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East and West Meet at 'Steppe Wind' Art Exhibit

By D. Garrison Golubock

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Badam making amendments to one of his more unique works at the Steppe Wind exhibit, with a rural scene in the background painted in his realist style.

Most Muscovites learned about the centuries-old Mongol invasions that ravaged Russia in their early school years. However, Mongolian Otgoo Badam is being warmly welcomed as he re-conquers Moscow — not with the fabled arrows and swords but with something far mightier: his skilled paintbrush.

Badam's exhibit "Steppe Wind" is on display until July 5 at "Le Connaisseur" Gallery. The collection of about 30 paintings focuses on images of traditional Mongolian life, depicting horse races, hunters and Khalkha Mongol brides. Muscovite art lovers do not seem to have been put off by the exotic subjects and still sense a certain familiarity in the paintings.

More than 20 percent of the works have already been sold since the exhibit's opening in May, and comments written in the gallery's guest book are filled with glowing praise for Badam's

lifelike canvases.

"Everyone has their own favorite [painting]: some like the landscapes, others the portraits or equestrian scenes," said Kirill Belyaninov, director of "Le Connaisseur" Gallery, commenting that viewers had particularly appreciated Badam's portraits of children, the innocence of which seem to cut across cultural boundaries.

Even those who may not relate to Badam's scenes have complimented the stylistic quality. Though Badam's subject matter may be Mongolian, he paints in an intensely realist style, reminiscent of Russian painters of the early 20th century. Belyanov said his style of painting could be more accurately described as "Russian," which perhaps helps to explain his popularity.

This unique mix stems from Badam's past. While born in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Badam has spent most of his adult life studying and working in Russia. Badam showed an early interest in painting, opting for art school in his home country.

In 2004, he won first place in a competition at his school, securing a full scholarship to study in Russia despite a complete lack of knowledge of the Russian language.

His first studies took place in the southern city of Voronezh before he was admitted to the prestigious Repin Academy in St. Petersburg. It was there that his painting acquired its recognizably realist style. Badam now lives and works in St. Petersburg.

Regardless of his Russian style, rise to fame and relocation in the country's north, Badam has now become well known in his native Mongolia too. Belyaninov said a number of his works had recently been bought by prominent Mongolian politicians, including Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj.

The interest garnered here may well be partially due to the rarity of a Mongol artist displaying his works in the city. "He's the first Mongol I've ever met!" remarked Belyaninov.

The exhibit "Steppe Wind. Otgoo Badam" is on display until July 5 at Connaisseur Gallery at 22 Myasnitskaya Ulitsa, Bldg. 1, Metro Chistiye Prudy. Tel. 495-623-1029.

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