

79th Annual Writer's Digest 2010 Writing Competition Award Winning Entry

Feature Article:

Retired Detective Discovers Lost Art Collection

At first glance, the small eight by fifteen foot public storage unit located on the outskirts of Orlando, Florida wouldn't seem a likely place to uncover a hidden treasure. No one ever guessed that behind the simple roll-up door and cheap lock laid an enormous collection of fine canvases which were hidden from prying eyes for more than twenty five years. On that overcast day in July of 2004, this unobtrusive setting was about to unlock a dream-come-true for retired Irish detective, Martin McDermott. For four years, McDermott had been searching for what he believed to be one of the greatest lost treasures of the twentieth century. As the thin metal roll-up door was raised, the entire shed vibrated until the flimsy door had reached the top. Peering inside, McDermott stood motionless gazing at the contents within. There, meticulously stacked from the floor to the ceiling lay nearly two hundred unframed paintings by the listed Russian artist, Ivan Garikow.

"I don't remember the exact time that I heard the name of Ivan Garikow, but his name came up and it immediately stirred an interest in me. From time to time I would ask questions of our international art experts about Garikow. It was during this time that I first learned about the Cadre of Artists that had come under the Nazi boot during the

years 1939-1945. Ironically, the lack of information made it both frustrating and intriguing at the same time.”

McDermott pointed out that Ivan Garikow was “one of the few artists that the Nazis had taken prisoner,” and the fact that Garikow had been present in the American allied zone after the war put him under scrutiny. People had lost their property, their valuables, their important documents, and unfortunately, their dignity. Many were displaced to neighboring countries. The confusion in Europe after the War was immense.

It was easy to understand how people like Garikow disappeared from the public eye. There was no paper trail or any physical evidence of their existence. The Nazis were very good at destroying personal property, public records, and any type of information that could possibly be traced back to an individual or the Nazis involvement of any kind. “I am certain that in many homes throughout Germany and Austria paintings by Garikow are hanging on walls, but unfortunately, the story of how they ended up there remains untold and probably forgotten”.

As McDermott continued his research about famous artists, he seemed to be drawn to Russian painters. While reviewing Davenport’s Art Reference Artist Index, McDermott saw his first listing for Ivan Garikow. “I kept going back to the question, what happened to the artist, but no one seemed to know. Garikow seemed to have just vanished.” His search for information about Garikow grew even more urgent.

McDermott managed to piece together some specific information regarding Garikow’s early life. Ivan Garikow was born on June 12, 1918 in the village of Belaya Glina which is located in southern Russia. In 1937, Ivan was accepted into the Repin Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Leningrad, and four years later, he

completed his classical training in the spring of 1941. Hitler's armies invaded Russia on June 22, 1941, and within weeks, Garikow was captured and became a prisoner of war. The next four years of his life was spent in Nazi concentration camps. On May 5, 1945, the camp at Mauthausen was liberated by soldiers of the 41st U.S. Cavalry's Recon Squad of the U.S. 11th Armored Division. Garikow was among the surviving 300 Russian prisoners of war who were given their freedom and released to the American sector of the Allied occupied zone near Salzburg, Austria. Ivan stayed in Salzburg during those post war years, and he quickly gained recognition as one of Salzburg's most popular artists.

"I'd spoken to European art experts and people at Repin Academy. They agreed that Garikow had been a great talent and had produced a number of acclaimed works, but no one was exactly sure what had happened to the artist after 1950. The European art world had lost sight of Ivan Garikow," he continued, "It's unbelievable that in today's world, an artist who had achieved such a high reputation and European fame could so easily disappear from view, but during those post war years when Europe was rebuilding after World War II, that is exactly what happened." McDermott's detective work came to an abrupt halt.

Not long after McDermott ran out of information, his determination paid off. McDermott noticed that an occasional painting by Ivan Garikow would appear for sale on the Internet from private sellers, and he noticed that every painting was dated after 1950 and originated in the United States. "I found it difficult to believe that an artist as talented as Ivan Garikow would have simply stopped painting, and there was no evidence to suggest that he had died young," concluded McDermott. "Garikow had been prolific

during the post war years, and, if the paintings offered for sale were genuine, obviously he had continued to paint later in life,” explains McDermott. McDermott believed there was a good chance that most of Garikow’s paintings had never been seen by the European art community.

In 2000, Martin McDermott retired from the Irish National Police Force and decided to relocate in the United States, specifically Florida. The art auctions appeared to originate in the Orlando area, so Martin decided to begin his search there. Garikow’s missing art work continued to consume McDermott. Finding answers became Martin’s pastime. In 2002, McDermott learned that a Garikow original would be offered for auction in Orlando. He contacted the auctioneer and was told that the seller was Ivan’s son, Arnold, but he had left no forwarding address with the auctioneer. In police parlance, the trail had gone cold.

Weeks later, McDermott heard about a Garikow exhibition that was part of another commercial art show, and that Arnold Garikow, Ivan’s son, would be in attendance. An opportunity to meet Ivan’s son seemed too good to be true. McDermott attended the show and was surprised to learn that there were fifteen original Garikow’s on display.

“My eyes were transfixed on one particular piece,” remembers Martin, “It was called *Marley’s Partner*. As his gaze remained fixed on the painting, a slender man in his late forties approached McDermott.

“How do you like his works?” the stranger asked.

“Magnificent! Absolutely stunning,” replied Martin, “I bought a Garikow just a few weeks ago.”

“Yes, I had that one for sale,” he answered.

“Are you Arnold Garikow?” McDermott asked.

“Yes, I am.” replied Arnold.

“We had a long conversation about Ivan and his work,” began McDermott, “The conversation was almost as interesting as the paintings. I was able to ask Arnold a few questions that helped me fill in a lot of the gaps in my research. I purchased *Marley’s Partner* that evening and promised to meet Arnold again, hoping to buy more paintings.”

McDermott managed to arrange a few informal meetings with Arnold which proved to be very beneficial for McDermott’s thirst for information about painter Garikow. “I could see that Arnold was having difficulty parting with his father’s works in such a piece-meal way,” he continued, “It became apparent to me that if the selling of Ivan’s works continued in this fashion, it wouldn’t be long the before the collection would be nonexistent and Garikow’s legacy lost forever.” Gradually, the two men developed a mutual respect and friendship for one another. Arnold eventually told Martin what had happened to his father during the 1950s and what ultimately led to his early death in 1982.

“We enjoyed a beer and lunch and a chatted about the collection. I suggested that we should try to keep the collection together. By that time, I had already decided that I would try to salvage the collection and do my best to re-tell the Ivan story. I wasn’t sure how I was going to accomplish this. I knew it would be financially difficult and would demand a lot of time and effort, but it was an exciting opportunity,” McDermott declared.

The men agreed that Ivan’s collection needed to be catalogued if his legacy was to be preserved. Although Arnold had been willing to share his father’s story with Martin,

no specifics were ever mentioned as to the magnitude of the collection or the exact number of paintings Arnold had inherited. Occasionally, as if to tease him, Arnold would show Martin a few photographs of Garikow's later works which only increased Martin's desire to learn more about the Russian artist. "Garikow's recent works were as powerful as his earlier paintings," insisted McDermott.

"Arnie started to trust me a bit more and I suppose he realized that I had a genuine interest in Ivan and his story; however, Arnold remained reluctant to disclose the whereabouts of his father's paintings, recalled McDermott. Initially, Arnold questioned McDermott's intentions. Arnold told McDermott that his father had been robbed at least twice in Philadelphia, and according to Ivan, the thieves knew exactly what they were doing because "they have taken some of my finest work." Arnold thought perhaps the robbery may have been planned by or for art collectors.

Preserving and maintaining the Garikow collection was expensive for Arnold, and storage fees were not cheap. In 2003, Arnold decided to sell the entire collection to the retired Irish detective. It was only after the deal had been agreed upon did McDermott learn the extent of the Garikow collection.

Since the beginning of McDermott's search for the Garikow collection, he had a hunch that the possibility of uncovering a large amount of unseen art work was highly probable. "Discovering this outstanding artist's entire collection was almost like discovering a Pharaoh's tomb for the very first time. I knew these pieces of fine art had not seen the light of day since the artist created them."

The sheer number of canvases meant that McDermott needed to mortgage his home and obtain a bank loan to finance the purchase. Over the next few months,

McDermott and Arnold catalogued Ivan Garikow's complete collection and drew up the final paperwork. In addition to the nearly two hundred paintings, the storage unit also had a few cardboard boxes and one metal cookie tin sitting in the middle of the floor. Arnold told McDermott that the boxes contained Ivan's personal property recovered after his death when his house was cleared. Martin had a quick look through the boxes and found photos, paper clippings, a Russian birth certificate, an Austrian marriage certificate, and several labels used on the clothing of refugees as they were shipped to the USA like cargo. The historical value of these documents complemented the great oil paintings that had been occupying the storage unit. What sent shivers down McDermott's spine were the contents of the final box. When opened, it contained the cremated remains of Ivan Garikow. "The thought crossed my mind," stated McDermott, "that Ivan had not been physically separated from his life's work since they were painted, and that even in death, he stood watch over them."

The day that McDermott took possession of Garikow's art collection and Arnold took his father's ashes elsewhere was somewhat eerie. "As I drove away from Orlando that day I had many thoughts. Could I take on such a huge project? What would be the next step? And more importantly, how would Ivan respond to the fact that he was finally separated from his art work?" That answer came a few weeks later in September of 2004 when a hurricane blew its way through central Florida and laid a path of destruction in many areas, including the exact area where the storage unit where Ivan and his paintings had laid undisturbed for many years. It was not just an ordinary hurricane; it was the sixth strongest category 5 hurricane on record. What was name of that hurricane in 2004? Yes, as incredible as it may sound, it was Hurricane Ivan.