

'Nature is right outside my door'

By Brook Mason

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Artist Sergei Isupov in his Massachusetts home

Artist Sergei Isupov, 45, is a native of Kiev, Ukraine, but resides in the tiny rural US town of Cummington, on the edge of the Berkshires, a cultural centre in western Massachusetts. He arrived in the US 16 years ago and today his work is in the permanent collections of museums in Estonia, Russia, Ukraine, Norway and Hungary. In the US his work is in museums in cities including Boston, San Francisco, Houston and New York.

How did you come to live in the US and did it take you a while to get settled?

I fell in love with an American, Dana Major Kanovitz, a sculptor, at an art symposium in the Baltic states. We later married and moved to her hometown, Louisville, Kentucky. There we lived on a farm at the edge of the city for six years. Within two years I was teaching students in my studio, showing with galleries in Atlanta, Philadelphia and San Francisco and had met Leslie Ferrin, whose gallery began to

show my work at Miami, Chicago and New York art fairs.

Where did you move to next?

After I was divorced, I moved to Richmond, Virginia, an inexpensive city where I knew a few people. There were good studio spaces, easy access to the airport and Virginia Commonwealth University, which has a great arts programme.

What led you to live in Cummington, which has only 800 people?

In Richmond I lived in an urban neighbourhood where there was noise; tour buses going by my home; the grass had to be mowed; my business relationship with the Ferrin Gallery was far away; my studio wasn't convenient. It was a disjointed way to live. Then Ferrin showed me photographs of this 19th-century mill for sale in Cummington, which was near her gallery.

The idea that a single larger space could hold all my artwork, a bigger kiln and serve as exhibition area and home intrigued me. With the gallery right there, it solved the practical problems of shipping, photography, framing and exhibition design, none of which I'm very good at or want to spend time doing.

Were there other advantages to living in rural Massachusetts?

Cummington is not totally isolated; it's near an international airport. Hartford Bradley is only an hour and 15 minutes away.

Can you describe the renovation of your new home?

We took a shell of a building with 8,000 sq ft and split it in half for two apartments and four distinct work areas. It took longer than we thought due to the fact that sprinkler and alarm systems were required. We were fortunate to have a dedicated contractor committed to the project and the fact that the building was a completely bare shell allowed the installation of new wiring, windows, insulation, efficient heating and plumbing with ease.

How did you configure your own space and what has been the impact of this home/studio for you?

I wanted to preserve the open feeling of the mill space. I use the first-floor studio for drawing and it is a place where other artists have worked for periods of time. The second floor is my living space and above that is my sculpture studio, where I worked on the large heads I created for my solo exhibition, *Androgyny*, now on view at the Mesa Arts Center in Mesa, Arizona, through to August 2 [moving on to the Daum Museum of Contemporary Art in Sedalia, Missouri, October 4 to December 6]. Without this building, the larger kiln and the space to stage work, my show would never have been possible. The project kept me anchored during the worst of the last year's financial rollercoaster.

How have you furnished your home?

MY FAVOURITE THINGS

Tea, bread, heat

My **paintings by David Miretsky**, who is a friend. They're narratives and I continue to revisit them, like old friends.

Sourdough rye bread, which I make every three days.

My **hot water machine** for tea. It's efficient design and means immediate availability. No waiting.

My celadon stoneware **teapot** by my friend Michael McCarthy.

My **butterfly and moth collection** of road kill insects acquired on daily runs and walks. The colours are extraordinary.

My **sauna**, which I built this winter with wood from fir trees. It's in the style of saunas in the Baltics. It is very simple and it

In Soviet Ukraine we lived in a concrete block and my family of four was crammed into two small rooms. By fifth grade I lived in a dorm, a single room with six other boys. So huge empty space remains the ultimate luxury for me. I keep it very simple, almost spartan. It's practically all white, pale bamboo, white Formica and handmade chairs. I like the empty feeling of light. reminds me of home.

What art do you have on view?

I live with a few of my current works that are finished and paintings and drawings by David Miretsky, a friend of my parents now living in New York. I use some pottery made by friends who live nearby. My workspace has my unfinished artwork and sketches. In my exhibition space I can show my work and an assortment of work by my parents, Nelli, a sculptor, and Vladimir, a painter, and my brother, Ilya, who works in mixed media and video. They all live in Kiev.

What is your life in the Berkshires like?

It's like my own health/spa centre with nature right outside my door. I work intensely but this is always punctuated with hiking, running, swimming or skiing.

What do you do away from Cummington?

I leave to do workshops and to visit New York and the galleries. The last time I went to New York I attended a fundraiser at the Barry Friedman Gallery, saw the Picasso at the Gagosian, Francis Bacon at the Met and visited collectors in Tribeca and Midtown. The Francis Bacon show was so compelling I bought the catalogue.

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