



ALEXIS GRITCHENKO – THE CONSTANTINOPLE YEARS

In the early 20th century, Moscow was an exciting city for an artist. The Ukrainian painter Alexis Gritchenko (1883–1977) was part of the modern art scene and exhibited with avant-garde artists including Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, and many others. Gritchenko also published books as an expert on old Russian icons and as an art critic. Furthermore, he was the founder of *dynamocolor*; an art movement influenced by cubism and futurism.

Gritchenko left the country to escape the civil war which followed the Russian Revolution and reached Istanbul in November 1919. Although the two years he spent in Istanbul coincided with the occupation of the city, the Ottoman capital provided the artist with a relatively safe refuge until he left in 1921. On his arrival, he was instantly attracted by the colors and dynamism of Istanbul. He recorded his impressions of the vibrant ports, markets, sacred spaces, and majestic monuments while wandering through the streets, notepad, pen and brush in hand. He befriended artists and writers of the Turkish intelligentsia including painters İbrahim Çallı and Namık İsmail who helped him to form a stronger bond with the city. When he left Istanbul, he took with him not only numerous artworks but memories and inspiration above all. In 1921 he settled in Paris and, after 1924, in Southern France. It was not until 1930 that he published his memoirs, which makes it possible to retrace the turbulent years of the capital through the eyes of a visitor.

When Gritchenko disembarked in Istanbul, the city of his childhood dreams, he immediately sought out the Byzantine monuments, frescoes, and mosaics. He got carried away with the city's vitality and painted in a different style on themes he never tackled previously. He had a deep knowledge of the city's history, however his admiration laid in details; the slight differences between the bastions of the city walls, how the setting sun glimmered on the sea and the domes, and the elegant but mysterious walks of the veiled women that he came across in the streets. Istanbul, in his words, became a consolation for him in unfortunate times.

Although Gritchenko witnessed two world wars and revolutions in his lifetime, he continued painting regardless. His persistent nature, determination to work and *joie de vivre* played a considerable role in his success. Reviewing his works retrospectively, the Istanbul themed watercolors are the most significant of his oeuvre, both in terms of technical achievement and their contribution to the artist's recognition.

One hundred years after his visit to Istanbul, "Alexis Gritchenko – The Constantinople Years" brings the artist's works together in light of his memoirs and reveals, through his works, the colors and shapes hidden in the details of this city.



August 20, 1920

“Here, there are no barriers; you don’t feel the presence of committees of scholars, you don’t hear the guides, you don’t see tourists, you don’t have any obstacles or limits... (...) I take each step according to my will, my desire, sometimes purely instinctive. This is the painter’s place.”

—Alexis Gritchenko. *Deux ans à Constantinople*



ALEXIS GRITCHENKO

THE CONSTANTINOPLE YEARS

01.09 – 01.11.2020

Curators

Şeyda Çetin, Ebru Esra Satıcı

Consultants

Ayşenur Güler, Vita Susak

Free guided tours are available every Saturday and Sunday at 12.00 and 15.00.

Please book via kayit@mesher.org

The exhibition catalogue is available at Meşher and YKY bookstores.

Visiting Hours

Tuesday – Sunday: 11.00–19.00

Long Friday: 11.00–20.00



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Alexis Gritchenko, *Still Life with Agave*, 1915–1918, oil on canvas, 118 x 87 cm, signed and dated. Collection of the National Art Museum of Ukraine.



March 8, 1920

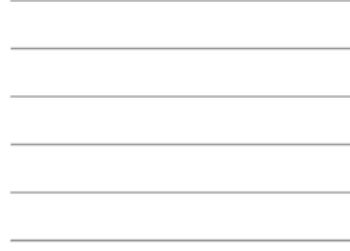
“It is not by chance that Constantinople was once known as the Paris of the Middle Ages. This comparison says a lot. The Slavic name echoes this: Tsargrad, King or the Queen of Cities. (...) ‘To have been to Constantinople and to have seen the Hagia Sophia meant more than to visit Paris and Notre Dame today.’”

—Alexis Gritchenko. *Deux ans à Constantinople*



April 2, 1920
"Everything here is reminiscent of the past,
those great tales."
—Alexis Gritchenko. *Deux ans à Constantinople*

"Alexis Gritchenko – The Constantinople Years," MESHER, 01.09–01.11.2020
www.mesher.org



Alexis Gritchenko, *Hagia Sophia*, 1920, watercolor and pencil on paper, 26 × 20.5 cm, signed. Ömer Koç Collection.

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