

Six visions of Britain

Our countryside is the unlikely source of inspiration for a group of artists from the Ukraine. **Julian Barnard** reports

Inspired by a childhood spent in the dramatic scenery of the Russian steppes, Tamara Demydenko, an art agent who now lives in Liphook, Hampshire, has spent much of her career promoting the art and culture of her native Ukraine. Beginning in Nigeria 10 years ago, she has exhibited her stable of artists in Dublin, the United States and all over Britain.

Until recently, the paintings have mostly depicted the landscapes of the Crimea and much of the Ukraine's romantic Cossack history. Her next exhibition, which will take place in London on Thursday, will be rather different. It will be held jointly in aid of the Countryside Alliance's rural campaign fund and the victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and will include many scenes of the British countryside.

"It all happened purely by chance," says Tamara. "About eight years ago, I organised an exhibition in Leicestershire and was approached by Barbara Rich, a local horse-dealer. She wanted me to go with her to the Ukraine to try to buy some Cossack horses." Despite knowing nothing about horses, Tamara managed to arrange the trip, which turned out to be, as Barbara described it, an "epic journey".

Not long after, Barbara invited two Ukrainian painters, Panas Tytenko and Andriy Yalanski, to an



Picture: MARTIN POPE

Exhibition piece: Panas Tytenko's Quorn hounds

autumn meet of the Quorn hounds. The artists were enthralled. They were fascinated by the English early morning light and the drama of the hunt. Since then, the pair have made regular trips to Britain, where they have painted classic rural landscapes of – among other places – Ullswater and Lake Windermere in Cumbria, of scenes around Buckinghamshire, and seascapes near Portsmouth.

The artists follow the Impressionist tradition of painting out in the open, and quickly discovered that capturing an English landscape between rainstorms and gales require a deft hand and quick legs. The Ukrainian weather is more predictable, Panas explains through an interpreter, so here they have

to "paint like fury". But he has been captivated by the beauty of our undulating hedgerows and trees: "The steppes are much flatter," he says, "and it is less wild in this country. A big difference is that the agriculture is more advanced here. There is much the Ukrainian farmers could learn from the British."

Hens, horses, goats, pigs, peasants – few aspects of English farming life have escaped their canvases – and they are shortly to attempt deer, which they hope will be easier than in their native country, where they are more widely scattered.

The link with the Countryside Alliance came when Tamara met Peter Malmstrom, chairman of foreign exchange dealers Exchange Direct, who has

considerable business links in the Ukraine.

Keen to help out with the current rural difficulties, Peter agreed to part-sponsor the exhibition at the Ukrainian embassy in London. Several artists are to exhibit at the embassy, representing three generations of Ukrainian painters. The oldest and best-known is Petro Magro, who was born in 1918, just one year after the Russian Revolution.

The next generation, represented by Panas and Andriy, will be also have their work shown; as will be Panas' wife, Olena, and daughter, Oksana.

At the bottom of Tamara's garden, Panas and his family are concentrating on the canvases in front of them. Having arrived in England a couple of weeks ago to attend the London exhibition, they are not wasting a minute of painting time.

● The exhibition 'Art from the Ukraine' is at 6.30pm on Thursday at the Ukrainian embassy in London. Paintings are between £500-£2,000. Tickets are available from Angela Egan at the Countryside Alliance for £20, 020 7840 9225.

● Petro Magro's 'Spring in the Crimea' is currently being auctioned online (www.ibrax.com), the proceeds of which will also go to the Alliance. The auction closes October 27.