OU’s Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art scores another triumph with an exhibit of masterpieces from The Museum of Modern Art.

BY VICTOR KOSHKIN-YOURITZIN

A dding to the University of Oklahoma’s ever-growing national and international reputation in the arts, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art mounted “Tchelitchew,” an exhibition of 29 paintings and drawings by the famed Russian-American artist, Pavel Tchelitchew (1898-1957), one of the 20th-century’s greatest painters and ballet stage designers. continued
Within the tree's trunk itself, other concealed images suddenly appear, one of the most crucial being a frontal face of an old, perhaps ancestral, Viking. Its nose is simultaneously the red-garbed torso of the enigmatic central figure, who, with long strands of hair and muscular legs, is perhaps the key to any one of innumerable possible interpretations of this painting.

Incorporating Tchelitchew's favorite device of triple perspective and "rhythmical time," this transcendentally spiritual picture possesses a magical inner luminosity and an eternally pulsating quality that are unique. According to Tchelitchew, the composer "Stravinsky, who ... stayed 2 ½ hours counting with his chronometer the rhythms of the appearances and disappearances of the images, said, 'The whole picture beats like a human heart with the blood pressure of 110.'" Into Hide-and-Seek Tchelitchew poured his entire energy and heart; the painting, created during World War II, seems to have been his life's testament and his most complete comment about the human condition. From this point he moved into a series of "interior landscapes," probably the most noted of which is The Golden Leaf (1943), an imaginary X-ray view of a standing human figure that possesses an extraordinary transparency and inner glow. Among the show's three other exquisite "interior landscapes" was The Sun—a view into an eye, on a scale both microcosmic and macrocosmic.

Progressing towards a weightless, transparent dematerialization of form, from 1950-51, Tchelitchew, against dark backgrounds, created a series of amazingly controlled, luminous...
drawings of "geometric" heads. Consisting of thin, nearly parallel, sometimes energetically intersecting, circular lines, these hauntingly hollow images—which sometimes appear simultaneously convex and concave—seem eerily prophetic of modern computer graphics. Exhibited from this series was Head, I, reproduced on the January 1951 cover of the internationally esteemed ARTnews.

In the few years before his death, Tchelitchew’s spiritual journey took him into the cosmos of his "Celestial Physiognomies." Placing round or oval forms such as a head-shaped egg (seen in the show’s Untitled) within dynamically crisscrossing rectilinear grids, he created glowing, pulsating evocations of interplanetary space with his ever-beloved subject—the human being—harmoniously represented at the center of the universe.