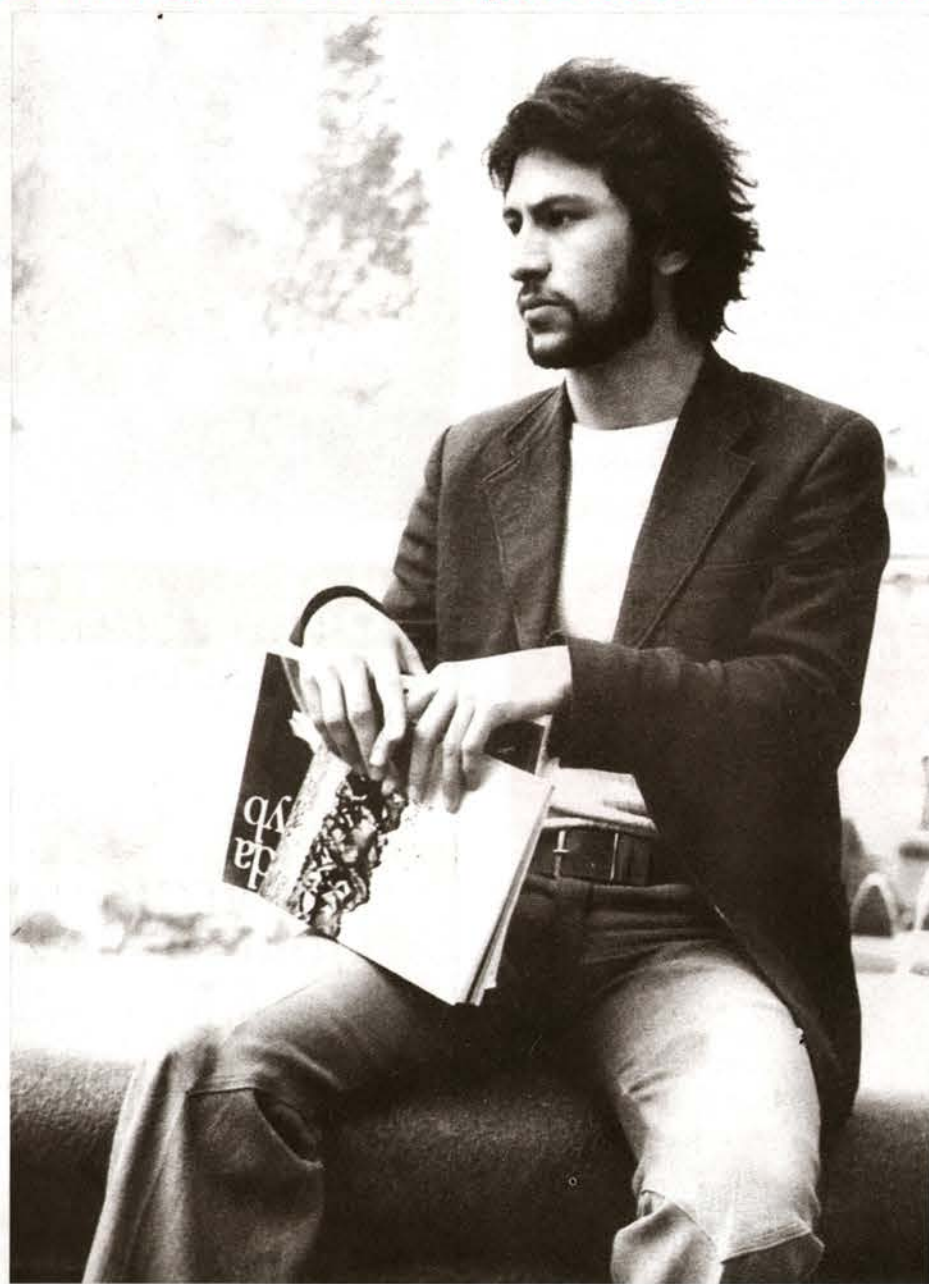


# Larger than Life

Vadim Bora retrospective aims to capture breadth of the artist's work.



Vadim Bora as a young man in Russia.



*On the Mend!*, a sculpture at Mission Hospital's Reuters Children's Outpatient Center. Photo by Vadim Bora

By Ursula Gullow

**Everyday Constance E. Richards ornaments herself with at least one piece of jewelry created by her late-husband Vadim Bora, whether it is a silver bangle or one of the many rings he made for her. Attached to Richard's keychain are two metal hearts he inscribed himself with symbols of affection for her.**

**Vadim Bora:**  
A Visual Legacy of Expressive Freedom  
— From Initial Spark to Final Form

» September 28 – November 26

» The Elizabeth Holden Gallery  
Holden Art Center  
701 Warren Wilson Road  
Swannanoa, NC  
828-771-3038

» Visit [www.vadimborastudio.com](http://www.vadimborastudio.com)

**Bora passed away suddenly at the age of 56 in January 2011 due to a massive stroke. His passing stunned the community of Asheville from which he had garnered a large network of friends and supporters. Bora is known for his celebratory studio openings and active social life but most importantly, he is remembered for his paintings of which he created thousands throughout his active career.**



TOP: Vadim Bora and Constance Richards, photo by Steve Mann; MIDDLE: Portrait of Constance Richards and self portrait by Vadim Bora; BOTTOM: *Cornelia and Cedric* at Biltmore Estate.



*Whose Rooster?* from the Village Allegories series.



*Whose Rooster?* study

A retrospective of Bora's work opens September 28th at Warren Wilson's Elizabeth Holden Gallery, organized by Richards and Dusty Benedict, a friend and the former head of the arts department at Warren Wilson. The exhibit is a testament to Bora's prolific career as a painter and sculptor. "I'm hoping to make an exhibition that he always had wanted to do, which is to show his entire breadth of work, his different bodies of work, from jewelry to sculpture to architectural ornamentation renderings and his different series of paintings," says Richards.

Bora was born in Beslan, North Ossetia, and his work consistently referenced the Caucasus Mountains where he was born. He graduated from the College of Art in Vladikavkaz and continued his studies at the St. Petersburg Academy of Art. Later he became the youngest member (at that time) of the Professional Artists Union of Russia.

He immigrated to the US in 1993 at the age of 39; he and Richards met five years later. Together the couple operated The Vadim Bora Gallery in downtown Asheville which showcased work by Russian and international artists in addition to Bora's work. "We were partners, in life and creatively," says Richards. "I did what I could to help him move forward in career and talent, and he did the same for me when possible."

No doubt, visitors to the Bora retrospective will be most impressed by the artist's masterful handling of materials and his bounty of aesthetic pursuits. While some artists spend a lifetime investigating a singular idea or technique, Bora was proficient at a wide array of painterly approaches — exemplified most firmly in the variety of portraits he created. "He said, he looks at the face and the subject tells him what style it should be. He allows the essence of that person to come out in his paintings," says Richards, pointing to a comical rendering of a man

with a moustache, "To him, this man just seems very cartoonish."

In the same way Pablo Picasso created a multitude of styles and artistic series, so too did Bora. His "Village Allegories" depict different characters from his home country and are painted in solid applications of primary colors, each lyrical composition based on a grid of thick black lines. In his "Cycle of Life" series Bora conveys a primordial archetype in the form of a voluptuous woman captured powerfully in soft strokes of paint. "He didn't like to stick to one particular style. He really liked to experiment and experience his own depth of creativity," says Richards. "He said, 'Materials are just words for my art language.' That's why he came to this country — for freedom in many different routes — but particularly for artistic freedom as well."

In addition to his painting, Bora was a master sculptor and he helped open a sculpture wing at the Fine Arts League in 2010 where he taught. Today five of his public art sculptures enrich the city of Asheville, including a lively installation located at Mission Hospital's Reuters Children's Outpatient Center — a 10-piece installation of kids and animals who cajole merrily in spite of their casts and crutches.

Richards is an arts writer as well as curator at the Grand Bohemian Gallery in Biltmore Village. After Bora's death, she spent nine months clearing out the paintings in his studio. "I would sort and clear and cry, sip on the remainder of Vadim's spirits that he always kept for guests, along with strong black tea," says Richards. In the process, she unearthed a painting she had never seen before — a self-portrait on a placemat. In it, Bora painted himself as a caricature winking at the viewer, his final farewell.