

February 2020

**ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS VISIT TO ISTANBUL  
ALEXIS GRITCHENKO IS AT MEŞHER WITH HIS WORKS ON ISTANBUL****1 September-1 November 2020**

With the exhibition “**Alexis Gritchenko – The Constantinople Years**”, Meşher showcases the Ukrainian artist’s artworks of Istanbul, where he lived between 1919 and 1921. 100 years after Gritchenko’s visit to Istanbul and in the light of his memoirs, more than 150 artworks that the artist produced during those two years are brought together for the first time.

The exhibition will be held between **1 September** and **1 November 2020** and consists of the artist’s work produced in Istanbul, mostly watercolors, but also charcoal drawings and gouache and oil paintings. Meşher first opened its doors on Istiklal Street last September and in its second exhibition, “**Alexis Gritchenko – The Constantinople Years**” provides an opportunity to rediscover Istanbul through the colors and shapes hidden in the details of the city through artist’s eyes.

**Istanbul from Gritchenko’s perspective**

A selection of Gritchenko’s artworks of Istanbul, where he lived between 1919 and 1921, are brought together at Meşher, located on Istiklal Street. In these artworks Gritchenko depicts Istanbul from his unique perspective and color palette; his passion for the Hagia Sophia, the city walls, from the Golden Horn to Galata and even to Büyükdada.

“Alexis Gritchenko: The Constantinople Years” exhibition is curated by Ebru Esra Satıcı and Şeyda Çetin, while the scope of the exhibition was determined by the research of the academics and exhibition consultants Vita Susak and Ayşenur Güler. The exhibition, accompanied by letters, publications, photographs and videos from various archives, sheds light into the lives of the artist and his associates.

After leaving Istanbul for Paris, Gritchenko published his memoirs in 1930; titled *Deux ans à Constantinople* (Two Years in Constantinople), The memoirs have been utilized as a guide for the exhibition, allowing us to trace the painter’s footsteps in the city and provides a unique insight into the excitement, longing, hope and despair that he experienced during his short time in Istanbul.

Regarding the exhibition, curators Ebru Esra Satıcı and Şeyda Çetin declared: “The two years Gritchenko spent in Istanbul coincided with the Armistice and occupation of the city. Although he lived in poverty and faced numerous difficulties he remained committed to his art and enjoyed a

highly productive period which was to prove a turning point in his career. Gritchenko unremittently continued to explore the backstreets, mosques and coffee shops of the city, and was inspired by his discoveries. His works skillfully depict the urban landscapes and historical buildings of Istanbul and the lives of its inhabitants: Paintings of boatmen, street peddlers, porters and others provide a window into the life of the city during that period.

Through a chance meeting with İbrahim Çallı, he made friends and contacts with artists and writers from the circle of intellectuals of the period. In particular he associated with painters from the 1914 Generation and his friendships with İbrahim Çallı and Namık İsmail were to have a positive impact on his personal and professional life.”

Among the archive documents and publications included in the exhibition is an edition of “*Deux ans à Constantinople*” from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s private collection of books. Furthermore, the exhibition gathers and showcases artworks loaned from over 20 museums, archives and private collections from seven countries including the National Art Museum of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Museum New York, the Centre Pompidou, and Collège de France. Offering the most comprehensive selection compiled from Gritchenko’s artworks on Istanbul to date, the exhibition pays homage to the artist’s dedication to work and enthusiasm for life.

With “Alexis Gritchenko – The Constantinople Years” exhibition, Meşher is inviting the viewers to see Istanbul through Gritchenko’s eyes, who was a foreign refugee artist in a city under occupation 100 years ago.

## **Publications**

### **i. Exhibition catalog**

The exhibition catalog includes current research by art historians Vita Susak and Ayşenur Güler. The catalog is published bilingually, in English and Turkish.

### **ii. *Two Years in Constantinople* Alexis Gritchenko**

During his time in Istanbul, Gritchenko recorded his experiences in notebooks. Later, in Paris, these were collated and published as memoirs in 1930 with the title *Deux ans à Constantinople (Two Years in Constantinople)*.

While the exhibition showcases the artist’s Istanbul artworks, these have been correlated with the corresponding accounts in his memoirs and notes to further inform and orientate the viewer.

A Turkish translation of his memoirs was also prepared for publication simultaneously with the exhibition by Yapı Kredi Publications, which details Gritchenko’s experience and his passion for work.

## **About the Artist**

The Ukrainian artist Alexis Gritchenko (b 1883, Krolevets – d 1977, Vence) was a practitioner of modern art in the early 20th century in Moscow; Moscow being one of the major art centers of the time. He participated in exhibitions that also included avant-garde painters Kazimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky. He also published books as an artist and art critic and taught at the art school. Gritchenko fled the October Revolution of 1917 and subsequent the civil war and arrived in Istanbul in November 1919. The city provided a relatively safe haven for the artist between 1919 and 1921. Gritchenko settled in Paris in 1921, and then in Southern France after 1924. His works were included in many exhibitions held in Europe and America and notably at the Salon d’Automne (Autumn Salon) in Paris. The Alexis Gritchenko Foundation was established in New York in 1958. In 2006, fulfilling the artist’s bequest, the artworks in this collection were handed over to the National Art Museum of Ukraine.

## Meşher

Initiated by the **Vehbi Koç Foundation (VKV)**, **Meşher** was conceived as an exhibition space that would hold a wide array of exhibitions with a range of subjects as well as organizing a variety of activities such as workshops and conferences. With a name that means “exhibition space” in Ottoman Turkish, Meşher aims to provide an inspiring platform of dialogue across time and cultures and has been welcoming visitors since its inauguration in September 2019. With an exhibition area of 900 square meters on three floors and an additional 100-square-meter activity area dedicated to events, Meşher will continue to contribute to the arts and culture scene through hosting exhibitions, organizing various programs on a wide range of subjects both historical and contemporary and act as a reference point with its research-oriented academic stance and publications.

Located on Istiklal Street, entrance to the exhibitions, activities and guided tours at Meşher are free of charge.

The exhibition is open to visit six days a week except Monday, between 11.00-17.00

[www.mesher.org](http://www.mesher.org) | [Instagram](#)

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