty chair appears in combination with still life, whereas in others a musical instrument is resting on it or leaning against it. Sometimes the chair is positioned in the landscape with a person seated on it and playing, and sometimes the chair is floating in the space of the painting.

The empty chair is a subject that has received a great deal of treatment in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. It has been ascribed various existential or metaphysical meanings that express feelings of alienation or longing for sanctity. The holy chair has undergone a process of secularization and the emphasis on it as a functional receptacle shifted beyond

its meaning as an aesthetic object and artistic raw material. Over time it was attributed with many metaphoric and symbolic associations.

The chair is valuable as a motif woven throughout human history in all places and times, and serves as a status symbol. The annals of chairs are like the chronicles of the world. The chair's presence and necessity testify to intense reciprocal relations. The empty chair has been portrayed in every artistic style developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse are all artists who frequently worked on the empty chair motif at the beginning of modern art. They created a revolution in the form of the chair, which is a portrait and object substituting for man. Pop artists such as Robert Rauschberg, Richard Hamilton and Andy



Warhol presented this object as a compulsive modern commodity or as representing the power of destruction. For the surrealist René Magritte, the empty chair floated.

Is the chair a self-portrait of the artist? Of the chair's owner? Through the empty chair, the artist in fact expresses the whispers of his soul, his way of thinking, and his unique artistic style. The chair — a practical, manmade piece of furniture, is turned from a useful object into a metaphor expressing emotional, cultural and existential states.

Gorban's chairs, symbolizing man's footprints, are perceived as being full of references to their vanished owners. Tension

is consequently created by the opposites of present/absent; and a dialogue takes place about man's lack of harmony with his world. One's gaze concentrates on an empty object. The viewer focuses on a subject that is absent, or present in the emptiness by its very absence. The question arises as to whether the absent dominates the present, making it disappear and turning it into a lack of presence, and therefore the absent actually becomes the only thing present; or if the present dominates the absent and turns it into something secondary, a possible but unfulfilled presence, or a reality that has been lost.

Notes:

1. Freud, S., *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1988. Chap. VI, pp 331.
2. Gombrich, E.H., *The Story of Art*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1964, pp 803.
3. Camus, A. *The Rebel*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, Sifriat Ofakim, 1974.

BIOGRAPHY

- 1956 Born in the former Soviet Union.
- 1976 Graduated from the Kishinev Higher School for the Painting Arts in Moldavia.
- 1982 Graduated from the Academy for Painting in the city of Lvov, majoring in graphics.
- 1988-1990 Received a grant from the Artists Association of the Soviet Union.
- 1990 Emigrated to Israel with his family.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 1981 "Speech and Peace" exhibition, Moscow
- 1983 "The Land and the People" exhibition, Moscow
- 1985 "Forty Years of Victory Over the Nazis" exhibition, Moscow  
Participated in numerous exhibitions organized by the Artists Association of Moldavia
- 1986 Participated in several European exhibitions organized by West German banks, featuring artistic works from the 16th century to the present
- 1987-1990 Participated in young artists' exhibitions throughout the Soviet Union
- 1991 One-man show - Tirosh Gallery, Tel Aviv  
One-man show - Artexpo California  
One-man show - Yurek Gallery, Ramat Hasharon  
Art Hamburg exhibition
- 1992 One-man show - Ludmilla Wagner Gallery, Munich
- 1993 TIAS - Tokyo International Art Show  
One-man show - J. Richards Gallery, New Jersey
- 1993-1995 Artexpo New York
- 1994 Artexpo Las Vegas
- 1995 One-man show - Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery, La Jolla, California  
Artexpo Las Vegas  
One-man show - Regal Gallery, Carmel, California
- 1996 One-man show - Regal Gallery, San Francisco, California  
One-man show - Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery, La Jolla, California  
Artexpo New York
- 1997 One-man show - Regal Gallery, Carmel, California  
One-man show - Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery, La Jolla, California  
Artexpo New York
- 2/97 Art Forum - Tokyo  
One-man shows in Tokyo, Osaka

- 10/97 Art Forum - Japan  
Exhibition tour in Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Fujiyama, Totory
- 1998 One-man show - The Caitlyn Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri  
One-man show - Regal Gallery, Carmel, California  
One-man show - Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery, La Jolla, California  
Artexpo New York  
Image '98 - Amsterdam
- 1999 One-man show — Gallery One, Denver, Colorado  
One-man show — Caitlyn Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri  
One-man show — Regal Gallery, Carmel, California  
Artexpo New York
- 2000 One-man show — Sutton Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana  
One-man show — Vally Bronze, Cannon Beach, Oregon  
Artexpo New York
- 2001 Art Forum — Japan  
Exhibition tour in various cities throughout Japan  
One-man show — Sargent's Fine Art, Maui, Hawaii  
One-man show — Gallery One, Denver, Colorado  
One-man show — Central Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico  
One-man show — Valley Bronze, Cannon Beach, Oregon  
One-man show — Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery, La Jolla, California  
Artexpo New York
- 2002 One-man show — Masters Gallery, Vail, Colorado  
One-man show — Gallery One, Denver, Colorado  
One-man show — Sargent's Fine Art, Maui, Hawaii  
One-man show — Glickman House, Ramat Hasharon, Israel  
One-man show — Galerie d'Art Francais, New Orleans, Louisiana  
One-man show — Regal Gallery, Carmel, California  
One-man show — Masters Gallery, Denver, Colorado  
Artexpo New York
- 2003 One-man show — Sargen't Fine Art, Maui, Hawaii  
One-man show — Regal Gallery, Carmel, CA  
Artexpo New York  
Group show — Museum Bar David, Israel
- 2004 One-man show — Gibson Gallery, Carmel, California  
One-man show — Sargent's Fine Art, Maui, Hawaii  
Artexpo New York

- 2005 One-man show — Hallmark Galleries, La Jolla, California  
Artexpo New York
- 2006 One-man show — Gallery Rive Gauche, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Artexpo New York
- 2007 Group show — Metro Convention Center, Toronto, Canada  
One-man show - Gallery Rive Gauche, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Group show — Designer's Walk, Toronto, Canada  
Artexpo New York  
Artexpo Las Vegas
- 2008 One-man show — Gibson Gallery, Carmel, California  
One-man show — Gallery Rive Gauche, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Group show — Gallery 133, Toronto, Canada  
Lineart 2008 — Ghent, Belgium
- 2009 Yaacov Pichman Award for Literature and Art
- 2009 One-man show - Dizengoff House, Tel Aviv