Imprints of freedom

Russian and American artists meld social and political issues in exhibit at MAG

The title of Russian artist Alexander Dijlia's Soldiers Are Always Blending in With Nature packs a similar nasty punch. Three camouflaged soldiers seem to be leaning into a field of flowers. On second glance, we realize that one reclines dying and "blending" into the earth.

More optimistic imagery is found in Hung Liu's Muses. Liu is a Chinese-born American who was forced to undergo four years of hard labor and "re-education" during China's Cultural Revolution. His lithographs portray a deeply weathered face flushed by perks dragons and butterflies, traditional symbols of Chinese culture.

If you're looking for sheer panache, head for Pavel Makarev's Small Tiger, a virtuoso study in textures. The ruins of a city are surrounded by giant flowers and realistic patches of peeling paint.

"It's like layers of memory you can erase," says Harmane-Whitmore.

With its emphasis on social issues, "The View From Here" is well suited to a university town such as Rochester. But the museum's longtime visitors might ask whether recent exhibits are becoming too narrow in their appeal. "The Paper Sculpture Show" and "The View From Here" are a wake-up call for art made with unorthodox materials are we really all resolutions off the beaten track.

Current exhibitions Marie Via says that the gallery's priorities have not changed. It tries to offer a lively balance of exhibits, importing a blackboard such as the Purcell or Degas shows every three years (previously every two years). A major exhibit for 2005 will be announced this fall.

"We can't continue to show the same 20 artists again and again," says Via. "We want to cover some new ground."

If you go

What: "The View From Here," an exhibit of 70 Russian and American engravings, plus 22 artists are affiliated with the Hand Print Workshop International

Where: Memorial Art Gallery, 500 University Ave.

When: Through June 16

Admission: $7 (15 for students and seniors)

$2 (children ages 4-10)

Special event: Russian-born actor Yury Petrov will speak about his work at the gallery, May 19. Entry costs $1, no reservations required.

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Of course, the gallery's smaller scale means that the pieces have to be packed in little boxes, but that's not a matter of taste. It's just the nature of the work. The paintings are still stunning.

The front room of the gallery is filled with works by such luminaries as Rembrandt, Hokusai, and Degas. The walls are lined with prints by such figures as Matisse, Picasso, and Warhol. It's a feast for the eyes.

As you walk through the gallery, you can't help but feel a sense of awe. The works are so beautiful, so stunning, so breathtaking.

The gallery is open every day except Sunday, and admission is free. If you're in the area, be sure to stop by and see some of the best art the world has to offer.