

In Memory of Natalia Kovalenko, a Director of the Acad. Filatov Museum and Exhibition Complex

Natalia Borisovna Kovalenko was a Director of the Acad. Filatov Museum and Exhibition Complex, President of the de Ribas Foundation for Renewal of Odesa, Magister of International Cultural Studies Academy, and Member of the National Union of Journalists and National Union of Theater Workers. She graduated from Odesa Theater and Art High School Actor's Department in 1965, and Kharkov Art Institute in 1982, and was a leading actress at the Pushkin Russian State Academic Theater at Kharkov, with 20 years of theatrical service.

After moving to Odesa in 1985, Natalia Kovalenko finished guide courses of the Odesa Travel and Tour Bureau under the auspices of the Odesa Tourism Board and developed the instructional materials for guides which were later used by several generations of Odesa guides. Specifically, she developed guided tours named "Hero City of Odesa", "Literary Odesa", and "Odesa – Bukovina" (a guided tour from Odesa to Western Ukraine) based on the information she had gathered. In addition, she supervised cultural programs and events which were organized by the Tourism Board in the city and region of Odesa.

In 1986, Natalia Kovalenko was one of the initiators behind and a directorate member of "Alternativa" cinema festival, the first cinema festival in Odesa, and prepared and presented all concert programs and meet-the-artist sessions at the festival. Moreover, within the framework of the festival, she prepared "The Eighties' Painters of Odesa", a group exhibition of Odesa painters of various genres and styles.

In 1988, she initiated "Golden Duke", the first international cinema festival in Odesa, and, within the framework of the festival, she also presented a group exhibition of more than thirty leading artists from Odesa specializing in painting, drawing, sculpture and ceramics. This, actually, marked the beginning of her activity related to organizing museum and exhibition events.

In 1989, she established the "De Ribas Foundation for Renewal of Odesa", named after the founder of the city, and, at that time, it was the only public humanitarian organization the major statutory activities of which were to renew the cultural and historical heritage of Odesa.

Natalia Kovalenko initiated numerous humanitarian and cultural study activities over the years in which the foundation has been in existence: (a) research and archive activities aimed at identification of the data related to, and preserving the memory of, the prominent figures who had lived in Odesa at various times and were no longer alive, and who were famous for their contributions to science,

culture, business, banking, sponsorship and philanthropy; (b) educational and awareness-raising activities; (c) providing social and professional support to gifted Odesa children, and (d) providing support and cooperation aimed at cherishing national traditions, arts and crafts of Ukraine, promoting and exhibiting arts and cultural works produced by Odesa artists, and historic preservation of monuments and buildings of special concern (particularly museums as centers of public enlightenment and culture).

Moreover, she prepared more than 350 exhibitions of Odesa and foreign artists and international exhibitions. She had hosted a weekly TV program "Renewal" on Odesa TV since 1993.

In 1993, she initiated a humanitarian action called "Children of Ukraine", which included President Kravchuk's official reception of gifted Odesa children in Kyiv, with provision of presidential scholarships to children contest winners from Odesa.

At that time, she was also engaged in activities aimed at renewal of the Exhibition Hall of the Odesa Local History Museum, and, later on, prepared more than 40 exhibitions for presentation at the hall. These exhibitions included, among others, "The World of Beauty and Harmony" (19th century household items from Odesa private collections), "May These Hands Be Praised" (on the 100th anniversary of Makar Posmitny, a well-known grain grower), and "Blue Rhapsody" (a sea shell exhibition from the Odesa private collection which later became a permanent exhibition). Actually, Natalia Kovalenko initiated and participated in salvage of a unique city collection.

In addition, she organized solo exhibitions of Odesa painters and photo artists, and, later on, organized publication of "Odesa Artists of Today", a booklet related to these exhibitions.

Since 1994, she headed the "Odesa-200" Organizing Committee Department for the Reception of Official Guests of the City, including foreign guests. In May 1994, she initiated and organized a humanitarian action called "Cultural Forum – Odesa-200" within the framework of the celebrations of Odesa's 200th anniversary, which included a Mediterranean cruise with calls at Odesa twin cities. More than two hundred cultural workers, craft persons, city's public figures, gifted Odesa children and artists participated in this action, and the pieces of arts created by these children and artists were exhibited both at the cruise ship's saloons and at the city halls of these twin cities during delegation receptions. Actually, this action was both the first Odesa cultural diplomacy event hold

abroad after a lull of many years in friendly relations with Odesa twin cities, and an invitation to the celebrations of Odesa's 200th anniversary. Participants of the action developed a petition to the city and region authorities, as well as to the government, requesting attention to the state of culture in Ukraine. A video film, "A Travel Over Seven Seas", was created during the cruise.

Several humanitarian publishing projects were prepared by Natalia Kovalenko to commemorate Odesa's 200th anniversary, including: (a) "Just Thirteen Months", an illustrated anniversary miniature edition of poetry collection by Iurii Dynov, an Odesa actor, on A.S. Pushkin's visit to Odesa, (b) an anniversary post card set, limited deluxe edition (these postcards featured the artwork from Karlo Bossoli, an Italian painter who lived in Odesa during the first 30 years after the establishment of the city, and reflected city life of that period in his etchings); (c) an anniversary miniature deluxe edition of pop-up books (these books featured engravings and lithographs of 19th century Odesa, and resembled similar editions of that time); (d) souvenir etchings featuring Odesa historical and architectural landmarks, velvet boxed, and (e) a 12-page calendar featuring engravings and lithographs of late 19th century Odesa.

In addition, she prepared production of exclusive souvenirs (coffee sets, glasses, cups, coasters, etc.) with the logo of Odesa's 200th anniversary.

During 1993-1998, in cooperation with Dimoff and Co, a publishing house from Moscow, she was co-head of the creative team which organized publication of a trilogy within a Russian-Ukrainian-German project: (a) volume one of the trilogy, "Old Odesa", was a reprint edition of Odesa chronicles by Alexander de Ribas, a well-known Odesa man of letters; (b) volume two, "Apocryphal A.S. Pushkin's Novels", displayed Pushkin's Odesa and epoch, poet's friends and foes, and his immediate circle, and (c) volume three, "Everything on Odesa", was an encyclopedic edition reflecting 200 years of city life from the establishment of the city, with regard to numerous aspects, and included, in particular, a list of the two hundred of the most prominent contributors to the development and prosperity of Odesa.

In 1981, she was a member of the Organizing Committee Board for the International Pushkin Conference which was attended by more than 150 participants representing, in particular, Germany, France, the USA, Canada, Japan, China, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, etc. An exhibition called "And so I Lived in Old Odesa" (with the items from Odesa private collections, Odesa archives, and from the private collection specially taken to Odesa from "Pushkin and Decembrists", a Kyiv museum) was presented within the framework of the conference.

A set of post cards, "Pushkin's Odesa", with engravings by Gennady Garmider, an Odesa artist, was prepared to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Pushkin's birth.

For many years, Natalia Kovalenko was busy with preparation of the anniversary premium edition of

"Admiral de Ribas in Documents, Letters and Memoirs of His Contemporaries" for publication. This publication would be both some kind of response from modern society and a tribute to our history, to events of that time. That is why the motto of this book is "From the 20th Century to the Age to Come!", and we take into account that the life of Admiral de Ribas was associated not only with Odesa, but also with St Petersburg, Spain and Italy. This humanitarian project was presented in such cities and towns as Mykolaiv, Kherson, Izmail, St Petersburg, Naples, and Barcelona, which may help make this publication an international humanitarian project, with joint efforts of cultural figures and business circles.

Great public activities were carried out over years. In particular, the Business Women's Club was established with the aim to help women in their personal participation in public life, and to promote their influence on public life with regard to spiritual and moral aspects. The club initiated a project called "Gold Fund of Odesa – Odesa Women", a humanitarian program presenting winners in 12 nominations at annual Christmas parties. The project was established as a humanitarian, social and charity program with the following goals: to identify the Odesa's women personalities who contributed much to the development and prosperity of the city in various aspects and fields; and to popularize these women, whose high moral character, self-sufficiency and personal contribution to public benefit can serve as a model for future generations.

In 2000, the "Gold Fund of Odesa – Odesa Women" anniversary annual meeting was held at the Opera Theater of Odesa. The meeting aimed to raise funds for piles required for strengthening of the theater building foundation, and thus, for restoration of the theater. As a result, one hundred and ninety thousand hryvnias were raised to help the theater. Numerous city companies, organizations and business persons participated in this action, and one more time proved that the tradition of Odesa charity is alive and well. Subsequently, a booklet "Gold Fund of Odesa – Odesa Women" was published, presenting all nominees of the program. Natalia Kovalenko was presented with a personal souvenir to commemorate her initiative, creation of this action, and contribution to restoration of the theater as a historic building of special importance.

She had been accumulating experience in organizational activities related to museums and exhibitions for the above projects for years, and thus arrived to the major phase of her life, a humanitarian project aiming at renewal of the Museum commemorating Acad. Filatov, the great scientist, in 1999. Since that time, Natalia Kovalenko, the initiator and founder of the project, became the director of the newly established Acad. Filatov Museum and Exhibition Complex, and contributed her loyalty, time, efforts, talent and enthusiasm to the activities related to this complex. She did not waste her time on meaningful projects that stood no chance of ever been completed, but demonstrated expertise in the museum field and self devotion to duty to us, her kindred spirits. Today, the

complex consists of the three separate components: (a) the Museum's Institute History Hall, where the stages in the development of the Institute and of its departments as well as the achievements of its scientists are represented, from the date of its establishment in 1936, to present time; (b) the Exhibition Hall featuring the artistic and literature legacy of Acad. Filatov; and (c) the Filatov Memorial Home, the only Odesa memorial museum displaying Filatov not only as a scientist but also a person of various artistic talents and a deeply spiritual person. It is also a nice period house museum, displaying household objects from the era at the turn of the 20th century as well as the Academician's personal library collection. Moreover, in the house garden, one may still enjoy seeing some trees planted by the scientist. Today, the museum has more than 6,000 objects on display, which is quite a lot for a state and government agency-run museum. In addition, it has about 3,000 objects.

The Museum and Exhibition Complex was formed based on isolated archives using minimal resources due to personal efforts of Natalia Kovalenko. In 2004, it was registered in the National Register of Museums as simultaneously a state and government agency-run museum under the Filatov Institute of Eye Disease and Tissue Therapy, and one established by the Academy of Medical Science of Ukraine.

More than one hundred pictures by V.P. Filatov have been restored with the financial support of sponsors found by Natalia Kovalenko, and this artwork legacy left by the academician would almost certainly have been lost without her efforts... It is due to her efficiency, energy, as well as selfless devotion to the cause that made it possible to form a worthy collection of exhibits -- one that the institute can boast about today.

The museum had never had a budget, so the director worked on a pro bono service. The museum was and is kept up with the assistance of friends and kindred spirits, the Odesans who are fascinated by the cultural and historical heritage of the city, and was kept alive and strong only due to Kovalenko's diligence and never-ending search for sponsors. For more than 15 years she managed not only to keep up the museum, but also to run all museum-related activities in the volume envisaged by museum standards. During these years, the museum was financially assisted for repair, restoration and decoration works, etc.

Natalia Kovalenko developed a three-hour guided exhibit tour of the current Museum and Exhibition Complex – one that is scientifically substantiated and historically accurate, with all the events in Acad. Filatov's life. In addition, she developed a guided exhibit tour of the Filatov Memorial Home, with the emphasis on the scientist's human personality, public activity and charity, personal and kinship relations, well as phases in institute development arranged in a chronological order. This exhibit tour development activity was aimed at public education and enlightenment to preserve cultural and historical artifacts and the memory of great compatriots

who invaluablely contributed to the development and prosperity of not only Odesa, but also the state.

The International Ophthalmology Conference on the 125th anniversary of the birth of Acad. V.P. Filatov was attended by about 1000 participants representing various countries. Natalia Kovalenko prepared for publication a booklet album commemorating Acad. V.P. Filatov within the framework of her museum activities, and persuaded the Academy of Medical Science of Ukraine to finance the publication. The booklet album provides a detailed overview of Filatov's development not only as a scientist, but also as a creative person; it describes his major life events, and features some of his paintings, poetic works, and awards. In addition, the beginning of the creation of the museum is described. This booklet album was the fruit of long and painstaking labour, and the first de luxe edition of such kind after the death of the prominent scientist.

In 2008, on 30 October, the memorial day for the great scientist, the museum marked its 10th birthday with a meeting attended by the general city public, city government department officers, city library and museum servants, and, certainly, Filatov Institute staff. V.P. Filatov's book of poems entitled "The Sense of Life ... and Thoughts ... and Love" had been laboriously prepared by the museum over a year, and was for the first time presented to the public at that meeting. The publication of the book was financially supported by Institute department staff and thus was some milestone in preservation of the cultural legacy left by the academician.

For more than 30 years that Natalia Kovalenko was in public life, she was driven by a humanitarian purpose, with the emphasis on the cultural and historical heritage of the city and region of Odesa, which included her activity related to organizing museum and exhibition events and saving museum collections, and she did her best to involve her friends, artistic intelligentsia, artistic unions, and sponsors into this field. She also co-initiated erecting a monument to the founders of Odesa on the Ekaterininska Square, and co-organized laying foundation and opening the monument to the public. In addition, in 2015, she hosted an annual issue of her "Gold Fund of Odesa – Odesa Women" program for the 20th time.

Moreover, in the years that followed, she continued laboriously implementing her projects aimed at preservation of the Acad. V.P. Filatov's cultural legacy, which resulted in publication of new books, "A Life-long Story", a book of short stories, and "Don't Say with Anguish: "They Are Gone", But Say with Gratitude: "They Were...", a collection of memoirs. This science and art activity of the museum was completed by publication of a full-color album of V. P. Filatov's paintings and verses, which was supplied with comments both from his personal archive and from Natalia Kovalenko, the author and editor of the project, making a multifaceted and touching display of the academician's personality. The album was presented to the public on October 30, 2014, the Memorial Day for

V. P. Filatov, and shortly before the 140th anniversary of his birth in 2015.

In July 2015, Natalia Kovalenko marked her anniversaries, 30 years of her art activity in Odesa, 15th anniversary of the museum, and her 70th birthday.

She received:

- the honorary award of the Odesa Mayor “For Merits to the City” (based on the City Mayor Directive No. 973-01/r №032041 dated 29.08.05) for public activities and significant personal contribution to renewing and preserving the cultural and historical heritage of Odesa;

- the honorary award of the Odesa State Administration Chairman in 2005 for hard work, a prominent contribution to the development of culture, scientific activities related to the history of Odesa, co-management of literary publications, and establishment of the de Ribas Foundation for Renewal of Odesa and the Acad. Filatov Museum and Exhibition Complex;

- the Cross of Gold of the International Association of Culture and Art Workers in 2006 for significant personal contribution to renewing and preserving the cultural and historical heritage of Odesa;

- the Cross of Gold of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine for contribution to renewing the cultural and historical heritage;

- the Diploma of the Winner of the “211 Odesans for the 211th Anniversary of Odesa” Municipal Program signed by the Odesa City Mayor on October 30, 2014; and

- the Diploma of the Winner of the “Woman of the Year” Regional Contest issued by the Odesa State Administration in March, 2007.

Natalia Kovalenko was a Member of the International Committee for Protection of Human Rights Related to Cultural Heritage.

In her anniversary year, 2015, she received the honorary award of the Odesa City Mayor for invaluable contribution and for merits to the City, and the Honorary Diploma from His Eminence the Most Reverend Metropolitan Agafangel for her contribution to preserving the cultural and historical heritage.

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