

NEIGHBOURS OF


AN EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY MAGAZINE FOR THE RESIDENT OF THE SOUTH END

Halifax South

MARCH 2023

*Alexander L.
Kalamkarov:
Where Math
and Art Meet*



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Cover photo by Jay Fisher

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ALEXANDER L. KALAMKAROV: WHERE MATH AND ART MEET

BY LEAH DOUGLAS INTERIOR PHOTOS BY JAY FISHER

Alexander L. Kalamkarov has lived on many different streets across the South End: In a yellow apartment building on the corner of South Park and Morris Street, Beaufort Avenue, Balmoral Road. He has called Bridges Street home for the past three years.

He shares his abode with his partner Yana, children Anton, Yahsa and Galina and their

pets, Miniature Poodle, Tommy, and a cat, Theo. But just as importantly as *who* is in the house, is *what* is in the house. Alex has turned one of the bedrooms into a spacious art studio. Its wide windows overlook the street, casting natural light over Alex's artistic achievements — over 200 works, including canvas paintings, ceramics and painted slate stones with handcrafted wooden pedestals — 85 of which were done in the last two years.

Born in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, a love of the arts runs in Alex's family. His father was a first chair clarinetist in the Georgia State Symphony Orchestra and a professor at the conservatory of music; his mother was a piano teacher. Growing up in a two-bedroom apartment in Tbilisi, Alex recalls the environment being "quite saturated" by sound.

"They had pupils almost every day. One room was occupied by a pupil of my father who was playing clarinet and another room was occupied by a pupil of my mother who was playing piano. And they were playing different pieces," Alex says, laughing. "So, it was kind of a crazy little concert."

His sister Larisa has taken up the mantle. She's a professional piano player and teacher at Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in Appleton, Wisconsin. Alex, for his part, developed a wide taste in music. In his everyday life, he enjoys listening to French and soul. He says that if he was dying and asked to play a last song, he would choose something by Mozart, Bach or Beethoven (in that order). He wasn't interested in practicing piano as a child, but he drew a lot.

That isn't the only way he diverged from his parents' paths in life. Alex moved to Moscow at the age of



16 to enroll in Moscow State University. He studied mechanics and mathematics, eventually earning a Ph.D. and a D.Sc. After graduating, he worked for some time at Moscow Technical University, going from assistant to full-time professor. Meanwhile, he fed his passion for art by attending Surikov Art Institute.

Alex immigrated to Canada in 1992 with his late wife, Olga, and then young son, Andrei. Having already tried living in Paris for two years, he thought it would be good to come to the New World, where most people are immigrants. The young family landed in Toronto, where Alex took a research contract at the University of Toronto. They settled in Halifax a year later. Alex

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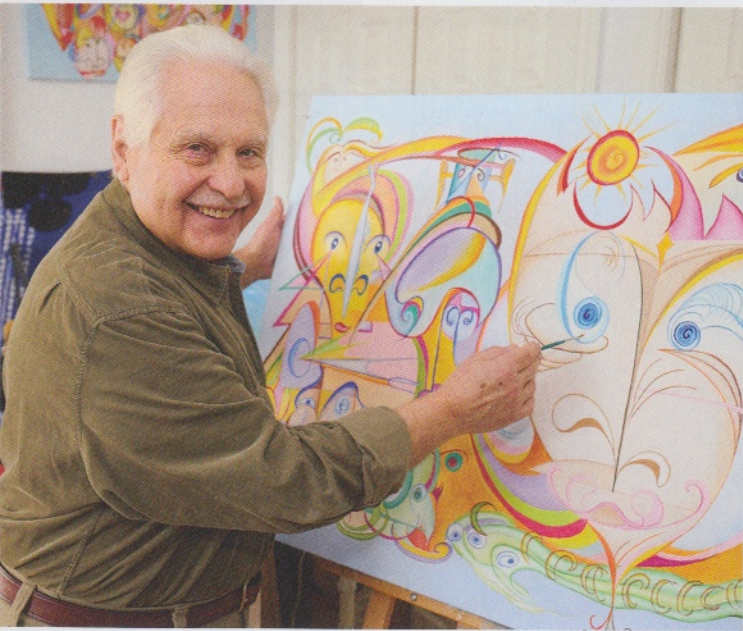
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accepted a faculty position at Dalhousie University, where he's been teaching ever since. Alex has published eight books and over 350 research papers throughout his tenure. He has also taken art classes at NSCAD and pottery classes at Centre for Craft Nova Scotia, where he learned to make his ceramic masks and statuettes.

Though he has been offered "more lead" positions at other Canadian universities, Alex prefers to stay in Halifax. He loves that South End Halifax is such a historic and friendly neighbourhood. Point Pleasant Park is a favourite place for Alex, Yana and Tommy. Alex runs into neighbours there often, many of whom he's friends with.

"Point Pleasant Park is one of the most beautiful parks in the world," Alex says. "And believe me, I've been to many places in the world."

A large map hangs on one of the studio walls, dotted with pins indicating all the countries Alex has spent at least one night. It's a combination of business and pleasure trips that are too numerous to list. His sabbaticals, notably, include Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Japan, Germany, England and the United States. Though Alex has made friends from around the world, not all his travels have been positive. On a train ride in Italy, he helped a well-dressed elderly man put a suitcase on an upper shelf. The man left the car, ostensibly to look for his wife, but never came back. It wasn't until half an hour later that Alex realized his wallet was gone.

For Alex, travel is about more than just working or enjoying himself. The artist in him loves taking in the beauty of different landscapes, from the oceans to the



mountains. He has scuba dived in many exotic locales, including Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, French Polynesia, Tahiti and the Red Sea. Seeing tropical fish, corals and "fantastic colours" up close is a big part of his life.

Alex, similarly, sees the beauty of Nova Scotia. He and Yana camp at Kejimukujik almost every summer. He also loves being along the coastline. He notes that there are few cities in the world where you can drive half an hour and find a trail to hike or a beach to swim in.

Alex was named professor emeritus at Dalhousie University in March 2022, lightening his teaching load. Despite being essentially retired from teaching, Alex never intended to stop working. He continues doing research and advising graduate students.



Alex is holding a solo art exhibition, "Mystery of Spirit," which will open at Nova Scotia Archives' Chase Gallery on March 4th. It will continue until March 29th, with receptions on March 4th, March 8th and March 25th. The exhibition is free to attend. It's a culmination of all Alex's artistic efforts to date.

"Over 200 of my works will be displayed at my art show. I consider it a major event in my life and of course in my life in Halifax, particularly," Alex says. "I cordially invite everyone to find a little time to visit it."

Alex Kalamkarov's solo retrospective art show, "Mystery of Spirit," will be held at the Chase Gallery at Nova Scotia Archives from March 4th to March 29th. Receptions will be held on March 4th from 1pm-2:30pm, March 8th from 6pm-7:30pm and March 25th from 1pm-2:30pm.

For more information and to see Alex's web art gallery, visit alexxkalamkarov.com

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ALEXANDER L. KALAMKAROV EXPLORES MYSTERY OF SPIRIT IN HIS MARCH ART SHOW

BY LEAH DOUGLAS

PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER L. KALAMKAROV

For Alexander L. Kalamkarov, life is empty if he isn't creating things. It's a philosophy he adopted from the Stoics. A mechanics and engineering professor by trade, Alex is devoting the next stage of his life to art.

He's already amassed a large body of work. He has thousands of drawings, which he uses as blueprints for his canvas paintings, ceramic masks and statuettes. Another medium Alex works with is slate stones. He paints abstract faces on the rocky, slanted surfaces, which he then attaches to wooden pedestals. (Between academic research and painting in oil and acrylic, he's also managed to pick up woodworking.) The stones are collected from Point Pleasant Park and beaches on the Atlantic Ocean. The shape and reliefs of the stones provide inspiration for Alex, guiding what he paints. Every art piece is unique, because no stone is identical.

"These stones are created by nature over millions of years, by glaciers, ocean waves and winds," Alex says. "Since 2021, I have created over 85 slate stone paintings and I continue to be excited by this direction."

He names each of his works after a philosopher or a notable person: Aristotle, Socrates, Beethoven, Modigliani, Hans Christian Andersen.

Alex's style has evolved over the years. When he was living in Paris in the early 1990s, he enjoyed doing nature and architectural landscape paintings. He has since moved on to faces. They are, by his own admission, in no way photorealistic.

"It's not because I'm not able to draw the shape of the eye," Alex says. "My feeling is different. When you look in the eyes, what do you see? You have certain emotions and feeling of what is behind the eyes, what that person thinks, what is their inner emotions and life."

Just as emotive eyes are important, he adds that the same is true, to an extent, for the nose and mouth. Alex admires the art of Amedeo Modigliani and Edvard Munch, who didn't always paint with the intent of copying the human face. He says his favourite artists are Amedeo Modigliani and Vincent van Gogh.

Though Alex has not made a living from art, it's remained an ongoing part of his life. While pursuing doctorates in mechanics and mathematics at Moscow State University in the 1980s, he joined the Association of Graphic Artists and the Union of Artists of the Academy of Sciences. He became a

member of the International Federation of Artists in 1990. Through these memberships, Alex has had the opportunity to take part in numerous art shows around the world. In 1991, he participated in a large art exhibition at the Moscow Manege Central Exhibition Hall.

Raised in a family of musicians in Tbilisi, Georgia, Alex was never inclined in that direction. But he has always drawn and as an adult, he began to paint. He describes his style as expressionist and surrealist.

"My artwork portrays faces and bodies, scenes from nature and architectural landscapes. But they don't copy them," Alex says. "They are more likely to convey impressions, emotions and aesthetics."

Colour is an important element in Alex's art. He likes pure colours and bold compositions. Blues, purples, pinks and yellows are often seen in his paintings. Sometimes, he'll use contradictory colours for effect.

His work attempts to shine a light on the fantastical and beautiful aspects of the world. Alex observes there are a lot of beautiful places in Nova Scotia — Lunenburg, Chester, LaHave, Antigonish, Cape Breton — though his landscape art isn't representative of any particular place.

In essence, Alex is capturing what he calls a "Mystery of Spirit." It's the title of his upcoming solo art show, which runs at Nova Scotia Archives' Chase Gallery from March 4th to 29th, 2023. The opening reception will be held at the Chase Gallery on March 4th, with additional receptions on March 8th and March 25th.

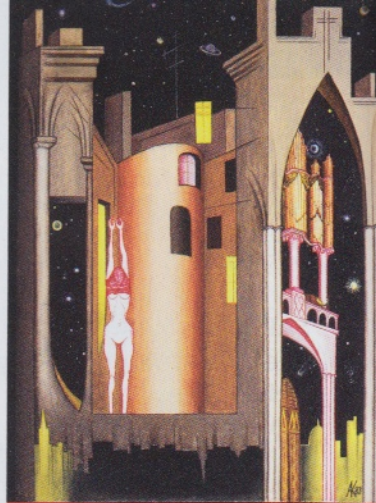
The art show, which is sponsored by Dalhousie University and CIBC Doyle Jacobs Advisory Group, comes four years after Alex's book of the same name. *Mystery of Spirit* — the book — features 25 ceramic pieces and carvings, 65 paintings and 82 original drawings, all created by Alex between 1975 and 2018. His exhibition at the Chase Gallery will be larger. Over 200 oil and acrylic canvas paintings, slate stone paintings and ceramics will be on display; the human spirit is a common subject throughout.

This isn't Alex's first art show in Nova Scotia. In fall 2002, he had a large solo art show at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. It was awarded the Nova Scotia Arts Council Grant and served as the backdrop for many events at Pier 21, including the Governor General's Awards. Alex has also showed his paintings at art exhibitions at the Dalhousie Art Gallery and NSCAD's Anna Leonowens Art Gallery.

He is set to show his selected works at London Art Biennale this July and over 16 selected works at Art3F Art Fair at Paris Expo Porte de Versailles this September.

Alex "cordially invites" everyone to visit his art show in Halifax, "Mystery of Spirit." You'll find something bigger than what he's taking across the pond.

Alex Kalamkarov's solo retrospective art show, "Mystery of Spirit", will be held at the Chase Gallery at Nova Scotia Archives from March 4th to March 29th. Receptions will be held on March 4th from 1pm-2:30pm, March 8th from 6pm-7:30pm and March 25th from 1pm-2:30pm. For more information and to see Alex's web art gallery, visit alexkalamkarov.com



This painting combines my impressions of Germany, particularly of Berlin. One can see buildings, the interior of a church and a woman, which is actually my impression of a bronze statue by W. Fürster that I have seen in a museum in Berlin. And, of course, the elements resembling Maurits Escher's drawings — Alexander L. Kalamkarov



This ancient pipe-like instrument called "duduk" or "duduk" looks simple, but it has a wonderfully deep polyphonic sound. Playing duduk and singing has been a tradition in Armenia and Georgia for centuries. This is an old musician playing this instrument. One can feel a deep and somewhat sad melody through the colours of the background — Alexander L. Kalamkarov



Ceramic Masks, 2019: 20x38cm by Alexander L. Kalamkarov