



НАУКОВЕ
ТОВАРИСТВО
ІМ. ШЕВЧЕНКА
В КАНАДІ

ЗАХІДНЬО КАНАДСЬКИЙ ЗБІРНИК

UKRAINIAN CANADIAN VISUAL ART

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Ukrainian Canadian Visual Art features contributions by outstanding Canadian writers and art historians. It also contains interviews with photographers and other visual artists, both established and up-and-coming. The concept of Ukrainian Canadian art is discussed and problematized in the introduction and afterword, with insights strewn throughout the contributions as well. The time frame encompassed is from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first.

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Ukrainian Canadian Visual Art

Edited by

John-Paul Himka and Kalyna Somchynsky

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Introduction: What Is Ukrainian Canadian Art?

John-Paul Himka and Kalyna Somchynsky

A Note on Context

When we began to consider how a collection of essays on Ukrainian Canadian may read, what artists may be included within its pages, and how we may attempt to define the ever-elusive concept of Ukrainian Canadian art, we never imagined that we would compose this introduction while Russia was conducting a full-fledged war against Ukraine. The essays comprising this special issue of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada's *Zakhidno-kanads'kyi Zbirnyk* were all written before Russian troops invaded from the North, South, and East; before atrocities were uncovered in Bucha, Irpin, and many other municipalities; before the port city of Mariupol was reduced to uninhabitable ruins; and before 80 percent of the Donbas region was under Russian occupation. At the same time, however, the contributions *were* written in a context where the war instigated by Russian backed separatists in Ukraine's east continued into its eighth year following the Revolution of Dignity and annexation of Crimea in 2014. These contributions *were* written by authors who are conscious of the history of Russia's occupation, oppression, and imperial tendencies against Ukraine spanning hundreds of years. While the current devastation that began on 24 February 2022 may have predated the essays contained herein, a number of contributions contain premonitions of current events.

In one striking and unsettling example, Janice Kulyk Keefer describes a detail from artist William Kurelek's painting *The Maas Maze* (1971), a surreal collage of vignettes arranged like the cross section of a doll house within an ambiguous organic structure. In a description that could serve as an allegorical representation of what is happening now, Kulyk Keefer writes "a maiden in traditional Ukrainian costume, her *vinok* detached from her loose dark hair, lies spread-eagled on the ground; though we see no further than her waist, we know that what looms above her — only a soldier's leg and boot are visible — is rape and possibly murder." Eerily and horrifically, we can visualize these victims of rape who are no longer othered by history, no longer unnamed archetypal women in traditional dress, but our contemporaries. Kurelek created these paintings after hearing about his father's experiences of World War I and learning about other atrocities committed in Ukraine from a local priest. Contemporary artists with connections to Ukraine are currently creating their own responses to ongoing events.

Jessica Zychowicz compares the figurative works of Ukrainian Canadian feminist artist Natalka Husar with contemporary Kyiv-based artist Lesia

Khomenko in her contribution “As Never Before’: The Body and Revolution in the Ukrainian Worlds of Natalka Husar and Lesia Khomenko.” Khomenko’s fleshy paintings of robust elderly women working in the garden composing the series *Dacha’s Madonnas* have recently given way to larger-than-life sized portraits of ordinary individuals who have been forced to abandon their previous occupations to defend their country as soldiers in the series *Max Is In The Army* (2022), exhibited at the companion exhibition “This is Ukraine” at the 2022 Venice Biennale.¹ These men, old and young, slim and pudgy, stand in an army salute while dressed in sneakers, slacks, and a conventional winter jacket. Similar to *Dacha’s Madonnas* (2004-2007), ordinary individuals are elevated in their status and social role through the hand of the artist as they encompass the gallery with their presence — the fate of Ukraine is in their hands.

The current war in Ukraine, understood as a continuation of Russia’s historical imperial trajectory, has encouraged much reflection on the past and future. In our correspondence with artist Sandra Semchuk this spring, we shared a few reflections on the war. Semchuk remarked how “we are witnessing the wisdom of our ancestors become action” as we come to understand in real time the threats our ancestors fought against through the twentieth century. This consciousness has perhaps strengthened the resistance we see from Ukraine today. Semchuk’s work with her late husband James Nicholas, as discussed in her interview with Somchynsky, highlight important discussions about decolonization that apply to both a Canadian and Ukrainian context. What lessons could Ukrainians seeking temporary refuge in Canada learn from Indigenous fights for decolonization and sovereignty in our own country? Where could we forge new solidarities in global fights against imperialism, tyranny, and oppression?

The ongoing war in Ukraine is but one historical event within which art is embroiled — created, destroyed, meditated upon, written about, offering solace, or provoking — the contributions in this collection feature artists and authors who address many others in form or prose. Through this collection, we highlight voices participating in the discussion on the multifaceted nature of Ukrainian Canadian art. We hope to attempt a definition, no matter how unstable or slippery it may prove to be, of Ukrainian Canadian art through the relationship between history, art, and ethnicity. What can be discerned, revealed, or come into focus about Ukrainian Canadian art when examined as part of the history of Ukrainians in Canada and their relationship with Ukraine?

¹ Charlotte Higgins, “We Are Fighting for Our Culture’: Ukrainian Artists Head to Venice Biennale,” <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/20/ukraine-artists-venice-biennale-russia> (accessed 21 June 2022).

The Focus of This Volume

What image is conjured in our mind when we read the term “Ukrainian Canadian Art”? What constitutes “Ukrainian Canadian art”? We’ll offer responses to that question in this introduction, although fuller answers are only attainable by reading all the contributions to this volume. Each artist and contributor has their own views and assumptions on this topic. For the moment, we are working with a blurry concept, to whose definition we aim to contribute.

Our title also indicates that we are concentrating on visual art. But we are omitting some major forms of visual art, such as film making and architecture, and some forms are only treated peripherally, notably sculpture. For the most part, the volume concerns painting and photography, although individual contributions focus on printmaking and comics. While there is some discussion of popular visual culture through the examples of comics and printing blocks used for the purpose of publications, this volume does not explore the rich visual and material culture created by Ukrainians in Canada in mediums such as textiles, *pysanky*, ceramics, woodcarvings, or murals, to name a few.

It is premature at this point to attempt a comprehensive overview of Ukrainian Canadian visual art, even within the limited fields of painting and photography. There are not enough scholars working on the topic, and as a result there is not much preparatory scholarship to build on. The topic of Ukrainian Canadian visual art has yet to be thoroughly explored either as a subcategory under Canadian art nor in the global sense of Ukrainian diaspora art.

Despite the lack of scholarly attention, Ukrainian Canadian art is frequently exhibited thanks to the support of community-based nonprofit Ukrainian arts organizations across Canada, the most prominent being Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre in Winnipeg, Canadian Art Foundation, KUMF Gallery in Toronto, and the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) in Edmonton. Collections of Ukrainian Canadian art are also held by the various branches of the Ukrainian Museums of Canada, Ukrainian Catholic Women’s League Museums, and formerly the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museums of Canada. The persistence of the category of Ukrainian Canadian art can likely be attributed to the efforts of these organizations to support and celebrate Ukrainian Canadian artists, privileging ethnicity as a distinct marker within artistic practices in the broader Canadian art scene. The activities of these organizations also raise the question whether part of defining Ukrainian Canadian art comes from being “claimed” by the Ukrainian community — otherwise, what differs one’s practice from that of mainstream Canadian artists?

Although the relationship between art and ethnicity in the context of Ukrainian Canadian culture has not received the attention it deserves, there have been some explorations of Ukrainian Canadian literary art. The anthologies *Two Lands, Two Visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine*, edited

by Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko (1998), and *Unbound: Ukrainian Canadians Writing Home*, edited by Lisa Grekul and Lindy Ledohowski (2016), come to mind. These anthologies, written nearly twenty years apart, include texts by authors based both in Canada and Ukraine.

Regrettably, we have had to omit numerous Ukrainian Canadian artists from this volume – Peter Shostak, for instance. His work can be found in many Ukrainian Canadian homes – original paintings, prints, and reproductions in coffee table books. His paintings evoke nostalgia for the vanishing rural lifestyle in the Prairies, pictures of sheepskin coats and boys playing winter sports. On the other side of the aesthetic spectrum, and also missing from our volume, is Taras Polataiko, who worked in Canada for years but has returned to Ukraine. Many of his creations disturb and provoke, and have also won international acclaim.

Aside from the interviews with Svitlana Kravchuk and Alina Senchenko, the work of young, contemporary Ukrainian Canadian artists in the early stages of their careers have not received sufficient attention either. The list of those not accounted for in this collection could easily be much longer.

Our volume devotes considerable attention to sacral iconography. Sterling Demchinsky, who has photographed almost every Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox church in Canada, has contributed a magisterial piece on the iconography in Ukrainian churches up to 1930. Although Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn's article on Jacob Maydanyk focuses primarily on his comics about Vuiko Shtif, it also outlines his work in sacral painting. Myroslav Shkandrij's survey of the art collection of Winnipeg's Oseredok mentions icons and church art produced by Roman Kowal, Myron Levytsky, Omelian Mazuryk, and Dmytro Stryjek. Prim-Rose Diakiw, in her 1980 interview with Chrystia Chomiak, describes in some detail her thoughts on and practices of icon painting. Halyna Kostiuk's article on Andrew Charyna also devotes considerable attention to his sacred art. Yet, totally missing from our collection are other masterful sacral iconographers, such as Dmytro Bartoshuk, Julian Bucmaniuk, Wadym Dobrolige, Marianne Savaryn, Vera Senchuk, and Paul Zabolotny.

Historical Outline

A brief general history of modern Ukrainian art emerges from Shkandrij's account of the paintings and sculptures that ended up in Oseredok's collection. Here in the introduction, we want to lay out a schematic history of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. As is customary, we are organizing this history around four waves of immigration to Canada.

The first wave of migration from Canada to Ukraine began in the 1890s and lasted until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. It was part of a major movement of peoples from Eastern Europe to the Americas that saw Jews leave the Russian empire and Habsburg monarchy for the urban centers of North America as well as Slavs of every description, Hungarians, and Finns for the coal mines of Pennsylvania and Alberta and the iron mines of Michigan. This wave of migration left sizable communities of Ukrainians in Brazil, Canada,

and the United States. The Ukrainians who came at this time derived primarily from the western territories of Ukraine. Most came from the crownland of Galicia in the Austrian part of Austro-Hungary. But there were also Ukrainian immigrants from the Transcarpathian region of the Hungarian part of the monarchy; these settled mainly in the United States, although some moved to the Crow's Nest pass mining region in Alberta. Ukrainians from Bukovina, in the Austrian part, moved mainly to Canada.

The Ukraine they left was stateless, and the regions they came from were among the poorest in the Habsburg monarchy. Most Ukrainians came over as unskilled laborers. Men worked in the mines, railroad construction, lumber camps, and construction jobs in urban centers. Women worked as domestics in the cities. This socially and economically disadvantaged stratum, which formed the majority of the Ukrainian Canadian population before 1914, was personified in Jacob Maydanyk's cartoon character Vuiko Shtif (examined in one of the two studies contributed by Cheladyn). These men were often drawn into socialist and labor movements. The importance of these movements becomes evident in the article on Thomas and Lena Gushul, photographers in the Crow's Nest Pass (contribution by Mariya Mayerchyk, Jelena Pogosjan, and Tatiana Saburova). Photographer Sandra Semchuk, though born in 1948, remains conscious that her family was part of that first-wave group of Ukrainian socialists. Bill Lobchuk's parents were also leftist (article by Walter Hildebrandt).²

Land hunger was a problem in these western regions of Ukraine. Farmers had relatively small plots that they divided among their children, male and female. The money economy was just making inroads into a society based on peasant subsistence agriculture. Lack of land drove many abroad. They were raised strong to do hard work on their family farms and could readily adjust to hard work as miners and lumberjacks, washerwomen and house cleaners. However, some Ukrainians – generally better off, although not always – took advantage of the Canadian Homestead Act. They were granted 160 acres of land if they cleared a quarter of it and built a permanent residence within three years. Many succeeded, and the Canadian Prairies – Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta – sprouted large populations of Ukrainians. To this day, even though most of that original population has left for the towns and cities, the prairie countryside is dotted with recognizably Ukrainian churches topped with domes.

Ukrainian life on the prairies became a notable subject of Ukrainian Canadian art. Perhaps the greatest exponent of this theme was William Kurelek, who was born on a farm near Whitford, Alberta. But as Janice Kulyk Keefer explains in her penetrating article on Kurelek, he did not view this rural life simply as an idyll – far from it. An artist who traces his family back to the

² Poet and historian Walter Hildebrandt contributed an evocative account to this volume of Ukrainian artists in Winnipeg, especially Don Proch and Lobchuk. With great regret we note that he passed away not long after completing his essay for us. May his memory be eternal.

pre-1914 homesteaders is Don Proch, whose work is discussed in Hildebrandt's contribution.

After the mass wave of immigration before 1914, various restrictions slowed down Ukrainian immigration between the two world wars. Still, people did manage to come over and they fit themselves into the Ukrainian community that had already been established. In fact, Kurelek's father was one of those who came over in 1923 from Bukovina. Bill Lobchuk's father had come over two years earlier. In the interwar period there was no Habsburg monarchy. The war had destroyed it. And in the years following imperial collapse in Austria-Hungary and Russia, Ukrainians fought to create an independent state, but in vain. After war and revolution, the trickle of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada originated primarily from Bukovina, which was now incorporated into Romania, and from Galicia, now in Poland. The region of Volhynia, which had formally been in the Russian empire, was incorporated into Poland as well, and its inhabitants also managed to settle in Canadian communities, notably outside the bloc settlement in Alberta and in the vicinity of Wakaw, Saskatchewan. Every wave of immigration left from a different Ukraine, even if there was the regional consistency of coming from the same western territories.

Some of the immigrants who came to Canada in the second wave were veterans of Ukraine's war for independence. They advocated a harder and more right-wing form of nationalism than had been common in the first wave. This was, on the whole, a more political cohort of immigrants.

The third wave of Ukrainian migration to Canada followed the Second World War. On Ukrainian territory, the war was fought between Nazis and Soviets. The democratic Allies made no appearance here. Both the Nazis and the Soviets established ruthless regimes in which deportations and murder were commonplace. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians fled Europe in the aftermath of the war, mainly fleeing from Soviet rule and again mainly from the Western territories, particularly from Galicia and Bukovina. If the first wave of migrants leaned toward socialism, this third wave was overwhelmingly nationalist in political orientation. Many professionally trained artists came to Canada as part of the third wave. Quite a few are mentioned in Shkandrij's article on Oseredok. In this collection, several chapters are devoted to artists who came to Canada as children after World War II, born in Ukraine itself, in camps for displaced persons, or soon after arrival in Canada: Andrew Charyna (article by Halyna Kostyuk), Natalka Husar (articles by Kulyk Keefer and Jessica Zychowicz), Christina Kudryk (article by Daria Darewych), and John Paskievich (interview by John-Paul Himka). These are artists who were educated in North America, and their work is both sophisticated and challenging.

And finally there was the fourth wave. In 1991 Ukraine became independent. One result of this was that all the travel restrictions that the Soviet system had imposed on its citizens were lifted. The collapse of communism saw rampant inflation throughout the post-Soviet sphere, and many Ukrainians were reduced to penury as the old economic formation ground to a halt and a new one had yet to emerge. Many Ukrainians went

abroad to work – to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and its successor states, and Russia. Many also came to North America and for the most part did well, establishing businesses, studying and working in institutions of higher education, and assuming leadership positions within the Ukrainian Canadian community. In this volume, two young woman artists from independent Ukraine are highlighted, Svitlana Kravchuk (interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky) and Alina Senchenko (interviewed by Vita Yakovlyeva).

Attempting Definitions: Ukrainian Canadian Identity/Ukrainian Canadian Art

How do we begin to define “Ukrainian Canadian Art”? What are its predominant characteristics? Who do we identify as Ukrainian Canadian artists and on what grounds? How are the Ukrainian Canadian arts integrated or intermingled with artistic practices in Canada, more broadly considered, and Ukraine? Answering these questions is a difficult task as their answers appear elusive, and concrete definitions prove slippery. Instead, we will begin the conversation, one continued by the contributions within this journal, and hope that it may subsequently provoke discussion as the Ukrainian Canadian arts undoubtedly shift and evolve. We are aware that the very production of this collection is part of the production of the concept of Ukrainian Canadian visual art. By grouping together the various artists and images of their work, by putting them altogether in a single volume, and reflecting on them, we are creating the very thing we seek to explore.

Let’s begin by proposing a general definition of art itself; from there, we can begin to deduce what makes a work of art or artistic practice distinctly Ukrainian Canadian. Art constitutes one’s response in pictorial form to their social, cultural, and political context and to dynamics, challenges, visual traditions, and developments. It is important to understand that this definition does not propose that the response in question take a particular content or form. We consider content in the instance as the components constituting the artwork--subject matter and/or visual elements, the “what”. Form is the way an artist chooses to produce and convey the content, whether in physical or theoretical terms — it answers the question “how.” The artist’s response is the *act* of producing an artwork, not necessarily the artwork itself. The artwork reveals the traces revealed by the act of production — the Ukrainian Canadian in Ukrainian Canadian art will be revealed in these traces.

This definition is rooted in social histories of art as proposed, for example, by art historian T.J. Clark. In his analysis of the work of late nineteenth century artists, most notably Gustav Courbet, he suggests that artists do not merely passively represent events occurring during a historical period within an artwork, nor do artworks merely operate within the realm of art. Rather, Clark suggests that the production of artwork is a component of overall social processes occurring during any given historical period. Artworks are created in response to political, social, and cultural stimulants where the

response is represented in the form — whether explicitly or implicitly. Sometimes, the artist's responses are dominant themes, and at other times they are latent—not even clear to the artist themselves.

The point is this: the encounter with history and its specific determinations is made by the artist himself. The social history of art sets out to discover the general nature of the structures that he encounters willy-nilly; but it also wants to locate the specific conditions of one such meeting. How, in a particular case, a moment of experience becomes a form, an event becomes an image, boredom becomes its representation, despair becomes spleen: these are the problems. And they lead us back to the idea that art is sometimes historically effective. The making of a work of art is one historical process among other acts, events and structures - it is a series of actions in but also on history. It may become intelligible only within the context of given and imposed structures of meaning; but in its turn it can alter and at times disrupt these structures. A work of art may have ideology (in other words, those ideas, images, and values which are generally accepted, dominant) as its material, but it works that material; it gives it a new form and at certain moments that new form is in itself a subversion of ideology.³

Taken in the context of Ukrainian Canadian art, we can infer that Ukrainian Canadian art is the creation of artwork in response to the conditions of belonging to the ethnocultural community of Ukrainian Canadians. To follow Clark one step further, the production and reception of artwork within this community is not an accessory, but a constituent part of its existence. To define Ukrainian Canadian art, it is imperative to define what it means to be Ukrainian Canadian. Here it is helpful to look to the contributions in this volume for clues. Sterling Demchinsky raises an interesting question while analyzing the iconography found in early Ukrainian Canadian churches: “The settler who made the processional cross doubtlessly copied these images from the memory of church decorations in the old country. Did the settler fully understand the meaning of this symbolism or was it merely inscribed because that is what he/she remembered from crosses in the home village?” In this proposition, Demchinsky emphasizes an important dimension of the Ukrainian Canadian: distance, whether physical or temporal. He suggests that Ukrainian settlers recreated imagery they remembered from churches in the home country, privileging these visual forms to recreate both sacred but also familiar places. The recreation of these places served a spiritual dimension, but also, and potentially more significantly, they served the function of home-making in a distant land. In the cases of the earliest churches Demchinsky discusses, where a trained iconographer did not execute the icons, the parishioners may

³ TJ Clark, “On the Social History of Art” in *Image of the People: Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 252.

not have obtained the sacral knowledge that informed the creation of the originals found in Ukrainian churches in the homeland. The significance of the religious imagery to the parishioners functioned both as the continuation of religious tradition and a bridge to religious visual culture to create a sense of place.

For many artists discussed in this volume, their artwork and biographies demonstrate processes of home-making and exemplify places where Ukrainians put down roots. For Kurelek, Lobchuk, and Semchuk, the Prairies were a Ukrainian Canadian place that animated familial histories and inspired both positive and conflicted (in the case of Kurelek) reminiscences of childhood and their immigrant parents. Paskievich, Husar, Lobchuk, and Diakiw found home alternately within urban centres. For Paskievich it was North End Winnipeg; for Husar it was suburban Toronto; and for Prim-Rose Diakiw the Ukrainian housing cooperative Hromada in Edmonton. These places all imprinted the artists with subjective experiences of home and community and emphasize how the Ukrainian Canadian experience is composed of a diversity encompassing both rural and urban environments.

One key to the Ukrainian Canadian experience iterated in several contributions, especially among artists who immigrated from Ukraine (the Gushuls, Senchenko, Kravchuk), is distance and displacement from Ukraine. Ukrainian Canadian art could then be the visual testament to the process of understanding one's place as an immigrant in Canada or as the descendant of immigrants longing to keep alive the culture passed down from previous generations. The production of the images served as a bridge to overcome their distance from the homeland. This artwork is not, and cannot be, a facsimile of artistic trends in Ukraine, although it will be influenced by them. Artistic traditions changed as they crossed the Atlantic and were passed down through generations. Part of what characterizes Ukrainian Canadian art is the memory, the traces, of visual traditions forced to develop new growth in new soil. The new visual traditions are a culmination of traces from various practises in Ukraine, adapted and mixed with traditions encountered along the journey.

But is it an oversimplification to suggest that Ukrainian Canadian art must contain traces of visual traditions originating in Ukraine? What are these Ukrainian visual traditions?

Following our previously established definition of art, *Ukrainian* art is the culmination of visual traditions that developed on the geography of modern day-Ukraine and the artwork being produced by Ukrainian citizens affected by their contemporary reality — whether this is visually explicit or not. In the contemporary sense, it is the art being created by people living under the conditions of the Ukrainian state. One could easily substitute “Ukrainian” for another nation-state. It is important to realize that this definition languishes in its broadness to encompass the diversity within any nation-state of experiences, solidarities, and conflicts that may transcend various internal boundaries. It is also important to consider that Ukrainian art is an every-

changing category and is not limited to visual traditions often designated to the category of folk culture such as *pysanky* making, embroidery, weaving, pottery, to name but a few. Ukrainian art is also significantly characterized by important developments in Modernism and the Avant-garde of the twentieth century — a fact emphasized by Myroslav Shkandrij in his survey of Oseredok's art collection.

Shkandrij reminds us that Ukrainian artists were participating and developing artistic traditions alongside some of the most prolific artistic movements in Europe prior to World War II. Until Stalin became leader of the Soviet Union, artists in Soviet Ukraine were on the forefront of artistic movements such as Constructivism and Suprematism; in the territories of Austro-Hungary prior to World War I, and in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania subsequently, artists sought training, exhibited, taught, and collaborated with their counterparts across Europe's art centers and were significant in movements such as Monumentalism/Boichukism and Art Nouveau. The interplay between distance and proximity with Ukraine proper by members of the diaspora constitutes a central component of Ukrainian Canadian art. Artists who established homes in Canada, whether by choice or in response to circumstance, were integral to artistic developments beyond Canada or Ukraine. In many respects, the art of a diaspora is transnational in character, as artists who we may claim as Ukrainian Canadian were active within artistic circles beyond either Canada or Ukraine.

Contemporary Ukrainian Canadian art stands at an exciting juncture made evident by the temporal span of artists discussed within this volume. The artists whose artistic practice spanned the whole twentieth century and beyond were largely limited to exposure to Ukrainian art either passed down from their parents or grandparents, brought by immigrants of successive waves, or encountered in exhibitions and collections. Individuals who may have travelled to Soviet Ukraine would likely have encountered only state sanctioned socialist realism or folk art. They would not have had access to underground apartment exhibits and non-conformist art. Only following Ukrainian independence could artists begin to travel to Ukraine and take in contemporary art uncensored — as evident in Zychowicz's discussion of Husar's trips to Ukraine. In the period following the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Ukraine has witnessed the rise of a vibrant, active, and socially engaged arts scene that artists based in Canada are aware of and responding to. This wave of activity is referenced by Zychowicz in her comparison of the work of Ukrainian Canadian feminist artist Natalka Husar and contemporary Kyiv-based Ukrainian artist Lesia Khomenko. The discussion of Khomenko's work provides the readership with a glimpse into artistic developments in contemporary Ukraine.

Beyond the response to Ukrainian visual tradition and contemporary developments, events in Ukraine without a doubt have shaped the work of artists working within a Canadian context. Perhaps a definition of Ukrainian Canadian art is anchored in that relationship between generations of ethnic Ukrainians born and raised in Canada and their relationship to their ancestral

homeland — whether as a historic imaginary or as contemporary and dynamic manifestation. Ukrainian Canadian art is about this relationship, as articulated by Daria Darewych to address Christina Kudryk’s relationship to Ukraine following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 as “she began to use her art to work through the cherished relationship with her inherited cultural heritage. Her work became inextricably connected with the political destiny of Ukraine and its people.” Evidence of reflections on Ukrainian history and current events is also evident within Janice Kulyk Keefer’s descriptions of William Kurelek’s depictions of Soviet atrocities in Ukraine and the threat of nuclear warfare, as mentioned earlier in this introduction.

Ukrainian Canadian art therefore is not the simple reproduction of the artistic trends occurring in Ukraine by members of its diaspora. It is created by artists who must respond to their existence as an ethnocultural community outside Ukraine and this existence is what shapes their work. There may be evidence of visual traditions originating in Ukraine and there may be response to current events happening in Ukraine, but the significant difference lies in the fact that the artists themselves are working in and shaped by the Canadian context as well. The artwork is evidence to being neither one nor the other — completely Canadian or Ukrainian. Rather, the production of artwork is a navigation of this identity. The art produced by the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada constitutes the definition of Ukrainian Canadian in a broader sense — it is not a linear process of influence, but a dialogue, a push and pull, part of a larger experience of resettlement, integration, and ethnocultural longing.

What about the Canadian component of this equation? What is Ukrainian *Canadian* in Ukrainian Canadian Art? The concept of Ukrainian Canadian art constitutes a dialogue between two parts — Ukrainian, as has already been addressed, and Canadian. It is important to consider the proximity and distance artists negotiate with the so-called Ukrainian Canadian, other diasporic communities established in Canada, and the artistic developments encountered in Canadian universities, galleries, and art centres.

Many contributions to this volume highlight the complexity of Canadian art as an international artistic category. Canadian art, just as Ukrainian art, can simply be defined as the art made by individuals who live within the nation-state of Canada. However, Canada as a colonial country warrants significant deconstruction in how Canadian art is defined. While this task is beyond the scope of our volume, some contributions shed light on this dimension of the Canadian in Ukrainian Canadian art and provoke important discussions.

Somchynsky’s interviews with Semchuk and Kravchuk emphasize the diversity of experiences and identities constituting the Canadian population — specifically highlighting collaborations with friends and companions from various Indigenous communities. These collaborations highlight both cultural synergies established through sharing and learning with one another, and simultaneously, gently raise the important notion that Ukrainians arrived in Canada as settlers. These texts are a reminder that part of adapting a Canadian identity requires coming to terms with inheriting a settler-colonial

identity and the responsibilities of being guests. Part of being a Canadian, Canadian artist, Ukrainian Canadian artist is acknowledging the colonial reality of this title.

Thus far we have spent considerable attention discussing the context in which Ukrainian Canadian artists work. What about the identity of the artists and their self-identification? How is Ukrainian Canadian art shaped by who the community claims as their own?

One way to proceed in this exploration is to look at some of the very different kinds of Ukrainians that work in visual art. Of course, there are the differences that spring from the different waves of immigration, and also differences in artistic direction (realist, abstract, impressionist) and metier (painting, photography). But here we want to look at ethnicity and its connection to the artist. Some particularly interesting cases are those of Andrew Charyna, Natalka Husar, Edward Burtynsky, Prim-Rose Diakiw, and Svitlana Kravchuk.

Perhaps Charyna, who is discussed in the article by Halyna Kostiuk, is the most embedded in the Ukrainian community. He is a scion of generations of the Ukrainian cultural elite. His great-grandfather was a prominent Ukrainian activist and outstanding painter, Petro Kholodny (Senior). His grandfather, also named Petro Kholodny (Junior), was himself a famous artist. Charyna's father was a priest and his mother a pianist. Charyna first exhibited in 1982 in an exhibit that also featured the works of his grandfather and great-grandfather. It was organized by the Ukrainian Artists' Association in the USA. Much of Charyna's subsequent artistic work was created in the context of Ukrainian sacral culture. His "membership" in the community of Ukrainian visual artists cannot be disputed.

In some respects, Natalka Husar has a similar story. She too came from a prominent Ukrainian family. Her half-brother, Danylo Husar Struk, was a professor of Ukrainian literature at the University of Toronto. Although Husar is one of the most recognized contemporary artists in Canada, with a truly national appeal, she has worked almost exclusively on Ukrainian Canadian and Ukrainian themes. Her earlier work focused on suburban Ukrainian Canadians and her later work concentrated on "types" to be found in independent Ukraine – mafiosi and vulnerable girls. She is an artist deeply committed to Ukrainian subject matter, which she treats, however, in an ironical and critical fashion.

Edward Burtynsky comes from the same children-of-the-third-wave cohort as Charyna and Husar. His photography has rarely engaged Ukrainian themes. His photographs in *Mosaica*, a book published in 1991 by the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre in Edmonton to celebrate the centenary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada, are pedestrian. He has made his huge international reputation otherwise, with photos and films that concentrate on industrialized landscapes. Yet he did not travel, even when it was possible, to the Ukrainian rust belt in the Donbas. He certainly is conscious of his Ukrainian heritage and of his emotional attachment to the Ukrainian nation. In April 2022, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Burtynsky

received a prize for outstanding contributions to photography at the Sony World Photography Awards in London. In his acceptance speech, he shared the award with the photographers documenting the war in Ukraine. Before that, in March, he donated prints of his photographs to raise about \$700,000 for the Red Cross to use in Ukraine.⁴ Certainly he is Ukrainian, but Ukrainian themes are conspicuously absent in his main body of work. Is he a Ukrainian Canadian artist? An interesting affirmative answer to this question can be found in the contribution by Kulyk Keefer.

Prim-Rose Diakiw has an unusual connection to Ukrainian heritage. She was raised in an Irish, Presbyterian family. She changed her name from Murphy to Diakiw after marrying the ceramics artist and painter Ted Diakiw (also Diakow). She found something almost mystically sympatico about the Ukrainian atmosphere she married into. She took classes in the Ukrainian language, and then went with her classmates on a trip to Ukraine. To her surprise, she was met in Kyiv by family relations on her mother's side. She later confronted her mother about this, who admitted she was of Ukrainian ethnic origin. Prim-Rose adopted Ukrainian culture with a passion, painting icons and other works using Ukrainian themes.

Svitlana Kravchuk was born in Ukraine, educated in the Middle East, and settled in Canada as a young adult. She was Ukrainian by culture, but did not integrate into the Ukrainian Canadian mainstream. She sees a sharp difference between her culture and the Ukrainian culture practiced in Canada. In her interview with Kalyna Somchynsky, she makes a significant observation: "...it's important to realize that Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe. It's huge and it's so diverse. It's Eastern Europe, it's Central Europe, and it's the Mediterranean. It's different in different regions.... it's very important to realize that most of the people who had a chance to immigrate to Canada were from western Ukraine, not from central, southern, or eastern Ukraine....Canadians of Ukrainian heritage are representative of a small regional pocket." Kravchuk's parents were from around Kyiv, and she could clearly perceive a regional difference between Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainian Ukrainians.

So does the ethnic connection of the artist constitute the entry card to Ukrainian Canadian art? Perhaps, but this is disputable. Asked if one had to be of Ukrainian heritage to engage in Ukrainian Canadian photography, John Paskievich answered: "I don't think you have to be of Ukrainian heritage to photograph Ukrainian Canadiana. And I don't think you have to be Indigenous or Black or Asian to photograph in their communities." This response raises the question of heritage appropriation by persons from outside a particular ethnic or larger-than-ethnic group. This has certainly been an issue in Canadian literature and art (e.g., the case of Joseph Boyden's claim of

⁴ Kate Taylor, "Burtynsky Dedicates Award to Ukrainians," *Globe and Mail*, 12 April 2022.

Indigenous origin).⁵ Generally speaking, Ukrainians in Canada have been happy to recruit non-Ukrainians into more popular forms of cultural practice such as *pysanky*-making and Ukrainian dance.⁶ Issues of cultural appropriation in the Ukrainian Canadian community often take the form of claims that *perogies* and *borscht*, or *varenyky* and *borschch*, are Ukrainian, not Polish, Russian, or Jewish, although broader discussions of colonization and appropriation in the context of Ukraine's relationship with Russian imperialism are beginning to emerge. St. George's Ukrainian Catholic church in Edmonton was painted in neo-Byzantine style by Heiko Schlieper. Schlieper was Orthodox, but not Ukrainian. Do the walls of that church, densely covered with sacred images, constitute an example of Ukrainian Canadian art?

The role of ethnicity in the definition of Ukrainian Canadian art remains a question. Janice Kulyk Keefer formulates it well: "What role does ethnicity play, and what value does it possess, in the development of an artist's oeuvre and establishment of reputation? To what extent is ethnic consciousness active and overt in an artist's work, and to what degree can it be latent, dormant, or even extirpated? Does the attribution of a particular ethnicity to an artist inevitably result in reductive labelling, and the corollary that work by, say, a Japanese Canadian artist can only really be of interest and significance to a Japanese Canadian audience, *pace* Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan*? Or can awareness of an artist's ethnicity as understood in the widest possible terms provide an invaluable means of understanding the true depth and scope of an artist's work?"

Another way to think about the concept of Ukrainian Canadian art, as Kulyk Keefer suggests, is to look at audience rather than artists. Some of the artists discussed in this collection created specifically for a Ukrainian Canadian audience. Certainly this was true of the iconographers who painted churches, especially those that Sterling Demchinsky writes about. Jacob Maydanyk's work was aimed at an exclusively Ukrainian Canadian audience. His Vuiko Shtif character could only make sense to that audience. Certainly much of the photography of Lena and Thomas Gushul was also produced primarily for Ukrainian Canadians. But as time passed, Ukrainian Canadian artists reached out to wider audiences, culminating in artists who achieved national and international fame (e.g., Burtynsky, Husar, Kurelek, Paskievich.

⁵ There is much literature on cultural appropriation of Indigenous art. See, for example, <https://canadianart.ca/features/dirty-words-appropriation/> (accessed 22 June 2022); Chelsea Vowel, "The do's, don'ts, maybes, and I-don't-knows of cultural appropriation", *âpihtawikosisân: Law. Language. Culture.*, January 30, 2012, <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2012/01/the-dos-donts-maybes-i-dont-knows-of-cultural-appropriation/> (accessed 23 June 2022).

⁶ Katya Chomitsky, "Picking at Threads: Reclaiming and Recreating Identity through Traditional Ukrainian and Indigenous Textile Art," part of *Threads that Connect*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J43K-ID0Evk> (accessed 22 June 2022).

Semchuk). Some, however, continued to work primarily within the Ukrainian Canadian community (notably Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn). A number of the artists featured in this volume had their early or important showings in Ukrainian galleries, among them Andrew Charyna, Svitlana Kravchuk, Christina Kudryk, and Bill Lobchuk. The Ukrainian Canadian community founded artist organizations and provided venues to view the work of its artists. Ukrainian Canadians are also major purchasers of Ukrainian Canadian art.

There is no one definitive answer to our question about what constitutes Ukrainian Canadian art. Like all living processes, it is too protean to capture in a definition. All we have been able to do in this introduction is to suggest different ways to conceptualize that art. That the art itself is interesting, no matter how we may delineate it, is proven by the essays and interviews that constitute this volume.

From Central Europe to Western Canada: The Oseredok Art Collection

Myroslav Shkandrij

Winnipeg's Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (Oseredok) has collected significant cultural materials for over seventy-five years. When first founded in 1944 it shared 184 Alexander Avenue with other institutions, but soon bought the entire building and in the years that followed developed an art collection, museum, library, as well as an archive of photographs and documents. The art collection alone today houses over a thousand paintings. These reflect an interest in Ukrainian subject matter with international, modern, and even avant-garde trends. In many ways the collection is a legacy of the Centre's first organizers, who had emigrated in the 1940s from Central and East European cities like Prague, Warsaw, Berlin, and Vienna, bringing with them a familiarity with contemporary Ukrainian art and twentieth-century modernism.

The biography of Kateryna Antonovych (1884-1975), a founder of the art collection, was typical of this generation. Like many contemporaries she was a "double" refugee. Her family left Ukraine after the 1917-20 struggle for independence and settled in Prague. These cultural activists drew inspiration from European trends in the arts, including interwar developments in literature, film, photography, theatre, dance, music, and costume design. Upon arrival in Canada they made it their mission to recreate Ukrainian culture in a modern "European" idiom. At the same time, in the 1950s and 1960s diaspora artists introduced new artistic styles and developed an art that reinterpreted traditional themes.

The trend toward a diaspora modernism was not new. It had already taken place in the earlier refugee diasporas created by the First World War and events of 1917-21. For example, the watercolors and prints of Oleksander Hryshchenko (Alexis Gritchenko) (1883-1977) had already gained fame in Paris in the 1920s. Born near Chernihiv, he studied in Kyiv, St. Petersburg, and Moscow, then travelled to Paris and Italy. He made a study of Byzantine art and the icon, which he linked to cubism and modernist experimentation. After the 1917 revolution he was appointed a professor in Moscow and offered a directorship of the Tretyakov Gallery, but left for Istanbul, where he painted hundreds of watercolors in the years 1919-21. He lived in Greece in 1921, then emigrated to France in 1922 and became known for exotic streams of oriental color. He exhibited in leading Parisian art galleries, in Lviv in the 1930s at the Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists (ANUM), and at personal shows in New York and Philadelphia. In 1963, he donated seventy works to the

Ukrainian Institute of America in New York. These works were transferred to Kyiv. Oseredok has copies of the popular prints *Harmal en Priere*, 1920, and *Campagne de Corinthe*, 1921.

Hryshchenko preceded post-Second World War émigrés to the French capital, among whom were Mykola Krychevsky, Omelian Mazuryk, and Andriy Solohub. Works by all these artists are in the Oseredok collection and show how each individual brought a particular form of modernist experimentation that inspired later artists. The westward movement of this emigration resulted in their finding a place in the Oseredok collection, which in many ways represents a transfer of works and influences, and sometimes an emigration of artists, from Central Europe to Western Canada.

Portraits

The biographies of artists sometimes reveal the story of how influences moved from Europe to Canada. Kateryna Antonovych, for example, was born in Kharkiv, finished high school in the city, then studied medicine in St. Petersburg. She moved to Kyiv with her husband, the art historian Dmytro Antonovych, studied in the Ukrainian State Academy of Arts (newly created in December 1917) under Vasyl Krychevsky, who headed the Studio of Landscape painting, and Mykhailo Boichuk, who headed the Studio of Monumental Art. After the struggle for independence by the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) ended in defeat, she lived in Prague, worked in the Ukrainian Studio of Plastic Arts and the Museum of the Ukrainian Struggle for Independence, both of which were created by this émigré generation. From 1945 she lived in Winnipeg, where she organized her own school of art.

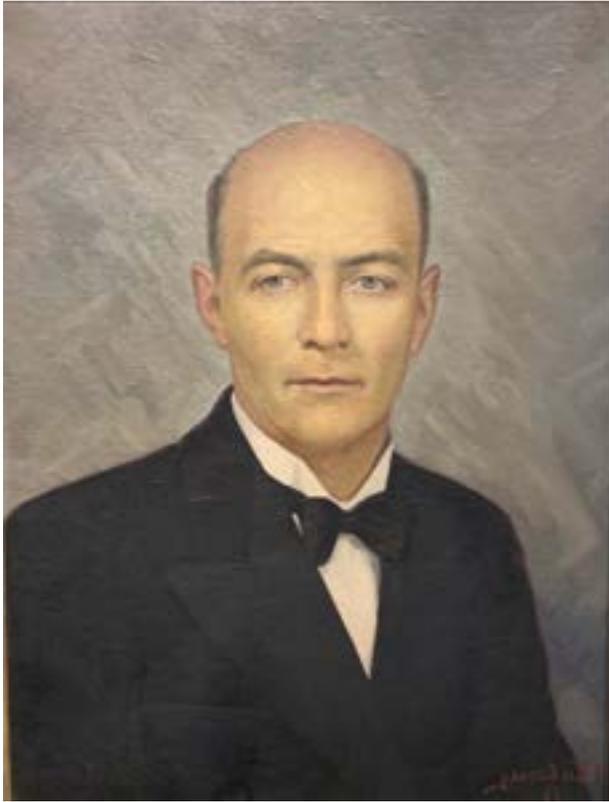
Antonovych had exhibited in Prague, Berlin, and Rome; her works can be found in Ukrainian museums in North America and Europe, and in private collections. Considered by many to be a member of the Boichuk school, she is best known as a portraitist. The works in the Oseredok collection demonstrate her evolution from the 1930s in Prague to the postwar years in Winnipeg. The subject of her *Portrait of Mykola Butovych*, 1938, is the graphic artist and modernist painter who studied in Prague, Berlin, and Leipzig, and then worked in Lviv before emigrating to the USA in 1947. He was a leading book designer and illustrator of the interwar period, and is credited with helping to develop a national modernist style. Her *Portrait of Dmytro Doroshenko*, 1950, is a study of the statesman who in the years 1917-18 served in the government of the Central Rada, the UNR, and the Hetmanate of Pavlo Skoropadsky. In the interwar period he was a professor of history in the Ukrainian Free University in Prague and the University of Warsaw and made lecture tours of Canada in 1937-38. After the Second World War he taught at St. Andrew's College, Winnipeg, before returning to Europe. Other works by Antonovych in the collection include two portraits of Shevchenko, from 1957 and 1959, and the *Portrait of Olha Voitsenko*, 1956. Voitsenko was a prolific author and chronicler of Ukrainian life in Canada, best known for *Litopys ukrains'koho zhyttia v Kanadi* (Chronicle of Ukrainian Life in Canada, 1961-1992).

The collection of paintings in Oseredok demonstrates the rapid evolution of twentieth-century Ukrainian portraiture, by allowing works of earlier Ukrainian artists to be compared with those who later worked in Canada. Perhaps the most prominent early modernist was the Lviv impressionist Ivan Trush (1869-1941). Born near Brody, Galicia, he studied in the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts in the 1890s, then lived in Lviv, where he was active both as an artist and art educator. He travelled widely in Ukraine, Italy, Egypt, and Palestine prior to the First World War. Many of his works are in the National Museum in Lviv. The Oseredok collection has two typically understated works from the 1920s, *Ivan Franko* and *Soldier*.

Early émigrés to Canada like Yakiv (Jacob) Maidanyk (1891-1984) painted dignified portraits of leading community figures. Born near Chortkiv in Western Ukraine, Maidanyk became one of the most celebrated painters and cartoonists of the early emigration to Canada. He attended school in Kolomyia, then completed a course in textile design and ornamentation near Rzeszów in Western Galicia. After emigrating to Canada in 1911, he graduated from teachers' college in Brandon and taught for a while, but gained fame producing caricatures and humorous writings for Ukrainian publications. However, Maidanyk also produced religious paintings and formal portraits, such as the one of Nykyta Budka, the first bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada and the first Eastern Catholic bishop in the New World. The bishop arrived in Winnipeg in 1912, helped to establish schools and parishes, and defended the autonomy of the Ukrainian church from the Roman Catholic hierarchy. In 1928, he returned to Lviv. The impressive *Portrait of Archbishop Nykyta Budka*, 1927, is one of Maidanyk's notable achievements.

In contrast, in the post-Second World War period several artists developed a highly realistic style. One of them was Ivan Kubarsky (1896-1971). Born in Ukraine, he completed the Kyiv Art Institute and worked as the main artistic director of the Kyiv Opera. He then taught art in Hanover in a refugee camp during the immediate postwar years, before emigrating to Canada in 1949 and creating an art studio in Toronto. He is best known as a portraitist and decorator of church interiors, some of which are done in the style of the "Cossack baroque" of the eighteenth century. His *Portrait*, 1950, is an example of the super-realist style (see image 01).

Ivan (John) Keywan (1907-92), another arrival after the Second World War, favored highly stylized portraits, such as *Portrait of Professor Pavlychenko from Saskatoon (професор Павличенко з Саскатуну)*, 1957 (see image 02). Born in the Pokuttia region of Western Ukraine, he studied in Oleksa Novakivsky's school in Lviv, the Kraków Academy of Arts, and the Warsaw Academy of Arts. After the Second World War he emigrated to Canada and lived in Edmonton, where he taught art. Although best known for his portraits and graphic designs,



01: Ivan Kubarsky, Portrait, 1950.



02: Ivan (John) Keywan, Portrait of Professor Pavlychenko from Saskatoon (професор Павличенко з Саскатуну), 1957.

he also organized exhibitions of Ukrainian Canadian artists in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Toronto, and published several books on Ukrainian art.

Peter Magdenko (1922-2002) was a representative of psychological realism, as is evident in his *Portrait*, 1960. Born near Poltava into a family of Ukrainian Cossack gentry, Magdenko studied sculpture in the Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) School of Art, winning first prize in a juried competition in 1940. He was conscripted into the Red Army and at the end of the war ended up in Displaced Persons camps in Germany. He was able to continue his studies at the Munich Academy of Arts, and together with Serhii Lytvynenko established an Advanced Visual Art Studio in the city. After emigrating to Canada, he studied portraiture at the Ontario College of Art, then qualified as a draftsman. Magdenko co-founded the Shevchenko Theatre Company in Winnipeg and Toronto, wrote about diaspora art and literature, and taught painting for the Ivan Franko Homes in Toronto and Mississauga. A retrospective exhibition of his work was held in KUMF Gallery in Toronto in 2003.



03: Peter Magdenko, *Portrait*, 1960.

However, these realist trends were less popular than the innovative works of artists like Olena Kulchytska, Halyna Mazepa, Vasyl Kasian, Myron Levytsky, and Yakiv Hnizdovsky. These blended modernism (impressionism, cubism, and expressionism) with aspects of the Ukrainian graphic art tradition

and Byzantine-inspired iconography. After the Second World War, Mazepa and Levytsky successfully popularized the new art in the diaspora. This new trend revived interest in folk and icon art, favored flat surfaces, strong lines, and bold colors. The two artists combined these features with a sense of balance and grace, and the result was a style both modern in its cubist inspiration, and recognizably Ukrainian in its themes and mimicking of traditional woodcut imagery. Levytsky's *Self-Portrait*, 1961, and *Nude*, 1961, are examples.



04: Myron Levytsky, *Self-Portrait*, 1961.

Halyna Mazepa (1910-95) was born in St. Petersburg. Her father Isaak, an agronomist by profession, served in 1919-20 as minister of internal affairs and prime minister of the UNR. Her mother was a bacteriologist and teacher. In the interwar years the family lived in Prague, where Halyna completed the Academy of Arts, then illustrated children's books, Czech and Ukrainian magazines, designed stage productions, and produced portraits of prominent community leaders. Her anti-realist style was already evident in an exhibition held in Lviv in 1935, where her painting of nude girls with a hockey stick, entitled *After the Hockey Game*, created a sensation. She emigrated to Venezuela in 1947. A leading representative of postwar Ukrainian art, she blended Ukrainian folk creativity and mythology with a child-like expressionism and surrealism. By using simple geometric forms and color contrasts, she was able to create works reminiscent of stained-glass compositions. An example of her work in the Oseredok collection is *Earth in Winter (Zemia zymoii)*, 1957.

During the interwar period the art of making prints from woodcuts and linocuts, a particularly popular technique in Western Ukraine, had been practiced by Olena Kulchytska and Vasyl Kasiian. These artists drew on the tradition of printmaking, which dated in Ukraine at least to the eighteenth century, when printing presses had made illustrations for books and pamphlets of a religious or political nature.

Born in Berezhany, Galicia, Olena Kulchytska (1877-1967) studied in Lviv and Vienna, but lived most of her life in Lviv, where she taught art. Best known for her woodcuts and watercolors, she was influenced both by the folk art traditions of Western Ukraine (particularly of the Hutsuls in the Carpathian Mountains) and by the Secessionist movement in Central Europe. She is considered a founder of modern Ukrainian graphic art. During the First World War she depicted the suffering of civilian populations and continued to do so in later works, such as *Kneeling Women*, 1930s and *Destroyed Village*, c. 1930.

Vasyl Kasiian (1896-1976) was born in the Pokuttia region of Ukraine, studied in the Prague Academy of Arts, and then lived in Paris in the 1920s. He emigrated to Soviet Ukraine in 1927, after which time his work concentrated on social themes, especially the class struggle. He became the leading Soviet Ukrainian graphic artist and illustrated many literary classics. The art from his Paris period, however, is less well known. One good example in the collection is *Woman from Pokuttia region*, 1925.

These leading graphic artists of the interwar period influenced Myron Levytsky (1913-93), who was born in Lviv, studied in Novakivsky's school and the Kraków Academy of Arts, then worked in Lviv as a book illustrator. In postwar Germany he produced graphic art for émigré publications before moving to Canada in 1949. He worked in Winnipeg for Ivan Tyktor's publishing house and edited the humorous magazine *Komar* (Mosquito) before settling in Toronto in 1954. He is best known for his paintings and graphic art, but he also produced murals and icons in a semi-abstract style for eleven Ukrainian

churches in Canada, Australia, and Ukraine. Along with a number of contemporaries, such as Roman Kowal in Winnipeg, he was instrumental in modernizing Ukrainian church art in Canada. Levytsky's *Venice Canal*, 1978, is an example of a landscape that resembles the semi-abstract, stained-glass appearance of many of his paintings.



05: Myron Levytsky, *Venice Canal*, 1978.

The graphic art tradition was perhaps most brilliantly practiced in postwar emigration by Jacques (Yakiv) Hnizdovsky (1915-85). He was born near Ternopil into a family of noble lineage, studied in Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts and in Zagreb. After he emigrated to the United States in 1949, he illustrated many books and gained fame for his ornate woodcuts depicting animals, plants, and scenes from daily life. By studying the work of Albrecht Dürer and Japanese ukiyo-e prints he was able to develop a unique personal style. His works can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C., the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago, and the Harvard University Art Museum. Two of his works reportedly hung in the office of President John F. Kennedy. The Oseredok collection has works from his earliest to later periods, including *Miser*, 1944; *Nude*, 1952; and *Self-Portrait*, 1971.

Landscapes

In the early twentieth century impressionism and expressionism left their mark on Ukrainian landscape painting. The most important expressionist in Western Ukraine was Oleksa Novakivsky (1872-1935), who created an entire school of art in Lviv. Born in the Vinnytsia region, Novakivsky studied art in Odessa in the years 1882-92, and then in the Kraków Academy of Art, from which he graduated with a gold medal in 1900. He first exhibited in Kraków in 1905 and in Lviv in 1913. In the next two decades he became known for his Lviv school of expressionism, which inspired many younger painters. He is celebrated for his portraits and still life paintings. In the Oseredok collection the work *Kosmach*, 1925, depicts a picturesque town in the Carpathian Mountains, near Kosiv in the Ivano-Frankivsk oblast, which the painter often visited.

Mykhailo Moroz (1904-92) was one of Novakivsky's most famous students. Born in the village of Plikhiv, near Ternopil, in the years 1923-27 he studied in Novakivsky's school in Lviv, then in Paris. In the 1930s he became an assistant to Novakivsky, with whom he made trips to paint the Carpathian Mountains. In 1949, he settled in New York and gave his first five solo exhibitions in the Panoramas Gallery. He is well known for expressionist landscapes painted with exuberant colors and turbulent strokes, such as *Landscape*, 1970s.

After the Second World War many émigrés achieved fame in the West and introduced Central and East European influences. The works of a number are in the Oseredok collection, including Mykola Krychevsky and Andriy Solohub, who settled in France; Petro Mehyk, who moved to the United States; and Mykola Nedilko, who lived in Argentina.

Mykola Krychevsky (1898-1961) was born in Kharkiv, the son of the famed Vasyl Krychevsky who in the years 1917-20 designed banknotes, seals, and emblems for the UNR. Mykola completed Kyiv University and worked for Mykola Sadovsky's theatre as a decorator and actor. In 1919, he studied in Uzhhorod, then completed Art School in Prague before emigrating in 1928 to France. Here he gained fame for his watercolors, especially of Venice, which he visited each May. After the Second World War he often visited family in the

USA. An example of his painting is *Venice*, 1956.

Mykola Nedilko (1902-79) was born in Ukraine, graduated in 1928 from the Kyiv Art Institute, and worked as a decorator of the Kyiv State Opera and Musical Comedy Theatre. In the 1940s he gained recognition in Lviv for his landscapes. After the war he emigrated to Argentina, and in 1961 moved to New York. One of the most eminent Ukrainian landscape painters of the twentieth century, he developed a lyrical, expressionist style that used heavy impasto and swirling colors. An example is his *Landscape*, 1970s.

Born near Khotyn, Ukraine, Petro Mehyk (1899-1992) studied at the Warsaw Academy of Arts in the 1920s, and then taught art at the University of Warsaw. In the 1930s he helped organize Warsaw's Spokii (Peace) group, participating in thirteen of its exhibitions and in several shows in Lviv. After the war he exhibited in Germany and Czechoslovakia before emigrating to the United States. Together with Petro Andrusiw he founded the Ukrainian Art Studio in Philadelphia, wrote widely on art history, and edited the *Ukrainian Art Digest (Notatky z mystetstva, 1963-91)*. Oseredok has an example of his work entitled *Boats*, 1960s.

Andriy Solohub (1922-2010) was born in Konotop, Ukraine, studied in Vienna, Salzburg, and then Paris. He settled in the French capital after the Second World War. From 1955 he exhibited widely in Europe, the USA, and Canada. Primarily a portrait and landscape artist, he was known for neo-impressionist works that radically limit the color palette. An example is *Paris*, 1962.

In postwar years, the Canadian-born William Kurelek (1927-77) drew on naive and popular religious art to develop his own unique vision of the prairies. He was born in Alberta to Ukrainian immigrants from Bukovina, but grew up near Stonewall, Manitoba. He attended Isaac Newton High School in Winnipeg, completed the University of Manitoba in 1949, and the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. In the years 1952-59 he studied in London, England. When he lost his eyesight and then regained it after praying, he became a devout Christian, produced paintings depicting the life of Christ and a cycle entitled *Passion of St. Matthew*. He held many personal exhibitions and was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1976. The artist has been the subject of several books and films. His *Landscape*, 1960s, is in the Oseredok collection.

Two more Canadians of Ukrainian descent Don Proch and Bill Lobchuk were part of a group of artists who in 1968-69 created the Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop, an innovative school of printmaking that gained widespread recognition. Located on 50 Princess Street in Winnipeg, it was the first artist-run centre on the prairies.

Proch (1944-) was born in Hamilton. After his family moved to Manitoba, he lived on his Ukrainian grandfather's quarter section of land near Grandview, and then in Inglis, where his father purchased a hotel. He studied fine art at the University of Manitoba, taught high school in the years 1967-70, and exhibited widely. His innovative sculptures and prints often give the illusion of three-dimensional surfaces. Many depict rural scenes, the pioneer experience, and

Ukrainian history. Oseredok has three well-known examples of his work: *Prairie Landscape*, c. 1975; *Silverfield*, 1979; *Granite 1*, 1979.

Born in Neepawa, Manitoba, Lobchuk (1942-) also studied at the University of Manitoba, where he taught art in the 1970s. Lobchuk was active in the arts community, served in 1983-88 on Oseredok's Board and chaired its collections committee in 1985-87. A well-known work by his is *Harvest Sunset (with thanks to Joann)*, 1988.

Abstract Art

In the years 1910-30, during the period of the "historical" avant-garde, many Ukrainian artists gained international recognition for their abstract and experimental works. They included Alexander Archipenko, David Burliuk, Kazimir Malevich, Alexandra Exter, and Oleksandr Bohomazov. However, abstract design had always been a part of the folk arts tradition. Geometric designs and stylized patterns of flora and fauna are features, for example, of the Ukrainian *rushnyk* (embroidered cloth), kilim, and *pysanka*. The designs on the last are of ancient origin and can represent the tree of life, the sun, the goddess, and flying birds. Patterns like the web, spiral, sun, star, and wave, along with stylized images of birds and animals, decorate the *pysanka*, which is the centerpiece of the ceremonial Easter basket. The symbolic forms on the *rushnyk* have significance for ceremonial and ritual occasions, including christenings, engagements, greetings and partings, weddings and funerals. Both the forms and colors of these designs inspired futurists and suprematists around 1913-25.

In the years immediately following 1915, avant-gardists like Exter and Malevich worked with peasant folk artists in the cooperatives of Skoptsi near Poltava and Verbivka near Kyiv to produce works with suprematist and futurist designs, which were then sold in Kyiv, Moscow, and Berlin. In the 1960s, when the trend toward abstraction again became powerful, a number of prominent émigré artists, such as Myron Levytsky, Roman Kowal, and Omelian Mazuryk, experimented with abstract or near-abstract compositions.

Born in Brzozów, Poland, Mazuryk (1937-2002) graduated from Wrocław Art School and Kraków Academy of Fine Arts in 1964, then studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris in 1967-68. He emigrated from Poland to France in the 1960s, where he became known for his vivid colors and experimental forms. He painted icons in several Ukrainian churches in France and Canada and held over thirty personal exhibitions in Canada, the USA, and Europe. An example in the Oseredok collection is *Paris*, 1980.

Religious Art

Over the centuries, icon painting has, of course, been an enduring tradition of Ukrainian art. Much of the earliest church art in Canada was produced by semi-professional artists from Ukraine who, like Peter Lipinski, had been trained as icon painters and church decorators. Sometimes they imitated naive folk art traditions and sometimes modeled their work on examples that were

closer to nineteenth-century realism. However, in both cases they tried to follow what they considered to be Byzantine models. Peter Lipinski (1888-1975) was trained and worked as a church painter in Galicia. After serving three years in the Austrian army, he emigrated to Canada prior to the First World War and lived first in Winnipeg, then Edmonton. He painted numerous early prairie churches, often at the rate of two each year, and produced icons for private homes. Because church interiors were finished in tongue-and-groove boards, he painted on canvas and then glued the finished product to the wall. He also painted backdrops for cultural halls and theatre productions. Examples in the Oseredok collection are *Saints Bartholomew and Philip*, 1921, and *Apostles Thomas and Simon*, 1921.

The new modernist trend of the 1960s broke with these examples of naive art and realism. Myron Levytsky and Roman Kowal introduced unexpected color combinations and a new feeling for simplified lines and flat surfaces. These were employed in icon-painting, church decorations, and stained-glass art. Examples in Oseredok are Levytsky's *Feast of Jordan*, 1960, and *Adam and Eve*, 1961. Epiphany, or the Feast of Jordan (Ukrainian: *Jordan*), is observed in the second week after Christmas in the Eastern Christian church. It celebrates Jesus's baptism in the River Jordan, when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and proclaimed Him the Son of God. A cross is cut out of the ice and the waters blessed. Holy water is drawn on this day and used for baptisms and other sacraments throughout the year. The feast marks the end of the twelve days of Christmas.

A number of contemporary artists, such as Maria Dolnytsky and Kostiantyn Szonk-Rusych, introduced similar simplified designs while working with enamel. Still others, like Dmytro Stryjek, were attracted to naive and primitivist forms.

Born in Lviv, Maria Dolnytsky (1894-1974) moved to Vienna in 1911 where her father was appointed a judge. She studied in the State Art and Industrial School in Vienna, winning an award for her enamel creations in 1918. In 1920 she moved to Helsinki, then in 1921 to the USA – first to Minneapolis and then to Philadelphia – before returning to Vienna in 1925 to open a workshop. She participated in exhibitions throughout Europe and the USA and held a large solo exhibition in Prague in 1936-37. ANUM invited her in 1937 to give a course of lectures in Lviv, which was attended by twenty Ukrainians along with forty Polish and Jewish artists, all of whom contributed to a joint exhibition. Her *Icon*, 1930s, is in the Oseredok collection.

Kostiantyn (Konstantyn) Szonk-Rusych (1915-83) was born in Ukraine, studied cinematography in Kyiv, and worked as a set designer before emigrating to the United States in 1949. He spent much of his life in New York, where he developed his own technique of enameling on copper and silver, producing not only icons, but also images of historical figures and plant life in a sleek, simplified style that has been described as mid-century modern. His *Icon*, 1960s, is in the Oseredok collection.

Dmytro Stryjek (1899-1991) was born in Western Ukraine and served in

the Ukrainian army during the independence struggle of 1917-20. He emigrated to Canada in 1922, settled in Hafford, Saskatchewan, and worked for the Canadian National Railways. After retiring in 1967, he moved to Saskatoon and began exhibiting works inspired by religious imagery, such as his *Icon*, 1970s.



06: Myron Levytsky,
Feast of Jordan, 1960



07: Dmytro Stryjek, *Icon*, 1970s.

Genre Painting

The painting of scenes from daily life has always been popular in Ukraine. Some of the earliest romantic and realist art of the nineteenth century depicted the traditions and customs of ordinary people. The work of Kostiantyn Trutovsky (1826-93), one of the founders of Ukrainian genre painting, is an example. Trutovsky was born in Kursk, Russia, to Ukrainian parents, educated in Kharkiv and St. Petersburg, and then worked for the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in the years 1871-81. His *Album of Scenes of Little Russian [Ukrainian] Life* was published in 1856. Although known for paintings depicting Ukrainian rural scenes and traditions, he also produced lithographs illustrating the works of writers, such as Marko Vovchok, Taras Shevchenko, and Nikolai Gogol (Mykola Hohol). Oseredok has his *Returning from Festivities*, 1868.

Mid-twentieth-century artists like Edvard Kozak and Myron Levytsky

reinterpreted the tradition of genre painting. They often favored romanticized, “postcard” images, particularly of boy-meets-girl scenes. At the same time, they introduced bold new painterly techniques. Edvard Kozak (1902-92) was born near Stryi in the Carpathian foothills into a family of German origin. He studied in Vienna, Lublin, and Lviv, and in the 1930s illustrated books and humorous magazines. He was a member of ANUM and in 1944 headed the Union of Ukrainian Artists in the Displaced Persons camps in Germany. From 1951 he lived in Detroit, published the satirical magazine *Lys Mykyta* (Fox Mykyta), and became popular as a caricaturist, illustrator of books and postcards, and oil painter. Oseredok has his *Ukrainian Girl and Cossack*, 1950s. Levytsky’s *Soldier with Girls*, 1949, is produced in a similar style.

These works can be contrasted with Canadian-born painters, who at the end of the century brought a satirical, even sardonic, attitude toward the representation of customs and character types. Nataalka Husar (1951-) was born in New Jersey, earned a Fine Arts degree from Rutgers University in 1973, and has lived in Toronto since 1974. Many of her paintings focus on aspects of her Ukrainian heritage, depicting the Ukrainian community in North America, or in Ukraine, in an ironic manner. Her work has been widely shown in North America. Oseredok has her *Priest, Wife and Daughter*, 1980s, and *Yesterday’s Heroes* from the series *Behind the Irony Curtain*, 1985.

Sculpture

Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964) is today universally recognized as one of the greatest and most innovative sculptors of the avant-garde period, 1910-30. He was among the first to produce cubist sculptures, to use negative space (concaves and voids that create implied volumes), to experiment with painted sculptures (which he termed sculpto-paintings), abstract, and transparent works. Oseredok has his *Form Vivant*, 1963, and *La Famille d’Une Forme* (Family of One Form), 1963.

Born in Kyiv, Archipenko attended the Kyiv Art School in the years 1902-05, then opened his own school in Paris in 1908-21. He exhibited the highly-colored sculpture *Pierrot* in Berlin in 1913, and *Boxing*, one of the most abstract sculptures done to that date, in 1914. His one-man show in the Venice Biennale Exhibition was ridiculed in *Telegrafo Livorno* on 11 June 1920, and Cardinal La Fontaine, Patriarch of Venice, advised the faithful not to attend. In 1921 Archipenko taught in Berlin, and in 1923 emigrated to the USA. Many of his sculptures have been linked to a Ukrainian inspiration, especially to the ancient stone idols found throughout the steppe, and to the smooth, elongated forms of Trypillian civilization, which archeologists excavated in the early twentieth century. Archipenko tried to apprehend nature spiritually, to capture its essence. His work has a harmonious, spiritual dimension that suggests the connectedness of all things. His prints have a sculptural quality and project an effortless sense of inward order.

Hryhorii Kruk (1911-89) who settled in Munich, became known for static, block-like monumental forms, which he was able to animate and endow with

features of individual psychology. Kruk was born in Bratysheve, in the Carpathian foothills of Ukraine, the son of a potter. He graduated from the Lviv School of Decorative Art in 1934, the Kraków Academy of Arts in 1937, and the Berlin Academy of Arts in 1940. He first gained fame in Lviv in 1935. At the end of the Second World War he settled in Munich, where he taught at the Ukrainian Free University. His work is internationally renowned. Oseredok has his *Washer Woman*, 1948.

Antin Pavlos (1905-54) who emigrated to Minneapolis, created monuments and sculptures of important figures in Ukrainian history. Pavlos was born in the Ukrainian village of Hostynne in the Chelm (Ukrainian: Kholm) region of Poland. He was among many Ukrainians deported from the border region by tsarist armies at the outbreak of the First World War. He lived in Lviv, where he began exhibiting in 1933 and where he completed Art-Industrial School in 1935. Many of his works were destroyed under Soviet rule in the years 1945-52. At the end of the Second World War, he exhibited terracotta and plaster sculptures in Germany and Austria alongside other artists who found themselves in Displaced Persons camps. In 1949 he settled in Minneapolis. He is considered one of the leading Ukrainian sculptors of the mid-century. Oseredok has his *Khmelnysky the Conqueror*, 1940s.

Leo Mol (1915-2009) who settled in Winnipeg, was celebrated for his sculptures of prominent figures. Born in Polonne, Ukraine, Mol was raised in Russian cities to which his family travelled. He learned ceramics in his father's pottery workshop, then studied in Vienna, Berlin, and the Leningrad Academy of Arts. During the war he lived in Berlin, where he was influenced by Arno Breker's work, then moved to The Hague. He emigrated to Canada in 1948 and held his first exhibition in Winnipeg in 1949. He created the monument to Taras Shevchenko in Washington in 1964, and over 40 stained glass works for churches, including for Winnipeg's Cathedral of Volodymyr and Olha (Vladimir and Olga). His works can be seen at the Leo Mol Gardens in Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park. An example of his work is *Pioneer Family*, plaster model for sculpture, 1960s.

Among contemporary Canadian sculptresses, Jean Bachynsky (1943-) and Svitlana Muchin (1952-) have attained recognition for their work with abstract sculptural forms. Born in Gronlid, Saskatchewan, Bachynsky obtained a Fine Arts Degree from the University of Manitoba, and taught art in Winnipeg High Schools in the 1980s and 1990s. Her sculptures have been exhibited at a number of Manitoba exhibitions, including several at Oseredok, and at other Winnipeg locations, such as the Manitoba Hydro Building and the Cambrian Credit Union Head Office. She typically works in alabaster, but also in sandstone, cement, chlorite, and serpentine. Her works explore the human figure and pairings, and are known for their poise and balance. An example of her work is *Embrace 1*, 1998.

Born in Winnipeg, Muchin received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Manitoba in 1975 and her Masters of Fine Arts from York University in 1982. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Toronto and Winnipeg. Much of her work is done in plaster. Her forms appear

to represent human torsos and animal heads, and often suggest mysterious ancient traditions and mystical powers. Oseredok has her *Woman of the Moon*, c. 2000.



08: Leo Mol, *Pioneer Family*, 1960s. 09: Jean Bachinsky, *Embrace 1*, 1998.

The genres in the art collection – which range through landscape, portrait, genre, and religious painting, to sculpture – are represented by some of the great names of Ukrainian art. The creativity of these artists highlights the process of cultural evolution under the impact of modernity. Unexpectedly, and perhaps surprisingly, they also demonstrate the transplantation of many artists from Central and Eastern Europe, where they studied and first exhibited, to Western Canada, where several lived and worked, and where many of their works contributed to the diaspora legacy.

Note: All images are reproduced with permission of Oseredok (Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre) and all artworks are in Oseredok’s permanent collection.



10: Svitlana Muchin, *Woman of the Moon*, c. 2000.

Early Ecclesiastical Art in Ukrainian-Canadian Churches, 1897-1930

Sterling Demchinsky

The Beginning

To understand the earliest ecclesiastical art in Ukrainian-Canadian churches, one must reflect on the circumstances of the first Ukrainians arriving in Canada. According to my family storytelling, my great-grandparents immigrated near the end of the nineteenth century, arriving in Yorkton, SK, where the rail line ended. They travelled fifty kilometers northeast of Yorkton by cart to their homestead, which was located in a wilderness of bush country. Their first concern was shelter, and they made a dugout covering it with a makeshift roof. They lived in this dwelling, called a *borday* or *burdei*,¹ for a year before being able to build a home above ground. This was far from unique.

The first significant wave of Ukrainian-speaking settlers began in 1896, and the flood continued until the outbreak of the First World War. They came primarily from the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Bukovina and Galicia. Those from Galicia were generally Greek Catholics, while the Bukovinians were Orthodox.² Ukrainians started to build churches in Canada often within a few years of their arrival, even though they were living in deprivation, and frequently there were no priests to serve those churches.³

Given that most of these settlers were poor and that the initial settlements were on just barely accessible land, there were severe limitations in decorating these early churches. Being devout and recognizing that a church without icons was unthinkable, many settlers donated their family icons to the parish.

¹ Harold Kalman, *A Concise History of Canadian Architecture* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2000), 347. Kalman indicates that it was common for Ukrainian settlers to use a *borday* as their first home in Canada. He writes that the concept was based on the type of dwelling used by Hutsul shepherds in the Carpathian Mountains.

² Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1991), 4-5.

³ Basil Rotoff, Roman Yereniuk, and Stella Hryniuk, *Monuments to Faith, Ukrainian Churches in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1990), 10-11.

Prints

While many parishes lost their earliest iconography during renovation and redecoration, there are a few Prairie churches that were never significantly renovated. They are, practically speaking, time capsules of the pioneer experience. In some instances, a parish may have built a larger church as the parish expanded but maintained the pioneer church for sentimental reasons. Such is the case with Canada's oldest extant Ukrainian church, St. Michael's Ukrainian Orthodox Church,⁴ just outside the village of Gardenton, MB. Since it is the oldest Ukrainian church in Canada, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada gave St. Michael's church a special status, and a committee called "Friends of St. Michael's Historic Ukrainian Orthodox Church" cares for it. The president of that committee, Donald Machnee, gave me a tour of the church and explained the origin of the icons, including some of those family icons that had been donated by many of the original parishioners at the turn of the last century. The photo below, image 01, is a typical example.⁵

Image 01 illustrates a common example of two icons in a double frame. The one on the left is a version of an image of the Theotokos (from Greek, meaning "birth-giver of God," a term equivalent to *Bohorodytsia* in Ukrainian) in a type that is called "The Theotokos of the Burning Bush." Fortunately, the frame did not obscure the fine print at the bottom of the icon, as often is the case. An inscription identifies it as printed in Moscow, and it is dated 1900, although presumably the printer could have continued printing this image after that date. "The Theotokos of the Burning Bush" is typified by the Theotokos placed in the center of an eight-point star. On four points of the star are winged creatures that symbolically represent the four evangelists: a lion, an ox,

⁴ Kalman, *Concise History*, 349-51. (The parish built a larger church in the village in 1935.)

⁵ SDPC 2012-21 to 2012-22. The Sterling Demchinsky Photo Collection (hereinafter SDPC) is a body of primary research containing a collection of over fifteen thousand images, detailing over six hundred Ukrainian-Canadian churches. Hard copies of the photos are held by Library & Archives Canada, the Archives of the Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, and the Archives of the Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada. Photos are cited by a film number, in which the first four digits represent the year, followed by a hyphen and two or three digits representing the chronological film number. Additionally, there are field notes corresponding to each roll of film (e.g., SDPC 2012-21 represents the twenty-first roll of film taken in 2012 plus the field notes corresponding to the images). Starting in 2014, images were taken with a digital camera. The first four digits represent the year, followed by a hyphen, followed by two digits representing the chronological count of the church or other subject matter (e.g., SDPC 2014-46 represents the forty-sixth church photographed in 2014 plus any field notes corresponding to the images).



01: Family icons (prints) brought to Canada from Bukovina.

an eagle, and a winged young man. In other sections of this complex icon, one sees various angels. This type of image originated in Sinai and spread to Russia in the fourteenth century.⁶ The icon on the right, in Image 01, is a version of the Theotokos also printed in Moscow and bears the date 1903. Both the Mother of God and the Christ child have unusually fancy halos. They appear to be in a font, which could mean this is intended to be the type of image known as the “Life Giving Source.”⁷

Thus, these two icons are examples of typically Eastern-rite themes and the number of such prints found in pioneer churches seems inexhaustible. While the inscriptions are often in Russian, some icons of Bukovinian origin contain inscriptions in Romanian, such as an icon of the Protection of the Mother of God found in Ss. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Arbakka, MB,⁸ and also in St. Nicholas Ukrainian Orthodox Church in MacNutt, SK.⁹ It may have not mattered to them what the language of the inscription on their family icon was. Orest Martynowych reports: “In 1890, 72.6% of Galician and 77% of Bukovinian males were illiterate....”¹⁰

In parishes founded by Greek Catholics from Galicia, the situation was similar. For example, I found a print in a beautiful hand-carved frame in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, Lowland, MB, featuring the

⁶ Alfredo Tragido, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 164-65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 193-94.

⁸ SDPC 2012-31.

⁹ SDPC 2014-46.

¹⁰ Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*, 11.

Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary with the respective inscriptions “Сердце Ісуса Христа” and “Сердце Богородицы” under the two figures.¹¹ This type is not strictly in the tradition of Byzantine iconography;¹² however, with Roman Catholic Poles and Greek Catholic Ukrainians living in such close proximity in Galicia, there was bound to be a crossover of artistic traditions.

Regardless of whether icons came with pioneers from Galicia or Bukovina, there was usually some Western-rite influence in them. Even Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, writing in 1913, bemoaned that “Ukrainian painting ended in the XVIIth century,” and he was particularly disturbed by the Baroque influence.¹³

If icons brought from the old country reflected Western-church influence, it was nothing compared to what was available for purchase in Canada. Here, religious art was mostly for Roman Catholics and imbued with sentimentality; however, the pioneers had little choice but to take whatever they could get. Image 02 illustrates a sweetly sentimental print of a young John the Baptist, located in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, Lowland, MB.¹⁴ We can be certain this is a Roman Catholic image because a tiny ribbon on his staff proclaims “Ecce Agnus Dei,” Latin for “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). This particular print is widespread in both Catholic and Orthodox churches across the Prairie provinces, although not always in such a fancy frame.

While a multitude of saints and iconographic themes are mutually acceptable in both Eastern- and Western-rite churches, prints purchased in Canada were often of saints venerated in the Western church or themes not in the Eastern-rite tradition. While this could be expected in Greek Catholic parishes, where the lines between the two traditions have often been blurred, it is interesting that this trend also existed in pioneer Orthodox churches. It would be asking too much to expect these pious immigrants to know the finer points differentiating the Catholic dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Orthodox tradition of the Dormition of the Theotokos. Thus, their taste reflected an understandable lack of knowledge.

¹¹ SDPC 2012-67.

¹² In this paper, “Byzantine iconography” takes the meaning of the “icon” as defined by Michael Prokurat, Alexander Golitzin, and Michael D. Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church* (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 163-66. The salient issue is that the Western church welcomes individuality and its artists have almost free rein, while Byzantine iconography is controlled by the church in accordance with canons and sacred tradition.

¹³ Sviatoslav Hordynsky, *The Ukrainian Icon of the XIIth to the XVIIIth Centuries*, trans. Walter Dushnyk (Philadelphia: Providence Association, 1973), 19. (Sheptytsky was head of the Greek Catholic church in Galicia.)

¹⁴ SDPC 2012-67.



02: A sentimental print found in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, Lowland, MB.

Certain prints seem almost ubiquitous in Ukrainian churches in Canada, and one such image is the “Mother of God of the Passion,” also called “Our Lady of Perpetual Help” in the West. It would have been easy to obtain in both the old country and Canada because this icon has always been popular in both Eastern- and Western-rite churches. The story of this image is that two angels (shown in the upper corners) appear to the Christ child exhibiting the implements of Our Lord’s passion (the cross, the lance, and the sponge). The child, notwithstanding His divinity, is also entirely human. He is, therefore, frightened and jumps into His mother’s arms grabbing hold of her hand. In the process one of his sandals falls free from its foot.¹⁵ It is a most compelling image, and I have documented one version where the printer put a tiny inscription of the name of the icon at the bottom of the print in no fewer than four Western languages plus Russian.¹⁶

¹⁵ Tradigo, *Icons and Saints*, 188-89.

¹⁶ SDPC 2003-12.

One source of prints came from Russian Orthodox missionaries during the pioneer era. There was a shortage of Greek Catholic priests in Canada because the Vatican forbade married priests to minister to parishes throughout North America. Bukovinian immigrants requested the Orthodox Metropolitan of Bukovina to send them priests, but he advised them to seek out Russian priests because the Moscow Patriarchate had jurisdiction over North America. The Russians funded the Russian Orthodox Mission in North America, and it had a specific policy to proselytize Ukrainians from Austria-Hungary. Orthodox Bukovinians had no choice but to accept the Russian missionaries, and there were extenuating factors that caused some Greek Catholics from Galicia to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁷ Thus, there are many pioneer parishes in Canada that were once under the Russian Orthodox jurisdiction. The Russian missionaries brought sets of six large lithographs that were suitable for placing on an iconostasis. The icons were of the Pantocrator (Christ, ruler of all things), the Theotokos, St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. John the Baptist, and St. Nicholas. There is an inscription in Church Slavonic at the bottom of the icon of the Pantocrator that names it “Savior Who Blesses.” It also states that Archpriest Alexander Smernov approved this image on behalf of the Moscow Spiritual Censorship Committee on 15 January 1896. The E.I. Feshenko Company executed the chromolithography in Odessa. Similar inscriptions are at the bottom of the other five icons.¹⁸ There were two versions of this set of icons, the only difference being that one version had darker backgrounds. Image 03 illustrates the Pantocrator from the iconostasis of St. Jacob Orthodox Church near Mundare, AB.¹⁹

The quality of the lithography must have been very good, since there are instances where the prints still seem relatively fresh even after hanging in a church for over a hundred years. Additionally, there were also half-length versions of these icons depicting only the upper part of the subject. While these smaller lithographs could be placed on an iconostasis, they are more often found on the walls.

While these Russian lithographs are mostly found in Orthodox churches, they are also sometimes seen in Ukrainian Catholic churches. In what was once Saskatchewan’s oldest extant Greek Catholic church, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jaroslaw (built 1903),²⁰ there was a tiny iconostasis

¹⁷ The factors leading to the conversion of Greek Catholics are complex and controversial. This topic is described in detail by Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*, 182-89.

¹⁸ SDPC 2003-03 and SDPC 2003-07. My home parish in Ottawa has all six of these icons in storage. Matushka Iryna Ozimko translated the inscriptions. I call them “Russian” because Odessa was in the Russian empire at that time.

¹⁹ SDPC 2004-11. (Also called “St. James Church.”)

²⁰ Anna Maria Baran, *Ukrainian Catholic Churches of Saskatchewan*, trans. Christine Pastershank (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1977), 37-38; hereinafter

containing the Pantocrator and Theotokos icons of the Russian lithograph type.²¹ This suggests that Russian Orthodox priests were proselytizing here but, in the end, the parish decided to stay with its Catholic roots.



03: A Russian lithograph (of a set of six suitable for an iconostasis).

First Hand-Painted Works

Initially, the devout pioneers gathered in a neighbor's home or at a farmyard to worship God alongside their brothers and sisters in Christ even before there

cited as Baran (1977). The church's location is called "Jaroslaw" because the first settlers came from Jaroslaw county in Galicia.

²¹ SDPC 1998-29.

were priests or churches. They would sing from memory parts of the liturgies and thus practice at least some part of their Eastern-rite traditions. If the community was lucky, it might have somebody trained as a cantor, or perhaps one of the literate settlers had a prayer book.²²

At Ss. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church southwest of Dauphin, MB, there is a homemade processional cross inscribed with “1897” on the back, perhaps two years prior to any Ukrainian church constructed in the Dauphin area.²³ On the top front of the cross are the Cyrillic letters “ИИЦІ.” These represent the sign posted above Christ reading, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (Иисусъ Назарянинъ, Царь Іудейскій).²⁴ At the bottom of the cross, the artist inscribed a skull representing that of Adam. Golgotha was Hebrew for “place of the skull” (John 19:09), and Orthodox tradition has it that Adam’s skull was buried here and revealed in a cavern at Christ’s crucifixion. This tradition serves to remind us of the doctrine that Christ, who is the New Adam, is the redeemer of the first Adam and of all humankind. On one side of the crossbeam, the maker inscribed a hammer and pliers while on the other side there are images of a ladder, a spear, and a sponge attached to a long reed.²⁵ These are implements associated with Christ’s crucifixion and descent from the cross that are commonly found in Byzantine iconography. The settler who made the processional cross doubtlessly copied these images from the memory of church decorations in the old country. Did the settler fully understand the meaning of this symbolism or was it merely inscribed because that is what he/she remembered from crosses in the home village? Image 04 illustrates this cross.

One can only speculate how many homemade articles were discarded in parishes across Canada after “professionally made” items became affordable. The “icon style” of cross (two-dimensional surface) is slightly rarer, doubtlessly because fewer settlers had the artistic confidence to paint Christ’s body onto the cross.²⁶ There are three examples of homemade “icon style” processional crosses in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church (built 1919, southwest of Roblin, MB). Each one is dated either 1920 or 1921, and they are beautiful but stylistically very naïve.²⁷ In St. Demetrius Ukrainian Catholic

²² Paul Yuzyk, *The Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada, 1918-1951* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1981), 34-35. Also, see Rotoff, *Monuments to Faith*, 11.

²³ SDPC 2011-43. The Dauphin priest felt they used the cross in prayer services held in people’s homes or yards prior to them establishing a parish.

²⁴ Rotoff, *Monuments to Faith*, 167-68.

²⁵ Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), 181.

²⁶ I have documented many homemade processional crosses where the “corpus” (Christ’s body) appears to have been taken from a crucifix and reused.

²⁷ SDPC 2014-51.

Church (founded 1910, eight miles south of Rama, SK) there is a homemade processional cross with a hand-carved crescent moon built into it.²⁸ In Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church, Ottawa, ON, there were two crudely painted processional crosses that were relegated to the cemetery chapel after the parish received two new ones from a monastery.²⁹ There are scores of unsophisticated homemade processional crosses in pioneer Catholic and Orthodox churches across the prairies, possibly because it was one liturgical article that was easy to construct.



04: Homemade processional cross, “1897” painted on the back.

One can only speculate how many homemade articles were discarded in parishes across Canada after “professionally made” items became affordable. The “icon style” of cross (two-dimensional surface) is slightly rarer, doubtlessly because fewer settlers had the artistic confidence to paint Christ’s body onto the cross.³⁰ There are three examples of homemade “icon style” processional crosses in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church (built 1919, southwest of Roblin, MB). Each one is dated either 1920 or 1921, and they are

²⁸ SDPC 2004-20.

²⁹ SDPC 2003-12. I interviewed the late Victor Antochi on 25 April 2004. Antochi had been an altar boy at Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church during the 1920s and remembered using these crosses; thus, they predate the chapel (constructed 1930). While “Bukovinian” is a more acceptable transliteration, I use “Bukowinian” because the parish was incorporated using that spelling.

³⁰ I have documented many homemade processional crosses where the “corpus” (Christ’s body) appears to have been taken from a crucifix and reused.

beautiful but stylistically very naïve.³¹ In St. Demetrius Ukrainian Catholic Church (founded 1910, eight miles south of Rama, SK) there is a homemade processional cross with a hand-carved crescent moon built into it.³² In Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church, Ottawa, ON, there were two crudely painted processional crosses that were relegated to the cemetery chapel after the parish received two new ones from a monastery.³³ There are scores of unsophisticated homemade processional crosses in pioneer Catholic and Orthodox churches across the prairies, possibly because it was one liturgical article that was easy to construct.

While the cross in Image 04 is the oldest artifact that I have documented in a Ukrainian-Canadian Church, the oldest actual icons that I photographed were a matching set of the Pantocrator and Theotokos found in Holy Ghost Ukrainian Orthodox church, located in the fields north of Dauphin, MB. The artist dated them 1899 but did not sign them. Additionally, there was an “icon style” processional cross, dated 1900, that appears to be from the same iconographer based on the palette of colors and style of the calligraphy found on these three works. The origin of these items is a mystery. The date the church was built cannot be entirely verified but oral history places it at about 1900. The parish was originally made up of Greek Catholic immigrants from Galicia, and an elder said this was one of the parishes visited by the itinerant priest, Fr. Nestor Dmytriw, who blessed the cemetery in 1897. Fairly early in the parish’s history it went over to the Russian Orthodox Mission, then later joined the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada.³⁴ Image 05 shows the Pantocrator from this set.

³¹ SDPC 2014-51.

³² SDPC 2004-20.

³³ SDPC 2003-12. I interviewed the late Victor Antochi on 25 April 2004. Antochi had been an altar boy at Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church during the 1920s and remembered using these crosses; thus, they predate the chapel (constructed 1930). While “Bukovinian” is a more acceptable transliteration, I use “Bukowinian” because the parish was incorporated using that spelling.

³⁴ SDPC 2011-43. Anna Maria Baran supports this oral history, although she identifies the church as being named “Holy Trinity” rather than “Holy Ghost.” Since her book only documents Ukrainian Catholic churches, she may never have interviewed its parishioners. See Anna Maria Baran, *Ukrainian Catholic Churches of Winnipeg Archeparchy*, trans. Theresa Herchak (Altona, MB: Friesen Printers, 1991), 4-5; hereinafter cited as Baran (1991).



05: Pantocrator, dated 1899, from Holy Ghost Ukrainian Orthodox Church, near Dauphin, MB.

As was the case with prints, some parishes had to take what hand-painted art they could find from whatever was available. Ss. Constantine and Helena Ukrainian Catholic Church (built 1906) south of Buchanan, SK, needed paintings of the Pantocrator and Theotokos for its iconostasis. The parish obtained paintings of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary (see image 06). Each painting is dated 1917 and Luigi Morgari signed them. The paintings are rendered very sentimentally with fluffy clouds and cute little angels.³⁵ This is not true Byzantine iconography; rather, these paintings are Western-rite religious art. But they served a purpose at a time when not much else was available.

³⁵ SDPC 2004-20. Also see Baran (1977), 73.



06: Painting from Ss. Constantine and Helena Ukrainian Catholic Church near Buchanan, SK.

Dating hand-painted artifacts from this period and determining their origin are difficult since most often they are not signed. The settlers often did not keep records and many of the elders that I interviewed were not even born when the artifact first entered the church. In her book, *Mamornitz Revisited*, Jennie Dutchak-Zayachkowski recounts that the records of Dormition of St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church (built 1910), Mamornitz, SK, indicate that the parish acquired a seraph-shaped eternal light from Bukovina in 1914. In the same year, the parish also acquired a shroud (*plashchanytsia*) and five processional banners from Bukovina.³⁶ At Descent of the Holy Spirit Ukrainian Orthodox Church, southeast of Canora, SK, the caretaker told me the entire iconostasis came from Bukovina, shipped in pieces.³⁷ Thus, we can say that at least some of the earliest artwork in pioneer churches came from abroad; but the extent of this remains unclear.

In some pioneer parishes, founded by Bukovinians, one might find works painted in a style reminiscent of Romanian folk art. One such parish, St.

³⁶ Jennie Dutchak-Zayachowski, *Mamornitz Revisited: One Hundred Years of a Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1897-1997* (Ottawa: Jennie Dutchak-Zayachowski, publisher, 1997), 135.

³⁷ SDPC 2004-18.

Pokrova Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Edwam, AB, has at least two. An example of one is in Image 07.³⁸



07: Folk-art icon in St. Pokrova Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Edwam, AB.

While at the Museum of Bukovinian Folk Architecture, Chernivtsi, Ukraine, I photographed an icon on the wall of St. Nicholas Orthodox church that was almost identical to the one in Image 06. The museum guide explained that the iconostasis was painted by a professional iconographer but the icons on the walls were painted by local parishioners.³⁹ While it is likely that amateur icons such as the one in Image 07 are works of settlers in Canada, it is also possible they were brought from the old country.

First Documented Iconographers

Most Ukrainians coming to Canada from Europe before the First World War did so to take advantage of Canada's cheap farmland. There was little advantage for trained craftsmen to move from the Ukrainian homelands to Canada. Yet, there were three trained iconographers who did settle in Canada before the war. They were Peter Lipinski,⁴⁰ Jacob Maydanyk,⁴¹ and Hnat (Ihnatii) Sych.⁴² All three came from Galicia and they seem to have had some type of formal art

³⁸ SDPC 2013-56 and 57.

³⁹ SDPC 2019-13.

⁴⁰ Most of the biographical notes regarding Lipinski are taken from Radomir Bilash, "Peter Lipinski, Prairie Church Artist," *Society for the Study of Architecture Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (March 1988).

⁴¹ Most of the biographical notes regarding Maydanyk are from Rotoff, *Monuments to Faith*, 125-28.

⁴² Most of the biographical notes regarding Sych are from Rotoff, *Monuments to Faith*, 135-36.

training in Europe. Maydanyk came to Canada to work to earn enough money to fund further art studies in France but this dream was not realized. The reasons for Lipinski and Sych coming to Canada are less certain. Perhaps they before the recognized that many new churches were being built in Canada and they could profit from the resulting need for iconography. Perhaps the competition among iconographers in Galicia was such that they could not make a go of it there. Whatever the case, these men dominated iconography in Ukrainian-Canadian churches until other iconographers started appearing in the mid-1930s.

Lipinski, Maydanyk, and Sych had similar artistic styles. Their works frequently included copious clouds or rays of glory and their icons of saints often featured iconographic symbols to identify the subjects, such as the implement used to execute a martyr. For example, all of Lipinski's icons of St. Josaphat that I documented include an image of the axe used to dispatch him.⁴³ Perhaps their styles are similar because all three came from Galicia. In his book, *The Ukrainian Icon of the XIIth to the XVIIIth Centuries*, Sviatoslav Hordynsky writes of a particular school of iconography developed in Galicia in which Western-style realism was introduced. He maintains that in the eastern part of the Ukrainian homelands, dominated by Cossack Hetmans, Western influence in iconography was even more pronounced.⁴⁴ Given that Galicia was ethnically mixed with Polish Roman Catholics and Ukrainian Greek Catholics, one might guess that the Eastern-rite iconographers there picked up influences from their Roman Catholic counterparts. As the images of their work suggest, Lipinski, Maydanyk, and Sych may have sought realism, but each painted with a lack of sophistication that often made their works look somewhat naïve. This "Galician naïve" style would not have exactly cut it at the great cathedrals of Ukraine but it was at home in the churches of small villages.

Radomir Bilash documented that Lipinski devoted the winters to painting canvases in his studio and then would spend from May to the end of summer installing the canvases in churches. Lipinski glued the paintings to the walls or ceilings then painted around the canvas to blend in the background of the work. Generally, only wood stoves heated the churches in winter, and it would have been difficult to paint the interiors at that time. Also, the interior finishing usually was tongue-and-groove boards, with a surface not conducive to mural-style painting.⁴⁵ Closely examining work by Maydanyk and Sych reveals they likely used the same approach. All three employed various forms of perimeter-stencilling to further embellish the churches in which they worked.

Peter Lipinski

Born in 1888, Peter Lipinski trained in iconography in Galicia and immigrated to Canada before the First World War. His artistic output was significant

⁴³ SDPC 2013-63, 2013-67, and 2013-101.

⁴⁴ Hordynsky, *The Ukrainian Icon*, 13-19, 21.

⁴⁵ Bilash, "Peter Lipinski," 11.

during a period of about thirty-five years. In Alberta alone he painted the interiors of as many as forty-five churches. His work can be found in churches that are Ukrainian Greek Catholic, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and even Polish Roman Catholic. While the majority of his work is found in Alberta, he also worked in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church in Ottawa, ON, acquired a large number of Lipinski's works but there is no evidence that he visited Ottawa. This collection includes icons and banners that are inscribed with various dates from the 1920s to the 1940s.⁴⁶

After setting up a workshop in Edmonton, he never had to advertise or promote his work. Lipinski started to receive commissions not long after arriving in Canada and he was so popular that assistants sought him out to work with him. His output was probably the most of any Canadian iconographer, putting him in the first rank of Canadian icon makers.

Lipinski usually took on each church as an individual project.⁴⁷ He would first view the interior and discuss potential iconography and its estimated cost with the parish. He was open to working with parish representatives to meet their needs. However, the actual placement of particular icons in the temple was according to the established traditions of Byzantine iconography that Lipinski learned in Galicia. Families or groups of families usually needed to commit to funding individual icons, and his policy was to receive payment before starting a commission. Thus, Peter Lipinski was a businessman.

Lipinski frequently added a faux marble or a faux brick design as a background for his work. He frequently painted a frame bordering the icon directly onto a canvas, which was one of his distinctive trademarks. Lipinski usually used the best materials that he could find; however, he was also sensitive to the fact that certain parishes were far from wealthy. He sometimes negotiated his fees taking into consideration a parish's means. He also used a lower grade of canvas to reduce costs. In image 08, the coarse weave of the canvas is clearly evident in this detail from an icon of the Deisis formerly in Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church in Ottawa. (For perspective, the distance from the base of the miter to the tip of Christ's beard is 10 cm.)⁴⁸

If Lipinski used lower quality materials to decrease costs, he could also use better quality ones when clients desired a finer product. In Nativity of the Theotokos Ukrainian Catholic church in Chipman, AB, there are four icons that appear to have textured gold-leaf backgrounds. (Lipinski signed and dated

⁴⁶ In 2003 I made an inventory of the iconography of Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox church which was the basis of an unpublished monograph that I wrote for the parish. Photos and notes are documented from SDPC 2003-01 to 2003-12.

⁴⁷ I have photographed scores of his churches and no two of them look alike.

⁴⁸ SDPC 2003-10.



08: Detail of a canvas by Lipinski from Holy Trinity Bukowinian Orthodox Church in Ottawa.

one of the icons with the year it was painted, 1922.) Only when one gets up close to these icons does one realize the background is done in high-quality gold-colored paint. The photograph in image 09 illustrating this was taken ninety-one years after the icon's completion and the background still maintained a glow.⁴⁹

In Byzantine iconography, the front of icons should not bear inscriptions of dates, signatures, or provenance, since icons are created solely to honor God and His saints. The artist's signature or other information draws attention away from the spiritual focus of the icon.⁵⁰ However, Lipinski understood that placing the names of donors on his icons would make it more appealing for families to sponsor them. Lipinski likely knew this was contrary to the conventions of iconography but it was good for business. In his early works, for example at Presentation of the Theotokos Ukrainian Catholic Church at Delph, AB (works dated 1918)⁵¹ or Ascension of Our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church at New Kiew, AB (works dated 1919)⁵² the names of the donors appear in a thin wispy script. One must stand close to the icons to see them. Starting in the early to mid-1920s Lipinski inscribed the names of donors in a script large enough to be read from several meters away. One can imagine a client telling

⁴⁹ SDPC 2013-53

⁵⁰ Steven Bigham, as interviewed by S. Demchinsky, 15 March 2021. (Rev. Dr. Bigham is an iconologist and author of several books on the subject.)

⁵¹ SDPC 2013-67 to 2013-68.

⁵² SDPC 2013-64 to 2013-65.

Lipinski, “If I’m going to pay that much for an icon, you better make sure people can read my name on it!”⁵³



09: Lipinski icon from Nativity of the Theotokos
Ukrainian Catholic Church in Chipman, AB.

Jacob Maydanyk

Born in 1891 in eastern Galicia, Jacob Maydanyk was a significant contributor to both secular and ecclesiastical art in the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Maydanyk studied art in a technical school of design near Kraków. While working as an apprentice for an iconographer, he made enough money to travel to Canada in 1911 when he was nineteen years old. He wanted to raise enough money in Canada to fund additional art training in France. When war broke out in 1914, he could not return to Europe and he eventually decided to stay in Canada permanently.

⁵³ One priest told me that, while it was regrettable from a theological point of view that Lipinski had placed so many names on their icons in bold letters, it was interesting, from another point of view, to see a history of the parish families transcribed on the iconography. See SDPC 2003-01 to 2003-12.

After his arrival, Maydanyk worked as a laborer before entering the Ruthenian Training School for Teachers. He also began drawing satirical cartoons for *Kanadiis'kyi ukrainets'*, a prominent Ukrainian-Canadian periodical. After graduating from the teachers' college, he taught in bilingual schools in the Ukrainian settlement areas of Manitoba. While doing this, he also produced secular and ecclesiastical artwork, continued creating cartoons for periodicals, wrote short stories and dramas, and became well known in the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

At some point, he took on a position in a religious supply store. A store would find a person like Maydanyk (who had studied religious art and could speak Ukrainian) to be an asset because so many Ukrainian churches were springing up on the Prairies. Maydanyk might have seen the job as a stepping stone, since he later opened Canada's first Ukrainian religious supply store in Winnipeg. According to the documentary *Laughter in My Soul*, Ukrainian Catholic Bishop Nykyta Budka encouraged him to open the store.⁵⁴ It sold a wide variety of liturgical items, and was bolstered when Maydanyk eventually added an art studio in which he employed apprentices to supply the growing need for religious art in the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

The Deisis icon in image 10 is an example of Maydanyk's early work, completed in 1918 at Fisher Branch, MB. This icon is located in the octagonal drum of the dome.⁵⁵



10: Deisis icon by Maydanyk from St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church, Fisher Branch, MB.

⁵⁴ Halya Kuchmij, *Laughter in My Soul*, a documentary produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 1983. See https://www.nfb.ca/film/laughter_in_my_soul (accessed 8 May 2021).

⁵⁵ SDPC 2010-67. Also, see Baran (1991), 270.



11: Maydanyk's work from
St. Michael Ukrainian Catholic Church,
Olha, MB.

Perhaps Maydanyk's greatest achievement, both in the number of icons and the quality of his work was in St. Michael Ukrainian Catholic church at Olha, MB. This project features a large iconostasis with four tiers of icons, as well as iconography on all the walls and on the ceiling. Maydanyk completed the work in 1927. Image 11 illustrates a large icon of St. Josaphat from a shrine located at the right of the iconostasis.⁵⁶

Maydanyk died in 1984. Since he was involved in so many activities aside from iconography, his output of icons was never as great as that of Lipinski. Basil Rotoff suggests that his most active years were the 1920s and 1930s and, following that, he acted as more of an intermediary between parishes and artists, particularly those who worked in his workshop.⁵⁷ However, evidence suggests that he still took on some projects as late as the 1940s. For example, he accepted a large commission at Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church, Grifton, MB. Maydanyk executed this work from 1940 to 1942.⁵⁸

Hnat Sych

Of the first three Ukrainian-Canadian iconographers, Hnat Sych was the most enigmatic; little has been written about him. He came from Galicia but the dates of his birth, immigration, and death are obscure. The dates of some of his works indicate that he must have entered Canada prior to the First World War. Of his training, Rotoff remarks that he "is said to have had formal training in L'viv."⁵⁹ Evidently, he lived in Winnipeg and most of his work is to be found in churches in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.⁶⁰ While he likely painted a significant number of churches, he did not always sign his work, and his painting was so inconsistent in quality that identifying churches decorated by Sych is sometimes problematic.

Sych's greatest work was likely the decoration of the massive Assumption Ukrainian Catholic church, Portage la Prairie, MB, in which he contributed over fifty icons. The church had to be torn down in 1983 because of structural problems. Rev. Jaropolk Radkewych methodically photographed the church in detail before the demolition, so we know how it looked. The icons are in storage at the Ukrainian Catholic Chancery in Winnipeg.⁶¹

Hnat Sych had a reputation for being able to nimbly scramble up and down scaffolding and for this reason he was a good choice for the Portage la

⁵⁶ SDPC 2014-11. Also, see Baran (1991), 165-66.

⁵⁷ Rotoff, *Monuments to Faith*, 135.

⁵⁸ SDPC 2014-40. Also, see Baran (1991), 172.

⁵⁹ Rotoff, *Monuments to Faith*, 135.

⁶⁰ Sych painted the first Ss. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church, Mundare, AB. See *Propamiatna knyha* (Yorkton: Holos Spasytelia, 1941), 269.

⁶¹ Gloria Romaniuk, Archivist for the Ukrainian Catholic Chancery, Winnipeg, MB, interviewed by S. Demchinsky, 11 May 2015. The chancery has the collection of Rev. Radkewych's photos as well as Sych's icons.

Prairie church with its very high walls. Another example of a challenging church is Ss. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church southwest of Dauphin, MB. Sych would have had to use very high scaffolding to decorate the pendentives and extremely large inner dome with iconography and stencilling.⁶²

The curious thing about Sych's work was that his earlier pieces often appear to be finely painted but his work became increasingly inconsistent. In image 12, we see an icon of St. Michael in St. Volodymyr Museum at the Ukrainian Catholic Chancery in Winnipeg. Sych signed and dated the back of this icon in 1918.⁶³ The features of St. Michael's hands and face are relatively well-rendered and the drapery of his garment is reminiscent of Baroque art.

Other documented works by Sych from his early period show equally good craftsmanship, such as the large patron icon (signed 1919) in the apse of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church, Dobrowody, SK,⁶⁴ or the Theotokos (signed 1916) and Pantocrator (signed 1919) at Protection of the Mother of God Ukrainian Catholic Church, Burlington, ON.⁶⁵ Doubtless, there are many other such extant works that cannot be definitively identified because Sych did not sign them.

However, by the 1920s, the quality of Sych's work seems inconsistent. Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church, Rosa, MB, is notable for the large number of icons painted by Sych from 1926 to 1934. The Theotokos on the iconostasis is comparatively well done by the standards of the day. Her foot is a bit large and Christ's hands and feet could be better rendered but the features of the faces are relatively well executed; the halos are perfectly round and the clothing is realistic. Most of the rest of the iconography is equally good.⁶⁶ In Image 13, we see an icon of St. John on a pendentive in Holy Cross Ukrainian Catholic Church, Elma, MB, that Sych painted in 1921.⁶⁷ In this instance, the halo and the round frame around the icon are far from perfect and the eagle looks like an ugly buzzard. The hands and face are poorly rendered. This icon is sloppy compared to other work that he did in this period.

Since little has been written about Hnat Sych, one must visit the churches he decorated to learn about the man. If one is lucky enough to be shown one of his churches by a talkative parishioner, one might hear that Sych was an alcoholic and maybe part of his payment was in the form of homebrew. That such parishioners may only have been children at the time the churches

⁶² SDPC 2011-43.

⁶³ SDPC 2012-71.

⁶⁴ SDPC 2014-30.

⁶⁵ SDPC 2018-10. The parish priest explained these icons were previously in a church that had closed in a mining town in northern Ontario.

⁶⁶ SDPC 2012-46 and 2012-47. Also, Baran (1991), 308. Baran states that the iconostasis was carved in 1934 and Sych's signature and date are on the icon of the Theotokos, so there is no doubt this particular work is from 1934.

⁶⁷ SDPC 2012-70. Also, Baran (1991), 197.



12: Icon of St. Michael by Hnat Sych located in St. Volodymyr Museum, Winnipeg, MB.



13: St. John by Hnat Sych in Holy Cross Ukrainian Catholic Church in Elma, MB.

were painted or perhaps not even born speaks to the fact that stories about him have entered into the realm of local folklore. When one hears such tales repeatedly, it gives a plausible explanation to the inconsistency of Sych's work.⁶⁸ Gloria Romaniuk, the archivist at the Ukrainian Catholic Church

⁶⁸ None of the stories of Sych's drinking came out of formal interviews. Rather, they were told while I was photographing church interiors. Indeed, if the

Chancery in Winnipeg, sent me transcripts of interviews that she conducted with Mary Yanchynski in 1985 and 1986. Yanchynski was the priest's housekeeper at the aforementioned Portage la Prairie church when Sych painted it. Yanchynski witnessed that Sych did drink while he painted, and the priest worried that he might fall from the scaffolding. Yanchynski made a rather odd observation attesting to Sych's eccentricity: the artist preferred to work in the evenings or through the night.⁶⁹

Other Iconographers

While the above iconographers appear to be the first ones to do significant work in Canada, it is possible unrecognised iconographers contributed work before 1930. In particular, an unknown iconographer may have visited Canada at this time, possibly even before the first three Ukrainian-Canadian iconographers discussed in this paper. Little is known about this "mystery iconographer" and it is possible that he⁷⁰ never came to Canada but, rather, shipped his work to this country from elsewhere. His work is found on at least four iconostases in pioneer era churches: St. Michael Ukrainian Orthodox Church (built 1907), Lepine, SK;⁷¹ Dormition Ukrainian Orthodox Church (built 1910) near Borden, SK;⁷² St. Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church (built 1904) near Gardenton, MB;⁷³ and Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church (built 1917-1921) near Sandy Lake, MB.⁷⁴ The Holy Eucharist iconostas was originally in Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic Church (built 1911) in the town of Sandy Lake.⁷⁵ He also did extensive work at Protection of St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church, Glenhope, MB, where A.M. Baran identified him as "Wysyliw." ⁷⁶ Additionally, there are two pioneer Orthodox churches in Alberta that each have a large icon

parishioners had thought I was conducting a formal interview, they may not have been so forthcoming. The following photo shoots are examples of when I was regaled with these colorful stories: SDPC 2011-43 to 2011-44, SDPC 2012-26, SDPC 2012-27 to 2012-28, SDPC 2012-43 to 2012-44, and SDPC 2012-67 to 2012-70.

⁶⁹ Interview with Mary Yanchynski conducted by Gloria Romaniuk on 9 August 1985 and Interview with Mary Yanchynski conducted by Gloria Romaniuk and Natalie Picklyk on 14 August 1986.

⁷⁰ I assume the iconographer was male since that is most likely.

⁷¹ SDPC 2010-30 to 2010-31.

⁷² SDPC 2017-16.

⁷³ SDPC 2012-30 to 2012-31.

⁷⁴ Zenon Stepchuk photographed this church and shared the photos with me. From Stepchuk's photos, it is clear that this was work from the same iconographer as the other three iconostases.

⁷⁵ Baran (1991), 204, 277. Baran acknowledges the iconostasis but does not cite the iconographer or date. It appears it was painted sometime between 1909 and 1937.

⁷⁶ Baran (1991), 227-28. Also see SDPC 2011-11 to 12.

of St. Barbara that appears to be the work of this “mystery iconographer”⁷⁷ and also an icon of the Protection of St. Mary in a Ukrainian Catholic parish in Manitoba.⁷⁸ Images 14 and 15 demonstrate icons respectively from the Lepine church and the Gardenton church for the purposes of comparison.

Note the similarity in the calligraphy, face, hair, double halo, and wings in these two icons and it is not difficult to imagine that they are from the hand of the same iconographer. Yet, no record exists of this artist, other than possibly his last name.

Conclusion

From the end of the nineteenth century to 1930 was a period of building from the ground up for the Ukrainian-Canadian community and for its religious institutions in particular. The building process can be witnessed through the growth of ecclesiastical art. This growth, seen in Canada’s earliest Ukrainian parishes, continued for many decades.



14: Angel Michael
from St. Michael Ukrainian Orthodox
Church, Lepine, SK.



15: Angel Gabriel from St. Demetrius
Ukrainian Orthodox Church near
Gardenton, MB.

⁷⁷ SDPC 2013-46 and SDPC 2013-75.

⁷⁸ SDPC 2007-11.

Thomas and Lena Gushul's Correspondence: Selected Letters

Mariya Mayerchyk, Jelena Pogosjan, Tatiana Saburova

Introduction

Thomas (Tymofii) Gushul (1889-1962) was born in Rozhniv,¹ in what is now Ivano-Frankivsk oblast in Western Ukraine, and immigrated to Canada in 1906, leaving his family behind. His father died shortly after his departure, but his mother and younger sister joined him in Canada later, in 1912, and the other sister, who was married in Ukraine, followed her husband to Canada in 1908 or 1909. Thomas Gushul, like many other immigrants, left for Canada to earn money and help his family in the Old Country (we know from his letter to Petro Rondiak that his father's homestead was in severe debt). He worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, then in coal mines in the Crowsnest Pass area, and for a short while he even taught Ukrainian to children in Shevchenko (renamed Vita in 1910), Manitoba.

Thomas Gushul was also an amateur photographer; he later studied photography in Winnipeg and became a professional photographer, operating two photo studios, in Bush Town (a part of Coleman) and Blairmore, Alberta. In a letter to Stefiuk, 15 August 1921, Gushul wrote: "Next week, we will start building a big photographic studio in the neighboring town of Blairmore. It is going to be the main headquarters of the photographic studio in this district. We have a chance here to bring our photographic work to a big scale." The studio in Bush Town was closed in 1926 (it was significantly damaged by flooding in 1923 and in general never had running water and sewage), so the second studio in Blairmore became the Gushuls' main photo studio and remained the center of the family business for many years. The photo studio was indeed a family business because Thomas's wife, Lena (Olena) Gushul (née Sawiek) (1898-1981), became a photographer as well, helping to take, develop, and print pictures (see, for example, Thomas's letters from British Columbia). Lena was nine years younger than Thomas, from Rozhniv as well, though they hadn't known each other before they met in Canada. She immigrated in March 1912 being only thirteen and a half years old when she came to Winnipeg to begin a new life. Later she moved to Edmonton and met Thomas through his mother and sisters. They married in 1914 and settled in Bush Town, part of

¹ On a number of envelopes, it was written as "Rożnów" or, simplifying Polish spelling, as "Roznow".

Coleman. All her life she worked side by side with Thomas in the photo studio. They had four children; their son, Evan, later became a professional photographer working in Lethbridge.



Fig. 1. Gushul Studio, *Thomas Gushul taking photo with old camera*, Alberta, Crowsnest Museum, 6517 Gush. Glass neg.



Fig. 2. Gushul Studio, *Gushul Studio*, Blairmore, Alberta c. 1922, Crowsnest Museum, CM-Gush-BL-04-02.

The Gushul photo studio in Blairmore took, developed, printed, enlarged, and colored photos, and offered rolls of film for sale, and cameras for rent. The studio advertisement said: “We photograph anywhere, anything, anytime. We can come to your home if you cannot come to our studio. If you wish for anything in photographic work, you should come to us.” Thomas Gushul became well known for his photos published in the local newspapers (*The Coleman Journal, The Calgary Herald, Nova Vlast*), documenting parades and music festivals, sport events and worker strikes, picturing local enterprises, people, and the nature of the Canadian Rockies. In the Crowsnest Pass everybody knew the Gushul studio, ordering portraits, family, wedding, and funeral photographs; the Gushuls’ photos were in many family albums in Alberta. His photographs tell stories of life in the Crowsnest Pass, its local communities, but also a story of a Ukrainian Canadian family of photographers, their business and strong ties with the Old Country.

A large part of the Gushul Photo Studio archives is housed by the Crowsnest Museum (Coleman, Alberta). In addition to photo negatives, photographs, a variety of cameras and other photo paraphernalia, it also contains a large collection of letters. Most of the letters are addressed to Thomas and Lena Gushul. There is also a smaller group of letters authored by the Gushuls: family letters that naturally stayed in the family archives, but also letters returned to the senders or those that had never been mailed. Business letters, mostly from the studio patrons and suppliers, were normally written in English, while personal letters were in Ukrainian. Part of them came from the Old Country and were written by relatives and friends of the Gushuls; the other part, from Canada, were mostly from Thomas’s political friends. Below we are publishing a group of letters from this collection. We also include one letter from Thomas and Lena to Peter Krawchuk (2f) from the Kravchuks’ family archive, courtesy of Larissa Stavroff.



Fig. 3. Gushul Studio, *Gushul Studio*, Blairmore, Alberta, c. 1922, Crowsnest Museum, CM-Gush-BL-04-07.

The letters below are grouped in four sections: (1) Thomas Gushul's letter that contains his short autobiography; (2) Thomas Gushul's correspondence with his political friends; (3) Thomas Gushul's letters to his wife Lena; (4) Letters from Rozhniv, from the Gushuls' relatives. All these letters are written in Ukrainian. The authors of the letters come from a variety of backgrounds with different levels of literacy, speaking different dialects of Ukrainian. Letters that originate from Canada contain some English or modified English words written in Cyrillic characters, e.g., "трин" (train) or "пас" (passport). In most cases those are easily understandable and are not explained; in some cases, English equivalents are given. Rare Ukrainian words are also explained. The date and authorship are usually given in the letters. In some cases, they are determined from envelopes and postal cancellations. Accordingly, these dates are given in italics in square brackets. Page numbers are also given in italics in square brackets unless they are included in the original letters. Italics in square brackets are also used for editorial comments, e.g. [*envelope*], [*letter*]. The orthography of the original letters, as well as punctuation and capitalization of proper names, is preserved. Technical errors are corrected.

We would like to express our special thanks to Dr. Svitlana Kukharenko for transcribing the letters for this publication, Vic Bergman for providing information about Matij (Mike) Knysz, and Nataliya Bezborodova for locating Thomas Gushul's letter to Peter Kravchuk and assisting in receiving permission to publish it.

Section 1. Tomas Gushul's Letter with a Short Autobiography from 1936

In the Old Country, land was a precious commodity. When Lena and Thomas Gushul immigrated to Canada, they left behind their share of lands. Lena's land was used by her brother Dmytro Sawiek and his wife Maria (letter from Anna Huculak, 1924 May 7).² Half of Thomas's land was used (from 1934 onwards) by Lena's other brother Wasyl Sawiek (Wasyl Sawiek's letter from 6 April 1934), who was first growing clover to improve the quality of the soil, and later wheat and corn. The legal status of Thomas's land was not clear: before coming to Canada, his mother did not include him in the land title, leaving everything to her two daughters, Thomas's sisters. It was, however, important for Thomas to own his land legally. Letters preserved in the Crowsnest Museum only sparsely reflect Thomas's attempts to change the legal status of his land.

The question of Thomas's land was discussed in Wasyl Sawiek's letter from 6 April 1934: he passed to his correspondent the address of "a good lawyer," Petro Rondiak. On 7 February 1936, Thomas sent Petro Rondiak a letter describing in detail the circumstances of his immigration to Canada and first years in the new country. This is practically a short autobiography. He

² Anna Huculak's letter is not included in this publication. For the letters that are included, "see below" is added.



Fig. 4. Gushul Studio, *Lena Gushul in Ethnic dress*, Alberta, Crowsnest Museum, 6023 Gush. Glass neg.

also described the situation with his house and his land. On 6 March 1936, Rondiak replied to Thomas. He informed Thomas that his services would cost at least \$45, as all the legal procedures were very expensive. Thomas probably declined Rondiak's services and requested that all the papers be returned to him. Rondiak returned Thomas's initial letter from 7 February 1936 with his cover note announcing the end of services (see below).

The "affairs with the land" didn't end here. On 18 April 1936, Wasyl Sawieck informed Thomas that he found "another Ukrainian lawyer, Yaroslav Rudensky who agreed to take their case for 150 zloty, less than \$25." Wasyl told Rudensky that he is paying for everything from his own pocket, which is why the lawyer agreed to take on the case for such a low price: he didn't know that he would be dealing with Thomas Gushul from Canada and therefore didn't expect "golden Canadian mountains" as payment. It is unknown, however, if Thomas ever attempted to legally regain ownership of his land again.

Thomas's letter to Rondiak is full of biographical details -- it confirms some known facts, but also provides some additional insights into the Gushuls' life in Canada. It shows, for instance, that Thomas, even after thirty years in Canada, was still very much attached to his land in the Old Country: he worried about his house, the cherry and plum trees that were cut down and used for firewood, and about the crops growing on his land. Like many immigrants, he settled in Canada forever and, at the same time, imagined that one day he would return.

1a

Адвокат
Др. Петро Рондяк
в Косові
Високоповажний Пане!

У відповідь на Ваш лист подаю Вам до Вашої ласкавої відомости, що я обчислив мінімальні кошти Вашого процесу, бо Ви мусілиб складати на комісію судову кошти, дальше стемплі до позову, доручення до Америки і т.д. – отже ціна була мінімальна. Натомість за се Ви малибисьте грунт Ваш в порядку та на Вас заінтабульований. Тому, що ся ціна видаєсь Вам за висока – проте відповідно до Вашого бажання звертаю Вам Ваші листи, та рівночасно почисляю Вам за конференцію з Вашими шваграми та з Вами і писанням листів та порто суму 2 ам. дол., котру то суму прошу прислати.³

З високим поважанням
Др. Рондяк

³ Rondiak's note was typed on a Cyrillic typewriter, which was missing the characters ї, є, and ґ.



Fig. 5. Gushul Studio, *Very Young Lena and Thomas Gushul*, Alberta, Crowsnest Museum, 6207 Gush. Glass neg.

1b⁴

Блеймор, Альта
7^{го} лютого, 1936

⁴ This letter was returned to Thomas Gushul (enclosed in letter 1a).

Др. П. Рондяк,
Косів

Вповажний Пане Др. Рондяк!



Fig. 6. Gushul Studio, *Thomas Gushul*, Alberta,
Crownsnest Museum, 00225 GUSH-NEG.

Вдаюсь до Вас з справою відносно мого ґрунту в Рожнові. Я не знаю, чи зможу все як слід точно описати Вам в цім письмі, тому раджу Вам

покликати мого опікуна Тимофія Міхнюка, Семена⁵ в Рожнові. Він зможе розказати Вам детально про повищу справу. Цей чоловік вповні обзнакомлений з цим ділом і все вияснить як слід.

Його устна історія буде більше для Вас зрозуміла, як моя писанина на папері. Та всеж позможности описую Вам як справа мається.

В 1906 році, коли я числив 18 літ, опустив рідний край і виїхав до Канади. Старенький мій батько Іван Ґушул з Захарія помер зараз по моїм виїзді щось в кілька тижднів.

Мати і дві сестри осталися. Старша сестра Ґрапина була замужною
2

і жила окремо в Новоселици (її муж⁶ враз зі мною виїхав до Канади). Отже вдома на господарці осталися тільки мати і молодша сестра Параска.

Господарка була в довгах по уха, а головно в клопоті з якемось Кутським напастуючим банком. За оден рік мої тяжкої праці в Канаді, мені пощастилося заробити поважну суму грошей, якими я позаплачував усі довги на цій батьківщині. Всі гроші були пересилані на руки мої мати (Полагна Ґушул).

Після батькової смерті, себто оден рік пізніше, коли вже всі довги були позаплачовані, мати вдалася до спадкового судії про втягнення нас дітей в маси.⁷ Отже, що сталося? Мати втягнула дві сестри в маси, а мене цілком оставили. Мене зовсім нігде нема. На податковий книжці, себто теперішній, тільки сестри стоять затягнені і здається мати, але на певно не знаю, а мене як не було так нема. Так виглядає, що я зовсім на світ не народився.

3

Ціла ця господарка осталася по батькови. Старша сестра Ґрапина дістала своє віно один добрий морґ поля, (під улицею) але це було по матери. Вона виїхала до свого мужа в Канаду в 1908 або 9^{тим} році.

В 1912 році мати і молодша сестра приїхали до Канади, а цілу господарку оставили на опікуна. Паперів, чи то документів від повищої господарки не привезли ніяких.

Молодша сестра згодилася, себто устно, прийняти від мене шифкарти яко її пайка чи то віно. Мати і сестри ще живуть тут. Мати через цілий час від 1912 року живе враз зі мною, себто з моєю родиною. З доньками вони не жили тут і ніколи не будуть, бо не можуть погодитися.

⁵ Thomas Gushul follows the formal way to refer to a person in the Old Country: first name, last name, name of the person's father.

⁶ Matij (Mike) Knysz (Матій Книш, 1878-1914).

⁷ Here – into the estate legacy.

Отже я рішив взятися до цієї справи і передати Вам, щоби все це спростувати. Інтабуляцію⁸ перевести і зареєструвати на мене. Я хочу дістати офіційний контракт.

4

Про не втягнення мене в маси, я нічого не знав через довгі роки, аж доки не на писав мені опікун 3 або 4 роки тому. Також прислав мені в тім часі старий документ, на яким говориться про мати і сестри, а про мене нічого. Цей документ я до Вас вишлю, аж тоді, коли буду мати від Вас відповідь.

Отце все, що я міг Вам на писати. Порозгляненню цієї справи прошу на писати мені, кільки це має коштувати.

З глибоким поважанням
Тимофій Гушул Івана

Адреса:
Thomas Gushul,
P.O. Box 54,
Blairmore, Alberta,
Canada

Section 2. Thomas Gushul's Correspondence with Political Friends

Documenting Thomas Gushul's political activism is generally challenging, as it has received little attention from biographers as compared to his photographic practice. Seeking to fill this gap, this section presents samples of Thomas Gushul's correspondence with Ukrainian workers and miners from Canada, the USA, and Galicia.

Thomas Gushul was a member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party of Canada, a socialist political organization founded in 1910. He became a strong supporter of leftist ideas probably back at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Thomas's reminiscences, in the fall of 1907, upon completing his work on railway construction, he took a trip to Winnipeg and "stayed for several weeks with nice and progressive people." When, at the same time, the first issue of a proletarian newspaper, *Chervonyi Prapor* (Red Flag), came out in Winnipeg (see below, Thomas Gushul's letter to Petro Kravchuk from 30 December 1957), Thomas put a couple of the copies in his suitcase ("do kuferka") and took them to Shevchenko/Vita, a small town in southeast Manitoba, where he was hired to work on a farm. The area was almost exclusively populated by Ukrainians. After getting acquainted with the farmers,

⁸ Інтабуляція – from Polish *intabulacja*, в давньому польському праві запис у книзі про володіння землею; in old Polish law: entry to the book on land ownership.

Thomas started reading *Chervonyi Prapor* to them. Eventually, the environment in the area became politically charged.



7. Gushul Studio, *Labor Day*, Hillcrest, Alberta, 1 September 1918, Alberta, Crowsnest Museum, 6202 Gush Glass neg.

While the Ukrainian socialist movement's headquarters remained in Winnipeg, its largest and most active branches were located in the Crowsnest Pass,⁹ where Thomas and Lena Gushul had permanently resided since they married in 1914. In 1918 the Canadian government outlawed radical organizations, including the Social Democratic Party of Canada; however, this did not stop Thomas from political engagement. In his letter dated August 1921 (see below) Thomas secretly informed his comrade Stefiuk that he was making

⁹ "Olena Hushul, Blairmore, Alberta," in *Reminiscences of Courage and Hope: Stories of Ukrainian Canadian Women Pioneers*, ed. Peter Krawchuk, trans. by Michael Ukas (Toronto: Kobzar Publishing Co. LTD, 1991) [1973], 75; Orest Martynowych, "Ukrainian Socialist Movement in Canada 1907-1918: The View from Below," manuscript (1985), Bohdan Medwidsky Ukrainian Folklore Archives, UF2020.015, 4-5; Orest Martynowych, "Ukrainian Section of the Socialist Party of Canada / Social Democratic Party of Canada," University of Manitoba, https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/ukrainian_canadian_studies/media/12_The_Ukrainian_Section_of_the_SPC_and_SDPC.pdf (accessed 19 November 2021).

“red-colored” photographs, and his new photo studio in Blairmore is going to be “the main headquarters of the photographic studio in this district,” meaning eventually not only photography production. The Gushuls’ photo studio most likely served as one of the leading centres of the region’s political life.

In the 1930s, as Allan Chambers aptly put it, the revolutionary events “blew with the fury of mountain winds through the Crowsnest Pass.”¹⁰ Thomas Gushul again was in the center of events as a participant and photographer, scrupulously documenting miners' strikes, rallies, and mass May Day demonstrations happening in Blairmore, Coleman, Hillcrest, Frank (Alberta), and Michel (British Columbia). As Thomas Gushul’s correspondence shows, he adhered to socialist ideas during his entire life.



Fig. 8. Gushul Studio, *Large Ukrainian Gathering*, Alberta, c. 1920, Crowsnest Museum, 6211 Gush. Glass neg. Lena Gushul is kneeling in the second row first from the right; Nadia and Evan Gushul are in the first row, far right and far left, respectively. The banner says: “Робітники всіх країв [єднайтеся] спільний пікнік від” (“Workers of all lands [unite] joint picnic WID”). WID probably refers to Workers International Day.

¹⁰ Allan Chambers, *Spirit of the Crowsnest: The Story of Unions in the Coal Towns of the Crowsnest Pass* (Edmonton: Alberta Labour History Institute, 2012), 7.

2a

[envelope]

From: S. Huculak¹¹
Box 199
Michel, B.C.

Thos. Gushul Esq.
P.O. Coleman
(Box 209) Alta

[letter]

Мішел, Б.К. ¹²
24^{го} жовтня 1918
Поважаний Товаришу!

Лист Ваш із 2^{го} жовтня отримав за який щиро дякую. За не скороу відповідь на Ваш лист прошу вибачати, бо се склалось з ріжних причин що аж до сего часу затрималось. Перша тое: Се тяглося в часі штрайку і як би штрайк був далі тревав, то я мислив відвідати Вас ще раз в Колеман і поговорити особисто. Друге знову писалисьте що приїдете на Мішел помочи штрайкувати і то занім сніг упаде. Тимчасом штрайк скіньчив ся скоро і я пішов далі доляри копати, а за тим уже і сніг паде тут у нас а Вас з Колеман не видати.

Однак я не противлюсь сему ніц бо я знаю щосьте досить заняті під сей час а то з реточованєм¹³ долярів.

Але мусю однак сказати отверто що уже час і Вам приїхати на Мішел. Чи може не? Як собі мислити?

Ану сами признайтесь!

¹¹ In 1926, Thomas Gushul took photographs of Huculak's funeral. On each photograph a caption was added: "Тов. Стефан Гуцуляк член Робітничих Організацій, який 3^{го} вересня 1926 р. зістав в копальні вугля тяжко побитий, наслідком чого по пять денних тяжких муках помер 8^{го} вересня 1926 р. в шпиталі в Колмен, Альта. Покійний числив 37 літ життя і був не жонатий. Походив з села Пусте Іванс, повіт Борщів Галичина. До Канади прибув 1906 р. Спи, любий наш товаришу, пам'ять про тебе і твою щиру працю ніколи не загине між нами! 'Хай буде земля тобі пером.' Photo by T. Gushul, Coleman, Alta."

¹² Michel, town in British Columbia.

¹³ Retouching photographs.

[2]

А тепер будемо зачинати дещо іншого, бо як знаєте і сами наших старших поговірку: що (жарт є жартом а фіст часом на....¹⁴

Перше хотівбим знати як Ви розписалисьє ся з вуйком Сіпяром за зломанє Вашої ляски,¹⁵ бо по мої думці повинин вуйко заплати з яких \$100⁰⁰.¹⁶

Тепер, що до другої палиці, то я заслав замовленє але як буде з нею то я не годен Вам тепер нічого певного сказати, бо як Вам відомо що плінників з Морріссей¹⁷ забрано десь до Онтарію. В той час як они їхали я був на стичіню,¹⁸ однак не міг нічого перемовитись з ними бо они їхали під охороною божих ангелів, і сьвітла погасили в вагоні наколи приїхали на стичіні, втім оден приклонник божий вигнав ангелів на двір щоби стерегли і берегли замкнених вікон, щоби ніхто не міг приступити і дещо говорити. І то став тільки щоби набрати води і знов далі поїхав. Тож наколиб отримав лист від них тоді повідомляю Вас що буде.

[3]

Знову що до Мушука то ся річ так має ся. Єсли я єго питаю ся про згадану річ то єму не дає щось говорити в той час ї втікає, але я єму не противляюсь, бо як й сами знаєте що то собі Мошук.

Дякую Вам за напімненє і пересторогу в минувшій листі подану, однак що до сеї справи тичить ся ми були уже приготовані і залагоджені передше, бо нам неприємним запахом тяглось по під ніс уже давно і наш відділ не істнував уже майже 3 місяці. От як то в сьвіті буває що відважних здибають ще відважнійші.

¹⁴ The sentence is not completed. The word “на” is written above the dots. The bracket is not closed. Huculak refers here to a proverb: “Жарт жартом, а фіст на бік” (in this context: “Jokes aside, let’s get down to business”).

¹⁵ Ляска - a stick, a cane, or a spindle.

¹⁶ This part of the letter contains a hidden message. Вуйко Сіпяр (uncle Sipiар) is most likely the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway). It is not clear, however, what happened and why Thomas should receive compensation for a broken “ляска.”

¹⁷ Morrissey, town near Fernie where an Internment camp was located in 1914-19. Most of the prisoners were the local miners who were deemed to be enemy aliens. Huculak continues here using hints, calling the guards “божі ангели” (God’s angels).

¹⁸ Rail road juncture.

Не знаю чи Вам відомо про Фернійський товаришів¹⁹ що позістали уже арештовані. Тільки не знаю якраз котрих але з них усіх арештовані 4, меже якими знаходить ся Ткачук і Григірчук і здає ся Коновальчук а за четвертого не знаю. Се я довідав ся від одного Росіяна їхаючи трином²⁰ з Фарної²¹, а він не знав докладно їх імен. Се стало ся в понеділок а ми довідались у вівторок. Розуміє ся що забрали від них усю бібліотеку з читальні.

[4]

А знову нині довідаєм ся що завтра то значить ся на 25 с[его] м[ісяця] має відбути ся суд над ними. Що буде не знати?

Головна річ, що правда мусить бути на якийсь час закопана.

[Правда, щож там поробляє щирий Тов. Баранюк Павло? Колеса крутять ся чи ні? Не знаю чому він листа не відписав мені, мусю бути дуже добрий у него? Замітка: Від М. Федорука.]²²

На сім кіньчу тимчасове писанє.

Остаюсь з тов. привітом

С. Гуцуляк

[Diagonally on the free part of the page]

На другий раз піде бесіда в иньшій справі – публичній.



Fig. 9. Gushul Studio, *May Day Coal Miner's Demonstration in Mishel/Natal*, c. 1930, British Columbia, 1924, Crowsnest Museum, GUSH-BC-31-06.

¹⁹ Friends from Fernie, town in British Columbia.

²⁰ Train.

²¹ Fernie.

²² Square brackets belong to the author of the letter.

2b

[envelope]

Com.
T. Gushul
Coleman Alta
Box 209

[letter]

Fernie 31/10 1918

Гаразд Товаришу,
листа від вас отримав за що сердечно дякую а що ви запитуєте на чій руки
вислати прупки²³ то прошу висилати на мой руки, ато просимо вислати
якнайскорше а що ви запитуєте що ту се стало то забрали книжки і все і
забрали 4 до корту: Ткачука Шлемка Коновалчука і Семенчука то сиділи 2
дни і Юнія²⁴ заложила 6 Тишч долярів і вийшли до кийсу в сей понеділок
буде кийс що буде то напишу пізнішче
здоровлю сердечно
до побаченя
Dmytro Turyk
Fernie B.C.
Box 830
Прошу о відпис

2c²⁵

[Thomas Gushul's letterhead]

15 серпня 1921

Дорогий Товаришу Стефюк!

Ваш лист з 8^{го} цвітня отримав за що складаєм Вам щиро-гарячу
подяку. Ваш лист мусїв бути десь затриманий що так пізно до нас
приблукав. Однак трохи і наша вина, бом припустили часу щось два

²³ Perhaps from English *proof*, meaning *proof of a photograph*.

²⁴ Turyk writes about the Union ("Юнія") that bailed out four miners and the following court case.

²⁵ Thomas Gushul wrote the letter to his friend Stefiuk in Halychyna. The letter is completed and signed but it likely had never been sent to the addressee because it is kept in the Crowsnest Museum.



Fig. 10. Gushul Studio, "Corbin" Miners' Wives, Corbin, British Columbia, Crowsnest Museum, GUSH-BC-31-09.

тиждні. Ваш лист дуже нас заінтересував про деякі «зміни» в старім краю. Наше поводження під теперішню хвилю не так зле, роботи маєм подостатком «всілякої». Виробляем різного кольору фотографії а найбільше «червоних» помимо того що червона краска видає найкращий кольоровий результат. На другий тиждень будем будувати велику фотографічну студію в сусіднім містечку Блейрмор. Се має бути головна кватира фотографічного закладу в

сім дістрікті. Ми тут маєм велику нагоду побільшити нашу фотографічну роботу на велику скалю, лише біда в тім що немаєм помочи в роботі. В сім дістрікті знаходяться тільки самі вуглеві копальні і всякий «бізнес» скорим кроком розвиваєсь до свого найвищого степеня.

[2]

Під теперішну пору робітники як в Канаді так і в Злучених Державах переживають тяжку кризу безробітя. Ся криза не одному дала до «думаня», а не одного заставила до «роботи». Урожай сего року в Канаді дуже бідний. Засіви повигорали майже в кожній провінції з винятком Манїтоби. Всі сподівають ся ще гіршого терпіня і нужди на зиму як тепер. В зимі прийдєсь не одному закувязнути²⁶ від голоду і холоду, ну але щож зробити? Се більше нічого тільки «кара від бога». Робітники коли мали сталу роботу і добре їм поводилось то не уважали на гріхи божї, а робили як самі хотіли, а тепер хоч здогадались то вже і трохі запізно. Не оден в добрі часи не хотів в неділеньку божу прийти до церковці послухати божої відправи. Та бо і не один лягав і вставав без говореня молитвів божих. Ну і кудаж тут тепер нарікати на сю тяжку кризу. Се ж кара від господа бога. На всіх тих котрі страшно согрішили. Се не панська ані божя вина а тільки тих малоумних грішників котрі ходять ще дрїмаючими, а як же!

[3, *Thomas Gushul's letterhead*]

Перестану я вже писати про сю «грїшну кризу» безробітя, а приступлю до чогось інакшого: Коли Ви вже знаходитесь в дома, то я Вас дуже прошу щоб Ви пішли там подивитись в яким порядку знаходить ся моя стара господарка а се єсть: хата, сад, плоти і город. Одні мені пишуть що всьо в порядку, а другі знов пишуть що ні. І тут я сам не знаю кого маю слухати. Опікуном від мої господарки єсть Матій Гуцуляк з Олекси в Новоселици з Заріцкої парафії. Я йому писав щоб подавав мені рахунок (справозданя) з кожного політку себто що року. На що він мені відписав що так він не може зробити але що аж тоді він рахунок зробить як я з Канади приїду – каже він що тоді си виведе таксаторі і втаксують всьо за минувші роки. Ну бачите який в сего чоловіка бідненький розом?²⁷ Таксаторі будуть таксувать політки минувших років, котрих не бачили і не бачуть.

[4]

Скажіть Ви йому устно най він мені не пише небилиці, а най подає правельно справозданя з політку щороку. Також дайте йому і мої сестрі комірнеци остру строгу щоб не нищили саду, плотів, вербів і взагалі всього.

²⁶ To die, to freeze.

²⁷ Розум.

Если хата розпадаєсь то нехай опікун лагодить. Також если плоти розпались або зовсім нема то най опікун загородить. За всяку направу най стягне собі з політку. Зайдіть там і загляньте в кождий куток і коли зобачите що не будь не в порядку то здорово з скритикуйте того хто винен. В саді абсолютно не позволяте якій-не будь худобині пастись. Скажіть їм що Ви маєте право переглянути всі закутини мої господарки. На кажіть їм і на махайте на них кулаком щоб не нищили саду. Сповніть мою прозьбу як слід і відтак мені на пишите щосьте чули і бачили.

Здоровимо Вас дуже сердечно.

Ваші щиро-зичливі

Т. Гушул і моя жена Олена

P.S. Адрес той що був

2d

[envelope]

From P. Danluck
P.O. Fraser Mills, B.C.

Mr. Thomas Gushul,
P.O. Coleman, Alta
Box 209

[letter]

Fraser Mills, B.C.
Feb. 1, 1922

Thomas Gushul,
Box 209, Coleman, Alta

Дорогий Товарищу Гушуль!

Пишу до вас кілка слів і хочусі довідати овашім здоровля і Поводзеню.

Я що до здоровля то як звичяйно іще Приздоровляю. А Поводзені мое «ни ружево», бо як і самі знаєти іке поводзені осталося тепер, для робітника.

«Тут тепер страшне безробітя!»

Аде ікі ідиниці що є при зняттю, то так їм платит щоб іно ни поздыхати. Я тут нидавно став дороботи у Тартаку. Хот є стала робота, але мала плата бо тільки 30¢ на годину. 9 годин роботи, то \$2.70 на День і стого я мушу заплатити \$1⁰⁰ на день гарч, і \$4⁰⁰ на дві неділі запомешкані і ще менісі остає щомісяці пару долярів наштани. і такі мої побуткі у Канаді.

Тепер маю надію що ви мені напишете щось діє там коловас. і кий там рух їде. Дуже я жалую товаришу, що я ни у Coleman, бо я би мав зким поговорити де що про справи ікі нас робітників інтересують.

Тепер товаришу що до «Книжок котрі я у вас оставев, то Прошу вас пришліт мені їх суда» за адресуйти на Повешу Адресу²⁸, або як слідує Fraser Mills, B.C. Express неподтребуєте оплачувати, я собі самий Тут оплачу.

Остаюсі з Товаришескем Привітом,

Danluck P.

2e

[envelope]

F. Michaluk
403 E. 5 St. New York City

Thos Gushul Esq.
Coleman Alta
P.O. Box 209
Canada

[letter]

New York
24^{го} лютого 1922²⁹

Дорогий Тов. Гушул

На Ваш попередний лист недав жадної відповіді а нині отримав другий то разом відписую обидва. Нас обоїх біда найшла себто (флу) і ніяк позбутись. Я відлежав щось два тижні і позбувся а жінка хора ще і досеї пори і мені голова стала як решето. Тепер трохи жінці лекше, однак ще мусить сидіти в ліжку щоб знов не погіршилось.

Тож прошу негніватись боя був сам несвій через сих пару тижнів. Яб був рад дати відповідь як найскорше але не міг. Тую копію я переглянув і можливо що дещо буде з сего зобачемо, однак я сю копію затримаю як ви пригадали. Єсли отримаю відповідь то повідомлю Вас як найскорше.

2

Нового немаю що так писати до Вас, хиба дещо перед видїздом. Друге каби страйку великого небуло, бо еслиб страйк потримав через кілька місяців, то може плохо бути і знами.

²⁸ Повищу адресу.

²⁹ Another possible reading: “27^{го} лютого” and “1932”.

Тут в Америці то здаєсь що буде немало різни між робітниками і властителями майнів сеї весни тож зобачем, коби бідні майнері побідили свого ворога то булоб досить здало і про нас. Я вже не працюю через кілька тижнів і багато шусток³⁰ розходить ся але всію байка коби мені жінка подужала бо се в мене перше від усього. Нам досить зле повелось через сих кілька тижнів я сподівався що хоть ще кілька десяток зроблю асе зготових розходить ся.

3

Що до помешканя то не потребуєте старатись боя акурат незнаю чи ми обоє разом поїдемо я напишу перед моєм видіздом, а хоть бисмо обидвоє виехали разом то можна перебути пару днів і в готели се ніц страшного. За пес-портом я тут був минувшого року на канадійскім амійґришін офісі а відповідь яку я отримав то заслав до Вас в тій відповіді було що неможливо мені вступ до Канади, сю відповідь я дістав з еміґрейшин офісу яку они дістали з Отави. Я чекав на відповідь б тижнів потім повідомили мене з офісу що неможливо мені їхати, відтак ту копію я заслав до Вас.

[4]

(Докінчення)

Зобачем що з сего буде що Ви були в Діксона.

В разі если позволія не прийде мені то мушу остатись тут і глядіти що небудь тут бо так як поперед їхав більше нехочу. але я сподіюсь що песпорт достанесь. Каби лиш нам бізнес наш не провалився, бо в разі щоб зле повелось то з мої сторони дуже плохоб було Вам инакше там на місци ніж мені їхати звідси до Вас, ми тут обидвоє працюєм і цент до centa і все є пару долярів а там перейди на мени самого і знов великий кошт яб поніс. але я не мислю щоб Ви хотіли мене в біду завести бо нічого злого між нами ніколи небуло, то ж если прийде (пес³¹) так я готов виїхати до Вас (чуєте.)

Так до побаченя невдовзі гаразд. Михайлюк.

2f

Blairmore, ALTA. 30^{го} грудня, 1957

[to Peter Krawchuk,³² Thomas Gushul's letterhead]

³⁰ This term refers to the six-crown Austrian currency, here – money, small coins.

³¹ Passport.

³² Петро Кравчук (Peter Krawchuk) was a Ukrainian Canadian journalist and writer, editor in chief of *Український робітничий вісник*, correspondent of *Українське життя*, member of the Communist Party of Canada.

Дорогі Друзі!

Знагоди 50 річчя Української прогресивної преси в Канаді, я і моя дружина жертвуємо \$10 на ювілейній фонд «Українського Життя»³³, як також залучаємо \$4.50 на відновлення передплати.

50 років минуло в місяць Листопаді, як почала виходити перша Українська пролетарська газета «Червоний Прапор»³⁴.

Я і моя дружина дуже радіємо і відчуваємось гордими, що ще довелось нам дожити до цього часу, і бути свідками цього історичного золотого ювілею Української народної преси в Канаді.

Пригадую собі як в 1907 році при кінці Жовтня закінчилась робота на залізній дорозі в західній Канаді, так я приїхав до Вінніпеґу. Тут я замешкав кілька тижнів з гарними і поступовими людьми, які називались Колісники.

В Листопаді почала виходити перша Українська Пролетарська Газета під назвою – «Червоний Прапор». Нам вдалось купити дві числі цього першого видання. Газета була дуже цікавою, яку я по перечитанню заховав до куферка і забрав її з собою на фарми, а ця місцевість була прямо українська колонія, около 96 процент українського населення і майже всі вони були

2

не грамотні. Пошта і залізнична станція цієї місцевості мали назву Шевченко, але по кількох роках змінили з Шевченка на Вайту (Vita).

В короткім часі, коли я вже був ознакочмений з цими людьми, тоді я їм почав читати «Червоний Прапор», всі були дуже захоплені моїм читанням і просили, щоби ще дістати цієї газети і читати їм. Я написав до цієї редакції і вислав їм одного долара, за що отримав кілька чисел одно за другим. Отже після цього, «Червоний Прапор» перестав виходити з браку фондів.

Тут я перебув зимові місяці аж до 1^{го} Травня, але не промарнував свій час даремно. Фармери скликали збори і на цім зібранні ухвалили і постановили, щоб мене наняти для научення їхній дітей по Українськи читати і писати як також звичайних рахунків.

При цій нагоді висловлюємо нашу високу пошану і подяку журналістови П. Кравчукови, який так яскраво описав цілу історію, яка

³³ *Українське життя* (Ukrainian Life) was a pro-Soviet Ukrainian weekly published in Toronto in 1941-65.

³⁴ *Червоний прапор* (Ukrainian Flag) was a social-democratic Ukrainian newspaper published in 1907-08 in Winnipeg.

друковалась на сторінках «Українського Життя» і «Українського Слова»³⁵ – починаючи від «Червоного Прапора» 1907 року.

При закінченню нашим бажанням єсть заявити, нашим усім друзям – будівничим Української прогресивної Преси, що ми як до тепер, і так від тепер, прирікаємо даліше

З

не похитно триматись того самого шляху. Ми духом з Вами!

Хай розвивається Українська народна преса!

Хай живе мир у світі і дружба між народами!

Хай згине і закаменіє проклята американська холодна війна!

Остаємось з дружним привітом.
Тимофій і Єлена Ґушул

Section 3. Two Letters from Thomas Gushul to His Wife Lena

The success of the Gushul Studio depended on a number of factors: the quality and affordability of photographs, the purchasing power of the population living nearby, but also on Thomas's ability to build networks of patrons. And it seems that Thomas Gushul was really good at that. Being an immigrant himself, he was able to connect easily to immigrant communities, and his knowledge of Ukrainian gave him access to a number of Slavic diasporas: not only to Ukrainians, but also to Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks. With Russian-speaking Doukhobors, who lived in communities shielded from the outside world, communication in a familiar language was only part of the task; it was much more important to build trust and mutual respect. Thomas did an excellent job to become a trusted photographer and an accepted outsider for Doukhobors living in southern Alberta and the western part of British Columbia.

One of the biggest commissions in Thomas Gushul's career resulted from the events that took place in the fall of 1924. On 29 October 1924, Peter (Lordly) Verigin, the leader of the Doukhobor community was killed in a train explosion. Already on the same day, *The Calgary Daily Herald* reported: "Gas Tank Explosion Kills Six on Passenger Train; Doukhobor Chief a Victim." On 2 November, Thomas was already in Brilliant, British Columbia photographing Peter Verigin's funerals. Although train schedules were very convenient for

³⁵ *Українське слово* (Ukrainian Word) was a Ukrainian pro-Soviet weekly published in Winnipeg in 1943-65. In 1965 it merged with *Українське життя* and became *Життя і слово* (Life and Word).

travelling from Coleman to Brilliant, it was still a long way: Thomas probably boarded the train on 1 November at 9:15 a.m. and arrived in Brilliant at 8:30 p.m, the same day crossing a time zone and ready to photograph the next morning. It was not enough, however, to take photographs. Thomas still had to find a buyer for them. In 1924-25 the Gushuls were in a very difficult financial situation, paying bank credit and literally counting every cent. So, was this trip a good business decision?



Fig. 11. Gushul Studio, *Crowd by Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood*, Brilliant, British Columbia, 1924, Crowsnest Museum, CM-GUSH-BC-11-07.

Things started to unfold only next summer. Evan Gushul, son of Thomas and Lena, remembered: “At one point in 1923 [sic], when Peter Varagin [sic] was killed in that bomb explosion in Vermillion BC, my father would see to get the contract, actually he was commissioned by them to do this work for them, to make up these memorial pictures....They were done up nice and he had, oh god knows how many different arrangements of these pictures, you know. Different combinations....They put out a call for different photographers to submit their samples of work of this memorial. There were four other people



Fig. 12. Gushul Studio, *Composite with Doukhobor Leaders*, 1925, Crowsnest Museum, unprocessed. Peter Vasilevich (the Lordly) Verigin is placed on the left; above is placed his predecessor Lukeria Vasilievna Kalmykova; on the right – his son and successor Peter Petrovich (Chistyakov) Verigin. In the middle, another photograph of Peter the Lordly Verigin is placed as a part of an emblem with ears of wheat, fruits and vegetables, representing the Doukhobors' prosperity.

from Vancouver, I think, that submitted stuff, and he submitted his stuff the way he thought it should be, and – they specified what they wanted in their memorial pictures and they liked his idea the best. But then he [sic] says ‘most importantly, you can speak the language.’ Which he did....”³⁶ In the summer of 1925, Thomas undertook another trip to British Columbia. There he walked from one Doukhobor village to another, showing sample photographs and collecting orders and money, while Lena was working back home to fill the

³⁶ Evan Gushul, interview by Tom Kirkum, 22 July 1981, Glenbow archives, rct-356.



Fig. 13. Gushul Studio, *Composite with Doukhobor Leaders*, 1925, Crowsnest Museum, unprocessed. In the centre, Peter Petrovich (Chistyakov) Verigin is placed. Above him his predecessors are placed: on the left Lukeria Vasilievna Kalmykova and on the right Peter Vasilevich (the Lordly) Verigin. Under Peter (the Lordly) Verigin is his mother A. Verigina, the photograph placed under Lukeria Kalmykova is not identified and requires additional research.

orders. From this period, a series of letters written by Thomas to Lena and dating from June to September are preserved in the Crowsnest Museum. Two letters from this group are included in this publication.

3a

[envelope]

Return to:
Thos. Gushul

Brilliant, B.C.

Mrs. Thos. Gushul,
Blairmore,

Alta.

[letter]

Brilliant B.C.
Лугове³⁷ 8^{го} [липня] среда
1925

Дорога мила солодка і щаслива!
Тільки кілька веселих лінійок до тебе.



Fig. 14. Gushul Studio, *Monument to Peter (the Lordly) Verigin*, Brilliant, British Columbia, 1925, Crowsnest Museum, CM-GUSH-BC-11-24.

³⁷ Lugovoe (Pass Creek, BC).



Fig. 15. Gushul Studio, *Young Doukhobor Lady Reading Letters*, Brilliant, British Columbia, c. 1924, Crowsnest Museum, 00011 GUSH-NEG. The young lady in the photograph is Anastasia Holuboff, Peter (the Lordly) Verigin's female companion.

До Гренд Форкс я поїду з готовими фотографіями треба зробити їх так: 150 D. з № 39, а 150 D. з № 40 (see Fig. 12-13). Я думаю що 300 штук то ще і за мало буде для Гренд Форкс але як забракне то я заберу закази. Я начав вчора ходити по селах і вже зібрав поверх сотки заказів. Всі беруть одну дві і є вигляд що яких п'ятнайцять сот заказів збереться. Єслиб я вже мав яких 5 сот (250 з 39 а 250 з 40) тоби міг сей час попродати по

2

далеких глухих закутинах. Всі домагають ся сей час фотографій. Треба як найскорше їх прінтувати а то «молодий» от от має приїхати³⁸ і всьо пропаде. Роби як день так ніч, прінтууй а прінтууй. До Кальгар як я тобі писав що я післав по 200 фолдерс D два гроси³⁹ паперу. Отже тепер я ще посилаю по 200 фолдерс D і по кільканайцять S, а по папір не посилаю бо маєш там 4 гроси а як буде впадати то замовляй прямо телеґрафічно. Я би хотів вже з 500 фотографій мати а то шось

3

може перешкодити наші роботі. Для Дмитра⁴⁰ замовляй сама фолдерс і папір. Се що я замовляю то єсть для В.С. З пам'ятника також треба зробити з найліпших позицій з 100 а то я би вже продавав (see Fig. 14). До Гренд Форк як буду їхати то треба з собою взяти яких 100. Я посилаю по 100 5x7 мавнтів до Калгар для пам'ятника. Я маю тепер коло себе \$54⁵⁵ і завтра пішлю тобі \$50 долярів абесь мала на С.О.Д. Я тепер єсть 7 миль від Бріліянт на Луговим (Pass Creek). Тут так як в раю. Ну я тільки посуваюсь з села в село. Попрацюй щиро так як я тобі пишу і за пару тижднів

4

будемо щасливі і вільні від усіх довгів і зажиємо веселим щасливим житєм. Вигляди на наше щастя дуже добрі. Тільки треба поспішати поки ще «той» не приїхав. На пам'ятник випробуй папері і замов по гросови. Тільки я не знаю як зробити що пам'ятник не зареґстрований і нема часу чекати. Треба буде на кожній фотографії писати чорнилом COPYRIGHT APPLIED

³⁸ "The young one" is Peter Petrovich (Chistiakov) Verigin, Peter Vasilevich (Lordly) Verigin's son, who arrived in Canada from the USSR in 1927 to become the Doukhobors' new leader.

³⁹ A gross, a group of 144 items, a dozen dozen.

⁴⁰ Dmytro Macko was Thomas's maternal cousin, he lived in Canada at least from 1917 and died in 1937 or 1938.

FOR 1925. З № 41 не прінтуї без ордеру. Настасії⁴¹ (see Fig. 15) тут нема, она десь [в] альберті. Там нікому не хвали ся як нам йде. Кажі що ще не знаєш. Твій залуплений⁴²

Т. І.

5

Бабі шепни у лїве ухо що наше щастя усміхаєсь. Як тобі потрібно їхати де коли до Колмен то їдь тексою і не трать часу. Для № 39 можеш зужити тії мавнті S, що маємо від давна, на чорта їх дальше тримати. Уважай там тримай добрий рахунок. Дмитрів рахунок тримай окремо а мій також окремо. За билдами і ресітами за С.О.Д. і експрес треба домагати ся кождий раз від express агента. Черешні і огірки вже тут єсть тільки сарака я не маю часу з ними заходити ся. Купи там дітям 1 баскет і скажи що я прислав.

[6]

Довжників попроси най зачекають ще пару тижднів а то їм заплатить ся всьо з гори.

Моя стала адреса:
Thos. Gushul
BRILLIANT, В.С.

Бай-бай
X X X X X X X X X⁴³
Бабі на пиво⁴⁴ даю \$1⁰⁰ екстра

3b

[envelope]

Mrs. Thos. Gushul,
Blairmore,
Alta.

⁴¹ Anastasia Holuboff (1885-1965), Peter (Lordly) Verigin's female companion. Anastasia was hoping to replace Peter Verigin as the Doukhobor leader. After Verigin's son was chosen as his successor, she bought land in Alberta and moved there with her supporters in 1926. John W. Friesen, "Pacificism and Anastasia's Doukhobor Village," *Alberta History* 41, no.1 (Winter 1993): 14-19.

⁴² Гоноровий.

⁴³ "Chain of kisses," a common epistolary convention of the time.

⁴⁴ Probably from Polish *napiwek* – tips.



Fig. 16. Gushul Studio, *Thomas and Lena with Family*, Alberta, c. 1920, Crowsnest Museum, 6562 Gush. Glass neg.

[letter]

Середа рано
В.С.

Brilliant,

Sept. 29th 1925.

Дорога жіночко!

Твоє письмо отримав вчора увечер на котре тобі відписую що я здоровий і веселий. Посилаю тобі в сім письмі почтовий переказ на суму 50 доларів що робить разом **одна тисяча доларів (\$1000⁰⁰)**. Нині я сьвяткую до полудня зробилось значить понинішній день я зібрав тут \$1000⁰⁰ доларів. Кілько ще

а то утратив трина котрий йшов рано до Тагум.⁴⁵ Так як я думав то і так вдасть ся зібрати не можу знати бо багато ходу а мало користи та все-ж я такі не дарую. Тут нині холодно і дощик мирчить а по горах сніжок

[2]

білії ся. Нині мушу купити черевики а то в сих дурних робурах можна застудитись. Тут тепер також вже показує на осінь. Терентикови можеш зробити пост-карти. Його ордер нам заплатив ся. Ну я не знаю як Дмитрови піjde, а то вже зима. А тепер прошу моя дорога і вірна жіночко о одну річ: (тільки не смій ся). Купи собі там файний петі-ковт бо я знаю що ти ще носиш той грубий і дуже не файний а то я як приїду то я тебе хочу бачити у файнім петі-ковті. Я думаю що ти заробила на цей кавалок. Ти знаєш що як спідне тіло гарненько прикрити то і Гаврило буде чіпурити ся як скажений.

[3]

[In the upper right corner written upside down]

Бабі шепни у ухо що вже дійшов до тисячі.

Іванови і Надії⁴⁶ відписую також нині. Іванів лист дуже мені милий і зворушаючий. Він дуже добре пише а то коротко і зрозуміло. Надія також бересь не зле а першого листа від неї я не міг розібрати а сей другий то вже був багато ліпше на писаний я міг прочитати і розумів чого она хоче. А Іван як пише та все тато знає тато знає. Ну се нічого що він так призвичаїв ся але диктованя його дуже ясне і коротке. Наш Івась хароший молодчина. Тішу ся ним

[4]

з цілою душею. Шкода що я ще не отримав № 36 (see Fig. 17). Заким прийде тут то я вже буду на закінченю свого діла. Тут будуть поминки на 29th October на другий місяць то думаю що можна буде ще багато продати фотографій. Побачим пізнійше як маєсь зробити.

Твій щиро-вірний муж-Тимофій.

Всякого сушеного фруту маю около 160 фунтів і привезу може ще чистого меду і варенія. Фрут я дістав за фотографоване і фотографії з памятника. Міняв.

⁴⁵ Taghum, BC.

⁴⁶ Two older children of the Gushuls; Nadia was born in 1915, Evan in 1916.

[envelope, back]

Чи ти вислала мені оверковт? Єсли ні то присилай скоро.

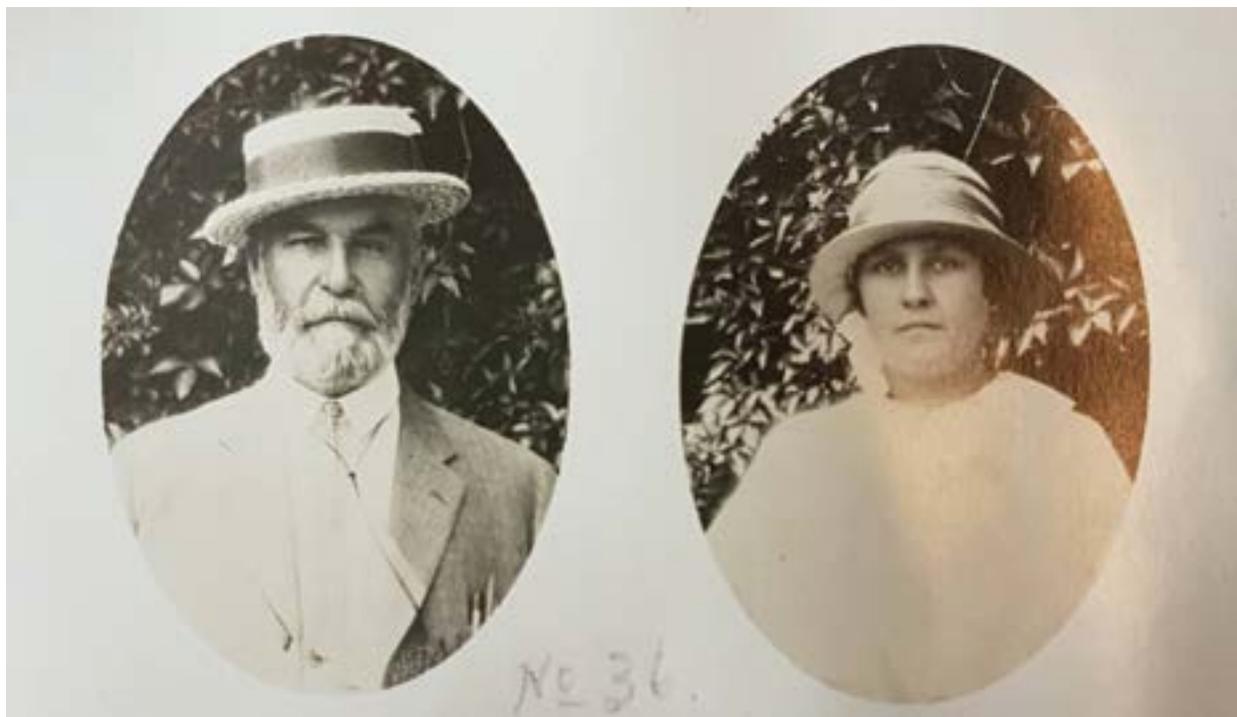


Fig. 17. Gushul Studio, *Peter (the Lordly) Verigin* and *Anastasia Holuboff*, Crowsnest Museum, unprocessed.

Section 4. Two Letters to the Gushuls from the Old Country

Letters included in this section represent Thomas and Lena Gushul's connections to the Old Country. The first one illustrates the role photography played in maintaining connections between the Old Country and Canada. Back in the Old Country, receiving any letter, but especially a letter with photographs included, was certainly an important event for the whole neighborhood. This letter also gives a rare example of a verbal description of photographic images. The second letter shows Thomas's interests in the "big politics" that he shared with Lena's brother Wasyl. It also demonstrates how wide and deep Wasyl's worldview was, and how clear it was for him (and probably for many of his fellow villagers) that very challenging times were coming.

Thomas and Lena corresponded with relatives in Rozhniv from both sides of the family. In their letters, they usually included a few dollars as well as family photographs. The following list gives a general overview of relatives from Rozhniv with whom the Gushuls maintained more or less regular connections.

There are only two letters from Anna and Makij Huculak found in the Crowsnest Museum collection, both written in 1924. Anna was Lena's cousin on her mother's side (in one of the letters Lena's mother is mentioned as "our aunt"). Anna's letter is one of a few in the Gushuls' collection written by a woman, and probably the most traditional one. It is composed in a "peasant" or "bowing letter" manner.⁴⁷ On 7 May 1924, Anna wrote: "Christ is Risen! My dear sister and you, dear brother-in-law. I am bowing to you, my sister and you, dear brother-in-law and letting you know that we are healthy, but we are wishing even better health to you, my dear sister and you, dear brother-in-law. We received your letter on the 3rd of May which brought your charity to us, so we are sincerely thanking you, dear sister and you, dear brother-in-law, and I am kissing your feet and hands, dear sister and yours, dear brother-in-law for your good hearts, for you are so kind to us."

Fedor Macko was Thomas's cousin on his mother's side. Some of Fedor's letters are also signed by his wife Vasuta. There are at least eleven letters from this family to the Gushuls, written between 1924 and 1962, in the Crowsnest Museum collection. Fedor focuses his letters mostly on everyday life in Rozhniv. In 1928, he wrote, for instance: "They started building a reading room here in Rozhniv, at the People's House. And Khaniuk organized the 'Radio.' We can now hear beautiful songs, musical concerts, speeches from Warsaw, Poznań, Berlin – we hear everything. The Poles here invented such a thing that if you want to sell a chicken you need a passport....But someone reported it to the Parliament, and an ambassador came, and called a general meeting, and he explained to the people what was allowed and what was not allowed; and as far as the chickens' passports are concerned, he was scolding the village elder so much as if he were a simple man" (Fedor Macko, 7 October 1928).

Tymofiy Mychniuk was also Thomas's cousin on his mother's side (he called Thomas's mother "our dear aunt"). There are only two letters from this family found in the Crowsnest Museum collection, written in 1924 and 1928, both of them are also signed by Tymofiy's wife Paraska. When Thomas's mother immigrated to Canada, she appointed Tymofiy as the custodian of the family land left behind. From one of Tymofiy's letters we know that Thomas was producing some special photographs for relatives from Rozhniv using images he received from them, probably creating composites uniting family members in one image⁴⁸ or maybe creating colored photographs. Tymofiy Mychniuk wrote in 1928: "I am sending you a photograph of uncle Hrytsko Macko and aunty, his wife. Their health is poor, and they are sending you their regards

⁴⁷ William Isaac Thomas and Florjan Znanięcki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1958), vol. 1:304; Jelena Pogosjan, "Post Office and Letter Writing in Ukrainian Canadian Community," *Love Letters from the Past: Courtship, Companionship, and Family in the Ukrainian Canadian Community* (Edmonton: Kule Folklore Centre, 2019), 13-17.

⁴⁸ Pogosjan, "Post Office and Letter Writing," 17-19.

and they would like you to respond to their request that I am writing about here....Uncle and his wife would like you, brother, to redo this photograph your way and send it back here” (Tymofiy Mychniuk, 28 June 1928). One of his letters is included in this publication (4a).

Lena’s brother Wasyl Sawieck was the most consistent correspondent of the Gushuls, one of his early letters was written in 1923 when he was twenty-one years old. In this letter, he asked for Thomas’s advice as he was deciding between immigrating to Canada or getting married. Over the years he grew closer to Thomas, sharing his interests and views. There are at least twenty-five letters in the Crowsnest Museum collection written by Wasyl between 1923 and 1939. One of his later letters is included in this publication (4b).

4a

[envelope]

Thos Gushul
Coleman Alta
P.O. Box 209
Canada

[envelope back]

Tymofiy Mychniuk
Rożnów
Powiat Sniatyn
[Wsch]odnia Galicija
Polonia
21. II. 1924

Дорогий брате і вся родино
Доносимо вам відомосыц же ми від вас лист отримали за котрий вам щиренько дякуємо щом си довідали овашім милім здоровлю та поведженю. Ми одержали влискі⁴⁹ від вас 5 пять образків фотографій ваших дітей і засе вам щиренко дякуємо бо се нам цікаве бачити і радо ми на се приглядаємо ся і то не лише ми самі але еще і сусіди до нас приході щоби оглянути сі образки та почути дещо з цікавого з ваших лисків з далеких заморских країн.

Дорогий брате пишу тобі правду що як прийшов мені почтовий ресіпіс за листом на почту то вже всі мої сусіди знали а як ем пішов по лист то вже громадка дівчат і хлопці та і старих цікали мого повороту з почти, но як я прийшов то всі цікаво призирали на сі образки та попитували мене

⁴⁹ В листі.

хто на кожній картці є зфотографований а я їм всьо витлумачував, аж всіх цікавила найдуше ся картка що було знято на ній двох ваших дітей що несуть индика [н]а дручку (see Fig. 18).

[2]

а друга ся картка що єсть наній маленька Полагна зфотографована се прекрасне дитя всім було приємне на сім образку зі своєєв поставою перед фотографованем як то оно тихенко сидит собі і очками мило світит мов зіроньки на небі і ротик отворило се всім було приємене і потілька разів оглядали сеї картки, всі завидуют вашему поводженю в Канаді. Тепер напишу вам дєшо про наше лихолітя в нашім Краю. Ми всі тут здорови зза Божої волі, а поводження наше як звикле нічо не поліпшуєся всьо дорожіє чимраз гірше зарібку нема ніякого жиди правї передвоєнні довги за 10 ринських Австрійских хотять 1дну килу пшениці або кокорузів на польські марки ні з ким не <нерозб.> а хоц на марке то тоту ціну шо коштує кила сєго хліба таби значило за 10 сят банок 40 мільонив марок польских, то здає ся знов жиди озмут ся до хлопского поля бо єще єсть багато людей з довгами передвоєнними, тепер знов унас податки велики наложені, чираз гірша біда на людей

[3]

спадає так що годі видержати. Нового внас нічого не чути зима дуже тяжка сєго року ось вже 20цятий марот, а снігу на городах лежит по півметер і водно снігу долипає і морозами тисьне, минулого місяця лютого була в нас затміня місяця. Місяц зійшов разом з вечером і нараз перестав світити і зробилося темно неначе би не було місяця на небі тогди я став призерати добре то тилько було видно доокола місяця тоненький обручик аж за 20 мінут зачав місяц світити але тилько якою пятою частию своєю і так чираз поширював свою світлісьть і за півгодини вже цілий світив як має бути, де котрі люди кажуть що то щось великого мало бути з того але вни сами не знають що; в нашій Парафії вмер несподівано Гнат Сахро в неділю рано встав дужий вбувся і худобу на дворі обійшов і так в вїйшов до хати і ляг на постіль і вмер в той час, нагла смерть всім дивна. Тепер дорогой брате буду просити вас всіх що би ви мені докладно написали чи міг

[4]

би я тепер дістатися в Канаду я маю дуже велику охоту розпрощатися з сими сторонами і пуститися дєсь шукати ліпшої долі собі бо тут чимраз сумніщі відоки⁵⁰ та гірші часи спадают на робощий люд отожд для того

⁵⁰ Відок – from Polish *widok*, here – prospect.

мавбим охоту звідси видертись коби міг та знав. Коби щось троха ліпше собі здобув. Правда що годі тепер звідси видертись бо се иньший час, як колись було перед війною, но а може биси вдало і тепер тобим хтів запробувати. От і кінчу своє писаня та Поздоровляю Сердечно вас всіх разом незліченими разами і zarazом зичу вам всім Щастя і Здоровля і доброго поведження много літ прожити.
Ваша навсе незабутна родина
Тимофій і жена моя Параска
Просимо відписати як ваша воля



Fig. 18. Gushul Studio, *Two Children, Evan and Nadia Gushul, with Christmas Goose on a Pole*, Crowsnest Pass, Alberta, ca. 1925, Glenbow Archives, NC-54-3744. The photograph that was mailed to the Mychnuks was probably from the same series but with greetings written in Ukrainian.

4b

[envelope]

Mr. Thomas Gushul
P.O. Box 54
Blairmore – Alberta
Canada

[envelope back]

Wasył Sawiek
Rożnów k. Zabłotowa
Poland

[letter]

Рожнів, дня 20.I.1939
Дорогий зять й сестричко!

Вашого цінного листа отримав вчора і зараз відписую. Ви навіть і вявити собі не можете, як мене втішив ваш лист. Я вже віддавно очікував нетерпеливо звістки з далекого заморського світа! Дякую сердечно за картини з ваших улюблених місцевостей, а щодо вашого листа, то він має для нас більше вартости, ніж ціла копа наших львівських газет з білими цензурними плямами....Та про цю «високу політику» зараз поговоримо окремо, а тут найперше повідомляю Вас, що ми перебули свята мирно, весело, але

2

булоб ще веселіше, якби так з нами були Ви, дорогі, рідні приятелі. Тоді ми малиб нагоду виповісти всі наші мрії, бажання, терпіння, надії, – всі думи, що цілими роками збиралися в серці. Тоді Ви, дорогий зятю, пояснилиб нам неодну загадку, над якою ми тут задармо ломимо голову. Бо в нас тепер, як сказав Шевченко, «ні дурень, ні мудрий нічого не знає....» Зате з Вами інша справа: в вас широкий світ і вільний, тай ваш досвід життя більший від нашого.

Нетерпеливо жду обіцяних фотографій з Мацкового похорону і вже наперед дякую. Дивно мені, що Ви згадуєте про те, чи я отримав ваші картини,

3

мені здається, що я Вас повідомляв про їх одержання. Також про Мацка, я, здається, писав Вам, що я питався в него, чи він писав до Вас? – і він оправдувався, що не міг писати до Вас через вічні клопоти, слабкість у родині і т.д. Одначе тоді він рішучо пообіцяв написати до Вас. А може Ви той лист, у якому це я писав, не отримали, бо я вислав nereкомендований.

Зима в нас дуже дивна. Зразу в грудні були шалені морози до 5 січня, потім зачало тепліти, так, що Різдво 7 січня було тепле, а тепер від 15 січня прийшла якась гейби

4

«зимова весна», вітер віє теплий, мов серед літа, сніг стопився майже зовсім, так, що навіть нема як вивезти гною на ваш город, бо нема дороги. Але така «зимова весна» може не довго буде, бо це навіть нездорово. І як знова впаде сніг, тоді вивезу гною.

Братови Дмитрови вашого листа прочитаємо, а він повинен постаратись викупити бажану клішу й вислати Вам. Зрештою, це вже його справа.

Тут повідомляю, що в Тимофія на Новій Рік дня 14 січня померла 12-літна донечка. - А щодо адреси тітки Василяни, то не памятаю,

5

щоб вона до когось тут писала, тому й неможливо роздобути її адреси. - Тепер кілька слів про «високу політику».

Щодо «Гітлерової гарячки», то ми як приклонники щирої демократії не можемо симпатизувати з його політично-диктаторською системою, антисемітизмом і мілітаризмом, але теж не маємо жадної прихильности до тих «великих риб», яких він мав би охоту проковтнути... Особливо, щодо большевицького медведя Сталіна, то ми навіть раді були б якби Гітлер з ним «стукнувся»... Най жере собака собаку, аж поки оба не здохнуть. - Ми в минулій війні майже всьо

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втратили, отже в новій війні можемо тільки зискати, коли, розуміється, наш народ тепер буде мудріший, ніж колись... Про Гітлерові обіцянки «автономії» тільки наївні думають поважно, а ми вже знаємо, як німецька армія обдирала українські селянські маси підчас минулої війни; а що не обдерли німці, те постарались до решти здерти більшовицькі чекісти, – і це свідчить, що ми не сміємо надіятись помочі ані від Гітлера, ані від Сталіна чи іншого Троцьківського чорта. Але беручи річ об'єктивно, з перспективи найблищих можливостей, то ми ніяк не віримо в те, що, наприклад, «Карпатська

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Україна»⁵¹ - це чисто «Гітлерівська інтрига». Воно розуміється само собою, що Гітлер на «Карпато-Українському вогні» пече свою «печеню», але поза тим і народ укладає свою працю, терпіння й сльози в будову рідної держави – і прийде час, коли чужі інтереси не будуть рішати про нашу долю.

Дуже добре, що в ваших обставинах можна досягнути такі вірні інформації. Як виходить з вашого листа, то Гітлер справді завеликий має «апетит», може легко вдаватися, як це сталося вже з Вільгельмом і Гінденбургом.

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Будемо дуже вдячні, як Ви ще напишете на цю тему – і це буде тут найцінніший голос з нового світа. В нас подібних думок не можна висловлювати так сміло!

Здоровимо Вас усіх щиросердечно та остаємо з родинним привітом,
Василь Савек і Гафія
Андрій Красовський

⁵¹ Carpatho-Ukraine (Карпатська Україна) was an administratively and politically autonomous region within the Second Czechoslovak Republic. Wasyl Sawiek's hopes were not fulfilled. Even though Carpatho-Ukraine was proclaimed an independent republic on 15 March 1939 after the breakup of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, within days it was occupied by the Kingdom of Hungary.



Fig. 19. Gushul Studio, *Gushul Family Portrait with Grandma very early*,
c. 1925, Alberta,
Crowsnest Museum, 6076 Gush. Glass neg. The photograph includes Lena and
Thomas, Thomas's mother Polahna Gushul (1863-1942), and the Gushuls' four
children: Nadia (1915-1959)? Evan (1916-2014)? Paraska (1921-1998), and
Pollyanna (Palahna) (1923-2012). The photograph of little Palahna that was
mailed to the Mychnuks was probably from the same series.

Life's Lessons Taught on the Streets of Winnipeg: The Didactic Art of Jacob Maydanyk

Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn



1: “Vuiko Shtif u Vynnypegu” (Vuiko Shtif in Winnipeg) – Maydanyk (1930a, 21).

Introduction

“When the Ukrainian community in Canada plays a respectable role in today’s political and social life, it is by and large to the merit of Jacob Maydanyk, who from almost the very beginning of Ukrainian immigration to Canada, satirized the gross flaws in the early pioneers, teaching them to ‘become people among people.’” S.M.¹

When it comes to didactic art, Jacob Maydanyk could easily be considered one of the most prolific twentieth-century moralizers that lived on the Canadian prairies. His religious paintings graced the interiors of over thirty churches, and his cartoons and illustrations filled hundreds of pages in

¹ In the foreword to Maydanyk’s book, *Vuiko Sh. Tabachniuk i 20 inshi novi korotki opovidannia* [Uncle S. Tabachniuk and 20 Other New Short Stories] (1959), this quote is attributed to a post in “an American paper” by “S.M.” praising Yakiv [Jacob] Maydanyk, who came to Winnipeg and began to ridicule Shtif Tabachniuk, play cards, and teach young people how to live in a foreign land among strangers.

Canadian almanacs and newspapers; together they shared the teachings of the gospel along with lessons learned on the streets. Wearing the hats of both iconographer and cartoonist, Maydanyk created visual narratives that spoke to settlers of the first waves of Ukrainian immigration and, in an attempt to guide those people spiritually and socially, he found ways to apply his artistic talents to produce imagery that “would do something for our people...show them how they could be better...and how not to act now that they are in Canada” (Ewanchuk 00:25:50-00:31:12).

In this chapter I acknowledge the breadth of Maydanyk’s creative gifts, including his repertoire of religious art; however, the major focus is on the comics he created a century ago. They are unique, and in some respects ground-breaking, in the canon of Canadian comics.² Set on the streets of Winnipeg and surrounding towns, the comics were intended for an immigrant readership living on the prairies. They were meant to share lessons, guide the misguided, and inject humor into the lives of many who were suffering as they grieved the loss of community and who were challenged to conform to unfamiliar customs and new social standards.

Who Was Jacob Maydanyk?

Considering his popularity, background information about Jacob Maydanyk is sparsely documented. My introduction to Maydanyk was recently published in the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (Cheladyn, 2019a). I drew from published sources by Dimitrij Farkavec; historians Basil Rotoff, Roman Yereniuk, and Stella M. Hryniuk; folklorist Robert Klymasz; recorded interviews with Yaroslav Lozowchuk and Michael Ewanchuk; and the documentary *Laughter in My Soul* by film producer Halya Kuchmij.

Maydanyk was born on 20 October 1891, the third of ten children in a poor peasant family in the Galician village of Svydova, Chortkiv county, in what is now known as Western Ukraine. His parents, Matvii and Ksenia Maydanyk, worked for an Austrian landlord; they expected their son Jacob to follow suit, but there was virtually no more land available and very little reward for hard labor. In response to this situation, Jacob made other plans. He was determined to become an artist. Upon completion of primary school (c. 1905), Maydanyk attended gymnasium in the city of Kolomyia (Kuchmyi 00:04:27). Upon completion of gymnasium (c. 1909) Maydanyk was inspired to study at a textile design academy in Kraków (Lozowchuk 00:03:54-00:03:30). While living there he also apprenticed under an iconographer; but after one year of training, he ran out of money. He returned briefly to Svydova before deciding to travel to

² Maydanyk’s *Vuikova Knyha* was published in the format of a comic book, which is defined by Britannica.com as a “bound collection of comic strips, usually in chronological sequence, typically telling a single story or a series of different stories.” Dated 1930, it is currently debated whether or not it was the first comic book in any language to be printed in Canada.

Canada to get his share of the “quick riches” that could fund his dream to study art in Paris (Kuchmij 00:05:00-00:05:05; Pawlowsky 55; Rotoff 125-128).

In 1911, as a nineteen-year-old, single man, Maydanyk immigrated to Canada. Upon arrival in the city of Winnipeg, he had to learn a new language, find a job, and adapt to a new cultural environment. He first worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) on an “extra gang,”³ laying rails across the Canadian prairies; he also briefly worked on a farm. However, hard labor was not something that suited his nature and skills. In 1912 Maydanyk enrolled in the Ruthenian Training School (RTS) in Brandon, MB. The school’s purpose was to train and prepare young bilingual Ukrainian teachers to fill positions in the new schools being built in rural Canadian communities. Maydanyk graduated in 1914 and then taught for six years in several one-room schoolhouses in rural Manitoba.⁴ He also painted religious images for many of the early twentieth-century Ukrainian Catholic churches that were emerging on the Canadian prairies (Rotoff 125-28). In 1920, encouraged by his friend Bishop Nykyta Budka, Maydanyk moved permanently to Winnipeg and established the company Providence Church Goods, which provided a somewhat steady income; he operated it until 1979.

It was during his time at RTS in Brandon that Maydanyk forged close relationships with future Ukrainian language newspaper publishers and created his iconic character Vuiko Shtif Tabachniuk (Uncle Steve Tobacco), and later Nasha Meri (Our Mary). They became folk heroes and popular figures in Ukrainian language almanacs and newspapers across Canada. The majority of Maydanyk’s illustrations appeared as cartoons in seven self-published almanacs, a comic book, and the newspaper *Kanadiis’kyi Farmer* (Canadian Farmer) (1927-29). He also contributed illustrations to several other newspapers, journals of humor, and the memoirs of Michael Ewanchuk, and he partnered briefly with artist Dimitrij Farkavec to illustrate the lampoon magazine *Canadoon*.

The onset of World War I dashed Maydanyk’s dreams of studying art in Paris; he lost track of his childhood sweetheart; and he never returned to Ukraine. His one and only art exhibit was hosted by Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (Winnipeg) in 1977. Maydanyk married, had three children, and continued to paint and draw until his death on 3 June 1983. He is buried at the Elmwood Cemetery in Winnipeg.

A Man with a Mission

Although Jacob’s aspirations to become a recognized European artist went by the wayside, he nevertheless became very popular within the Ukrainian

³ An “extra gang” was a team of laborers hired on by the Canadian Pacific Railway to assist with laying the new tracks across the prairies. Extra gangs were often comprised of foreign immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia.

⁴ Maydanyk taught at St. John Kanty School and Olha School in Rosburn, Oakburn School in Shoal Lake, and in Gimli, MB.

diaspora. He was equally known for his religious paintings as for his cartoons and caricatures. Although he often focused more on one than the other at different times in his life, he appears to have been equally passionate about both genres, simultaneously creating icons and comics on demand. For over sixty years he produced an enviable portfolio of images that at first glance could make one question his mission, motives, artistic inclination, incentive, and the state of mind that led to such a diverse and eclectic collection of works.

As an artist myself, I have contemplated Maydanyk's prolific career and recognize that much of it was created in response to financial needs. He took every opportunity to use his artistic skills to support himself, and later his family. Documents in the Maydanyk and Providence Church Goods collections (Oseredok) include many "past due" notices for utilities and supplies that plagued him up until the late 1970s when he finally retired.⁵ They would explain in part his continued drive to produce.

When looking at the imagery, it is easy to determine that much of Maydanyk's visual inspiration came from his personal experiences as a Ukrainian immigrant. For his religious paintings he chose familiar imagery from his Ukrainian Catholic faith. Following church tradition, he produced specific icons with prescribed compositions intended for designated locations in a church. The dominant narratives in his comics came from immigrant experiences on the Canadian prairies from 1914 to 1930, and directly reflected the lifestyle from which he emigrated and the one into which he settled.

I have found, however, that the main motivation for Maydanyk's thematic choices for both icons and comics stems from another source. On several occasions he emphatically noted that his work was inspired by a drive to teach fellow Ukrainians how to be civil citizens in their new homeland. This primary goal was first acknowledged in 1959 in the foreword to the final Vuiko Shtif publication, *Vuiko Sh. Tabachniuk i 20 inshi novi korotki opovidannia* (Uncle S. Tabachniuk and 20 Other New Short Stories) (5). It states that throughout his career, the author's overall plan was to use satire and humor to expose all the misfortunes that inflicted shame on his people, and thus correct them with laughter.⁶ In later years, Maydanyk repeated this mission statement in interviews with Yaroslav Lozowchuk (00:19:52-00:20:40), Michael Ewanchuk (00:24:50-00:31:10), and Halya Kuchmij (00:06:44-00:07:00).- He hoped that his comics would help fellow immigrants deal with obstacles associated with

⁵ Shipping receipts found in the Maydanyk collection at Oseredok confirm that he distributed his comic book and almanacs of humor across Canada and as far away as Kyiv, Ukraine and Madrid, Spain. Personal correspondence confirms that his work was known among Ukrainian immigrants in Argentina and Brazil.

⁶ "The general plan of the author was to reveal, in the language of satirical images, all the bad things that have brought shame to our people and thus to correct them through laughter." (Maydanyk 1959, 5.)

resettlement in a new country and inspire them to bring pride to the Ukrainian community and become productive Canadian citizens.

Although his religious paintings and comics differed from each other in content and style, it is this didactic philosophy that appears to have bridged the duality in Maydanyk's approach to artistic expression and unified his portfolio. His strong commitment to teaching and guiding his contemporaries was echoed in both the text and visual content of his work. What follows are examples found in his icons and cartoons that reflect the didactic messages that he personally felt compelled to share.

Religious Artwork

The majority of early Ukrainian immigrants to Canada upheld the Christian faith, and churches adhering to the Byzantine rite were often the nucleus of their activities.⁷ A yearly schedule of calendar customs and religious celebrations dictated their lives; therefore, the church was often the first communal building erected in a new settlement. The first two waves of Ukrainian immigration to Canada (1891-1939) resulted in a boom in church construction on the prairies and, once a church was built, parishioners were motivated by tradition to complete the interiors as soon as possible. By the 1920s, Jacob Maydanyk's talents as an iconographer were in high demand. While documentation of his religious paintings and church decorations is limited, of note are the summaries authored by Anna Maria Kowcz-Baran. She acknowledges each artist that provided icons and painted the interiors of Ukrainian Catholic churches in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It appears that Maydanyk's earliest religious commissions coincide with his time at the Ruthenian Training School in Brandon and while he taught in rural Manitoba. Kowcz-Baran credits him with painting the church interior and icons for the original iconostasis in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic church in Garland, MB -- built in 1912 (124), and the first large icons for St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic church in Fisher Branch, MB (264) as well as the wall decorations for Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic church in West Selkirk (272), both built in 1918. In *Monuments to Faith* by Rotoff, Yereniuk, and Hryniuk, the iconography and interior artwork of St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church in Poplarfield, MB (built in 1913) is also credited to Maydanyk during the same period (57). Over the course of thirty-five years, he went on to contribute religious imagery to at least nineteen other churches in Manitoba, and several more in Saskatchewan.

The first nine years of Maydanyk's life in Canada were somewhat nomadic, at first gathering job experience from hard labor, then retraining and teaching in various schools in Manitoba. He also moved from one community to the next, painting his early church commissions. In approximately 1920, Jacob decided it was time to settle down. After marrying Katherine Vasylyka from

⁷ In 1914, 80 percent of the Ukrainian immigrants to Canada were Christian (Ukrainian Catholic) (Martynowych 182).

Oakburn, it took very little convincing from his friend Bishop Budka to move out of the rural setting and onto the streets of Winnipeg (Kuchmij 17:05-17:13). He first worked for a French religious goods store, and then established his own store – Providence Church Goods – originally located on McDermott Avenue and later Main Street adjacent to the CPR train tracks. It was a time when the demand for religious artwork and painted church interiors was more than Maydanyk could handle alone. To keep up with orders he took on several apprentices and wore the hat of agent and intermediary between Ukrainian congregations and artists. Among the artists were Leo Mol, Olga Moroz, and Theodore Baran, who eventually transitioned to represent themselves and became individually known for their work.

Icons associated with the Byzantine rite are an essential part of church architecture and figure significantly in the act of prayer. They adorn the iconostasis and walls of a church and are often displayed in homes of the devout. By definition, icons “serve as mediums of instruction for the uneducated faithful” (Britannica), and as such they play an important role in the lives of many Christians around the world. This aligned with Maydanyk’s vision of behavior modification through painted imagery; and, while the boom was on, the business of religious art provided financial stability.



2: Icons of the Mother of God and Jesus and Christ Pantocrator – St. Michael’s Ukrainian Catholic church, Olha, MB, painted for the iconostasis by Jacob Maydanyk in 1927. Photographed by Zenon Stepchuk.

Maydanyk's religious paintings are in a Western European representational style, copied from holy pictures to which he had access (Rotoff 128). They were most often painted on canvas,⁸ and delivered messages as directed by tradition and the Holy Scriptures. Maydanyk came from a village where national consciousness was already awake and stirring before he emigrated (Lozowchuk 00:06:00-00:15:40). In retrospect, we see that Maydanyk was compelled to incorporate a message of Ukrainian ethnicity into some of his religious imagery through subtle additions. For example, there is embroidery on the shirt of Jesus and blouse of Mother Mary found on the iconostasis in St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic church, Olha, MB (See Figure 2); and he added Ukrainian embroidery motifs to frame the traditional holy images on the walls of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic church, Dolyny, MB (Kowcz-Baran 191). These additions stating ethnic identity coincide with a growing national awareness that swelled within the Ukrainian community in the homeland and in the diaspora following World War I. It appears that as an iconographer Maydanyk chose to wear the hat of artist-pedagogue to not only show his fellow countrymen how to be "good in God's eyes"; he also subliminally promoted Ukrainian national awareness via his religious artwork.

The Comics World

Since the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the fifteenth century, up until the new millennium, print grew to be the dominant form of communication. Both text and images could stir the community into a state of national awareness and societal identity. The leadership role of the press in Ukraine emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The formation of reading clubs, including Prosvita and the Kachkovsky Society, reinforced the role of the press in improving social standards and raising global social awareness (Himka 59-104), subsequently influencing a mass migration to Canada, the United States, and South America.

Comics, as we know them now, were preceded in England with the eighteenth-century "readable images" of William Hogarth, followed in the 1820s by the grandfather of comics, the Swiss schoolmaster Rodolphe Töpffer (McCloud 149). Since that time there has been an evolutionary process of picture stories, caricatures, and humorous illustrations of pictorial narratives that moved towards the now familiar comic strip format of sequenced frames and dialogue bubbles on paper. As an established craft in Britain and Europe, the production of comics was introduced to North America with the waves of immigration in the late nineteenth century (Gravett 22-50). There are also many examples indicating that since the mid-1800s the press in Eastern

⁸ Due to the severe cold of Canadian winters, rather than painting directly onto the wooden church walls as was done in Ukraine, Maydanyk and others usually painted on canvas during winter months and later installed them during the warmer summer months.

Europe, including Western Ukraine in the Habsburg Monarchy, also incorporated illustrated cartoons (Sic Transit Pestilentia).

Ukrainian Canadian comics are part of a print tradition that emerged with the arrival of immigrants to North America at the turn of the twentieth century. It was natural to continue the strong tradition of the press to establish communication networks and disseminate information in a new country. The first publications followed formats and carried content that were common to periodicals published in Ukraine; therefore, editorial cartoons were often included in the earliest Ukrainian-language newspapers such as *Kanadiis'kyi farmer* – est. 1903, and *Ukrains'kyi holos* – est. 1910. Additionally, one- and two-panel comics commonly appeared in Ukrainian Canadian almanacs, of which over forty Canadian titles were published annually over a fifty-year span (Swyripa 1985). Jacob Maydanyk would have been exposed to the comics form while training in Kraków; in Canada he would have had access to East European comics, such as those in *Szczutek*,⁹ that were imported by the Ruthenian Bookstore in Winnipeg. Later, with the help of Winnipeg publisher Frank Dojacek, comics by Jacob Maydanyk, along with his popular comic strip heroes Vuiko (Uncle) Shtif Tabachniuk and Nasha Meri, became the most widely distributed turn-of-the-century comics found in the Ukrainian diaspora – with readership in Canada, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, and Spain.



3: Preliminary pen and ink sketch for an editorial cartoon for the *Brandon Daily Sun* by Jacob Maydanyk c. 1913. Oseredok, 79-1-143e.

⁹ *Szczutek* was a popular Polish publication that began distribution out of Lviv in 1919 (Kołodziejczak).

Maydanyk started cartooning within a few years of his arrival to Canada in 1911 and continued to pen his graphic narratives through to the late 1970s, peaking around 1935. His career as a cartoonist corresponds to the same era as several well-known Canadians including Harold MacGill (*The Hall Room Boys*) and Hal Foster (*Prince Valiant*) from Nova Scotia, as well as Winnipeg-based Benjamin “Ben” Batsford (*Unk and Billy*) and Charles Gustav Thorson (*Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd*) (Schuddeboom). While attending the RTS, Maydanyk began to explore the meanings of assimilation and integration within a Canadian context and first flexed his secular voice on the pages of the press. It began when the school principal, James Thomas Cressey, noticed Maydanyk’s artistic skills and encouraged him to submit caricatures of Clifford Sifton and Provincial Minister of Education G.R. Coldwell to the local Conservative-party-backed newspaper (Ewanchuk 1981, 204). This led to Maydanyk’s first published editorial cartoons for the English-language *Brandon Daily Sun* (see Figure 3). He later contributed a few pieces to the competition, *The Brandon Times*, but that was quickly curtailed when the principal threatened to expel him (Ewanchuk 1976, 00:14:20).¹⁰ Maydanyk complied – he did not want to lose his steady income. He was proud of the fees for his cartoons, which ranged between \$.50 and \$1.00 each and which he collected weekly while at RTS (00:15:00). It was a far cry more than the \$.05 per letter that his friends received weekly as scribes or readers (00:10:36). Cartooning made him popular and also positioned him financially in the favor of peers and community leaders who in many cases were editors of Ukrainian-Canadian publications and often turned to Maydanyk to visualize the social commentary on their pages.

Maydanyk’s first illustrations for the Ukrainian-language press were also inspired while attending the RTS. They appeared in the almanac *Iliustrovanyi Kaliendar Novyn* (Illustrated Calendar of News) from 1915 published in Edmonton; it featured the characters Vuiko Shtif Tabachniuk, his wife Yavdokha, their son Nicholas (Nick), and daughter Kateryna (Katie). The images illuminated a series of fictitious letters between Shtif and his wife appearing under the pretence of real correspondence between Canada and the homeland (Cheladyn 2019b). The submission is iconic in that it marks the first appearance of the character Vuiko Shtif. Maydanyk’s section in the 1915 almanac was extremely popular; however, he was not impressed with the fact that he was neither credited nor paid for contributing to that Ukrainian publication. As a result, he backed away from the Ukrainian community for a few years and supplemented his teacher’s pay by painting churches and submitting comics to the English-language press (Ewanchuk 00:31:12). In

¹⁰ Maydanyk was threatened with expulsion because, at that time, J.T. Cressey supported the Conservative party, which backed the *Brandon Daily Sun*. With an upcoming election Cressey did not want Maydanyk’s illustrations to appear in the Liberal-backed *Brandon Times* and risk attracting readership from the Ukrainian community (Ewanchuk 1976, 00:14:20).

1918, Dojacek offered to help Maydanyk print and distribute *Humorystychnyi kaliendar Vuika na rik 1918* (Uncle's Humorous Almanac for the Year 1918). It was a self-published work intended to become an annual serial almanac of humor. This almanac included Maydanyk's first sequenced illustrations,¹¹ with folksong lyrics as narrative. Subsequent issues were released in 1925, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931, and 1959. Maydanyk also wrote and edited the weekly comics insert for *Kanadiis'kyi farmer* from 1927 to 1929; and between 1914 and 1975 he contributed editorial cartoons, illustrations, and comic strips to thirty-nine issues of various periodicals (Farkavec 1983).

Building on the familiar, Jacob produced both one-frame editorial cartoons and multi-frame comic strips. Over a period of twelve years (1918 to 1930), his comics changed from silent, wordless sequential frames that illustrated lyrics from folksongs (reminiscent of nineteenth-century picture stories) to the comic strip format that incorporated dialogue and thought bubbles, which was "the most natural way to attribute the gift of speech to a drawing in a sequential narrative" (Smolderen 137). Maydanyk's body of work is an example of the evolution of comics styling in North America during that period, which in itself makes his work notable.

The Message in the Media

Immigration presented many challenges for new Canadians. For early twentieth-century Ukrainian immigrants, the interjection of humor and satire into daily life was a productive way of dealing with the trials and tribulations of resettlement. The most popular sources of comedic escapism were the yearly almanacs of humor, and comics. They reflected a familiarity and provided levity, thus helping new settlers deal with the many anxieties associated with integration into the community. In addition to offering a distraction from everyday concerns, comics, particularly those created by Jacob Maydanyk, were also didactic; they recorded the folklore of the time and served as fables, or moral compasses that guided settlers through the social customs of their new environment (Klymasz 1988, 182-83).

Like many author-artists, Maydanyk took events and identities from the real world and transformed them into comic-strip story worlds (Aldama, 2). He catered primarily to a male audience by penning Vuiko Shtif narratives that illustrated the activities of the male-dominant community into which he settled.¹² Many of the tales echoed experiences from the perspective of a young man travelling solo to a foreign country. Scenarios included working, political meetings/rallies, interacting with authority figures, wooing young women, and partying with male friends. Maydanyk often personified his characters based on people he knew personally or on public figures (Maydanyk 1930a, 80-81);

¹¹ Comics are defined as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" (McLoud 9).

¹² In the early 1900s, men outnumbered women on average 2:1 (Swyripa 1993, 21).

on occasion he relied on stereotypical physical features to define cultural identity, such as slanted eyes for characters of Asian descent (Maydanyk 1930a, 4-5). Clothing defined social status -- for example, upper-class characters often wore monocles, top hats, and waistcoats (34), and laborers were dressed in coveralls (24). In contrast to his icons, Maydanyk rarely incorporated Ukrainian cultural imagery into the frames of his comics. He consciously chose to depict cultural neutrality, reflecting the process of assimilation that was occurring in the community at that time (Ewanchuk 1976 00:52:11-00:53:04).

Maydanyk liked to poke fun at the immigrant's dream of freedom and riches in Canada. In his earliest works many of the Vuiko Shtif stories juxtaposed the lifestyle from which Maydanyk emigrated with the one into which he settled. For example, in the 1915 *Iliustrovanyi Kaliendar Novyn* the Tabachniuk letters refer to the hegemony that existed in Canada and how it was much like that which had been left behind in a Polish-dominated homeland, relating how democracy in Canada could be influenced by a \$5 bribe much like back at home (20). Also, the old oral tradition of singing to communicate stories is directly evident in the 1918 almanac (24, 42, 55). Here he helped the readers transition to the new world by using lyrics to folksongs to accompany sequential images, thus capitalizing on the sense of belonging which came from singing together.¹³

Narratives inspired by the new country featured challenges related to immigration, including isolation (Maydanyk 1918, 55), integration (1925, 77-79; 1930a, 3), communication (1914, 20-22; 1928, 92), homeland oppression (*Brandon Sun* 1913), domestic disputes (1930a, 16-20), acculturation (72-72), courtship (9), and education (64-65). I also found that many of the Tabachniuk narratives were reflexive. In interviews with Kuchmij and Ewanchuk, Maydanyk noted that he often turned to personal experiences for his story lines, including: teaching (1930a, 64-65), working on an extra gang (5), local politics (40-41), and religion (85-88).

As noted earlier, Maydanyk's comics were intentionally didactic. Consumed by his mission to guide newcomers, he wove specific themes into his cartoon stories including: alcohol abuse, domestic friction, and election manipulation, among other misdemeanors. Of them all, the most common theme was overindulgence in alcoholic spirits. Maydanyk included no fewer than three alcohol-related stories per publication -- beginning with "Shtif Muliarem" -- his very first sequenced illustrations in his first almanac (Maydanyk 1918, 24-29) (see Figure 4). In the example we see a series of five frames; they were accompanied by lyrics to a kolomyika -- a popular type of song that often critiqued current events and referenced specific people in the

¹³ Due in part to physical displacement across the Canadian prairies, the opportunity to sing together greatly diminished upon immigration to Canada. The illustration of a folksong could vicariously evoke feelings of belonging and self-worth (Angus 1988, 276).

Штiф Мyлiарем [Shtif the Bricklayer]



4: “Shtif Muliarem” (Shtif the Bricklayer) – Maydanyk (1918, 24-29). Abridged.

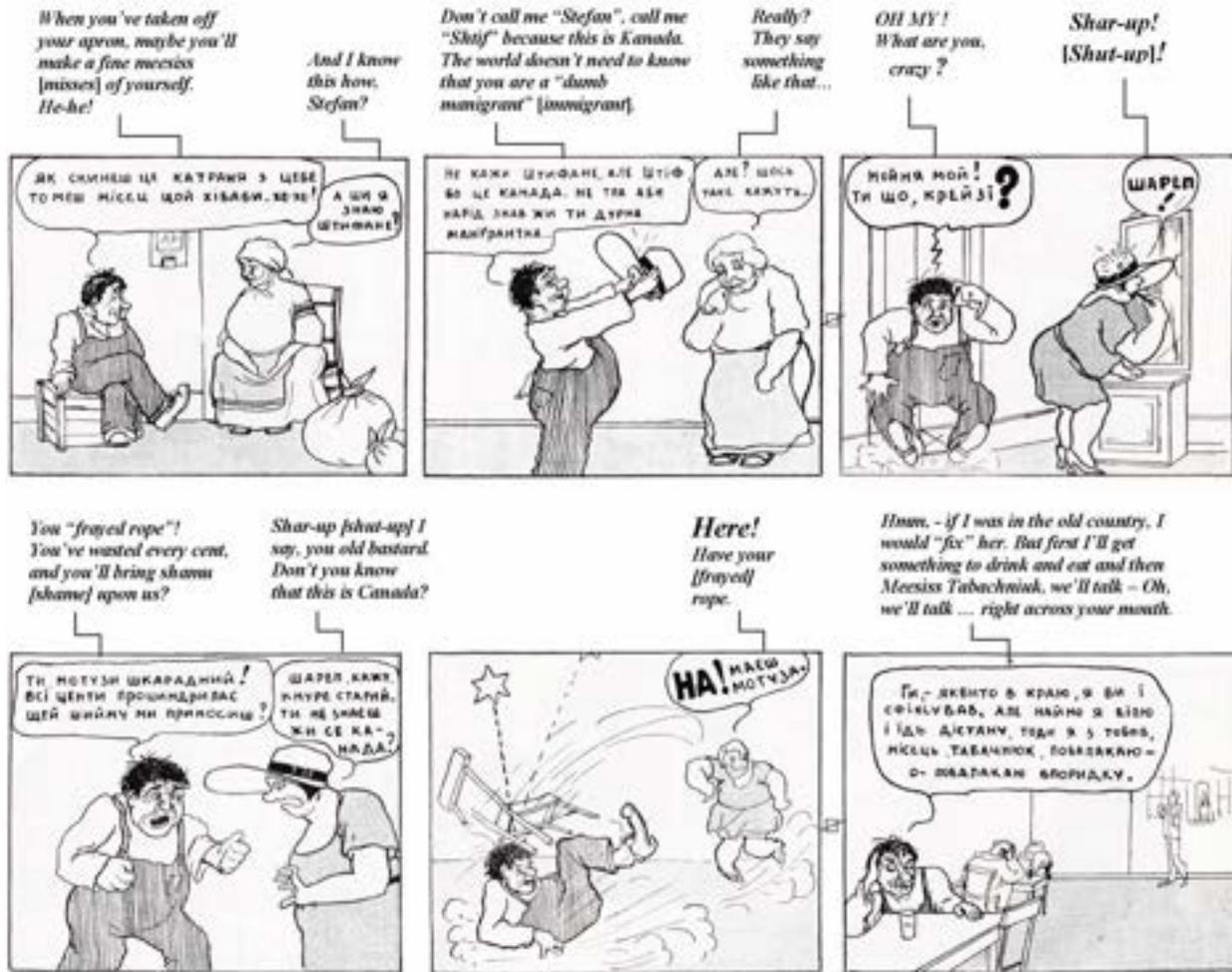
community. In summary, Vuiko Shtif, representing the stereotypical single male immigrant, was working odd jobs as a bricklayer. Always carrying a flask, he could not bear to waste a drop, even when it spilt into the eavestrough. Within the blink of an eye, he runs down the stairs and saves the day by drinking from the down spout. It was a reminder not to let liquor dictate our life such that we lower ourselves in society and literally lay down in the street. In the same publication, in “Sipiiars’kyi prytrafunok” (A CPR Incident), Maydanyk again points out how drinking brings on shame and can leave you penniless.

On the theme of gender equality, although Maydanyk’s early work was decidedly male-dominant, there was a notable shift in gender balance in the 1930 comic book *Vuikova knyha*. Female counterparts to Vuiko Shtif, specifically his wife Yavdokha and the character Nasha Meri, were prevalent in over one third of the narratives. These stories targeted dating and married immigrants – addressing social roles and the change in gender expectations found in the new country. For example, in the following abridged series of strips titled “Vuiko sprovadzhuie kobitu lavdokhu” (Uncle Brings over his Wife Yakhvdoha), the reader is introduced to immigration from a woman’s perspective (15-20).

Summary: When Vuiko Shtif’s wife, Yavdohka, first arrives in Canada he buys her a hat and suggests she exchange her apron for more stylish clothes -- Vuiko Shtif does not want them to be mistaken for “dumb immigrants.” Yavdokha goes along with it, then recognizes that the new look makes her more attractive and intelligent-looking, which in turn raises her self-esteem. Shtif is threatened by the new look. Feeling that he has lost control over her, he insinuates that she’s crazy and will bring shame to the family. The outcome is more autonomy to Yavdokha, and Uncle Shtif is left pondering the differences between social norms in the old country and the new.

There are several messages voiced within this one story that relate to women and immigration. Here, Maydanyk’s didactic message is best contextualized by Canadian historian Frances Swyripa. In her book, *Wedded to the Cause*, Swyripa explores the significance of clothing in relationship to the

ВУЙКО СПРОВАДЖУЄ КОБИТУ ЯВДОХУ [UNCLE BRINGS OVER HIS WIFE YAVDOKHA]



5: “Vuyko sprovadzhuie kobitu Iavdokhu” (Uncle Brings over his Wife Yakhvdoha) – Maydanyk (1930a, 15-20). Abridged.

Ukrainian girl in the Canadian city. She notes specifically that “hats attracted an inordinate amount of attention” and were subject to various levels of interpretation (92-93). In Ukrainian folklore, there is a wedding ritual where the bride exchanges her wreath of flowers for the head shawl/kerchief of a married woman. Exchange of the head covering represented acceptance of a change in status – a leaving of the past. From one perspective, refusal would have been a statement of resistance to leaving the past; from another point of view, refusal could have been a militant statement of defiance and independence. In Canada during the 1920s, the “flamboyant hat” was synonymous with the new country. Symbolically, those who wore one appeared to be aligned with the upper class, the intelligent and educated, and the Anglo-Canadian lifestyle. Although the head was still covered, the older community members feared the hat; it symbolized assimilation and a disregard/disrespect for cultural traditions. As a result, a woman’s choice to wear a hat was very

controversial within the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Yet, for many young female immigrants the wearing of the hat was an expression of emancipation and progress (Cheladyn 2019a 16). Maydanyk’s message is clear: the moral of this story is to respect women’s rights and independence.



6: “Nasha Meri” (Our Mary). Episode 1 – Maydanyk (1930a, 3).

When it came to women and morality, Maydanyk didn’t hold back on proselytization. *Nasha Meri* (Our Mary) appeared in her own strip dedicated to the exploits of young, single female immigrants (See Figure 5). Meri symbolized the Ukrainian immigrant girl in young womanhood testing the freedoms and attraction of a new country. She represented the first urban Ukrainian girls such as those who became domestics in English homes or changed their names to improve chances for a job. Meri was the counterpart to Vuiko Shtif and the other maladjusted “Jacks” – young men “whose education began on the railway gang and ended in the bar and pool hall” (Swrypa 64). With her attraction to modern fashion and the rejection of the headscarf, and her fascination with “good time” dances and moving pictures, Meri displayed the undesirable effect of uprooting and transplanting as Ukrainians groped to reconcile the ways of the two worlds. Appearing during the interwar period, Meri attracted a lot of criticism. The status and assimilation with the Anglo-Canadian world that Meri so desperately sought through marriage to English men drew sharp disapproval for its alienation from things Ukrainian and the nationalist cause that was rising in the old country. In *Wedded to the Cause*, Swrypa notes that Meri’s character brought forth questions of intermarriage, language loss, and alienation from the Ukrainian community, and describes *Nasha Meri* perfectly as the woman who “personified female rebellion against traditional, demanding subservient roles, as well as parental expectations and community directives in the name of the larger good” (65).

Voicing the Immigrant

Another dominant didactic element in Maydanyk’s comic strips focuses on language. Conspicuously, the words in the dialogue bubbles were all written with a Cyrillic font. A close reading determines that the language is a hybrid of Ukrainian, Polish, German, and English, mimicking an early-1900s dialect

commonly spoken on the streets of Winnipeg. On one hand Maydanyk was poking fun at the multilingual language spoken by immigrants, but on the other he was encouraging the illiterate to read and educate themselves about current affairs. Creating Vuiko Shtif's hybrid dialogue was somewhat intuitive for Maydanyk. He was from Western Ukraine, which at one time or another had been included in or bordered on Poland, Russia, Austria, Romania, and Hungary, and shared fluid linguistic boundaries for hundreds of years (Martynowych 13-19). Within the region there were at least eight different dialects that enriched the language.¹⁴ This linguistic diversity was the spoken vernacular of the time, and vernacularization of text is thought to be one of the major contributing factors to the rise of national consciousness and literacy – "...if it is written in the common language, it will be read, and ultimately discussed" – and prior to the digital era, "print-languages [not necessarily just text] created unified fields of exchange and communication" (Anderson 44). Adding to the cornucopia of vocabulary, the language on the street was macaronic.¹⁵ One could hear Ukrainian endings added to words to facilitate a flow in conversation and understanding among those engaged in the conversation. For example, *kisuvaty* meant "to kiss," *kvytuvaty* meant "to quit," and *vachui* was a directive to "watch over" something (Farkavec 1983 Appendix "Zrazok inshomovnykh sliv"). This type of macaronic text in Maydanyk's comics empowered the reader through familiarization with the new-world language. They could relate to Vuiko Shtif, who like his fellow immigrants eased into speaking English by integrating familiar English words and phrases into his discussions.

Although Maydanyk may not have been conscious of it, the pedagogical affordances of comics (imagery combined with text) define this literary genre as one that encourages reading. For many early immigrants from Ukraine, Vuiko Shtif Tabachniuk looked and sounded extremely familiar, and by way of familiarity they were willing to learn how to read; "in many cases Maydanyk's comics were the *first* stories that they *could* read" (Farkevec, 6). Unfortunately, although Vuiko Shtif's multilingual, macaronic dialogue contributed in part to the comic's popularity and increased literacy, it may have also contributed to its demise. In the 11 February 1978 issue of the Ukrainian daily *Svoboda*, Ukrainian literary scholar Yar Slavutych commented on Maydanyk's Vuiko Shtif stating that: "...at the time, this satirical literature served its function in society criticizing human flaws. However, from today's perspective, it has no value. That scribble died with its generation..." (32). Ultimately, Vuiko Shtif

¹⁴ Map of Ukrainian dialects and subdialects (2005), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_dialects#/media/File:Map_of_Ukrainian_dialects_en.png

¹⁵ Macaronic: adj - denoting language containing words or inflections from one language introduced into the context of another (<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/macaronic>).

Tabachniuk, his wife Yavdokha, Nasha Meri, and the other Ukrainian characters no longer mirrored the lives of subsequent waves of Ukrainian immigrants. As a result, the popularity of the comics waned and circulation dropped off completely. Now, a century later, on rare occasions they can still be found in a library or archive – forgotten and unknown to a current generation (Cheladyn 2019a, 22).

Conclusion

Maydanyk chose to edify and educate the Ukrainian community early in his artistic career. He capitalized on his ability to paint religious art and entertained himself by cartooning. Vuiko Shtif Tabachniuk and Nasha Meri did not materialize out of thin air: they were a product of their time. Historical, political, industrial, as well as social factors contributed to the initial inspiration for the characters and the narrative. Although by today's standards his story lines are often considered crude, racist, and derogatory, Maydanyk's messages rang true for the readership of the time. The characters had lives, interacted with the rest of the community, and shared with readers their hopes and dreams, trials and tribulations. Unfortunately, although Maydanyk himself lived until 1984, his series ended in the 1950s and did not continue past a reprint of *Vuikova knyha* (Uncle's Book) in 1974. There were several contributing factors that challenged its survival. Primarily, language evolved, and the macaronic narratives became associated with the past. Politics during both world wars targeted comics as radical publications undermining the public order; during World War I Ukrainian immigrants were labeled as enemy aliens, resulting in censorship of Ukrainian Canadian publications –cartoons were strictly omitted. Finally, subsequent waves of immigrants no longer mirrored the life of Vuiko Shtif Tabachniuk, and the lessons to be taught were thought to be irrelevant. Nevertheless, the comics world created by Jacob Maydanyk was valuable. It provided a breath of levity during a stressful time of immigration; and illumination of churches created a spiritual sanctuary. In retrospect, as implied by the opening quote, I would agree with S.M. that Maydanyk's didactic imagery played a hand in positioning his readership as "people among people" within the globally recognized multicultural community in Canada.

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Photographs and Illustrations

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collections in the archives at Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre in Winnipeg, MB.

William Kurelek's Dark Ghosts and their Heirs

Janice Kulyk Keefer

Vasyl/William Kurelek: born 1927, near Whitford, Alberta, to Mary, née Huculak, Alberta-born of parents from Borivtsi, Bukovina, and to Dmytro Kurelek, who emigrated from Borivtsi to Alberta in 1923. Died 1977, Toronto.

These facts concerning William Kurelek -- a giant of Canadian art, with an international reputation -- are the only uncomplicated things about him. A painfully complex human being, he has been described in ragingly dichotomous terms: as popular and prolific but also tortured and driven; as journeyman and prophet; as a spouter of proverbial, “folk” wisdom and the conscious semblable of Hamlet and Stephen Daedalus. His work is similarly paradoxical, according to the critics: idyllic and apocalyptic in vision; parochial and cosmic in scope; primitive, and informed by careful study of Bosch, Brueghel, Van Eyck, Diego Rivera, and Stanley Spencer among others. He is considered a master of high realism and fantasticism; as a producer of enchanting “memory” paintings; and a purveyor of uncompromising “message” paintings predicting a catastrophic future for humanity. Perpetual dissonance, rather than any arduously-achieved harmony, seems to me the keynote of Kurelek's oeuvre. Critics and scholars have attempted to reconcile the contradictions — to make the experience of viewing Kurelek's entire oeuvre more comfortable or less disturbing — though that attempt seems doomed to fail, and ultimately, to diminish the importance and impact of this artist's work. It is tempting to cherry-pick among the mass of pictures, rejecting those you find rebarbative, informed as they are by contentious values and belief systems. Nevertheless, to do justice to the man as well as his work, we must consider it all, the aborted fetuses of *Our My Lai*, *the Massacre of Highland Creek* (1972) as well as the fireflies of *The Young Skyey Blossoms* (1970).

The complexity of Kurelek's psyche — his struggles with mental illness, involving two suicide attempts and the ferocity of his work ethic, designed as if to justify what Václav Havel has called a “permanently questionable right to exist” — combined with the development of what Kurelek called his “ethnic consciousness” to produce an embattled Artist Agonistes.¹ Sunny prairie

¹ William Kurelek, “Development of Ethnic Consciousness in a Canadian Painter,” in *Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society*, edited by Wsevolod Isajiw (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1977), 46-56.

landscapes are, it is true, a staple of his oeuvre, but they are often vitiated by the presence of what I have called elsewhere, the “dark ghost in the corner” of his canvases and consciousness.² Over the quarter century of Kurelek's working life, that dark ghost takes the form, first of a martyred Ukraine whose diaspora forgets her suffering in their pursuit of materialistic success, and subsequently, of a crucified Christ whose suffering reaches its nadir in humanity's unparalleled lust for destruction, involving, most direly, the threat of nuclear annihilation. In this essay I wish to explore these two kinds of haunting and the question of influence: namely, how Kurelek's oeuvre has influenced, overtly or sub rosa, the work of two contemporary artists who between them represent polar extremes of Ukrainian Canadianness: Nataka Husar and Edward Burtynsky.

Ethnicity — and Unbelonging

In its broadest possible sense, I would define ethnicity as the identifying culture into which a person is born and raised, or, less commonly, which she or he chooses to adopt. Ethnicity may confer a distinctive identity, but it does not necessarily produce a sense of belonging to a particular group: it can be celebrated as a given, adapted to changed circumstances, constructively critiqued, or even contested to the point at which an ethnic subject rejects her or his ethnicity. It is therefore, neither inclusive of all “born into the ethnos,” nor exclusionary of those who do or cannot fit a predetermined social or political mold. Fluency in a mother tongue is not a constitutive element of ethnic identity: just as there are Acadians in North America who do not speak French, for example, there are Ukrainian Canadians whose knowledge of *mova ridna* does not extend far beyond borscht and *sharyvary*. Nor does identification with a given ethnos demand adherence to a particular religion or set of political beliefs: Ukrainian Canadians have, over the years and through successive waves of immigration, joined the Labor Temple and ODUM, and have professed the Greek Orthodox, Uniate, or Baptist faiths. While most members of a multicultural society like Canada are familiar with such overt signifiers of ethnicity as traditional forms of food, dress, music, and other art forms, the deepest and certainly most problematic elements of an ethnos are rooted in historical or ancestral memory, in which mythology and ideology can play powerful roles. Nationalism, in the sense of fidelity to some prescribed idea of an originary nation state, is not, to my way of thinking, a crucial component of ethnic belonging, though considerable pressure can be brought to bear by certain members of an ethnos to conform to the precepts of integral nationalism.

The conception of ethnicity that I have outlined above may be close to Henry James's definition of certain nineteenth-century novels as “loose, baggy

² Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Dark Ghost in the Corner: Imagining Ukrainian-Canadian Identity*, A Mohyla Lecture Publication (Saskatoon: Heritage Press, 2005).

monsters”: nevertheless, it seems to me to provide a workable framework for establishing the role of ethnicity — his Ukrainian Canadianness -- in the art of William Kurelek.³ Here, another set of concerns demands consideration. What role does ethnicity play, and what value does it possess, in the development of an artist's oeuvre and establishment of reputation? To what extent is ethnic consciousness active and overt in an artist's work, and to what degree can it be latent, dormant, or even extirpated? Does the attribution of a particular ethnicity to an artist inevitably result in reductive labelling, and the corollary that work by, say, a Japanese Canadian artist can only really be of interest and significance to a Japanese Canadian audience, *pace* Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan*? Or can awareness of an artist's ethnicity as understood in the widest possible terms provide an invaluable means of understanding the true depth and scope of an artist's work?

I would argue that any artist of significance must be recognized first as artist: part of a transnational, transcultural community in which affinities or polarities of technique, style, vision, and subject matter are paramount. Thus, the different uses of realism in the work of London-based Paula Rego and the later work of Paris-based Avigdor Arikha are of far greater importance vis-à-vis their practice as visual artists than pigeonholing the first as Portuguese- and the second as Israeli-emigré artists. In terms of reception — how an audience comes to know, interpret, and value the work of these artists — the historical, political, and cultural dimensions of ethnicity and nationality can be crucial. An understanding of Rego's upbringing in Salazar's Portugal, and her experience of the constricted nature of femininity as constructed in Portuguese cultural tradition, allows us a far richer appreciation of the iconoclastic power of her art. Yet as far as Arikha is concerned, his Israeli background and Jewish identity seem far less germane to our appreciation of his work than, for example, his profound links to the work of Samuel Beckett or the cosmopolitan yet distinctly Gallic ambience of Paris, that city which both artists made their adopted home. To switch to a literary perspective, consider a writer like Joseph Conrad, whose Polish ethnicity and whose direct experience of the political oppression exercised by Tsarist Russia over his homeland are vastly overshadowed in his oeuvre by his engagement with European imperialism, the mentality of colonialism, and that destructive but also saving element, the sea. Is Conrad a Polish or an English writer, or an Anglo-Polish writer, or simply the author of the first modernist novel in English, *Heart of Darkness*? Or is he all of these, in varying and ever-shifting degrees, depending on who is reading him and why? And after all, isn't great art supposed to be universal? It's not only Spaniards for and to whom Goya speaks, or the French who can claim Matisse.

³ “Preface to *The Tragic Muse*,” *The Portable Henry James*, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: Viking, 1951), 476. James’s notorious phrase chastised such mid-nineteenth-century novelists as Thackeray, Dumas, and Tolstoy for what he considered their stylistic sloppiness and narrative excess: in other words, their failure to consider the novel as, first and foremost, an aesthetic construct.

Nobel laureate Alice Munro's international stature as a writer is unquestionable, but what is lost and what is gained by regarding her as a Canadian writer, or as a Scots-Canadian?

In this context, let's examine the complicated case of William Kurelek, a visual artist of international reputation and a man tormented by questions of belonging and identity. By birth and upbringing, Kurelek was solidly Ukrainian Canadian. Ukrainian was his mother tongue, and he was raised by Ukrainian-speaking parents, one of them a recent immigrant, who preserved the traditions and values of the old country in the raising of their children. Kurelek's experience of ethnic identity was, however, far from simple and celebratory: in canvas after canvas, his references to his childhood and adolescence possess a painful edge. If there is nostalgia in his depiction of prairie boys and the landscapes that formed them, it is tempered by an acute awareness of the cruelties children endure, inspire, and commit. And those cruelties have more than a little to do with ethnicity, or with a particular, peasant-based reality. Life in the Ukrainian village, as Kurelek's father described it to his children, was ruled by the struggle for survival; gestures of love and affection between parents and children were strikingly rare, and punishment for mistakes, however innocently committed, was draconian. Physical strength and endurance were at a premium: the sensitivity and vision needful for the artist's development were treated not only as liabilities, but as shameful weaknesses as well. Moreover, in the new world of the seemingly free and open Canadian prairies, prejudice abounded: William and his siblings were forbidden to speak Ukrainian in the schoolyard, and humiliatingly punished for their linguistic transgressions.

However deeply imbued Kurelek was with the culture, traditions, and language of his father's Bukovinian village, he could never feel anything but a partial, fractured sense of belonging to his family or their ethnos. Kurelek felt himself to be an outsider in his own family — by his account he was scorned by his father and neglected by his mother, his extraordinary qualities abused rather than fostered by them. This experience was intensified by an extreme introversion: apart from a brief period during his adolescence when he was mentored by a sympathetic Ukrainian Greek Orthodox priest, and immediately afterward, at university, where he made a very few like-minded friends within his peer group, he remained pitifully isolated and alone. Even his growth and development as a young artist reinforced this sense of unbelonging: he left the Ontario College of Art after only two semesters, convinced that he could learn more on his own than he could from his instructors or his peers. Turning his back on abstract expressionism, the aesthetic orthodoxy of his day, he placed himself on the fringes of the art world. Thus, the foundational feature of his sense of self — his identity as an artist, and a driven artist at that — exacerbated his loneliness. For a time, the young Kurelek saw himself as a Stephen Daedalus figure: the kind of outsider-artist who must reject family and homeland in order to create and survive. Whether looking at his people or ethnos with helpless longing, with critical detachment, or with a savagely observant eye for foibles, grotesqueries, and transgressions, this kind of artist

remains resolutely on the edge, eschewing any central place or role within a given community.

The stories of life in the old country which Dmytro/Metro Kurelek would tell at night to the young William and his brother John sank deep: one of the tableaux in Kurelek's rendition of *The Passion of Christ* is a transposition into early twentieth century terms of the passage "Those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." That transposition is a visual quotation from one of Metro Kurelek's stories: how he and his father were forced to remove soldiers' corpses from a battlefield near their village in Bukovina during World War I. Under the guidance of a passionate Ukrainian nationalist, Father Mayevsky of Winnipeg's Ukrainian Orthodox cathedral of St. Mary the Protectress, the adolescent Kurelek deepened his knowledge of the atrocities and horrors inflecting recent Ukrainian history. This knowledge gave form to the images of Ukraine that appear in *The Maze* (1963) and *The Maas Maze* (1971): in the first a young fair-haired woman in traditional dress is blindfolded and tied to a column like a scourged Christ, while a giant, brutal hand looms above her. In the second, a maiden in traditional Ukrainian costume, her *vinok* detached from her loose dark hair, lies spread-eagled on the ground; though we see no further than her waist, we know that what looms above her — only a soldier's leg and boot are visible — is rape and possibly murder.

In "Dark Ghost in the Corner: Imagining a Ukrainian Canadian Identity," a talk given as the 2005 Mohyla lecture, I used Kurelek's *Manitoba Party* (1964) as a focus for the problematic nature of ethnic consciousness as experienced by the diaspora. At first glance, *Manitoba Party* seems a paean to harmonious belonging, a depiction of convivial eating, drinking, and dancing within an ideally united community. Whereas Kurelek's later "party piece," *Ukrainian Canadian Farm Picnic* (1966), openly asserts its ethnic credentials by its very title, its inclusion on the canvas of a Ukrainian-language banner, its two celebrants wearing traditional Ukrainian dress, and its use of an "embroidered" border on its frame, *Manitoba Party* is cagey: it boasts no Ukrainian signage, and only one figure in the canvas wears traditional dress. Where the later painting provides two watchers or observers — the boys in the poplar tree in the extreme foreground, bisecting the canvas — the earlier painting offers us what we might call a "stowaway" from a lost world: a hunched older woman in the back left corner of the bright orange tent. She is wearing a black *khustyna*, an embroidered blouse, and a dark vest. She sits alone, unnoticed, her face averted from the festivities. She is, in my reading, a personification of Ukraine's tragic history, a shadowy reminder of those hardships, injustices, and traumatic events that forced the parents or grandparents of the younger partygoers to flee Ukraine for Manitoba.



01: William Kurelek
Canadian, 1927–1977
The Maas Maze, 1971
Mixed media on panel

Gift of Professor James B. Maas, 86.073
Collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University,
Image courtesy of the Johnson Museum

It is a distinctive trope of Kurelek's vision, this coexistence on the same canvas of the blithe and seemingly-blessed with human suffering, and the looming existential threat that the “blessed” ignore. *In the Autumn of Life* (1964) and *Material Success* (1967) are cases in point. While the overwhelming majority of the canvas in *Manitoba Party* is given over to celebration, perhaps of the golden wedding anniversary of the older couple at the head table, the presence of that dark figure in the corner forms a disturbing counterweight to the festive facade, as do the fighting children in the extreme right-hand corner of the painting. One of the most emphatic forms of this bliss/bane trope occurs in *Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine, 1939* (1968), which reveals, behind actual bars, a canvas split horizontally. The top shows a pleasure garden — it

proclaims itself to be a “Park of Culture and Recreation” — in which people stroll and play, enjoying a fine summer's day despite the banner reading Glory to Stalin and the uniformed and possibly armed soldiers in their midst. The bottom half of the canvas displays what the pleasure-goers have either forgotten or dismissed: two of the ninety-one mass graves of thousands of citizens of the town of Vinnytsia murdered during Yezhov's “Great Purge” of 1937-38.



Caption 02: William Kurelek
Manitoba Party, 1964
oil on masonite, 121.9 x 152.6 cm
Purchased 1965
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Photo: NGC

Ukraine is usually gendered as female in Kurelek's work: for example, the young woman — perhaps his muse — shown emerging from a *tryzub*-patterned pot in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1960). A female-rooted idea of Ukrainianness informs Kurelek's depiction in *Mama* (1966-67) of the key roles played by mothers in instilling formative elements of Ukrainian culture in the next generation. And yet another aspect of Ukrainianness that proved highly significant in Kurelek's work was passed on by his father: not just the barbed stories of village life, but also a concept of masculinity which William Kurelek both as child and young man found it impossible to master or embrace.



03: William Kurelek
Canadian, 1927–1977
Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine, 1939, 1968
ballpoint pen, house paint, wood, oil, ink, graphite on masonite
57.5 x 76 cm
Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Desmond Smith, G-78-55
Photograph by Ernest Mayer, courtesy of WAG-Qaumajuq

In his autobiography, Kurelek stresses the acute sensitivity to which he was prey even as a very young child: the monsters he would see swarming over his bed at night would reappear as the bullies who terrorized him in the schoolyard by day. The ideologically-informed prejudice that led to the banning of the Ukrainian language on school property was another form of this bullying. But the most brutal force in Kurelek's childhood was his father Metro, or perhaps we should say, the ultra-sensitive Kurelek's apprehension of his father, who demanded of his firstborn a physical strength and endurance, a hardness and coarseness utterly foreign to his son's nature. In Kurelek's personal mythology, mothers are guilty of sins of omission regarding the nurturing care, concern, and understanding they refuse to give or are incapable of giving to their children. But fathers perform sins of commission, and the father figures who appear in Kurelek's early work are punished accordingly. Is there a more hateful paternal figure than the one who, in *Behold Man without God* (1955), harnesses his son to a cart? Forced to haul his father's massive weight, the son buckles under the load, his individuality annulled by the sack forced over his head, his back welted and bleeding from the tongue-lashing his father literally vomits forth. The knife impaling the small loaf of bread with which the father keeps the son at his tortuous task might as well be thrust into the boy's heart.

In this context the painting which Kurelek dedicated to his father, *Zaporozhian Cossacks* (1952), speaks volumes. It is an orgy of violent masculinity: the cossacks muscle-bound, their faces brutal to the point of grotesqueness. The cossack in the painting's foreground, just left of centre, bareheaded and whirling his saber, seems to be crushing the only female figure on the canvas. The strategically placed bird of prey rules as the genius loci. A bruised and turbulent sky on the left side of the picture overwhelms the etiolated, almost fairytale light emanating from the church in the extreme right upper corner. And the episode of Gogol's/Hohol's *Taras Bulba* on which the painting focuses—the father's decision to kill his son for his weakness in having fallen for a Polish girl — speaks for itself. Ukraine as brute, patriarchal power, as an Abraham who slays his son — no ram in the thicket here — an all-powerful father who believes only in the efficacy of the sword, scorning the power of brush, pen, even love itself, forms a horrific counter to Ukraine as the victim, not the perpetrator of physical violence.

During his seven-year sojourn in England and his stays at psychiatric hospitals there, Kurelek wrestled with the interconnected demons of family and ethnicity to produce the crowded, compartmentalized, psychic theater of his darkest period. His conversion to Roman Catholicism preceding his return to Canada in 1959 resulted in a partial taming of those demons (he would make a second attempt at suicide after his marriage in 1962). For the rest of his short life, he was able to accommodate them. One consequence of this was that religious rather than ethnic consciousness became his defining locus for both identity and belonging. He would no longer spit at life — the title of an early canvas — but teach others through his paintings to acknowledge a world in which material reality and familial relationships, both inherently destructive,

might be redeemed by belief in Christ, Incarnate, through a universal Church. He would reference but not privilege Ukrainian Canadian experience in his work. He would travel twice to his ancestral home ground — his father's village in Bukovina — but also to Israel and South and Central America — to sketch and record the lineaments of human suffering and endurance within a global context.



04: William Kurelek
Canadian, 1927–1977
Zaporozhian Cossacks, 1952
oil on masonite
102 x 152 cm
Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery
Gift of Robert G. Kearns, 2003-146
Photograph by Ernest Mayer, courtesy of WAG-Qaumajuq

Religion

Kurelek's post-conversion life and work represent a revision rather than a repudiation of his ethnic consciousness as a Ukrainian Canadian. The fact that he left the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church, to whose doctrines he felt he and his family had paid only lip service, to commit himself wholly to Roman Catholicism, combined with his choice as a marriage partner of an Anglo-Canadian who was also a fervent Roman Catholic, may be seen as the upsurge of the Canadian part of his identity. And by Canadian, I mean the Canada of multiculturalism, of a fluid and open rather than static and closed-off concept of ethnicity. Thus, though Kurelek did consider the option of showing his work only under Catholic auspices, he found no insurmountable problem in keeping Avrom Isaacs as his dealer. Given the long, complex, and ugly history of antisemitism in eastern Europe, it is especially noteworthy that it was a group of women from Hadassah that sponsored Kurelek's first exhibition at the Isaacs gallery. Kurelek's openness to and curiosity about other forms of ethnic experience led him to undertake canvases on Irish, Polish, and Jewish life in Canada as well as his best-known series, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*.

Ethnicity was never enough for William Kurelek either to anchor his identity as a man or to assure the meaningfulness of his art. A lifelong outsider vis-à-vis his nuclear family, the contemporary art world, and the dominant culture's definition of success, he found in his religious commitment a cure for the devastating loneliness and isolation that had afflicted him for so long. In truth, it saved his life and made possible the art which he produced so insistently. The title of his autobiography, *Somebody with Me*, refers to God; the axiom he described as "inescapable" to those who would acknowledge his bucolic, but not his Christian-message canvases is as follows: "NO religion. NO Kurelek. And No Kurelek: No farm painting."⁴ Religion, not ethnicity, is the Muse of his mature oeuvre. To come to any real and comprehensive sense of his achievement as an artist we cannot prioritize those canvases that satisfy our various desires for beauty of landscape, nostalgia for childhood, and the celebration of ethnic community, while ignoring works more evocative of the Bosch of *The Last Judgment* than the Brueghel of *Children's Games*. Neither the "ethnic" nor the "religious" works are characteristically Kurelek. Rather, both are, and while poring over one sort, we are haunted by our knowledge of the other in a form of double vision, rather like in those illustrations of ambiguity where a drawing can be either rabbit or duck, a wineglass or two profiles.

Influence

Kurelek married outside of the Ukrainian community. He also exchanged his family's Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox religion for a Roman Catholicism that

⁴ Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Art Gallery of Hamilton* (Victoria, BC, 2011), 52.

defined itself as emphatically universal. The two most important events of his life both as a painter and as a human being — his undergoing hospitalized psychiatric treatment and his conversion to Catholicism when his cure by science failed him — occurred not in Canada but in England. Many of his canvases are deliberately “Ukrainian” but many, including the lumberjack, “multicultural,” and apocalyptic series and those illustrating scenes of prairie life, are not. And yet he has become the definitive Ukrainian Canadian artist and has importantly influenced two important Canadian visual artists whose ethnicity is also Ukrainian: Nataalka Husar and Edward Burtynsky.

Nataalka Husar was born and raised in New Jersey, emigrating to Canada in her twenties. Her parents were Displaced Persons from Halychyna who were able to exchange their camp in postwar Germany for the fabled riches of America. Those riches were, of course, in short supply for the newly-arrived immigrants. Husar's father was prohibited from practicing his profession, dentistry, taking on factory work to support his family. Her mother worked as a seamstress to enable her two children to attend excellent, expensive private schools. Husar's parents were educated and cultivated people, and they were strong Ukrainian nationalists: Ukrainian was the sole language spoken in the home, and strong ties to the Ukrainian émigré community were established through membership in various cultural and social organizations. Nataalka Husar's brother, Danylo Struk, the son of her mother's first marriage to the distinguished head of Lviv's Medical Institute, murdered in 1941 by the NKVD, became a distinguished scholar of Ukrainian literature and a professor at the University of Toronto's Department of Slavic Studies. Husar, whose passion for drawing and painting first showed itself in childhood, graduated from a fine arts program at Rutgers University and embarked on the precarious life of an artist, selling flowers, and later working as an airline stewardess to subsidize her true vocation.

Avrom Isaacs has described William Kurelek as a “cauldron” of a painter; it is a perfect term for Husar as well.⁵ Both artists are driven, disciplined, passionate about their vocation, and astonishingly prolific. I have spoken with Nataalka Husar about her great admiration for Kurelek; she vividly recalls her first encounter with his work when, as a child of twelve, she discovered his series *The Passion of Christ* (1960-63). Devastated and exhilarated not so much by the religious nature of the work, but by the depth of feeling it roused in her, she conceived an overwhelming desire to create a similar intensity in the art she hoped to make. Husar's passion for Kurelek has remained strong: I remember how enthralled she was, on a visit we both made to Kyiv in 2005, at viewing in the Shevchenko Museum a Kurelek neither of us had known existed. I do not use the term “enthralled” lightly: Husar's profound emotional engagement with Kurelek's canvas was as remarkable as her appreciation of the painting's technical mastery.

⁵ Avrom Isaacs, “Knowing Kurelek,” in *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 20.

As far as the question of direct influence is concerned, it seems to me that what one artist learns from another involves a highly complex and often subtle process, and that, in the long run, an artist's oeuvre is the best authority. Whether serendipitous or deliberate, the echoes or twinings between numerous themes and tropes in these two painters' work constitutes, I suggest, a case of influence that ranges from dialogues to whisperings. Certainly, significant differences abound, sometimes for historical reasons: Kurelek was only able to visit Ukraine during the Soviet era, and the art that emerged from his visits is entirely rural, focused on the village. Husar has travelled frequently inside Ukraine, both before and after Independence, and she is as familiar with large cities — Zhytomyr and Poltava as well as Kyiv and Lviv — as she is with her mother's birthplace, the town of Skala. Kurelek is well known for illustrated books like *Lumberjack* and *A Prairie Boy's Winter*, whereas the one example of overt narrative in Husar's oeuvre (all her work is narrative in some form or other) comes in the form of a series of paintings entitled *Library* and bearing titles of Harlequin romances. The titles describe a narrative arc, while the story, in all its detailed particularity, is told in pictures only. Husar did a degree in fine arts and taught for many years at the Ontario College of Art and Design, whereas Kurelek insisted that he learned more by working on his own from a volume by Kimon Nikolaïdes than from any institution. He never took up a teaching post. For what it's worth, both painters chose as life partners non-Ukrainians, in fact, Anglo-Canadians, and though Husar has extensive ties and friendships with other Ukrainian Canadian or Ukrainian American artists in all disciplines, she remains an outsider, or rather, a maverick, as far as the community is concerned. Her satirical takes on the good life among the Ukrainian diaspora in North America have earned her opprobrium, and her vision of her role as artist as inflected by her sense of Ukrainianness is distinctly discomforting: her alter-ego as nurse defines the painter's task as the probing of wounds.

What Kurelek and Husar do share, beyond ethnicity, is a mode of painting which is representational or figurative rather than abstract, and as a consequence they have “rusticated” themselves vis-à-vis their era's dominant ways of making art. The human face and figure are constants in the work of both artists, but with a striking difference: apart from two fine self portraits, Kurelek chose to represent the human form in schematic, even caricatural ways: his figures are often dwarfed by the landscape, mazes, or massed activities going on about them. Husar's cast of characters — her work is nothing if not theatrical — usually appear life-sized rather than miniaturized. Although certain roles and identities recur, among them the overweight and middle-aged odalisque, the Mississauga matron, and the artist herself, at various ages and stages and as alter-egos, they are individuals, never mere types. Still lifes are another obsession shared by these artists: everything from rubber gloves and enamel pots to wineglasses and tubing are staples of Husarland. They usually form part of large, supercharged canvases containing human figures, for example *Self-Portrait as a Has-Been* (1997) or *Pandora's Parcel to Ukraine* (1993). Kurelek's still lifes, mostly produced as trompe l'oeil

potboilers (all highly accomplished and some, haunting) tend to be stand-alones. Finally, serendipitous “twinings” often emerge: thus the medically-instigated tubes and pipes congesting one of Husar's latest works, *Rehab* (2018), seem like uncanny quotations from the tubes and pipes featured in Kurelek's *Tramlines* (1952), just as his *Frame Finisher's Glove* (1974) can be seen to haunt her *Latex Love* (1988).



05: *Pandora's Parcel to Ukraine*, 1993
oil on linen, 224x 274 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada
Photographer: C.T. Chown

Husar's subject matter, though not restricted to the Ukrainian, has, nevertheless, been primarily focussed on her relationship to her country of ancestral origin. Like Kurelek, she shows Ukrainian Canadians at festive occasions, though Husar is openly satirical in such works as *Heritage Display* (1985) and *Fish on Friday* (1985). She has a relentless eye for kitsch and the suburban grotesque; as for Kurelek's strictures about the greed for material possessions among the descendants of Ukrainian pioneers, she takes them to impious heights in works like *Immaculate Conception* (1987) and *Our Lady of*

Image Works, a photo laboratory that has pioneered new techniques for producing the large color prints which are his forte: two-dimensional fields in which, miraculously, everything is in focus, both fore- and background. Burtynsky's commercial and artistic success recalls that of William Kurelek, as does his interest in far flung places, and in terms of background, startling similarities between the two artists emerge.

Taras Buratynsky (he later altered his name to Burtynsky and goes by Edward or Ed) was born in St. Catherine's, Ontario in 1955 to Ukrainian immigrants — Displaced Persons — who met in northern Ontario. They had originally intended to farm in the south of the province, and it's interesting to speculate how the artist's work may have differed had he grown up on a fruit farm as opposed to a working-class neighborhood in an industrial town. Burtynsky's first language was Ukrainian — his parents insisted that their four children speak Ukrainian in the home — and he attended *ridna shkola* two evenings a week. “Then there was the Ukrainian mandolin band....Ukie camp in the summer. There were cultural events and parties at the Black Sea hall, the Ukrainian community centre.”⁶ Like Kurelek's father, Burtynsky's was strict and all-powerful; unlike Metro Kurelek, Petro Buratynsky initially encouraged his children's artistic interests — he himself dabbled in landscape painting. He even gave Taras/Ed his first camera, though he refused to pay for film with which the eleven-year-old could practice, thus forcing his son into entrepreneurial habits that have led to his current financial independence. Contracting cancer most likely related to his work with PCB impregnated oil at an auto parts plant, Petro Buratynsky died aged forty-five; it has been argued that Burtynsky is driven as an artist by his unfinished quarrel with the father who both initiated him into the art of photography and then, as terminal illness wracked and embittered him, jeered at his son for idleness and day-dreaming. Remembering his father's verbal assaults on him, Burtynsky has observed: “There is nothing more motivating than someone who is important to you who says you can't achieve something....It's one of those motivators where you say, 'Fuck you—just watch me.’”⁷

Raffi Katchadourian describes the impact of Petro Buratynsky's death on his son's development:

Burtynsky helped his mother with janitorial work to support the family. After high school, he got a job at a plant that built frames for trucks — the most gruelling labor he has ever done, he says — and then another on an assembly line for Ford. He was also taking night classes in photography,

⁶ Gerald Hannon, “The Eyes of Edward Burtynsky,” *Toronto Life*, February 2005, 83-84.

⁷ Raffi Katchadourian, “Edward Burtynsky's Quest to Photograph a Changing Planet,” *The New Yorker*, 11 December 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/19/edward-burtynskys-epic-landscapes> (accessed 11 October 2021).

and he became determined to enroll in a full-time program. In 1976, he entered Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, in Toronto. But he studied intermittently, often returning to industrial labor to pay for school. At one point, he worked in a gold mine in northern Ontario. “It was insane,” he said. “You go down, like, two-thirds of a mile into the earth, and then walk along these drifts for another thousand feet, climb up, and you are somewhere in the middle of fucking rock.”

One summer, Burtynsky returned home to work at G.M., where he held a number of jobs, among them helping to clean up PCBs. The plant offered him a management position and the prospect of steady employment. “My mother kept saying, ‘You got a great job, you can have a house,’”....But by then he had already decided to leave: “I felt, in my heart, I wanted to be an artist.”⁸

A harshly critical father, an economically marginal background involving stints of hard manual labor in remote places, intermittent studies in his chosen field, voluntary displacement from the Ukrainian Canadian community in which he'd grown up: Burtynsky's *Bildungsgeschichte* uncannily resembles Kurelek's. “[Burtynsky] understands the importance of and richness of his Ukrainian heritage,” Gerald Hannon has observed, “but found it too claustrophobic, too closed in its acceptance of ideas and its lack of interest in exploring a complicated world. He resisted the pressure to marry...a Ukrainian girl and have children...who would learn the language.”⁹

Certainly, then, Burtynsky is a Ukrainian Canadian: but can he be accurately or meaningfully described as a Ukrainian Canadian artist? His rejection of the “ethnic consciousness” with which he grew up is one thing; the fact that he has never photographed Kurelek's *Big Lonely* is another — for if there is a recognizably Ukrainian Canadian landscape, it is surely the prairies. Yet Burtynsky's consuming interests as an artist lie in industrial rather than agricultural subjects. The industrial wastescapes of contemporary Ukraine, one might argue, would surely be a fitting subject for him, were the Donbas not a militarily contested region. Yet surely every artist must be allowed a free choice of field and subject matter: given that Burtynsky has declared his aesthetic home ground to be “the world of the gargantuan,” it is easy to see why, instead of the post-Soviet industrial decay of Dnipropetrovsk, for example, he has opted to photograph Lagos, that “hyper-crucible of globalism.”¹⁰

⁸ Katchadourian, “Edward Burtynsky’s Quest.”

⁹ Hannon, “Eyes,” 88.

¹⁰ Katchadourian, “Edward Burtynsky’s quest.”



06: Edward Burtynsky, Homesteads #32, View from Highway 8, British Columbia, 1985.

And yet, the influence of Kurelek on Burtynsky, or the affinities between Kurelek's and Burtynsky's oeuvre and vision, are significant. Kurelek's landscapes have been described as “flattened,” aiming at immensity of effect. Works such as *When We Must Say Goodbye* (1977), the *Indian Hitchhiking from Saskatchewan* series (1974) or *Cold Dawn in Saskatchewan* (1974) evoke that inhospitable vastness captured by Burtynsky's use of digital technology. Looking at Kurelek's *Glimmering Tapers Round the Day's Dead Sanctities* (1970), in which a huge swath of eerily green northern lights dwarfs a scatter of farm machinery parked on a stretch of bare mud, or looking at *Starting Flywheel Tractor* (1969), which contrasts miniscule machinery with the immense and empty land it attempts to control, one cannot help but think of Burtynsky — though with an all-important difference. For Kurelek's vision of a beautiful, heartless nature riding roughshod over human aspirations and ambitions predates the Anthropocene. What Burtynsky's oeuvre represents is the intermingled beauty and horror of our human invasion of the natural world, whether the glaucous green rivers snaking through the Niger delta due to illegal Nigerian oil refineries or the blood-red rivers formed by the tailings made by nickel mining in Ontario.

The oeuvres of William Kurelek and Edward Burtynsky show important areas of overlap in terms of technique and subject matter: Tobi Bruce's essay “Kurelek as Journeyman Picture Maker” in *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, the

catalogue of the most recent Kurelek retrospective, demonstrates how important photography was for Kurelek in shaping his “compositional eye and thinking.”¹¹ Yet it is principally in terms of vision, moral and aesthetic, that these artists most tellingly agree, and this despite the fact that Kurelek was devoutly religious, while Burtynsky is resolutely secular. For both artists, this vision is ultimately catastrophic. The mushroom clouds that bloom so horrifically in Kurelek's skies distill the same consciousness that drives Burtynsky in his photographic pursuit — physically taxing, technically challenging, and often dangerous — of the lacerations we've inflicted on our planet and so many of its people. Gerald Hannon's description of Burtynsky as “a man who is at argument within himself, savouring the wonders and comforts we mine from our wounded planet, apprehending the woe we are bound to inherit” could apply equally well to William Kurelek: son semblable, son frère.¹²

¹¹ Tobi, *William Kurelek*, 142.

¹² Hannon, “Eyes,” 84.

The Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop: Ukrainian Identity and the Artistic Legacy of Bill Lobchuk and Don Proch

Walter Hildebrandt

I arrived in Winnipeg from Saskatoon to work for Parks Canada in 1979, having recently received my MA in Western Canadian history from the University of Saskatchewan. The Prairie Regional Office of Parks Canada, responsible for National Historic Sites in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the North, was located in Winnipeg, close to the old warehouse district. I was assigned the North West Mounted Police posts of Fort Walsh and Fort Battleford and the military theme at Batoche. My thesis had prepared me slightly for these tasks as it was about Ontarian settler P.G. Laurie and the *Saskatchewan Herald* -- the first newspaper established west of Winnipeg. Sarah Carter and I moved to Winnipeg together; she was then working on her MA on the ideologies of three prairie Methodist missionaries and their promotion of settler colonialism, and she later started a PhD at the University of Manitoba on First Nations and agriculture, later published as *Lost Harvests*. We were both determined to write about the prairies, though most of our professors dismissed “local” history as not intellectually worthwhile. We were members of a generation arising out of the liberating atmosphere of the 1960s-1970s who wanted to understand our own place, and not write about the “lords and ladies” of Tudor England or the Great Men of politics and industry in distant realms.

Immersed in this atmosphere and aura we enthusiastically arrived in Winnipeg joining other like-minded young people of Parks Canada. On Fridays after work (except in spring and summer when we played softball), we would congregate at the old brown, sprawling, log-walled basement of the Aberdeen Hotel where we would argue, debate, and zealously discuss topics and issues related to our work and times. I remember Rose, our server, a tall Indigenous woman who brought us trays filled with draught beer two glasses at a time in the distinctive tulip-shaped glasses. Prohibition laws still in effect in Winnipeg decreed that no alcohol could be served during the dinner hour, a measure designed to send working men home before they could squander their wages on beer. During this hour most of us would walk to the Paradise Restaurant on Portage Ave where we had Italian food – pizza, spaghetti, gnocchi, lasagna, etc. Occasionally, after this break, we would return to the Aberdeen. They were heady times.

At first Parks Canada people who came to the Aberdeen sat in one group which included historians, archeologists, planners, and interpreters, sometimes joined by university students, and provincial heritage resources employees. We soon discovered there were equally loud, rowdy groups around us. Loudest was a table made up of artists, and among them the loudest was Bill Lobchuk. At their table were printmakers, painters, performance artists, singers, journalists as well as a butcher and a cook. Among them were Don Proch, Tony Tascona, Mike Olito, Kelly Clark, Reg Gibson, Len Anthony, and Dianne Wilt.

The shouting across the room started when Bill and I, both squash players, dared the other to arrange for a game. As people at the various tables got to know each other, they integrated and would sit together. There was a remarkable atmosphere for a few hours every Friday best captured by the English Professor Ken Hughes who was a regular denizen:

In a very important sense, the Aberdeen is a microcosm of Culture as well as Nature, not just Manitoba or Western Canadian, but the Culture of the whole of Western Civilization. It had its Liberals, Conservatives, Social Democrats, Marxists, Neoists, Don't Knows, Straights, Mixeds, Gays (both sexes), Well Offs, Poor, Youngsts, Oldish, Men, Women, Ukrainians, Poles, Lobchuks, Irish, French, Lithuanians, Pukka-Sahibs, Metis, Drivers, House-Painters, Plumbers, Unemployeds, Salesmen, Bureaucrats, Academics, Visual artists, Poets, Morrissettes, and even a highly respectable street Beggar who clocked off dutifully for his draft.¹

Numerous occasions were celebrated, including birthdays. For Bill's birthday one year we had a special cake made at Gunn's, a famous North End bakery. The image on it was not politically correct. The late poet and playwright Don Kerr, visiting from Saskatoon, attended the 1988 draft at the Aberdeen and wrote in his poem "June 1988 Winnipeg Journal":

final day of the hockey draft and the loudest
gathering in my life, Lobchuk's t shirt
for Walter, Olito yelling , Lobchuk yelling.
Tascona, after a five minute allout attack on him and
Ukrainians, said
I'm Polish.²

All our tables were shoved together and the whole table of fifteen people shouted insults each time a player was selected, making fun of the picks that were made. At the 1988 hockey draft Bill had a T-shirt made for all participants with a cartoon drawing of me labelled "Fatty" as a bald and round

¹ "The Prison House of Language," *NeWest Review* 10, no. 8 (April 1985): 2.

² *NeWest Review* (June-July 1989): 36.

Alfred E. Neuman of Mad Magazine (with the gap in the front teeth that we share) and an Adolf Hitler mustache. Bill had nicknames for everyone, and he ungraciously called me “Fatty,” though I always thought the name would suit him better.



01: Walter Hildebrandt and Bill Lobchuk at the Aberdeen, c. 1991.

The work these two groups produced – the historic content and the artistic imagery – had common themes. While we were pleased to be telling the history of our own place, they were creating visual art of the places around them. Memorable are Kelly Clark’s Delta Marsh watercolors, Tony Tascona’s abstract images of local workplaces, and Mike Olito’s performances with sticks and stones from his acreage. Prominent in this vein were Bill Lobchuk’s colorful screen prints of Neepawa, Carberry Hills, Garson’s marshes, and sunflowers. Don Proch achieved international recognition for his prairie imagery from around his hometown of Inglis, in Western Manitoba. In the pages of the *NeWest Review*, particularly the special issues from Winnipeg, the worlds of history and art on the prairies intertwined as many of us published there on art, poetry, politics, heritage conservation, books, films, and exhibits.

In time we got to know about the Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop on McDermot Avenue. A wide variety of art from the 1960s and -70s was displayed on the walls, testimony to printers working with visual artists to produce limited edition silk screen prints. As we got to know Bill, we discovered that in the late 1960s Bill was the spark that lit the enthusiasm to establish a meeting place for artists dispersed across the province and more widely the prairie West. Bill came up with the idea of establishing a place for silkscreen printing, a place where people could bring their ideas and work in a cooperative process with the technical assistance of master printers like Bill and Len Anthony to produce highly accessible art. Others came just to visit and watch in a spirit of good will and friendship. Bill got financial and moral support from many established artists to realize his ideas and get the project off the ground. Bill purchased a vacant store and the Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop began, becoming the hub of energetic art production fueled by the energy of the 1960s. Prominent among those who assisted was Ivan Eyre, who also did many prints with Bill, and whose work was included in most Screen Shop shows. Eyre's ancestry was Polish and Ukrainian, and he gained international recognition for his prints and paintings.

While working at Daly Display, a commercial screen shop, Bill met photographer Len Anthony and the two worked together to develop the "knowhow" of the screen printing process. In 1967 Bill and his new bride Carol Coyne visited Minneapolis for their honeymoon and they toured the Walker Art Centre. There he saw Andy Warhol prints for the first time. He was working in commercial printing at the time and had never seen anything like the Warhols he discovered and became inspired by the possibilities of turning commercial images into art.

By the mid-1970s the Screen Shop had moved from Princess Street to a large warehouse building on McDermot Avenue, in an area once home to Winnipeg's garment district. There were 1200 square feet of space, and the main floor had huge, high, grand windows that gave it a bright, airy feeling. Working tables to lay out the work for printing were located throughout with drying racks beside them. Barrels of toxic and volatile chemicals to clean screens stood at the back. A lacquer and thinner Opex No. 9 was so dangerous that Bill was told by his doctor to stop the printing to save his health.

High walls were covered by artworks from the floor to the ceiling stacked three or four tiers high. A dominant image of Roy Rogers, by Richard Hrabec, stood out along with nudes and erotica by Louis Bako and Kelly Clark. There were large graphite prints of prairie scenes (experimental successes) by Don Proch, jungle scenes by Chris Finn, and the high realism prints of Danceland in Moose Jaw by David Thauberger, conceptual art by General Idea and Gordon Lebrecht, and a Ukrainian Easter egg with prairie scenes by Joe Fafard. Indigenous artists included Daphne Odjig, Carl Ray, Jackson Beardy, Alex Janvier, and many more. Joe Fafard's ceramic sculpture of Bill with his signature red neckerchief and beloved dog Snow at his side was what first drew the attention of visitors to the Shop. The work of ceramic artist Vic Cicansky

was also prominent. The whole place was a fabulous celebration of autochthonous, mostly prairie art.

Don Proch had his large studio on the entire second floor where he created his masks. Jackson Beardy had his studio on the third floor, and after Jackson passed away, Kelly Clark moved in. The building was not in the trendy, artsy Osborne Village district but right in the middle of the downtown, not yet gentrified, North End. Large trees grew around the building providing shade. There was plenty of parking on the street for visitors who could drop by to observe and converse with the artists on the three floors.

Celebrations and parties were frequently held at the Screen Shop for launches and show openings. At these events and parties, marijuana smoke wafted through the room and the nearly seven foot Gimli-born Lithuanian giant Mike Olito loomed over the crowd. One such occasion was the launch of my poetry book *Sightings* in 1991, a long poem about the Metis Resistance of 1885. Bill contributed seven watercolors for the book with images of John A. Macdonald, Queen Victoria, and Big Bear. The large paintings hung on the west wall. We had T-Shirts with images of the paintings printed on them, accompanied by vats full of ice, beer, and wine for sale. Over a hundred people attended this grand occasion. Bill and I had decided that at the end of the night we would divide the paintings between us unless someone bought them all together. And indeed that was what happened. Carol Phillips, Winnipeg Art Gallery director, bought them all for the WAG collection where they are still housed.

Silkscreen printing has been stigmatized in two ways: by its association with commercial sign and poster printing and by the notion -- eagerly perpetuated by those who sell art -- that the artist alone ought to produce the work of art and that such a work ought to be a single "original" painting or sculpture. The artist's name becomes as important and saleable as the work of art, resulting in a hierarchy of "art stars." Those who sell art, and often the art critics as well, frown on the production of "multiples" in the market place. To the dealer this availability lessens the value of each piece of art. The vested interest of the art dealer is usually in the "value" of an "original" painting, one of which can command a higher price than the total price of a print edition of fifty.

The other side of this coin is of course the democracy of printmaking, which makes more fine art available to more people by producing a number of prints of the same image. Art therefore becomes accessible to those who could not otherwise afford it. You might, as a middle-income Canadian, be able to own a print of David Thauberger, Tony Tascona, Joe Fafard, or Don Proch while never being able to buy one of their paintings or drawings -- the print will nevertheless allow you to appreciate the images created by these artists.

Some critics are hesitant to acknowledge the status of fine art printmaking because they are uneasy with the process of producing a print. The concern is with the author rather than with the work that is produced. Often a painter or sculptor will collaborate with a master printmaker to produce a print. This tradition is known as the "ateliers" system, which

originated in the printmaking studios of Paris. For some myopic critics, this cooperative effort taints the authorship of the art work, lowering its status in the hierarchy of art forms.

When commercial galleries only reluctantly show silkscreen prints, this limits the exposure that the public has to this art form. It is a bias that is also evident in public galleries and at our universities. It appears that for many public galleries the commercial value of a piece of art will also prove its intrinsic value as art. This leaves the lower-priced silkscreen prints without a requisite share of public attention, and often they are relegated to art gallery gift shop rentals.

In 1968 Lobchuk was aware of only one other print studio in Canada: Richard Lacroix *Guilde de Graphique* in Montreal. Later he learned that simultaneous to the establishment of his own enterprise, Pierre Ayot, with whom he later worked, opened his *Graff Centre de Conception Graphique*, also in Montreal. There was also the *Open Studio* in Toronto. Initially, Lobchuk hoped to set up a studio for silkscreen printing that would grow as a facility to include etching, lithography, and photography. Not all of this vision was to be realized but he thought that Winnipeg and its artists deserved such a place. While working and experimenting with his own prints, Lobchuk invited artists not familiar with silkscreen printing to use the studio. He firmly believed that you did not need to be an expert at the technical process of printmaking to produce fine art prints. Some artists became totally involved in producing their prints while others left most of the technical work to Lobchuk. A number of artists stayed for a time to hone the skills involved with silkscreen printing and became accomplished printers in their own right. Among these are Len Anthony, Randy Gledhill, Ted Howorth, and Chris Finn.

While interviewing Lobchuk in Winnipeg's old warehouse district, it became clear that he had a sense of the history surrounding the *Screen Shop* and its place in the development of silkscreen printing in Winnipeg. He was proud that many artists now did silkscreen printing along with their other forms of artistic expression and pleased that there are now at least half a dozen facilities in Winnipeg for lithography and silkscreen printing. A large body of art work produced by the silkscreen medium is now available. Lobchuk is also proud of the atmosphere of experimentation that exists at the *Screen Shop*. Over the years printing was done on many kinds of paper as well as on plexiglass, canvas, and velvet. A wide variety of inks and paints were tried, as were stencil techniques. One of the remarkable innovations in Lobchuk's memory is the use of emulsion concocted to achieve the "graphite look" for a number of Don Proch's prints. When Proch wanted this graphite look, printmaker and artist began to experiment with a variety of mixtures until they discovered that the desired effect could be produced using a roller bearing a graphite and bronzing varnish mixture.

The art critic and curator Philip Fry has said that the prints from the *Screen Shop* have a particular quality to them. Lobchuk says that this distinctive look is the result of the inks and papers used. They are basically a hybrid of the techniques and materials of commercial silkscreen printing,

where Lobchuk worked prior to 1968, and those of fine art silkscreen printing. He takes pride in this adaptability that resembles a prairie pragmatism that works out new solutions to the problems at hand.

Lobchuk is among a generation of artists who decided to stay in the West and believes that many artists, like David Thauberger, Joe Fafard, and Don Proch, could have left and made it elsewhere. But instead they stayed, and continue to stay, and give the rest of us a greater sense of place. It may be that, in the words of Martin Heidegger, we are as a result of such work becoming “more historical”: “The origin of a work of art -- that is, the origin of both the creators and preservers, which is to say of a people’s existence, is art. This is so because art is by nature an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical.”³

Lobchuk is critical of the commercial and public galleries for not doing more for silkscreen printing, and particularly critical of the universities for doing so little in their art schools to teach the craft and appreciation of silkscreening as an art form. He attributes these both to the low status in the art hierarchy that this medium suffers under and to the professors of art who cling to old conceptions of artistic expression. He blames these university professors for not taking the time to encourage all forms of artistic expression in their students. Many of these professors, Lobchuk somewhat ironically says, taught here as “immigrants” -- though immigrants who only intended to stay for a short time.

The indifference of the universities and the commercial galleries to silkscreen printing clearly rubbed off on the public galleries. The Winnipeg Art Gallery, for instance, did not exhibit the fifteen year survey of art done at the Screen Shop entitled “The Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop: Print Legend, 1968-1983.” This indifference, however, has also been evident in the lack of an informed commentary about silkscreen printing. Lobchuk says few art critics even understand the silkscreen printing process. Virtually nothing was written or said in the local media about the 1983 show. It is ironic that for those artists who chose to stay and work in the West so little informed criticism is present. Lobchuk emphatically says that many of our own critics are influenced by an “artistic colonialism” that downgrades the local without serious consideration and elevates the alien.

Funding agencies like the Canada Council and the Manitoba Arts Council, share responsibility for not developing screen printing as an art form. The Canada Council, he says, “gives you just enough money to make it difficult to do your job properly.” In setting an exhibition in 1983 the Canada Council provided only half the money asked for. Had they received full funding, they had hoped to hold a workshop to discuss the politics and future of printmaking in Canada. The workshop was to draw attention to issues now facing silkscreen printers, to inform a broader audience of these issues, and to initiate a

³ Cited in *Twentieth Century Theories of Art*, ed. James M. Thompson (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 410.

dialogue. The National Gallery's role in this area seems non-existent. It has no active policy for developing its print collections or for keeping curators and artists informed of developments in all parts of the country. These are only a few problem areas, and they point to the need for an examination of the current situation which should include a review of the support structures that are presently in place to assist those involved in the printmaking discipline and a discussion of what lies ahead. The style of expression in works produced at the Screen Shop ranges from the three-dimensional approach to the medium used by Pierre Ayot to the fluid linear imagery of Alex Janvier. This reflects the diversity of roles fulfilled by the Screen Shop for various artists, the diversity of the medium itself as it has been used by each artist, and finally the collaborative efforts of artist and printmaker.

Bill was familiar with imperialisms other than "cultural" through the experiences of his parents, Harry and Velma, who immigrated to the prairies in 1921. Both came from villages in Western Ukraine. They fled a small acreage in Ukraine where it had become increasingly difficult to make a living; land was scarce and it was impossible to purchase enough land to survive. They hoped that the wide-open Canadian prairies could offer them the chance to homestead and make a comfortable living. They had two children in Ukraine – Lola and Ann – and would have four more in Canada – Nancy, Mary, Russell, and Bill.

Harry and Velma escaped a country that for many centuries experienced a fraught history. Its name, "Ukraine," means "on the edge." It was annexed and occupied by many different powers and countries. Ukraine did not really enjoy statehood until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Most Ukrainians had been illiterate "living in villages and towns dominated by foreigners who exploited them mercilessly and regarded them with contempt."⁴

Emigration was the only escape for many. They brought to their new homes their language and culture and sense of constituting a nation. Some Ukrainians fled to mines and factories in France, Germany, and Poland, but many more of them took ships to Canada. Even on these ships, immigrants were victims of con men, vultures who took whatever small amounts of money they might have. The railway agents had given them attractive, wonderful images of what they could expect in this promised Eden.

After World War II a new, large, and more nationalist Ukrainian diaspora came to Canada. Many of them did not assimilate into existing Ukrainian organizations but established their own, and a new more "strident" nationalism emerged. But Harry Lobchuk remained a strong leftist and belonged to the Ukrainian Labor Temple in the North End that had a sign above the door "Workers of the World Unite."

Harry and Velma arrived earlier, after World War I, but the Ukrainian Canadian community was even then in the midst of chaos and tumult, with many and various bewildering factions. Harry and Velma had left Antwerp on a

⁴ From a manuscript in progress by Winston Gereluk.

boat to Halifax, and from there took the train to the prairies, disembarking in Saskatchewan. It was here that Harry worked as an itinerant laborer and farmer. He was especially adept at breaking horses and knowledgeable about selling them. Velma stayed at home to care for the four children while Harry took work wherever he could find it. During the disastrous Dirty Thirties, the family moved to Plumas, Manitoba, a dozen miles from Neepawa where, Bill remembered, you could see the Riding Mountains to the west.

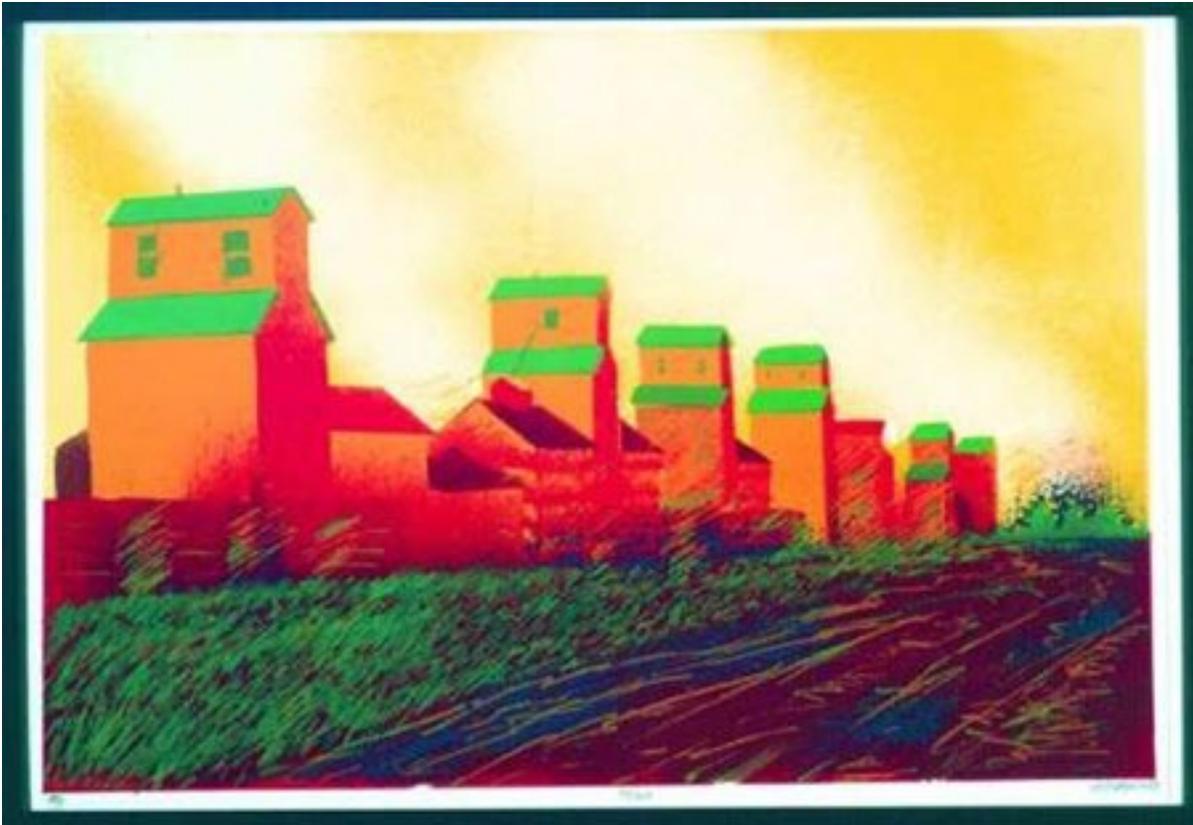
Plumas was a thriving multiethnic community with people from many European countries. This was Bill's birthplace. While in labor, Velma was taken to the railway tracks in the freezing cold, where the train picked them up and took them to the hospital in Neepawa. Bill was born here on 20 December 1942. A cheerful baby, he was given the nickname "Sunny." Bill spent his first five years on the family farm which Harry was finally able to purchase. He spent years there playing with Buster, a favorite dog who had been run over so many times by the threshing machine that he was missing legs. Finally, Buster had to be put down before the family moved to Winnipeg. In 1947 the family moved again to Selkirk Avenue in the North End where they purchased a grocery store. The North End became infamous for the many ethnicities who settled there – Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Jews, and Hungarians. Bill learned English in the street playing with this polyglot of people, but he never properly learned English, leaving him ill-prepared for school. In high school he was enrolled in the "high school leaving" stream and failed most subjects with the exception of art and history where he earned marks of 95 and 85 respectively.

Bill's ability to draw earned him entrance to Tech Voc High School in the west end of Winnipeg, learning about commercial art from Winston Leathers. From there he went to a diploma course at the University of Manitoba, studying with Ivan Eyre and Ken Lochhead. At the University of Manitoba his interests changed from commercial art to the fine arts program, learning about silkscreen printing. With his diploma he was hired by Daly Display where he honed his printing skills working with advanced technologies that were not available at university – a gap existed between the printing taught at university and the technologies available at Daly's. While at Daly's Bill conceived of a plan to set up his own shop to produce fine art and attract artists and any contracts he might land.

He began by renting a building at 50 Princess St. and called it The Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop. His Ukrainian friend with the unlikely name of Len Anderson began bringing artists to the shop who shared Bill's ideas of creating an artistic community, such as Kelly Clark. During this time Bill also got involved with a political organization founded by Jack Chambers – CAR or Canadian Artists Representation which lobbied for better treatment for arts by funding agencies. The Screen Shop became the nexus for both artistic activity and the centre of political lobbying to aid artists.

Life experiences from his days on the farm in Plumas would influence both his choice of screen printing and the need for community. To survive on farms isolated from each other, where money was scarce and crops difficult to grow, communities had to come together for all to survive. This sense of

“rugged individualism” coupled with community support were how Bill solved everyday problems. The farm experience of working together at harvest time, for example, helped him to choose screen printing as his favored form of artistic expression. The production of “multiples” reinforced a democratic ethic whereby many people in different places could purchase and enjoy the same image, which stood in contrast to painting where only a single “original” resulted. It was the community of multiples against the individualism of single original production.



02: Bill Lobchuk, *Elevators (Sentinels)*, 1990.

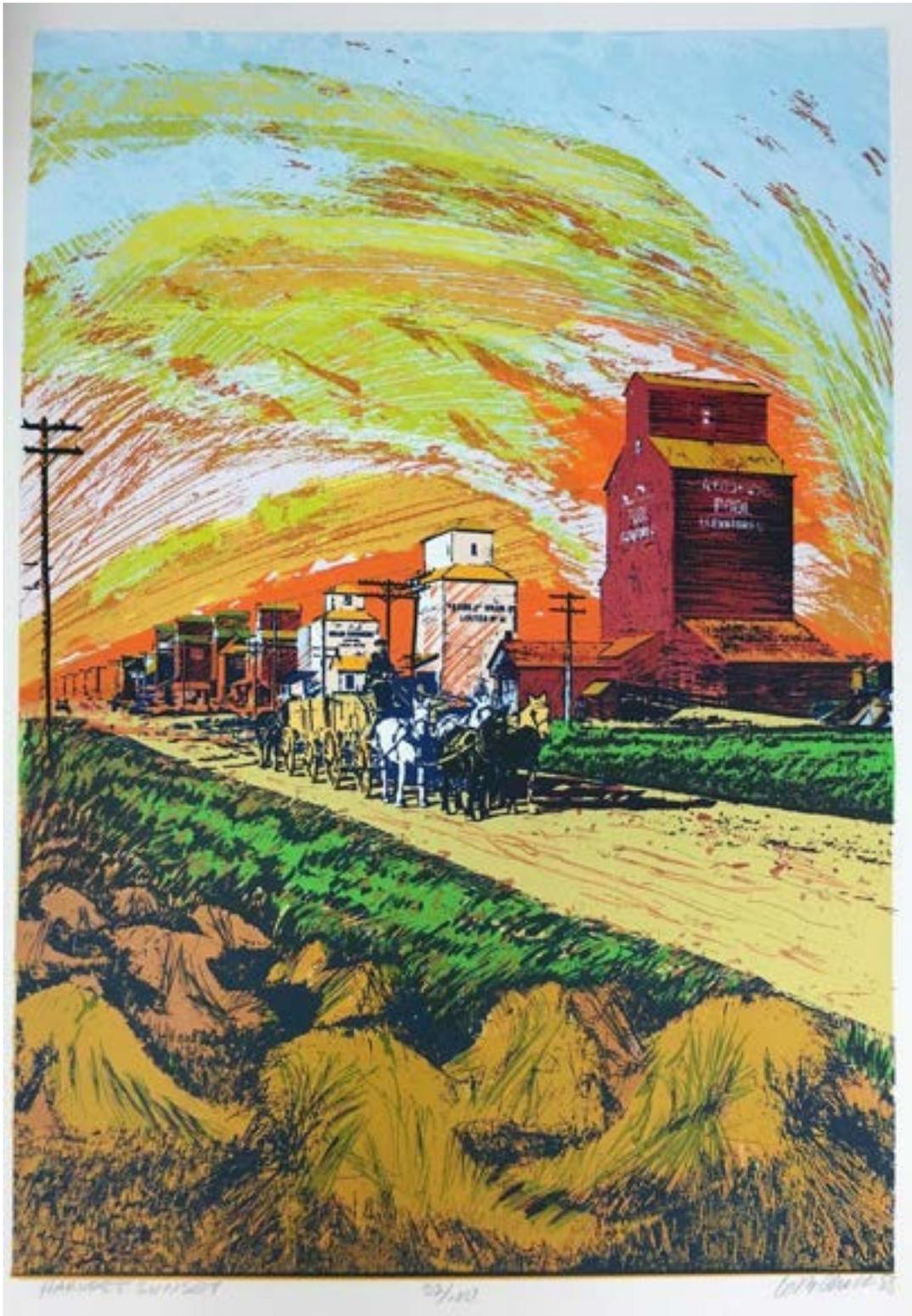
Bill’s democratic sensibilities and his sense of prairie place now combined with the influence of his parents’ Ukrainian culture to become dominant themes in his artwork. His idyllic landscapes represented a rural Eden – a place of escape from the chaos and poverty of the Ukrainian homeland and a respite from the rough and tumble life of North End Winnipeg. Rural Manitoba was a place for new “beginnings” and a place to put down roots -- a garden to sustain you. The dispossession of small-scale farming in Ukraine was in stark contrast to the availability of the wide-open spaces on the prairies.

Old log buildings, sunflowers, fence posts, vast skies, panoramic fields, rural landscapes are all prominent images of Bill’s work. Evident in Bill’s creations are the bright primary colors that stand in contrast to darker, somber

browns and blacks of classical European painting. Bill detested such somber colors, which is why you can't find black in any of his work. His bright colors come from Ukrainian folk-art traditions: yellows, oranges, and reds similar to colors in designs of clothing and decorated eggs. The sunflower, the national flower of Ukraine, which grows over vast fields in both Ukraine and Manitoba, dominates his prints. Also present in much of his work are the surrealistic blues and turquoise of skies that leave the viewer with an overwhelming and sublime sense of awe felt on seeing dramatic prairie sunsets. The viewer feels welcomed into prairie scenes such as *Post*, *Sundance*, *Homestead*.

Bill bought an old Ukrainian homestead a few miles from Winnipeg at Garson, close to the limestone quarries. He would spend time there gardening and entertaining friends, particularly around the time of the Winnipeg Folk Festival. Parties at his "homestead" were legendary, with some lasting all night and people camping out. He bought a quarter section from John and Brataslava Dominik, and the document was the original parchment describing the land. Years later Bill produced a wonderful print of the crumbling *Dominiks' Barn*, recalling and preserving the work of these Ukrainian settlers.

Another remarkable rural image is the dog portrayed in *Neepawa I and II*. The scene is of a dog resting in the sun at a gas pump in Neepawa. Bill brings back Buster to us, his favorite childhood dog, in this diptych. In the first image the dog lifts his head as if to scrutinize the visitor/intruder. In the next print he puts his head down as if to indicate "there is no threat here." These images appear immanent to the viewer – that something most important is at hand. A Ukrainian sensibility is present everywhere in his art – the old guard dog, the fence posts, the dramatic blue, even turquoise skies, yellow and orange of the fields, old homesteader sheds, small town gas pumps. Over the years, Bill owned several dogs, including "Snow," "Thor," and then "Snow-Thor."



03: Bill Lobchuk, *Harvest Sunset*, 1988.

Don Proch is another major Ukrainian-Canadian artist who incorporates ethnic themes and images in his work. In fact, the representation of Ukrainian heritage is very overt in his work. Like Lobchuk, his roots are in rural Manitoba; there is a strong sense of place in his landscape, and he has a concern for community and community life. He even signs his art with Cyrillic writing. Don's ancestors come primarily from Galicia in Western Ukraine. His grandparents Luke (1882-1997) and Mary (1882-1993) Burtnyk had eleven children, one of whom was Nell (1915-94), Don's mother. They emigrated through Hamburg in 1899 and settled west of Loon Lake at Ethelbert, Manitoba.

Don's paternal great grandparents were Michael (1853-1919) and Maria Protz (1860 -?). They immigrated to Canada from Western Ukraine in 1899 to a homestead in the Kulish district, homestead number NW 18-28-23. They had three children in Ukraine: George, Olina and Anna, and two more in Canada, Katherine and Nellie. George married Mary Baron and they settled on the homestead in the Kulish district. George was a farmer and the local mailman. Metro, later to be called Don (1913-79), was the second of two sons. In 1949 George and Mary moved to Grandview, Manitoba.

Prior to the start of World War II, Don Sr. moved to Hamilton and worked in a foundry for steel production. After the war, and wanting a farm, he moved to Grandview and shared a farm with his parents, George and Mary. Don Jr., the artist, lived for a short time on this farm. Doug, his brother, said Don remembers this time as "the best years of his life." In the evenings he sat and drew with his mother. In the winter he was taken to a rural school by his grandfather in an enclosed cutter that was heated by a wood fire. Finally, his father was unable to make it on the farm, and he bought a hotel in Inglis with Nell's parents. It was a communal family place with extended family always present. In summer some family members would come to stay for their vacation. In Inglis the family were members of the Ukrainian Catholic church. As a hotelier, father Don was not overtly political, but he did support a popular Conservative politician, Wally MacKenzie. In Inglis Don was good friends with the Andersons who owned the general store. Don loved the family's Inuit sculpture collection. He learned photography and painting with Mrs. Anderson. Don also took painting lessons from Bell Bush who lived in nearby Shellmouth.

Don completed high school in Inglis and then went to the University of Manitoba to study engineering. After one year he switched to education, where he studied art and trained to be a Fine Arts teacher. Upon graduation he taught art in Winnipeg schools. He taught high school from 1967 to 1970. At that time, he decided to dedicate himself to creating his own art full time. His style of painting and drawing evolved from traditional paintings to sculptures, installation art, and masks. Yet the theme of connection to the land and place was paramount. A prime example of this was the formation of the Collective, Ophthalmia Company of Inglis, Manitoba. The Greek root of Ophthalmia, "ophthalmos," means the eye, and the entire word means an inflammation of the eye. The "company" was established as a collective to assist Proch with his artistic undertakings. So, again like Lobchuk, he wanted to create a

community that would work together. Proch would get friends and family together who, under his direction, would help with his work. It arose out of peasant Ukraine, where people worked together to survive. The objective of Proch's art is to influence the viewer's eyes, to force them to look at the world differently – to see the rural for what it is and what it was for prairie peasant, populist Ukrainians. Proch has been called a “prairie shaman,” a transformative role by which he brings old things to life and breathes life into the ordinary. Proch creates installations from wood and woodpiles; his imagery is of skies, fields, roads, landscapes. He portrays favorite rural prairie past times such as curling and biking. He incorporates farming tools, labor saving devices, and machinery in his art, including axes, saws, rakes, shovels, barbed wire, plows, seeders, wheels, velocipedes, horses, and grain sacks. He draws various versions of grain elevators, the most classic reminder of rural life. Like in Lobchuk's art, there are the beloved sunflowers that Ukrainians celebrated. He anthropomorphizes the landscape with female forms both on land and in the clouds. Common in his work are furrows plowed for seeding and raked rows of grain and hay. Ukrainian heritage and influences are everywhere in his art.



04: Don Proch, *Motria's Hair*, 1972.

In 1988 I wrote an article entitled “Changing Images of the Land: Don Proch’s Ancestral Mask.” I wrote that Proch “explores the themes of man and culture, and reveals how people internalize their experiences of place while living in (on) our vast prairie space.” Furthermore: “He reminds city people of what has been left behind, by celebrating the small, the local, the dialogical, the many voices of the rural communities.” About *Ancestral Mask* I wrote that “even the back-to-the-land movement shows a sign of hope for the land, for there Proch has drawn a furrow formed in one of the shapes of the sign for infinity: The small, cultivated oval plots coexist on this sculpture in a dialectical relationship with the grasses of uncultivated nature. These plots can represent the small acreages first cleared by the Ukrainians in the wooded lands they homesteaded in Manitoba and by extension can signify on a universal plane all primary culture/nature relationships....The most overt image in this sculpture is the thatched roof over the land. The roof refers to the Ukrainians who settled and worked the prairie and is, as Proch says, one of the two basic roof types in the old country. The thatch is constructed of binder twine and reminds us that Ukrainian agriculturalists, who transplanted part of their European culture into the North American setting, built their vernacular structure from the wood and straw they found around them when they arrived.”



05: Don Proch, *The Farm as a Memory Mask*, 2000.

Works produced by the Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop have been exhibited throughout the world, including Japan, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Many smaller exhibitions have been held in and around Winnipeg. But there have been two major shows that included the accumulation of many years of print production. The first was held in 1983 entitled *The Grand Canadian Western Screen Shop: A Print Legend, A Fifteen Year Survey 1968-1983*. It was an exhibition in two parts. The large show was displayed at the Ukrainian Cultural Centre and included all who had made prints with Bill. A smaller exhibit was held at Gallery III at the Art School of the University of Manitoba and contained the work of graduates of that school. It was a lavish production with a glorious bright yellow catalogue and the red flying goose emblematic of the Screen Shop, very traditional Ukrainian colors. The catalogue contained short essays explaining the printing process and the genesis and history of the Screen Shop -- the oldest print shop in western Canada with a worldwide reputation as an outstanding print facility. Each artist in the show had a color 8x10 image of their work with a history of their career on the back. Other Ukrainian artists, namely Larry Kissick and Richard Hrabec, were included as well as many Indigenous artists such as Daphne Odjig, Jackson Beardy, Carl Ray, and Alex Janvier. Other outstanding artists were part of the show: Ivan Eyre, Joe Fafard, David Thauberger, Kelly Clark, Louis Bako, Pierre Ayot, Judy Allsopp, Marsha Wineman, Tony Tascona, Don Proch, Glenn Lewis, Gordon Lebrecht, Winston Leathers, Ted Howorth, Chris Finn, Russ Yuristy, and General Idea. The exhibition was a resounding success. A wide variety of styles and printing techniques were on display.

The latest exhibition of Screen Shop prints was held in March of 2019 at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina; it was entitled *Superscreen: The Making of an Artist-Run Counterculture and the Grand Western Canadian Screenshop*. The exhibit focused on the “artist and provocateur” Bill Lobchuk whose Screen Shop became the hub of “artistic engagement, education, experimentation and production.” Located in the Old Warehouse District of Winnipeg, once the home of a vibrant needle trade, the artists created works “critical of modernism, Eurocentrism, and American imperialism.” Screen printing was favored for its economy and “anti-elitist ethos.” The Screen Shop was part of a shift in Canadian art culture towards artist-run centers and away from the powerful, well funded and influential art galleries. The works captured “a sense of innovation and diversity of Canadian cultural production from the 1960s-1980s, from playful psychedelia and the influence of Pop Art, to conceptual questioning, political reflection, regional discourses, Indigenous pride, and feminist practice.” The many forms on display included prints, sculptures, commercial work, and photographs. The exhibition celebrated the “spirit of a rebellious, fertile and overlooked chapter in Canadian art history.” Local regulars included Don Proch, Winston Leathers, Judith Allsopp, E.J. Howorth, Tony Tascona, Gordon Bonnell, Christopher Finn, Louis Bako, Leonard Anthony, and Gordon Lebrecht. Numerous Indigenous artists made prints –

Jackson Beardy, Daphne Odjig, Alex Janvier, and Carl Ray. Artists participated from outside Winnipeg – General Idea, David Thauberger, Joe Fafard, Victor Cicansky, Russel Yuristy, and Sanarik Co-op in Baker Lake, artists who, as in the Ukrainian tradition known by Lobchuk, preferred community and co-operative practices. It should not be surprising that the Screen Shop arose out of the North End and the strong sense of community common to various ethnic groups there.

I have stayed in touch with Bill since I first met him in the 1980s. He recently created two images for my book *Rupture*, one of Gabriel Dumont and another of Louis Riel. In 1991 he provided me with nine watercolor paintings for my book about the 1885 Resistance in the West entitled *Sightings*, including images of John A. Macdonald, Queen Victoria, Big Bear, Poundmaker, and Imasees. He remains interested and committed to the history of our prairie place. Even though the Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop no longer exists, Bill continues to produce paintings and prints about the West and its history.

The influence of his Ukrainian heritage continues to be evident in the bright colorful works he creates and his willingness to work cooperatively with others. Both Bill and Don have provided us with a rich body of art about the sense of place they remember from their experiences in rural Manitoba. The values of the close-knit Ukrainian communities they grew up in were inscribed in their being and are so evident in their art. They both have said these were the best years of their lives, and their passionate commitment to the rural prairies is reflected in the skies, fields of grain and flowers, landscapes, farm buildings, and small town sports such as curling that are at the heart of their work.

John Paskievich Photography Interview

John-Paul Himka

Himka: How did you get into photography? Was there a mentor who guided you? Were you influenced by the work of other photographers? Did you ever engage in commercial photography?

Paskievich: I took up photography relatively late. After graduating from university, I spent a year travelling through Europe and other places. I brought with me a cheap camera to take souvenir snaps. During these travels I discovered a peculiar pleasure in the act of looking through a view finder and putting a frame around things.

When I returned to Canada, I enrolled in Ryerson's Photo Arts program. I only stayed at Ryerson for one year to learn photography fundamentals but my experience there convinced me to try photography as a possible career. If that didn't work out, I thought I might go to graduate school.

I didn't have a specific mentor. Ryerson exposed me to the thoughts and talents of the instructors and fellow students. I soon became familiar with the work of prominent photographers and the history of the medium. I was especially influenced by the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, and the Magnum photo agency photographers.

When I left Ryerson and returned to Winnipeg, I worked for a few years as a free-lance photojournalist shooting for various magazines and government institutions. After I got involved in film making, I only did photojournalism occasionally.

Himka: Now I'd like to go right into the photographs, starting with the old woman at the bus station in L'viv. That comes from your collection *A Voiceless Song: Photographs of the Slavic Lands*. Here you put your frame around a lone figure surrounded by buses. What led you to take that photo? What did you see in that frame?

Paskievich: To my North American eyes, the woman is a figure from another time, from a centuries-old fairy tale who, finding herself standing amidst a fleet of modern-day buses, is asking a driver when can he return her to her world.

To my Ukrainian eyes, she is a mythological archetype. Women, like this one, carrying their wares and produce to city markets in make-shift backpacks made of coarse linen were a common sight. Their faces and the shapes of their bodies spoke of the toils of rural life during those communist times and before. If ever a monument was needed in a Ukrainian city, then and now, it would be of a peasant woman carrying that ubiquitous load on her back.



Himka: It just hit me that I may have singled out that image because the woman reminded me so much of my own grandmother. But this photo was part of a larger project, scenes of the Slavic lands, framing Slavic faces and figures. I understand that you spent most of 1980 travelling around what was then communist Eastern Europe. How did that come about?

Paskievich: I first travelled in Eastern Europe after I finished university. My time there was a revelation and when I became a photographer, I thought that photographing there would make for an interesting project. The project was funded by the Canada Council.

Himka: Did you start out the photo expedition with an idea of “Slavs”? My father had pan-Slavic leanings, but he was rather exceptional. In general, the Ukrainian national perspective has downplayed the idea of Slavic community because of historical conflicts with other Slavic nations (Poles, Russians). Czechs, on the other hand, whose historical antagonists were the Germans, have been much more open to pan-Slavism. Some of that attitude comes out in Josef Škvorecký’s excellent introduction to *A Voiceless Song*. How were you yourself thinking about these lands: Slavic, East European, or communist? Do you remember how you approached this issue in your proposal to Canada Council?

Paskievich: When I set out to do this project, I wasn't aware of the history of pan-Slavism. It was from Škvorecký that I first learned about the various pan-Slavic movements and that was after I had already finished the project.

In my Canada Council proposal, I said that I wanted to photograph the East European lands from which my parents and so many others were forcibly displaced by communism. I wanted to see the places that they continued to recall, celebrate, and mourn but to which they could not return.

I thought that focusing only on the Slavic countries would make the project more manageable in terms of distance and communication. Interestingly, I set out knowing basic Ukrainian and returned with my own invented interactive pan-Slavic language.

Himka: Can you tell me what it was like to be taking photos in those communist countries back in 1980?

Paskievich: A main support of communism was the state-controlled media which churned out propaganda.

Any Westerner travelling with a camera was suspected of gathering material that could refute communist claims. In Moscow I was accused of taking pictures of potholes and cracks in buildings.

This suspicion was extreme in the former Soviet Union. Foreigners could only travel to designated cities. Travel in the countryside was out of the question.

I was frequently followed and on several occasions I was taken to police stations where I was interrogated. But I never had any of my film confiscated.

The year 1980, when I took these pictures, was an especially tense time. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was in full force and that summer the Western countries boycotted the Moscow Olympics.

1980 was also the year of the birth of the Solidarity movement in Poland when workers went on strike for independent trade unions.

The anxiety and fear that I felt in the USSR was much diminished, but still remained in the Eastern Bloc countries where, unlike the USSR, I could travel anywhere.

Himka: The woman with the mandolin. Why is that such a powerful photo?

Paskievich: She is a point of quiet in a room of musicians preparing for a concert.

The woman's trusting, attentive face and posture as well as her jewelry bespeak a simple, pleasing elegance.

The face and the two hands cradling the mandolin make a strong visual triangle; our eyes move across these three points. And then the triangle is echoed in the shape of the mandolin.

The cigarette is a nicely off-key punctuation mark.



Himka: I see here too your keen sense of the beauty of older women, which shows up again and again in your work. Do you remember the circumstances of the photo?

Paskievich: The photo was taken at the Ukrainian Labor Temple in Winnipeg as the mandolin orchestra was setting up for a concert.

Himka: The mandolin orchestras were once a staple of Ukrainian communities in North America. They were sponsored by communists and Ukrainian Catholics alike.

I am very moved by the photograph of the church brotherhood in Fisher Branch, Manitoba, which is another photo of a once widespread phenomenon in our community. I think I am moved because I have spent about ten years of my life documenting Ukrainian churches in the prairies, but surely my attraction to this photo cannot be just personal. What do you, the photographer, see here?



Paskievich: Situated next to the icon of Mother Mary, the male figures, in their arrangement and with their serene postures are, themselves, secular facsimiles of icons.

I like your use of the word brotherhood. I imagine that these men attended this church from childhood and their loyalty to the church and their bonds of friendship continued into adulthood.

Himka: Yes, that is the feeling conveyed – men comfortable with one another and with their church.

I chose this photo from a publication prepared for the centenary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada: *Mosaica: Photographic Explorations*. It's a daytimer illustrated with photographs by six photographers, including also Orest M. Semchishen. Both you and he have done a lot of work on Ukrainian Canadian themes. Do you think there is a genre called Ukrainian-Canadian photography? Do you have to be of Ukrainian heritage to engage in it?

Paskievich: I don't think there is a Ukrainian-Canadian genre of photography per se. The Ukrainian Canadian photographers with whom I'm familiar are Orest Semchishen, John Max, Sandra Semchuk, and Ed Burtynsky. Much of Semchishen's work and my own is motivated by our Ukrainian Canadian experience. Semchuk's early photography as well as her latest work is very much informed by her Ukrainian roots. There is little evidence of Ukrainian concerns in either Max's or Burtynsky's work.

I don't think you have to be of Ukrainian heritage to photograph Ukrainian Canadiana. And I don't think you have to be Indigenous or Black or Asian to photograph in their communities.

Himka: Fair enough.

We've looked at some of your pictures of older women and older men. Now I'd like to look at some young women you photographed. There is the young lady with a scarf and luxurious hair that you caught with your camera at Ted Baryluk's grocery store. Can you say something about her? It's another striking photo.



Paskievich: In my 1982 film *Ted Baryluk's Grocery*, I shot photographs of the customers as they interacted with Ted and Helen, his daughter. The idea was that we needed a lot of photos of each customer to carry the dialogue that was being recorded simultaneously. I was making a sequence of photos as opposed to trying to get that one good one as is the usual method.

The photo of this girl was a good one from a sequence of photos of her.

Himka: Yes, it's a powerful image of the face of youth.

You also have a photo I've looked at again and again, the lithe young woman in her embroidered shirt. The young woman in the grocery photo appears, even after forty years, so contemporary. The even younger woman in her embroidered blouse, is also nearly timeless. That photo could have been taken in 1935 or 2021. Since there's an angel next to her, I imagine that the scene is a Christmas pageant. The girls in both photos have incredibly expressive faces, but one looks rather puzzled and the other is pensive and concentrating. How do you see these two photos in juxtaposition?



Paskievich: I see the photo of the girl in the grocery store in terms of modernism. The raised arm and the expression on her face evoke tension and apprehension. We wonder what is happening. That she is attractive in appearance is secondary. The photo of the girl in the embroidered blouse is traditionalist. It depicts beauty and grace.

Himka: Now I'd like to move to a sense of place, to your photo at the corner of Main St. and, I think, Aberdeen Ave. To me this is classic Paskievich. How do you see this photo?



Paskievich: The location is Main St at Redwood Ave.

The photograph references the sacred and the secular. There is a visual discordance between the traditionalist Orthodox church with its visually organized cupolas and the modern low-slung mall and various advertising pillars and hydro poles. The church is diminished physically, and any thought of the Christian message is lost among the gimcrack signs advertising fast food, vacuums, golf clubs, and the price of gasoline.

Himka: That's interesting. I see that now, but I was thinking of it in another way entirely. To me, it was The North End, a changing place with a historically Ukrainian character marked by the cathedral but also now with the bustling of all kinds of people going about their business. Your many photos in the North End sometimes have a Ukrainian character but sometimes capture the modern mix of the area.

Why have you focused so much in your photography on North End Winnipeg? And how do ethnicity and place factor into your choice of subjects?

Paskievich: My motivation to photograph the North End is twofold. Firstly, I wanted to put into pictures the variety and vitality of life that I experienced growing up in that part of the city.

Secondly, when I returned to the area after being away in Toronto for three years, I noticed the beginning of what became a rapid demographic turnover in the North End. The children of the Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and other Europeans who had made up such a large percentage of the North End population were increasingly leaving the area for more upscale neighborhoods. At the same time, Indigenous people from the reserves were moving in.

This demographic movement caught my interest and I decided that I would document it.

Ethnicity and place are major factors in my work. Growing up in polyglot and working-class east end Montreal and then North Winnipeg made me sympathetic to the immigrant and working-class experience. In university this interest in society and culture led me to study anthropology and sociology.

Himka: What you just said about demographic change is, I believe, well caught in the photo of the two Indigenous men standing on the sidewalk in front of the "Indian and Metis Pentecostal Church." In spite of the ethnic specificity here and the men's individual characteristics, very little would need to change if the photo were to show two trustees of a Ukrainian credit union. They would be dressed the same and stand in the same pose. It's as if the city and neighborhood forge certain types. The ethnicity comes and goes, but the neighborhood types prove more stable.

One of the many things I have found interesting in your work is your engagement with Indigenous peoples and culture. I suppose the North End demographics provided the catalyst for this. You have two films that in very different ways explore relationships between Indigenous people in North America and others, namely *Sedna: The Making of a Myth* (1992) and *If Only I Were an Indian...* (1995). You also did the photography for Larry Krotz's book entitled *Urban Indians* (1980). Do you think we could categorize your photos of the Indigenous North End as anthropological? Or is there something else going on?

Paskievich: My interest in ethnography led me to do projects that explore various ethno-cultural themes. I'm especially interested in what happens when disparate cultures meet. Diversity is not, by definition, a strength. But I

wouldn't call my work anthropological. In my films I try to follow a storyline that develops as I work with the subjects. With my still photography, my main goal is to make an interesting photograph, no matter the ethnicity of the person in front of the camera.

Himka: Thank you, John, for these reflections.



Defined by Two Cultures: The Paintings of Christina (Chris) Kudryk

Daria Darewych

Christina Kudryk is the most prominent of the generation of Ukrainian Canadian artists who came to Canada as children, in the late 1940s, from war-torn Europe. Raised and educated in Canada, they entered art schools or enrolled in university fine arts faculties and graduated with Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees.¹

Christina, like some of her peers, belongs to a generation which grew up in two very different cultures – Ukrainian and Anglo-Saxon. They were part of a generation that was defined by their displaced Ukrainian parents, the Ukrainian community in Canada, and Canadian society at large. It was a generation immersed in the Ukrainian culture and traditions of their families at home and in the Ukrainian community, as well as being surrounded by the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture of Canada and to a lesser degree influenced by artistic developments in the United States of America.

How did Christina Kudryk navigate the two identities and cultures? What impact did the dominant Canadian artistic and cultural milieu have on her paintings? What role did her Ukrainian upbringing and culture play and how was it manifested in her creative endeavors throughout the years? What were some of the visible signs of Ukrainian culture? It is the aim of this paper to explore and answer some of these questions.

Christina Kudryk née Nawrocky was born 15 February 1940 in Peremyshl,² into a prominent Ukrainian family. At the time her father, Stefan Yarema Nawrocky (1893-1960), was a well-known lawyer and a former member of the Polish Parliament (Sejm) from the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance Party for the Peremyshl region. He was also a former officer in the

¹ Some of the other artists who came to Canada as children include: Vera Yurchuk and Lev Mykytchuk in Toronto; Ihor Dmytruk, Ksenia Aronets, and Orest Keywan in Edmonton; Laryssa Luhovy and Ludmila Temertey in Montreal; Daria Zelska Darewych and Maria Maryniak in Winnipeg.

² During the Princely period the city of Peremyshl was part of Rus'-Ukraine; later it was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and as of 1772 part of the Habsburg Monarchy. After World War I it became part of Poland, where it is known as Przemyśl. It had a sizeable and active Ukrainian population prior to World War II.

Austrian army and later served in the Sichovi Stril'tsi (Ukrainian Sich Riflemen) and the Ukrains'ka Halyts'ka Armiia (Ukrainian Galician Army) in their fight for independence. A popular song, "Pyimo druzi" was composed to honor his wartime experiences.³ Her mother, Maria née Lominska, was a teacher and one of the organizers of the Youth Branch of Soiuз Ukrainok (Society of Ukrainian Women) in Peremyshl.⁴

During the Second World War, in 1944, the family, which included an older brother and younger sister, fled from the onslaught of the advancing Soviet army and sought refuge in Germany. They lived in Wangen, Bavaria where Christina attended a German school.⁵ In 1949 they immigrated to Canada and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a city with a large and vibrant Ukrainian community.⁶ As a child growing up in Winnipeg, Christina attended St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic School and graduated from Isaac Newton High School in 1957 where many of her classmates were of Ukrainian heritage. She was a member of Plast, the Ukrainian Youth Association of Canada, sang in the youth choir directed by Tatiana Koshetz, took dancing classes with Vasyl Avramenko, and enjoyed art lessons taught by Kateryna Antonovych.⁷ The latter introduced her to basic drawing and painting in water colors and oils. Kateryna Antonovych also introduced her to modern Ukrainian painters such as her favorite former teacher, Vasyl Krychevsky, and some aspects of

³ The song was composed by Roman Kupchynsky (1894-1976), a fellow Sich Rifleman (*ususus*) and member of the Press Corps.

⁴ Soiuз Ukrainok (Society of Ukrainian Women) was established in 1917 in Lviv.

⁵ The family first found accommodation in the village of Humbrechts before moving to Wangen. Christina attended grade one in Niederwangen and grades two and three in Wangen.

⁶ At the time Winnipeg was considered the center of Ukrainians in Canada. The headquarters of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee (later renamed the Ukrainian Canadian Congress) was located there, as were many Ukrainian organizations and such newspapers as *Ukrainian Farmer*, *New Pathway*, *Ukrainian Voice*, and *Progress*. There were several choirs, many halls, libraries, co-op stores, credit unions, and numerous Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox churches. Concerts, lectures, and plays were regularly presented and well attended.

⁷ Kateryna Antonovych (1884-1975) was born in Kharkiv, Ukraine. She studied at the Kharkiv School of Drawing and Painting with M. Pestrykov (1903-05), at the Ukrainian National Academy of Art in Kyiv with V. Krychevsky, M. Boichuk, and Yu. Narbut, and graduated from the Ukrainian Free University in Prague with an MA. She moved to Winnipeg in 1949 and opened her School of Drawing and Painting in Winnipeg in 1953. Christina Nawrocky attended classes in 1955-57.

Ukrainian folk art including regional clothing. Christina also attended night classes in Ukrainian literature taught by Prof. Jaroslav Rudnyckyj.⁸

As a student of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Manitoba she received a solid grounding in art history and art. Art history classes were attended together with architecture and interior design students, while classes in drawing, design, painting, sculpture, and printmaking with art students at the Winnipeg Art School. During this period Christina was exposed to some of the latest trends in modernism, including Bauhaus design and contemporary trends such as abstraction and American abstract expressionism — both in theory and practice.

At the time, the university encouraged fine arts students to choose elective courses from other faculties. Christina took Ukrainian language classes with Prof. Rudnyckyj and Slavic history with Prof. Paul Yuzyk. She was also active in “Zarevo,” a Ukrainian Catholic students’ club, which she headed (1958-60). In 1960 Christina graduated with a BFA degree from the University of Manitoba.

An exhibition of her work, together with that of her fellow fine arts graduate Daria Zelska, was sponsored by UVAN (the Ukrainian Free Academy of Arts and Sciences) and USOM (the Ukrainian Visual Artists Association of Canada) at the UNF (Ukrainian National Federation) auditorium in Winnipeg. It brought out the Ukrainian community and resulted in several articles in the Ukrainian press. Kateryna Antonovych spoke at the opening.⁹ Although as a student Christina participated in the life of the Ukrainian community, at this time there were no identifiable Ukrainian themes or elements in her work.

Soon after, in 1960, Christina moved to Toronto where she worked as a graphic designer for Bomac Art Studio. By this time Toronto was the art center of Canada. It was also home to a large third wave of Ukrainian immigrants with a thriving artistic community.¹⁰ In 1962 she married Walter Kudryk, a son of displaced Ukrainians, who came to Canada and settled in Winnipeg in 1948.

⁸ These classes were initiated by Prof. Jaroslav Rudnyckyj, a linguist, Ukrainian literary scholar, and professor at the University of Manitoba, in association with evening extension courses offered by The University of Manitoba. They were attended by Plast youth, at the Plast Home on Flora St.

⁹ K. Antonovych, “Vstupne slovo na mystets’kii vystavtsi u Vinnipeg,” *Zhinochyi svit*, no. 6 (June 1960): 4.

¹⁰ The Literary and Arts Club was established in 1952 in Toronto. It was instrumental in organizing the First Convention of Ukrainian Artists and Writers from Canada, the USA, and Western Europe in 1954. An art exhibition was held at the Canadian National Exhibition, as well as concerts and discussions. A commemorative book *Knyha Mysttsiv* was published. In 1956 the Ukrainian Association of Creative Artists of Canada (later called the Ukrainian Association of Visual Artists of Canada) was established in Toronto with the aim of supporting professional Ukrainian artists by organizing exhibitions.

Christina continued to paint initially in a technique learned during her university studies using enamel paints poured onto a surface and manipulated. This technique was somewhat akin to Jackson Pollock's large, innovative "poured" paintings using commercial enamel and oils. *Nebuchadnezzar* (1960) and *Rooster* (1960), although on a much smaller, more traditional scale, are examples of these early expressionist works. Christina also experimented with oils in *Toronto Night* (1962) where using a variety of heavy, impasto strokes she conveyed the pulsating night life of a city. In contrast, the surfaces of her oil pastel paintings were smooth, space was flattened, and shapes blurred as in *The Red Magi* (1963), where the figures are barely discernible on a field of beautifully nuanced hues of magenta, burgundy, and orange. The prevailing feature of most of Christina Kudryk's paintings was color: vibrant, rich, and sensual or subdued and nuanced.



The Red Magi, 1963, oil pastel on board, 552x72 cm.

In 1963 she participated for the first time in a group exhibition organized by USOM.¹¹ Her paintings were also included in the Tenth Art Exhibit organized by the Ukrainian Artists Association in the USA in New York.¹² Some of these early paintings were included in 1964 at her first solo exhibit at the Colonnade Gallery in Toronto, as well as in the three women artists exhibit at the Toronto Central Library Fine Arts Gallery.¹³

In 1964 Christina graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Education Degree and began teaching art at Silverthorn Collegiate.¹⁴

Christina's travels to France, Spain, and Morocco in 1965 and 1966 had an impact on her work resulting in a series of urban streetscapes focused on architecture painted in sun-drenched warm hues using the new medium of acrylics. An acrylic extender was used in *Santiago* (1968) to create a heavily textured surface overlaid with glazes of rich color depicting what appears to be a church façade. It is not a depiction as much as an impression of the visual impact of sunlight on a building. *Carcassone* (1967) is a study of sunlight on contrasting geometric architectural elements, devoid of people and painted in a warm golden-ocher palette in acrylics.

Although the emphasis in these early experimental paintings was on formal elements of design such as color, form, and texture, some aspects of figuration remained, despite the prevailing trends in mainstream art toward total abstraction.

An early example of ties with her heritage is a minimalist ink drawing of the head of Taras Shevchenko executed in 1961, the centennial of his death, which appeared on the cover of the Ukrainian Canadian Students' Union publication, *SUSK Bulletin*. Otherwise, her Ukrainian background appeared only sporadically in the late 1960s and early 1970s through Ukrainian subject matter in such paintings as the mixed media *Kniahynia Olha* (Princess Olha) (1970), *Dazhboh* (1971), and *Prince Ihor* (1971).¹⁵ *Kniahynia Olha* was created as a submission for a competition sponsored by the Ukrainian National

¹¹ Christina Kudryk exhibited three works: *The Roosters*, *Toronto at Night*, and *Three Riders*.

¹² According to the catalogue Christina Navrotzka Kudryk exhibited: *Three Riders*, *The Roosters*, and *The King*.

¹³ The other two artists were Ukrainian-born Halyna Novakiwska and Lydia Palij.

¹⁴ Christina taught art at Silverthorn Collegiate until 1967. After giving birth to two daughters, she resumed her teaching career in 1976 at Scarlett Heights Collegiate where she taught until 1986. From 1986 to 1998 she taught drawing, painting, and art history at the Art Centre of the Central Technical School of Toronto, where she also served as acting assistant department head and participated in annual staff art exhibitions.

¹⁵ *Kniahynia Olha*, a princess of Kyivan Rus', was the wife of Prince Ihor. She became regent (945-60) for their son Sviatoslav when Prince Ihor was killed by



Santiago, 1968, acrylic on board, 76x56 cm.

Women's League of America (UNWLA) in New York. Her submission received first honorable mention. For Christina it appears to have rekindled an interest in Ukrainian history and culture. It is interesting that without the titles indicating their cultural origins, there are no identifiable Ukrainian markers. Stylistically these paintings are in keeping with the rest of her work. *Dazhboh* (1971), which refers to the sun god of pagan Ukrainian mythology, is non-figurative. It is composed of various overlapping, textured circular shapes, symbolic of the sun in Ukrainian folk art. Textured round shapes also dominate the mixed media work *Zoloti Kul'baby/ Golden Dandelions* (1973).

the Derevliany in 945. She was christened, and because of her efforts to spread Christianity through Kyivan Rus', she is venerated as a saint by both the Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholics. There is a prominent halo around her head in Kudryk's work.

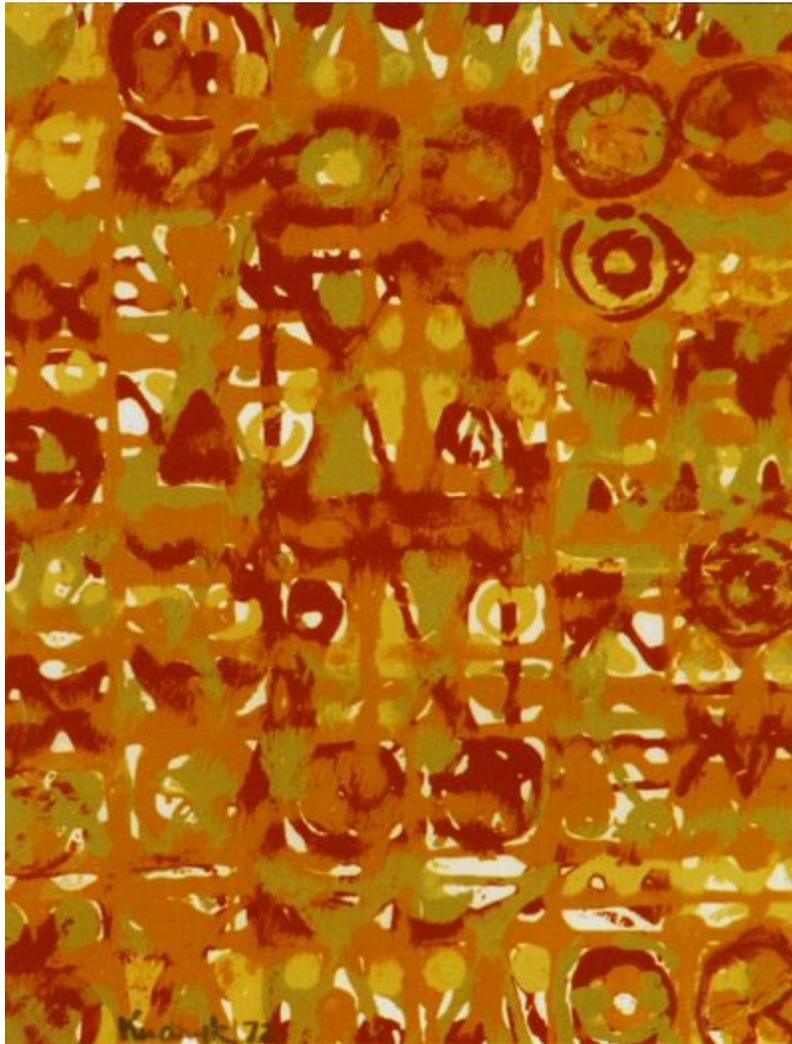
Both are part of the *Texture and Sun* series of abstract paintings in warm sun-filled hues.



Golden Dandelion, 1971, mixed media, 76x61 cm.

Christina returned to liquid enamel paints to create all-over configurations as in *First Bouquet* (1971). Her interest in mythology and symbols continued in such enamel paintings as *Quetzalcoatl* (1972), inspired by a Mesoamerican Aztec deity, and *Ancient Legends #3* (1972), where geometric shapes of circles and triangles are overlaid with layers of rhythmic patterns in all-over compositions. In *Ancient Legends #3*, the rich palette of variations of reds, yellow-orange, and ocher, with touches of black, echo Moroccan tapestries. Figuration has been abandoned in favor of non-objective compositions emphasizing the controlled fluidity of the enamel paint. These paintings were exhibited in 1973 at a solo exhibit at the Albert White Gallery in Toronto and then at the Peter Hess Gallery in Hamilton. They were in keeping

with the intense experimentation of the 1970s in Toronto, as elsewhere in Canada, which to some extent echoed trends in New York.



Ancient Legends #3, 1972, enamel paint on paper, 58x43 cm.

Christina continued to explore the properties of liquid enamel in the mid-seventies, but her focus shifted to music and a search for ways to depict its sound visually in an all-over activation of the surface. Using a restricted palette of blues and greys in *Sound Impressions #2* (1975), she conveyed the sound and mood of the music by pouring the enamel in horizontal bands which resemble vibrating pictorial sound waves. The oval, egg-shaped image appears suspended on a white field. A wedge of white breaks the oval and interrupts the horizontal flow of rhythm and the continuity. In *Sound Impressions #3* the contrasting horizontal lines of various blues, greys, and yellows shimmer and appear to vibrate. They create an unbroken pictorial space reflective of serial music of such modern composers as Anton Webern or Lubomyr Melnyk's continuous piano playing. According to the artist, "the mood, the rhythm of the

music, the emotions brought forth – were what I wanted to depict.”¹⁶ Art critic Maria Ochrymovych very aptly described these works as lyrical abstractions.¹⁷ These works from the *Solar Impressions* series were exhibited in a solo show at the West End Gallery in Edmonton in 1978.



Sound Impressions #3, 1975, enamel paint on paper, 66x56 cm.

¹⁶ Artist’s Statement, 18 May 2020, 2.

¹⁷ Maria Ochrymovych, “Abstract Lyricism in the Art of Christina Kudryk,” article written for the exhibit.

When total abstraction began to lose ground as the predominant expression of modernism in Canada, Christina's art underwent a pronounced change of direction. She turned to hyperrealist depictions where chosen objects were depicted three dimensionally with careful modelling, but without their expected context. According to the artist her focus was on the abstract beauty of each object – giving the viewer the opportunity to stop and wonder.¹⁸ *Red on Black* (1990), showing a slice of watermelon on an almost black ground, was the first painting in this series. It also marked a return to oils which allowed for very subtle variations and gradations of color. Likewise, it was a move to larger scale canvases. In *Beyond Context #4* (Red Apples) (1993), Christina painted nine almost identical apples viewed from an unusual angle of the calyx in a grid of very dark red squares framed by muted reds.¹⁹ By challenging the traditional depiction of apples and our visual experiences of them she creates a provocative composition that leads us to question our perception of reality and the expectations that shape those perceptions.

This is also the case in *Beyond Context #5* (White Apples) (1994) where six half-apples with exposed core with seeds have been placed in two rows of three square panels. Each half-apple is set in a halo of light which blends into a field of pale yellows. A popular fruit, apples often were depicted as part of still-life compositions, not as isolated objects in a grid. Their placement and depiction within a square suggest their deployment as symbols. In antiquity, as we recall, apples served as attributes of Venus and the Three Graces. Apples also have Christian attributes starting with Adam and Eve, as does the number nine which may be read as the angelic number referring to the nine choirs of angels. The number six may be seen as the number of creation symbolizing divine power, majesty, wisdom, and love. Removed from their surroundings and portrayed within geometric forms their depiction invites contemplation and viewer interpretation.

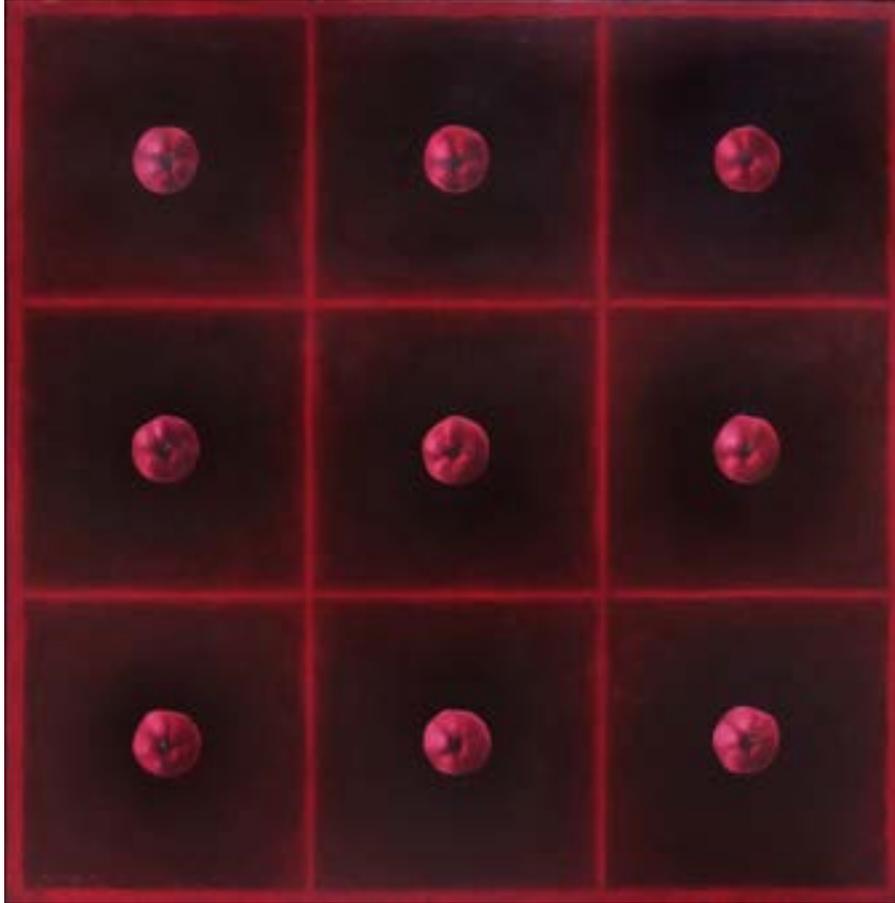
Symbols as a form of communication and musings continued in the next series, called *Meditations*, which coincided with Christina's retirement from teaching and the possibility to concentrate fully on her art.²⁰ According to the artist, "it was a time of contemplation, thought, and a strict routine of working in my studio."²¹ For this series composed of eleven large canvases, she chose to depict the fragile and commonplace egg and to place it in symbolic numbers, repetitions, and arrangements within other geometric forms with symbolic

¹⁸ Artist's Statement, 18 May 2020, 2.

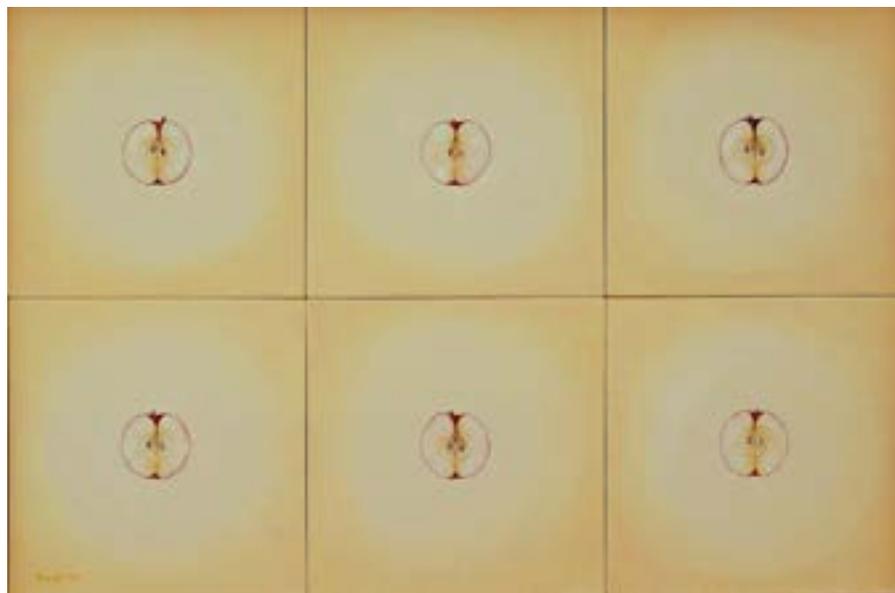
¹⁹ *Beyond Context #4* (Red Apples) is in the permanent collection of the Andrey Sheptytsky Museum in Lviv. It was reproduced on the cover of the book by Natalia Mocherniuk, *Poza kontekstom – intermedial'ni stratehii literaturnoi tvorchoosti ukrains'kykh khudozhnykiv-pys'mennykiv mizhvoiennia* (Lviv: Vydavnytstvo L'vivs'koi politekhniki, 2018).

²⁰ Christina Kudryk retired from her career as art educator in 1998.

²¹ Artist's Statement, 18 May 2020, 3.



Beyond Context #4 (Red Apples), 1993, oil on canvas, 63x68 cm.



Beyond Context #5 (White Apples), 1994, 6 panels, oil on canvas, 76x114 cm.

connotations. Since pagan times, in Ukrainian culture eggs, particularly decorated ones, were seen as symbols of life and used as talismans to ward off evil. In ancient Near Eastern religions, an egg was considered a symbol of creation and hence rebirth. In Christianity it is a symbol of the Resurrection. Similar attributes were assigned to certain numbers and geometric shapes.

In *Meditations #4 (Mandala)* (1999), working with a square canvas, Christina has painted delicately modelled eggs in four concentric circles around a central egg. Three rows of beautifully written text along the edges of the canvas act as a border along the square but also recreate some of the artist's thoughts.²² Both eggs and text taken completely out of context have become elements of design. The combination of two basic geometric shapes — circle and square — suggest perfection and harmony of the universe in eastern religions and have been used as symbols of earth and heaven in Christian art and architecture.



Mandala, 1999, oil, acrylic on board, 118x117 cm.

²² The words starting at the right read: meditation...serenity...tranquility...elation...energy...essence...evolution...procreation... perfection...pattern...rhythm...mantra...mandala. According to the artist they represent the stream of thought that led her from visualization/thought/meditation to the next word.

In *Meditations #8 (Ascendance)* (2000) three eggs are stacked in three vertical columns of twenty-one eggs each and separated by the black lines of the triptych panels.²³ By imposing a very limited palette composed of variations of light beige and flesh tones with pink hues and white, Christina eliminates any distractions and exhibits incredible discipline in painting so many almost identical egg images. The process of repetitively painting each egg with slight variations became in itself an act of meditation.

The inclusion of meticulously hand painted texts was an innovation in this series of Kudryk's paintings, as was its use as an element of design and a vehicle for expressing her musings. In Ukrainian art, areas of text were part of the nineteenth-century depictions of Cossack Mamai.²⁴ Texts were also used by such artists as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in their Cubist works at the beginning of the twentieth century and later in conceptual and postmodern art. Among contemporary Ukrainian artists, Volodymyr Makarenko made extensive use of written words, phrases, and poems associated with his mixed media paintings. What makes Kudryk's beautifully handwritten texts very interesting is their double duty as a conscious and effective element of design, as well as a venue for expressing her thoughts and feelings.

The paintings of the *Ethereal Garden* and *In My Daughter's Garden* series mark a return to figuration inspired by nature, as well as a continuation of images without context. Individual flowers like lilies, tulips, roses, as well as fruit like cherries are all meticulously modelled in oils and depicted against a flat field of color. In *Ethereal Garden #1 (Calla Lily)* (2003) a single white calla lily is superrealistically rendered on a red ground. *Ethereal Garden #8: Tudor Rose* (2003) is much more complex. It is composed of five individual panels forming a square. In the central square panel there is a frontal portrayal of a red rose tinged with scarlet in the shape of a circle. Despite the title it is not the traditional Tudor Rose of England which is a stylized combination of white and red roses.²⁵ A line of text in white on the four rectangular panels surrounding the rose provide an interesting textural contrast and function as design elements. The narrow spaces between panels that appear as black lines also serve as yet another element of design. Overall, the whole composition is monochromatic, based on variations of red, starting with the rich blood red of the rose and surrounded by burgundy panels on all sides.

The texts in this painting consist of the artist's somewhat random thoughts associated with roses. In the top line she writes "Tudor Rose...Guns and Roses...Thorny Rose...Rose of Sharon...Queen of Roses...Bread and

²³ *Meditations #8 (Ascendance)* is in the collection of the Ukrainian Museum in New York.

²⁴ Depictions of Cossack Mamai, Ukrainian folklore hero and symbol of freedom, were popular in Ukrainian folk art from the late seventeenth century.

²⁵ The traditional Tudor Rose of England takes its name and origins from the House of Tudor which united the House of Lancaster and the House of York.

Roses...Bed of Roses” and repeats the same text in the lower section. It is an interesting visualization of the subconscious in art not through images but through language.



Ethereal Garden: Tudor Rose, 2003, oil on board, 53x53 cm.

To commemorate the hundred-twentieth anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada in 2011, Christina created three mixed-media compositions: *The Promised Land* (2010), *The Dream* (2011), and *Our Roots*

(2011).²⁶ In all three works, the artist placed a modified archival photograph of Ukrainian settlers very prominently near the center.²⁷ In *Promised Land* the silkscreened image in black of the arriving pioneers is superimposed on a blue field inscribed with the names in both English and Ukrainian of the first settlers, the first child born in Canada, the first teacher, first lawyer, and first Member of Parliament, etc. Toward the bottom left a facsimile of the emblem taken from the artist's Canadian passport and the date of the arrival of the first official pioneers (Sep. 07. 1891) in Canada have been carefully reproduced. In the upper right there is a facsimile of a Canadian entry stamp. According to the artist, she placed all of these images on a painted field of light blue, symbolic of the great ocean that separated these settlers from their homeland.²⁸ In *Our Roots* a silkscreened image of a mother and young son are superimposed on a modified map of the three Western Canadian Provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba where most Ukrainian pioneers settled and where she arrived as child in 1949. A monochromatic, geometric pattern typical of Ukrainian weaving and embroidery is overlaid and stretches across the whole area of the work, perhaps implying the impact Ukrainian settlers had on developments in this part of Canada.

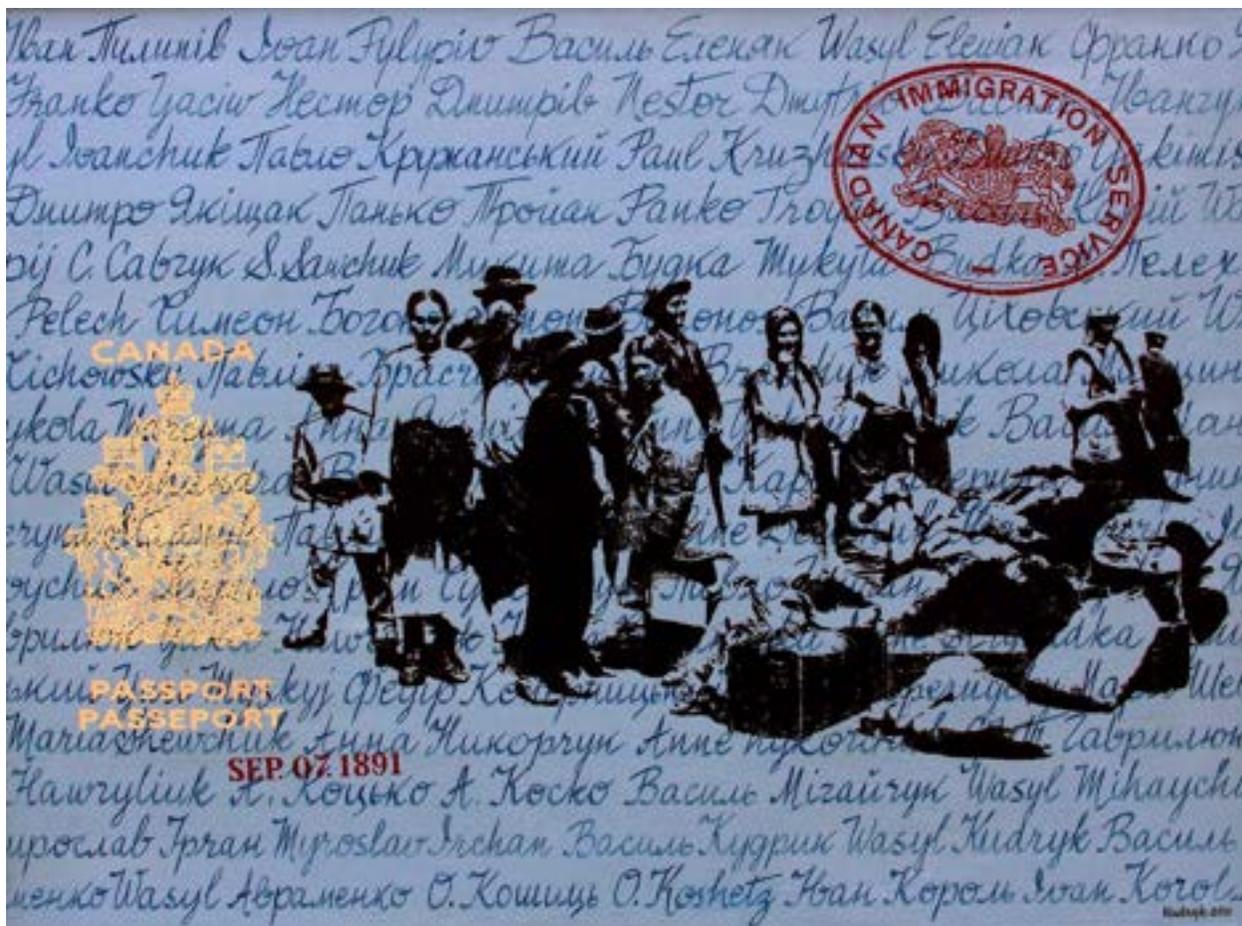
It is interesting to note that the *Heritage* series was a milestone in Christina's art not only in terms of relevant subject matter, but also stylistically. The cultural environment in which she grew up and with which she had remained in contact throughout the decades surfaced and became a dominant force in her future work.

This move to culturally significant subject matter was accompanied by a change in style. Stylistically, Christina embraced postmodernism by appropriating and adapting photographic images, signs, symbols, and texts, as well as combining several techniques and borrowing from other fields such as photography and printmaking. There was also a change in the implementation of text. It no longer consisted of random thoughts related to the theme and design. It became very specific, informative, meaningful, and important to our comprehension and appreciation of the work of art.

²⁶ *The Promised Land* and *Our Roots* were purchased by Buduchnist Credit Union for their collection in Toronto. *The Promised Land* was reproduced on the program cover and poster of "Identities – Glorious and Free," a concert commemorating the hundred-twenty-fifth Anniversary of Ukrainian Immigration to Canada, 14 May 2017, Koerner Concert Hall, Toronto. It was also used on the cover of A.V. Zav'ialov's book *Sotsial'na adaptatsiia ukrains'kykh immihrantiv* (Kyiv: Samit-Knyha, 2020; Russian version: Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo IGU, 2017) and *Our Roots* was reproduced on the cover of Andrei Zav'ialov's book *Sotsial'naia adaptatsiia migrantov: sotsiologicheskii analiz teorii i praktiki* (Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo IGU, 2019).

²⁷ Christina learned the silkscreen process especially for this work.

²⁸ Artist's Statement, 18 May 2020, 3.



The Promised Land, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 76x101cm.

In 2011 the Kudryks, with children and grandchildren in tow, embarked on a family trip to Ukraine. While in Lviv, the principal city and cultural center in Western Ukraine, Christina received an invitation from the Andrey Sheptytsky National Museum to hold a retrospective of her work. This gave her a wonderful opportunity to take stock of five decades of her creative endeavors. The solo retrospective exhibition was held in Lviv in August 2012 with great success. Several articles appeared in Ukraine and Canada and there was extensive media coverage.

For the two-hundredth anniversary of Taras Shevchenko's birth, Christina painted two works which were shown at the commemorative exhibition organized by USOM at the KUMF Gallery in 2014 in Toronto.²⁹ For

²⁹ Both paintings, *Epistle* and *Obnimit'sia zh braty moi/Maidan* were reproduced in the exhibit catalogue *Art Exhibition Commemorating 200-th Anniversary of the Birth of Taras Shevchenko* (Toronto: USOM, 2014), 15-16. *Epistle* (2013) is in the collection of the Andrey Sheptytsky National Museum in Lviv and was reproduced on the inside back cover of Oksana Zhelyns'ka's book *Mystets'ka Shevchenkiana (1829-1940) Natsional'noho Muzeiu u L'vovi imenem*

the first of the acrylic paintings titled *Epistle*, she appropriated and painted Shevchenko's first self-portrait from 1840 and overlaid it with handwritten text from his poem "Poslaniie" (Epistle) where Shevchenko addresses those of his brethren that were dead, alive, or yet unborn. She felt that the prophetic words of the poem spoke clearly to the tragic events unfolding in Ukraine at the time.³⁰ The excerpts of the poem were inscribed in white, a color of light and hope, and were presented in continuous lines across the whole canvas.

In the second painting titled *Obnimit'sia zh braty moi* (Embrace Each Other, My Brothers) also exhibited as *Maidan*, she continued with selected passages from the poem "Poslaniie" inscribed over a panoramic view of burning sky above the famous Maidan Nezalezhnosti, with its Independence Monument crowned with the figure of Berehynia towering high above the square.³¹ The text begins with Shevchenko's prophetic words "Doborolas' Ukraina do samoho kraiu..." and ends with the words of the title. Reacting to events in Ukraine she says of this moving work: "I watched the horror on TV, I cried, and I painted."³²

What is interesting compositionally is that whereas the text in *Promised Land* provided the backdrop, in the Shevchenko paintings the text is inscribed in white over the images and acts as a filter through which we see Shevchenko's facial features and the events of revolution on the Maidan. In the *Meditations* series and *Tudor Rose* the text served as a design element; the word and phrase selection, albeit associated with the theme, seem random as a continuous stream of thought. In *The Promised Land* and both Shevchenko paintings, it has become an integral and significant part of the subject matter and composition.

Although Christina had never distanced herself from the Ukrainian community, with the events of Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity, she began to use her art to work through the cherished relationship with her inherited cultural heritage. Her work became inextricably connected with the political destiny of Ukraine and its people.

Andreia Sheptyts'koho (Lviv, 2015). *Maidan* was reproduced on the cover of *Our Life* magazine published by the Ukrainian National Women's League of America in October 2019.

³⁰ In February 2014 a series of violent events involving peaceful protesters and riot police in Kyiv turned deadly and culminated in the ousting of President Viktor Yanukhovich. The protesters came out by the hundred thousands demanding that the government implement an association agreement with the European Union which had been promised.

³¹ This monument in the central square of Kyiv was constructed in 2001 to mark the tenth anniversary of independence of Ukraine. It is a victory column in the style of the Ukrainian baroque crowned with the figure of a young woman holding a branch of *kalyna* (guelder rose), a popular symbol of Ukraine's fight for independence.

³² Artist's Statement, 18 May 2020, 4.



Maidan, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 60x90 cm.

Christina says that the events of the Euromaidan and then the Russian occupation of Crimea aroused very deep emotions. She thought of the disparity between what was happening in her ancestral homeland and life in Canada, her adopted land.³³ This resulted in the triptych *Toronto, the City of Many Voices* (2015), a collage depicting the different races and ethnicities of Canadian society and its multicultural nature. In the lower half running across the three vertical panels is a skyline view of the city with the CN Tower in the center that serves to unite the whole composition. The central panel was dedicated to English and French, the left panel to immigrants from other parts of Europe – Germany, Ukraine, Poland, Portugal, and Italy, the right panel to Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The work was done as a montage of phrases collected and cut out from the newspapers published in various languages throughout the city. The undulating surface, particularly in the sky, suggests waves, perhaps symbolic of the waves of immigration.

³³ Ibid.



Toronto: City of Many Voices, 2015, mixed media on board, 76x85 cm.

Homage to My Father (2016), was also inspired by current events in Ukraine. It was created to honor the artist's father, Stefan Yarema Nawrocky and to commemorate his fight for an independent Ukraine.³⁴ Christina combined an enlarged and manipulated archival photograph of her father in a Sichovyi Strilets' (Sich Rifleman) uniform with medals over a backdrop of

³⁴ Stefan Yarema Nawrocky was drafted into the Austrian army in 1914 where he received his officer's training. He was seriously wounded on the Serbian front and was awarded the Iron Cross. After recovery and an honorable discharge, he joined the Sichovi Stril'tsi where he at first served as a staff officer. Then he volunteered for active duty and was wounded in the Battle of Semakivtsi where he lost his left eye. He was decorated with the Silver Medal, First Class.

triangular shapes, perhaps borrowed from the designs of Heorhii Narbut.³⁵ A golden ring of victory frames his image. To the left there are stylized, triangular *kalyna* berries, symbolic of the “Usususy” (as the Sich Riflemen were called) and their song, and Cyrillic letters (“УСС”) identifying them.³⁶ Inscribed across the top and not completely visible, are the words of the refrain to the song “Pyimo druzi” which was composed in his honor. They read: “Buv sobi strilets’, shcho divchynu mav” (There was a rifleman who had a girl). The monochromatic palette of greenish grey echoes the color of the Sich Riflemen uniform and sets the mood of this unusual and beautiful portrayal.



Homage to My Father, 2016, mixed media on canvas, 76x50 cm.

³⁵ Heorhii Narbut (1886-1920) was the most prominent Ukrainian graphic designer of the beginning of the twentieth century who based many of his designs on Ukrainian folk art motifs.

³⁶ The song “Hei, u luzi chervona kalyna pokhylylasia” (Hey, in the Meadow the Red Guelder Rose Is Leaning Over) was made popular by the Sich Riflemen.

Christina's involvement with things Ukrainian has continued in her latest works as may be seen in *Vyshyvana Troianda* (The Embroidered Rose) (1918)³⁷ and *The Flowers of Our Time* (2019) where she has combined her earlier interest in nature and flowers with aspects of contemporary Ukrainian pop culture. In *Vyshyvana Troianda* the greatly enlarged rose was made with patterned paper imprinted with cross-stitched embroidery to coincide with the flow and curve of the rose petals. At first glance, *The Flowers of Our Time* appear as red poppies so popular and loved in Ukraine. However, they are shown not in a field or garden, but against a grey backdrop of a street map. On closer examination it is the map of the streets of Lviv and the poppies are not really poppies. They have not been painted. They have been cleverly montaged from snippets cut out of plastic shopping bags imprinted with red and black embroidery designs adapted for commercial purposes. The stems have been made with the edges of the embroideries on the bags and resemble railway tracks. Christina says, "I have my thought, but I leave it to the viewer to interpret this work from their own point of view."³⁸



Flowers of Our Time, 2019, mixed media on canvas, 51x76 cm.

³⁷ *Vyshyvana Troianda* is in the collection of KUMF Gallery in Toronto.

³⁸ Artist's Statement, 18 May 2020, 5.

The artist's latest work and one which has been on her mind for a while is *Dva kolory moi: dlia Lesi Ukrainky/My Two Colors: Homage à Lesia Ukrainka* (2020), the foremost Ukrainian woman writer, poet, and playwright with a universal message.³⁹ It is an interesting combination of portraiture, poetry, and symbolism where decorative, folk art zig-zag patterns in red and black intermingle with words taken from various poems by Lesia Ukrainka. They create a vertical screen of embroidery and verse which border the face of Lesia Ukrainka. Her portrait copied from a popular archival photograph overlaps with a map of Ukraine that partially camouflages her face. It is a tribute to Lesia Ukrainka's spirit, writing, and love of Ukrainian embroidery. It is indicative of the artist's admiration, reflections, and the research that preceded the creation of this work.

As can be seen, through the years Christina Kudryk's paintings have undergone thematic and stylistic changes, as well as multiple transformations. There have been numerous adaptations to mainstream art trends and world events. However, there is also continuity. From the early years, prominence has been given to the artist's creative imagination in transforming objective reality. This principle has become a permanent component of her artistic career. Experimentation and amazing inventiveness continue to prevail, resulting in interesting developments particularly in her postmodernist works. In her latest works, ideas and concepts have been successfully integrated with traditional aesthetic concerns and growing attachment to her Ukrainian heritage.



Christina Kudryk

³⁹ In 2021 Ukrainians celebrated the hundred-fiftieth anniversary of Lesia Ukrainka's birth (1871-1913). *Dva kolory moi – dlia Lesi Ukrainky* was reproduced on posters and became an integral part of the celebrations of the Days of Georgia in Ukraine, sponsored by Lviv oblast in June 2021.

“As Never Before”: The Body and Revolution in the Ukrainian Worlds of Natalka Husar and Lesia Khomenko

Jessica Zychowicz

In 1984 during a conference on Canadian-Ukrainian culture, the painter Natalka Husar (b. 1951), then thirty-three years old, remarked:

I was born American, raised Ukrainian and my status is Canadian — a hyphenated consciousness reinforced by anger and guilt, and, of course, there is going to be evidence of this in my work....Nevertheless, I am in it for life. I do art because I have to. The content is always very specific, usually biographical. Sometimes, if I am lucky, the concept is universal....I depict the universal characteristics of human nature specifically through Ukrainian people because I am Ukrainian, and therefore I see myself in my work. Only by confronting that which I hate can I resolve my guilt and see that which I love.¹

When asked by a participant in the audience: “Would Natalka Husar consider the audience for her paintings to be the Ukrainian or the universal community?” she responded: “The universal community.”² What could possibly be meant here by the universal community? And what might Husar be telling us that we might perceive in her paintings, with regard to history, and the people in them — are these people capable of revealing to us some “truth” that we, in our individual understandings of ourselves in relation to history, cannot access on our own?

In 1998, just before her untimely and tragic death, famed literary scholar and feminist from Kyiv, Solomea Pavlychko, found herself in Edmonton, Canada on an academic fellowship where she began working on an anthology that would bring together literary voices from Ukraine and the Canadian-Ukrainian diaspora. The resulting volume is graced with not one, but two Introductions, the first penned by Pavlychko. Being from Ukraine and having

¹ Natalka Husar, “The Relevance of Ethnicity to the Artist’s Work: Personal Perspectives,” in *Visible Symbols: Cultural Expression among Canada’s Ukrainians*, ed. Manoly R. Lupul (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1984), 37.

² *Ibid.*, 43.

lived through the turbulent decade of the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union, she inscribes a specific moment, but does so by positioning the texts in the volume and their Ukrainian authors within a concept of time marked by gender: “the return, after a long period of silence or some puzzling boycott of socialist realism, of women.” The end of the Soviet Union, for her, is a revolutionary paradigm that means overcoming “the most optimistic era of Ukrainian history,” of everything “saccharine” that “spawn[s] terrible fantasmagorical plots, a world without dawn or hope.” From the old world of Soviet utopianism, new processes of *world-ing* take its place, in which the Red Army brigades’ and their officers’ promises wither away into the fading backdrop of marching bands and parades that now deliver “a pessimistic minor key, an interest in the dark side of consciousness.”³

The second Introduction to the volume is by the Canadian-Ukrainian writer and scholar Janice Kulyk Keefer. She remarks that the primary difference between the authors from Ukraine and those from Canada are the latter’s striving to articulate their ethnos and histories vis-à-vis a dominant mainstream, a task that requires “transformation.” This task relies on subject-position, though is not dependent upon it, as it is “indispensable for any artist: that of being both within and outside of a formative community, of being free to observe, analyse, and judge as you will, without the kind of censorship so often exacted by blind loyalty to ‘our own.’” In her view, pointing out injustices, contradictions, hypocrisy, and cruelty is the crucial task of the writer and the artist, who for her are interchangeable. Kulyk Keefer addresses her Introduction to Canadians “of whatever background” and sets before all readers a great challenge to understand not only a place, but another sense of time: “of discovering something of what it is like to live in contemporary Ukraine — the hopes and frustrations, the continuing shock of the old and the comparable shock of a runaway and often hostile “new.”⁴ This sense of time is revolutionary time, a break from teleological narratives under the spell of the USSR; it is time stripped from organized labor, hierarchical public/private divides, and production quotas. It is all free time, all time outside of the public domain; it is a woman’s time, embodied time.

And with this “new” sense of time is mapped a new Ukraine. This charting of history is defined by the term “contemporary Ukraine,” mirrored at the end of both Introductions, tethered to 1998. Pavlychko writes:

“As never before” — these are the words used most frequently to characterize contemporary Ukraine as well as its literature. Indeed, Ukrainian life is, as never before, dramatic, dynamic, multifaceted, and creatively and intellectually stimulating. The atmosphere of liberty and

³ Solomea Pavlychko, “Introduction,” in *Two Lands, New Visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine*, ed. Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko (Regina: Coteau Books, 1998), iv, iii.

⁴ Janice Kulyk Keefer, “Introduction,” in *Two Lands*, xii-xiv.

constant change that has lasted for years now is inebriating as never before.⁵

What shared features do places and times considered “contemporary” merit? Are these similar or different qualities to the “universal community” in Nataalka Husar’s comment of 1984 on her own artistic task, with regard to the concept of “contemporary Ukraine” as it was not in 1998, but how we perceive it today in 2021?

Nataalka Husar would later travel with Janice Kulyk Keefer to Ukraine in 2005, where the latter would write a collection of texts, and the former create a series of paintings, published together as *Foreign Relations/Burden of Innocence*.⁶ On one level, this return to their parents’ homeland would seem to revert to traditional values in an act of cultural preservation and heritage work, at odds with the break from the Soviet past taking place at the same time. Yet the distance and temporal remove of their familial emigration out of “the old country” as well as their lives lived in Canada, as Canadians, makes them outsiders to the community in contemporary Ukraine, in Kulyk Keefer’s sense, “free to observe, analyse, and judge as you will.” Is it possible that the “contemporary,” more than Ukraine or Canada, is the universal community, the global condition for which their art strives?

In 2007, shortly after 2005, the year Nataalka Husar was traveling in Ukraine and working on the paintings that would later become *Burden of Innocence*, the painter Lesia Khomenko (b. 1980) was mounting her series *Dacha’s Madonnas*, featuring large-format canvases of elderly women with robust figures working in the fields. The citation of the socialist realist pastoral harvest scenes of the prior century was clear, but the clothing, colors, and perspectives in the paintings introduced to Ukrainian art something “new.” This something was not new, in essence, but newly visible: in Pavlychko’s sense, the return of women, old rural women, invisible women, to the platform of “contemporary” art. Lesia Khomenko, from Kyiv, is a founding member of the R.E.P. Group, a non-hierarchical affiliation of approximately twelve artists who found common ground after the Orange Revolution in their growing interest in exploring public spaces, post-Soviet aesthetics, and theories and practices of direct democracy.⁷

Husar and Khomenko are each from different generations, different countries, and different “waves” of feminists if one examines them from the

⁵ Pavlychko, “Introduction,” viii.

⁶ Janice Kulyk Keefer and Nataalka Husar, *Foreign Relations/Burden of Innocence* (Ukraine: Rodovid, 2009).

⁷ R.E.P. Group (Revolutionary Experimental Space), *R.E.P.: Revolutionary Experimental Space:*

A History, ed. Lada Nakonechna, trans. Larissa Babij, Mariana Matveichuk, Weronika Nowacka, Anastasiya Osipova, and Olena Sheremet (Berlin: The Green Box, 2015).

standpoint of the equally progressive, yet divergent, representational politics of their works' embedded social contexts. Yet there are many similarities between these two painters. Khomenko, like Husar, utilizes the human form in large format paintings of groups of people, crowds; both artists place objects and stylistic details in their paintings from the combined — clashing — visual diction of “local” Ukrainian early Soviet modernism, late socialist realism with the “global” pop idiom of television and print, mass media, and fast fashion in the consumption patterns of working-class men and women. Khomenko, like Husar, is an artist looking “outside” at what is unfamiliar to her, but within reach of living memory, couched in a familiar but inaccessible language of Ukrainianess: her parents' Soviet generation and the aesthetics of that era, reworked as a backdrop for their living memories. Husar, by contrast, encounters the Soviet ghost differently — by looking at its contours wherever the Ukraine that her parents left appears as a backdrop for understanding the people she painted on her travels in Ukraine.

Both artists paint bodies and portraits of faces, but as “outsiders” they do so with a great deal of distance in mediating the connection to the people inside the paintings. Characters appear and reappear within and across series; rarely are individuals named, rather the titles of the paintings frame their larger social fabric with irony, humor, even sarcasm. *Dacha's Madonnas*, for example, is at once an elevation of the field laborer to holy icon, a recognition of women's work as the backbone of the Ukrainian family food chain, an inversion of the church's role in policing proper conduct for women, and an interrogation of conformist standards of beauty (subjects are in indiscreet poses with buttocks facing the viewer, bent wrinkly knees, etc.). By bringing these two artists together in a closer exploration of their work, we can identify a few additional shared features along with those named above. The layers of time referents in their paintings mark decline and yet introduce a dynamism that opens up space for reflection on the reductivism of “progress” as a mandated category, rather than individually defined set of values. The circumstances of the people in their paintings would, in their everyday appearances, seem to be “obsolete” — they are themselves outsiders: impoverished, poor, working-class women, mafiosi, and even a “has-been” as Husar names one of her heroines. The everyday, as subject, is reclaimed from the dregs of socialist realism providing the backdrop for these painters' historical commentary on the post-Orange revolutionary moment, layered over post-1991. The once second/first world and bipolar Cold War are set in relief against globalization.

Dead Artists' Paints — A Visual Language for Time

For Nataalka Husar, “to paint history is to paint the truth.” Husar's and Janice Kulyk Keefer's aforementioned trip to Ukraine took place just after the Orange Revolution, which entailed peaceful mass demonstrations in public spaces against election fraud in the presidential elections. The outcome of the journey, like the revolution, was fruitful. Kulyk Keefer produced several texts and a cycle of poems under the heading *Foreign Relations*, which were published

together in a book featuring Husar's series of paintings she created, *Burden of Innocence*. These many-sized paintings were exhibited in Canada by the McMaster Museum of Art from November 2009 until 2011. Husar painted the works in the series using what she calls "dead artists' paints":⁸ tubes of heavy metal pigments, most too toxic for today's market standards, that she collected in street markets of Ukraine, or by negotiating with local museums. A close-up color photograph of these corrugated, chipped, and rusty tubes of paint lines the inside of the published book. The names of the colors in Cyrillic on the tubes are only partially visible, due to the oxidation processes eating away at the label over what appears to be decades. These metal capsules double as a mirror of the defunct, dilapidated, hulking Soviet metal structures everywhere in Ukraine in the 2000s, as well as a frame, an ersatz door, into Husar's passage into and through the scenes she encounters and reimagines. The curator of the McMaster Museum, Carol Podedworny, has written of Husar's relationship to painting in the context of the genre of "history painting" in post-revolutionary France, when painters left the studio and focused not on grand narratives, but humble everyday life instead of classical, mythological, or religious scenes. She compares Husar's preoccupation with the ordinary to Goya, Daumier, and Hogarth, but adds that "Husar's Ukraine is seen from the outside in, through eyes of someone brutally honest and in despair." The critical agenda is to develop further the language of painting for a "current artistic vocabulary," while also "to create a critical thematic response for the record of a State in its current social, political, and cultural moment."⁹ Husar's published notes that accompany the series *Burden of Innocence* describe it as "a history play in three acts." Act I, "Nurse and Stew," features the artist in her dual avatars as a nurse and stewardess; Act II, "Trial" includes the group of paintings called *Soviet Priesthood*, of burly men who look like they have stepped out of a series of mugshots, and whose brutal masculinity speaks of a world mired in corruption and lawlessness, where the individual struggle for honor necessarily takes on Shakespearian magnitude. The third and last Act is "Banquet" and the grand finale is the painting *Looking at Art* (2009) in which the artist's alter-egos Nurse and Stew serve empty platters to a cadre of characters from the other paintings: a young girl impacted by Chernobyl now grown up, a leather-clad bald man, and an overwrought "has-been" whose expression is unequivocally Husarian — captured so as to rest forever on canvas in that indistinguishable state between laughter and sobs. Such is the history of Ukraine.

While traveling in Ukraine, Husar collected various photographs, prints, and folk paintings along the way. Husar has spoken about these found images as ghosts: "Hanging in my studio as I was painting my own work, these

⁸ Husar, *Burden of Innocence*, 14, in Kulyk Keefer and Husar, *Foreign Relations/Burden of Innocence*.

⁹ Carol Podedworny in Gerta Moray et al., *Husar Handbook* (Macdonald Stewart Art Centre / ABC Art Books Canada, 2010), 30, 29.

anonymous portraits felt like ghosts of innocents from a bygone era.”¹⁰ These “ghosts” come to populate the project, appearing almost as interlopers in the series’ intertextual references between the other characters and their environments. A detailed pencil sketch of a photograph of a boy soldier is smuggled into this “contemporary” art series by the subversive hand of Husar and given the title *Soldier* (an anonymous portrait from the 1940s). We are not given any information about him, but can see from the star on his uniform he was in the Red Army. Later, in another painting there is another young boy of approximately the same age, roughly ten years old, but he is wearing all black and the title is simply *Boy in Uniform* (an anonymous portrait from early twentieth-century Ukraine). The weary expression on his face, formal stance, and shaved head indicate that he may also be a soldier, or a revolutionary; the latter is more likely the case given the background of the image, which is pastoral and split evenly between a blue sky and yellow-green earth — a way of organizing the sight plane of the canvas that mirrors the stripes of the Ukrainian flag and its sky-over-grain. A third boy, also roughly ten, appears in a different painting in new guise: an Adidas track suit and clenched fist, at the edge of a traffic jam in a rain-soaked village road at night. Stew and Nurse are in the background with a babusia (grandmother) figure selling weights on a home scale on the side of the road. The small mafia-soldier boy stares at us; he could be from a Shevchenko painting, or recently released from prison. His face portends a difficult future, a life of hardship ahead in a world gone bad. Husar’s despair is felt most clearly in the faces of these children, whose innocence becomes not only Ukraine’s burden, but the burden of the painter to bring to light what came before her — the dead artists, whose deaths left no evidence of revolution, only the admission of loss. The “ghosts” Husar refers to hover over the most defining historical event of these territories of the twentieth century: the Bolshevik revolution and the Soviet experiment, which left millions and millions interned, starved, imprisoned, and dead. Artists were the first to go.

What makes the intertextual elements of the series especially powerful is that the point where the references cross is in the found portraits, and it is at these points precisely that the “world” of Husar’s imagination becomes most *Ukrainian*. A young girl-child in the found painting *Maiden by the Well* (anonymous folk portrait, early twentieth century) conjures up a key moment in history: after the folk romanticism of the nineteenth century, but during or just before the targeting and killing of rural Ukrainian peasants in the Soviet dekulakization campaign and the stifling of national expression under Stalinism. The repetition of this image in the pastoral painting *Seedspitter* (2006-08) of a young woman in a short leather skirt and boots in a garden is styled after the folk artist Kateryna Bilokur. Bilokur’s artistic associations with Ukraine were brave, as they were largely forbidden in the 1930s-40s, as well as her successful struggle, against the will of her father, to continue drawing. The

¹⁰ Quoted by Stuart Reid in Moray, *Husar Handbook*, 41.

citation of Bilokur in Husar's scene could only be one of prostitution (the car leaving the scene in the background, and the ironic title). This scene, also in reference to the nineteenth century "found portrait" of the maiden by the well, can be read as Husar's commentary on the timelessness of an issue as stemming from patriarchal control over young women. Patriarchal control over women mirrors the state's control over artists. And in this version of affairs, a state that no longer has any reason to support or justify artistic expression, the girls wind up prostitutes and the boys mafiosi.

Husar reveals by omission the time-gaps in history. All of the found images are images of children, save for one: *Ukraine and Me* (2007). The backdrop of this painting is a folk-style painting on linen from the early twentieth century. Husar's two alter-egos, Nurse and Stew, cling to each other on a bridge. In the foreground a woman in a peasant-style dress crosses the bridge; her two-dimensional round features match the socialist realist painting common to the style of the artists surrounding Mykhailo Boichuk in the 1920s, including Olenka Pavlenko, whose famous painting *Long Live 8th of March!* (1930-31) depicted a crowd of rural women in peasant dress with red flags. The woman in Husar's painting is left at the end of the bridge, alone, with no one behind her; it is almost as though the original, unknown, artist of the painting had been waiting for Husar to fill in the rest of the picture. The effect is also of a "ghost," but this time Husar herself is the ghost, rather than the person depicted in the found image. By adding her own likeness in dual form in the painting, in her own style, she also adds her artistic signature: reconfirming her right to exist as an artist, as a woman, as a woman-artist in all guises.

The fact of mass execution of Ukrainian artists in the 1930s, beginning with Boichuk and his followers, is pinned onto the painting in the form of Husar's grammar, which reveals the time-gap between the original and the present tense. Moreover, Husar's addition showing herself in dual roles is her gift to what others have written about as "difficult heritage," as otherness, in her own Canadian context, where to be Ukrainian and female has not only meant being perceived as "alienated and rebellious" under an Anglo gaze, but within the Ukrainian immigrant community as "guilty of rejecting traditional restraints and values, and of succumbing to the vulgar and superficial in the Canadian lifestyle."¹¹ If we return once more to this painting to "read" it not as an artifact of where Husar found it, in Ukraine, but as if it were found in her more immediate context, in hyphenated Canadian-Ukraine, the representational qualities will shift. This gap in place mirrors the time gap. This painting could then be said to resemble those precious remnants among families in Canada that are displayed in their homes as the few prized possessions that were taken by their ancestors to the "new country." Of nominal or no value, even mass-produced, these folk paintings stand in for the story of immigration to Canada that, not unlike the propaganda of early Soviet

¹¹ Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 64.

socialist realism, also demanded certain roles from women at different points in time.

Historian Frances Swyripa in *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891-1991* takes a long-range view of Canada and Ukraine as intertwined civic projects in which women take up the social positions available to them at different points in time on either side of the ocean:

With the consolidation of organized community life and the hardening of ideological lines between the wars, the question of community influence over individuals grew in importance as nationalist and progressive elites sought to popularize their perceptions of what was best for Ukraine and for Ukrainians in Canada....Now military and political defeat and the insecurity of national-cultural life in the homeland necessitated motivating individuals in the interests of group survival and duty to Ukraine.¹²

Yet her study also shows a continuous struggle by women for discursive power that transcends the bounds of nation: “Whether cultivated and exploited by community elites (male or female) as part of a political message, or expressing spontaneous grassroots emotions, the images, roles, and myths created about and for Ukrainian-Canadian women over the past century said relatively little about their lives....But the images, roles, and myths created about and for Ukrainian-Canadian women said a great deal about the way Ukrainian Canadians at elite and grassroots levels saw themselves, and about the way they identified women with the issues and concerns of their group.”¹³ Husar inherits these myths, takes them to Ukraine, then spits them out again in a new form. She does this from her own unique subject-position -- but also in a more universal commentary on the social conditions of being a woman in art. As Podedworny writes: “there is no sweet and syrupy nostalgia for a homeland here. Husar is pissed off and she is kicking the shit out of history.”¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 102.

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Podedworny in Moray, *Husar Handbook*, 37.



01: Natalka Husar, *Ukraine and Me*, From the Series *Burden of Innocence*, 2007. Oil on early 20th century Ukrainian folk painting, sewn on linen, 62 x 77cm. Shared with permission of the artist. Photo credit: Michael Rafelson.

An illicit self takes form throughout Husar’s paintings, where deeper taboos against which one defines oneself surface: ethnicity, belonging, fear, and love, including self-love too often demarcated as a last priority for the virtuous Ukrainian woman, for whom self-sacrifice is supposed to equal virtue. This visual vocabulary is bolstered by a fellow traveler, a sister in arms: the poetic language of Janice Kulyk-Keefer’s *écriture féminine*. The poem “*Ars Grammatica*” opens the section of the collection *Foreign Relations* entitled “¡Pomaranchevo / Orange!”:

....To name this country
 in any alphabet but Cyrillic
 is to speak in a condition
 of transliteration, yes, but also of
 translation, which is another word for error,
 as in wandering, *errare*. Not just words,
 but the very letters from which words are stitched,
 pure symbols as those letters be, refuse to pose, connect
 like petals at their base, becoming flower. Instead,
 they sting, not prettily, like the bees
 that puzzle Cranach’s cupid,
 holding up the plundered honeycomb,
 but bites that rasp and scorch,
 swelling the skin on which they’re inked:
 УКРАЇНА —¹⁵

¹⁵ Kulyk Keefer, *Foreign Relations*, 16, in Kulyk Keefer and Husar, *Foreign Relations/Burden of Innocence*.

The poet's voice here is alienated, like Husar, from the medium; where to speak as a Canadian-Ukrainian is everywhere already "a condition of translation." The alphabet, like dead artists' paints, does not simply transport meaning between eras or places, but recreates them, and in so doing, introduces "another word for error"—experiment, subversion, transgression — or revolution, perhaps. The act of "wandering" itself, and especially as a woman, involves stealing back one's freedom outside the boundaries of family, work, church, home, and hearth. This is not only the perpetual position of the nonconformist female, but also that of the perceptive writer or painter. The Canadian-Ukrainian author and feminist Myrna Kostash, a contemporary of both Janice Kulyk Keefer and Natalka Husar, has likened the position of being an outsider to being "an ethnic" in Canada.¹⁶ In one of her autobiographical reflective essays, entitled "Domination and Exclusion: Notes of a Resident Alien," she drives at the double-edged sword of daring to speak about ethnicity as a subversive concept in Canadian society: "They give me a place to stand, from which to launch salutary barbs, critiques, *and* visions, but there is a price to pay. In trying to reconcile all the elements of my alienation into a critical whole, I discover new marginalities and new exclusions. Such is the dance of the dialectic!" She reclaims this outsider status not only for herself and her own identification as a writer and "as an ethnic, a feminist, and a socialist," but for anyone willing to venture a critique of the status quo. She accomplishes this through giving back history to the marginalized: "...the history of social movements also reveals to us the capacity of the outsider to fight back against marginality, pain, and inconsequence"¹⁷ Kulyk Keefer's reference to Lucas Cranach the Elder's painting of Cupid complaining to Venus after being stung by the honeybees from which he had stolen their honeycomb is a similar twist on the idea of emancipation. Words are "pure symbols" and bites that "rasp and scorch" the tattooed serf's hand; the words of the feminist poet are the tools of the master's house. Yet both, and especially in combination with the paintings of the feminist artist, the meanings in the images and the text are opened up to new possibilities.

The eponymous image from the series *Burden of Innocence* features the portrait of a small girl on the shoulders of a burly man smoking a cigarette, likely her father. She is sucking her finger, a gesture repeated from an earlier painting *Pandora's Parcel to Ukraine* (1993). Like in the earlier painting, and in the depiction of the other children throughout Husar's works, the expression on the girl's face is overwise, self-protected, determined. The artist and several critics have commented on these finger-sucking girls as the survivalists of a

¹⁶ Myrna Kostash, "Baba Was a Bohunk," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 69-78.

¹⁷ Myrna Kostash, "Domination and Exclusion: Notes of a Resident Alien," in *Ethnicity in a Technological Age*, ed. Ian H. Angus (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1988), 57.

post-Chernobyl world. The allegorical condition of emergency is here elevated through the figure of a child combined with “the outsider”: ethnic or otherwise. Here the mafioso man’s cigarette burns as the background burns red — he is an anti-hero cast in a moment of heroism — possibly carrying a small child away from the flames of a society in peril. The bows on the girl’s head are Soviet-era *bantiky* traditionally worn by schoolgirls to school on official state holidays, most importantly on 1 September or the “Day of Knowledge.” The artist presents a picture of mixed despair and hope for the fate of a nation: where knowledge cannot emancipate, it becomes a burden. Is it better to be innocent? Or to know, and carry on knowing, even if one is condemned to repeat the same mistakes?

Cranach’s cupid is also Eve —“the plundered honeycomb,” the original sin after which all else is divided into knowns and forbidden unknowns. Meeka Walsh, writing in reference to the critic Barry Schwabsky: “like modernist and conceptualist antecedents, contemporary painting holds that ‘a painting is not only a painting but also the representation of an idea about painting’ thus abstract and representational are no longer opposed (as they were in the Soviet era), in both cases, he says, ‘the painting is not there to represent the image, the image exists in order to represent the painting.’”¹⁸ The young girl is a future Ukraine that is survivalist and discordant, emerging from relegation to a “second world” status. This Ukraine is “the contemporary” that Husar reaches for, but cannot fully grasp for it does not exist anywhere. And in this failure to fully know Ukraine, or be known, there is a window through which the generations can finally admit to one another’s time and place: as being truly nowhere, but for the bravery and intent toward self-invention from exactly where one stands, as Kostash declared in 1985: “in the action of the dissident alien *in this place*.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Walsh in Moray, *Husar Handbook*, 55.

¹⁹ Full quote, from the paper delivered in October 1985 at the University of Alberta “Second Wreath” Conference organized and about women, feminism, and activism in Ukraine: “This new consciousness does not stop with multiculturalism, which accepts the social hierarchy, nor with conservation. It proposes a struggle for a social existence based on humanizing relations. Those of us engaged in the development of this new consciousness may have begun with our particular ethnoculture, with ancestral memory, with historical grievances but we end in the action of the dissident alien *in this place*.”



02: Natalka Husar, *Burden of Innocence*, From the Series *Burden of Innocence*, 2007. Oil on rag board, 22 x 21 cm. Shared with permission of the artist. Photo credit: Michael Rafelson.

Embodied Memory

Artist Lesia Khomenko could also be said to be “kicking the shit out of history,” but from a different viewpoint. She is a generation younger than Husar and was born and raised in Kyiv. Where Husar’s characters in the “new” Ukraine are ultimately filtered through her eyes, which peer through the shadow of the immigrant experience, and of the challenge of being a female and an intellectual; by contrast, a kind of smuggling of knowledge between places and times, like knowledge between mothers and daughters, Khomenko’s “new” in post-revolutionary Ukraine is positioned differently. For the artist living in Ukraine, daughter of Soviet artists, hers is a dismantling of the systematic “rules” governing public space, public conduct, time, and the professions, including the management of labor vs. leisure. For example, in the painting *Personal Vocation*, it is clear that these are the bodies of the working classes emptied of their ideological content —“set free” from their appropriation by the past regime. We cannot tell whether the figures are working or at leisure. Their poses do not conform to any expectations: they could be workers working, workers at leisure, pensioners daydreaming, thinking, or exercising. Diagonal lines shift the composition in a gravity-defying visual display of a circus or gymnastic pyramid. The bodies could not possibly stand up in this configuration in actual life; this is not socialist realist representation of reality; it is socialist realism reimaged. The appropriation of forms into a kind of playful free-fall lends the pastel color schemes, not unlike the hues of Husar’s dead artists’ paints, a certain significance: these hues were not chosen or arranged by the artist; they are the inherited backdrops of the environments

she co-inhabits with the people in the paintings, people who lived through the Soviet era, some still holding Soviet passports, and who populate Ukraine as it actually exists, today. In the context of the post-Maidan Decommunization Law introduced in Ukraine in 2015, Khomenko's playful gestures in the idiom of earlier sots-art propaganda lend her work an immediacy to the artistic legacy of the language of propaganda/censorship as material for critical reflection.



03: Lesia Khomenko, *Personal Vocation*, 2010-11.

Enter the Ukrainian flag. As in Husar's found folk portrait of the small rural boy dressed in black, Khomenko also displays the flag as a backdrop — as it might have appeared in its most subversive placement by artists killed in the previous century: in its classical association with sky over grain. The citation of the body in front of this background also clearly evokes the pastoral Ukrainian peasant from socialist realism of the past century. Here we see a new take on the iconic painting *Bread* (1950) by Tatiana Yablonska, where the happy faces of harvesters spare no irony in the wake of the manmade famine (Holodomor) under Stalin in the 1930s. Khomenko goes a step further. The view of the backside of this “Madonna” positions audiences for a literal take on conception; the body, from which all life springs forth, is posed for everyone's contemplation. Like Husar, Khomenko's Ukraine is carnivalesque and postrevolutionary. Voluptuous flesh and muscle recline and stretch while working. Her protagonists are Caravaggio rearranged into unposed and deliberately “incorrect” stances, even “unflattering” in the traditional language of painting, and brashly rude in terms of social mores or religious morals. No figures of authority, neither Soviet bureaucrat nor royal, could find a flattering portrait of themselves among her cast of casual outsiders, who are, by any measure, everyday working-class Ukrainians. In the genre of history-painting, Khomenko, like Husar, also uses titles and irony to challenge the idea that

history belongs to the few, and therefore should be somehow represented only by portraits of happy peasants, neatly arranged for the oppressive gaze of the landholder, or the state.



04: Lesia Khomenko, *Dacha's Madonnas Series*, 2004-07.

Each in their own respective idioms, Husar and Khomenko both explore themselves as artists and the role of art in its relationship to power, a relationship in which the body takes central stage as the oldest material for the language of art. Memory in these works is intensely personal — and both painters present subversive interstices through which the generations pass knowledge, once forbidden, about the cruelty wreaked upon everyday people, in this instance people living on the territories of Ukraine during and after the Soviet experiment. The role of painting becomes a commentary on death and renewal, as much as it is an object capable of linking the generations in their different experiences of upheaval. The body stands as a testament to the fleeting nature of life, and the loss of knowledge with the loss of life as the opposite of the artists' task as creator, life-giver. These two painters are both intensely concerned with corruption and decay in the post-Soviet period, yet in their large format canvases and their citation of the body, they accomplish more than just reactionary statements against the Soviet regime, or how they imagine it, as both experience that era mostly as outsiders (Husar due to her place, Canada; and Khomenko due to her time, born in 1982 at the end of the regime).

Rather, both painters introduce and experiment with a language for alienation marked by their individual identity, which takes plural form: in collage, fragments, and intertextual references. In Khomenko's work, the Soviet workers' bodies are reframed in a baroque saturation of space and time into a compressed present tense. The 1960s pastel colors of advertising and fabrics

add to the androgyny of her protagonists with large hands, feet, shoulders, even disproportionately so. These forms contrast with Husar's hypersexed feminine characters who seem to contort themselves into the straps and buttons of their tiny tank-tops and miniskirts, or the prickly necks of the mafia men who seem to burn with frustration, "oligarchs in waiting," Husar has called them, "yet without any real clout." These are the men who kill to be more than men, demigods of a broken palace. They are not androgynous at all in their pursuit of dominion, nor godly, more like Gogolian devils. And that is exactly the point. Husar, like Khomenko, is playing with archetypes. The common denominator is that all of their archetypes give viewers a glimpse of Ukraine with the effect of being "outside looking in." This is not because either artist is fully outsider/insider — and what these categories could fully mean in terms of ethnicity, gender, class, and nation will always be unresolved, rather, this is because this can only ever be the view of an artist in a constant revolutionary state of affairs.

In the poem Kulyk Keefer named "Looking At Art," dedicated to Husar's painting of the same title, she addresses the artist:

Oh artist who, with polished tongs
and rubber gloves;
with downcast gaze
or double-crossing eyes,
concocts a seating plan
for multitudes, then crams
the mess of meaning in a dish
compact, divided as an egg²⁰

Here Husar's alter egos of the nurse and stewardess are serving dinner to the protagonists of the young girl, now grown, a painted lady "has-been" and a mafia-man, but the platters are empty. This is Judy Chicago's dinner party in negative, where the artist is captive to her imagination and its possibilities. The scene also references Husar's early porcelain culinary sculptures from 1977 featuring gendered commentary through Canadian-Ukrainian cultural foodways: *Veroniky Varenyky*; *The TV Dinner Sviat Vechir*, and *After All That, Supper*. These works found resonance in the North American context among feminist works of this period such as Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975). Feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, published in 1990, reflects on the militarization of society in the global military buildup of the post World War II order. She has written elsewhere of the symbolism of a Heinz promotional *Star Wars* soup can as an artifact of a globalism that "may reveal a gendered military system that is more political than it is cultural," and can "show just

²⁰ Kulyk Keefer, *Foreign Relations*, 85-86, in Kulyk Keefer and Husar, *Foreign Relations/Burden of Innocence*.

how politically constructed any national or international culture is.”
Uncertainty, more than consensus, among the decision-makers within the
constructed order “may reveal tension, contradiction, and confusion,” along
with “ambivalence, that is, both men and women with mixed feelings.” She:
“Masculinity-privileging militarization, however, can survive, even thrive, on
mixed feelings.”²¹

Is Husar’s *Last Supper* a sacrificial ritual warning a Ukrainian or
Canadian farewell before the resurrection...or an invitation to a beheading?
Whose art is this? Who is imagined by whom?

Cigarette unraveling, a luscious
orchid strangling a wrist. One book
of unstruck matches and this silver dish:
this mirror in a foreign language.²²

Here in the poem are two mirrors, not only the silver dish, but also “the book.”
The enjambment of the line after “book” links it to the final line, and, in
combination with “this silver dish,” doubles other doubles in the painted scene.
The nurse and stewardess twins, the latter with two expressions at once, in
motion, conjure up the Judeo-Christian duality of Saint/Sinner, especially in
the yellow star-like points and halo-like sheen covering the nurse’s head. The
“double” in Slavic lore and literature is also there as a mocking devilish
element. The “mirror in a foreign language” is the immigrant’s daughter, always
in translation, but never fully translated. The doubled state of existence is one
of permanent exile that artists have long had to negotiate; whether Bulgakov’s
Master with his cat, or Gogol’s farmer’s wife with a conniving little devil before
serving varenyky on Christmas Eve. Kulyk Keefer’s book of poems is the
matchbook on the table, ready to ignite new ideas in a new generation, light the
“book of unstruck matches,” or be ignited and consumed.

²¹ Cynthia Enloe, “How Do They Militarize a Can of Soup?” *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 109.

²² Kulyk Keefer, “Looking at Art,” *Foreign Relations*, 86, in Kulyk Keefer and Husar, *Foreign Relations/Burden of Innocence*.



05: Natalka Husar, *Looking at Art*, From the Series *Burden of Innocence*, 2007. Oil on ragboard, 81 x 102 cm. Shared with permission of the artist. Photo credit: Michael Rafelson.

The “Contemporary” in Contemporary Ukraine

Husar’s and Khomenko’s individual Ukrainian worlds depend on rejecting the grand-scale historicism of *nation* and *people* as giant categories, or propagandistic tools, handed down to them from the past century. Rather, they both focus on the everyday, framing what is “contemporary” about the present, as they experience it. The way out of repeating the Soviet past, for them, is both content and form in the language of painting, a language that shares some features in each of their individual activation of its Ukrainian idioms, some of the specifics of which we have noted throughout this chapter.

But what can these painters offer to the wider landscape of visual culture? What is the sociopolitical context of art in Ukraine today, and how does it inform our global present condition, a condition marked by constant crisis, mass protest, and a pandemic? Is there any hope left? The answer is yes: Husar and Khomenko’s bold and frank critiques of society, of history, and of gender. The body becomes the figure for painting itself; the subsumption of time into an act for which the artist must be present. They interpolate continuities across the times and places represented in their works that can be recognized as distinctly Ukrainian, but also have universal meaning connected to the broader language of revolutionary emancipation, especially for women.

Where the idea of “the contemporary” in their works pivots on the concept of emancipation, it is, in turn, part of a world that is not just in perpetual crisis but is always changing; this differs from modernism or post-modernism, which are rooted in a progressivist linear time, but links aesthetic language to historical turn as a procedure of recovering lost agency for women.

Ukraine's historical trajectory is punctuated with dramatic change from the post-1991, and post-Orange Revolutionary moment of 2007, to the moment after the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-14. Hito Steyerl has remarked on the institutional setting of art in developing countries more recently, that, "every contemporary oligarch loves contemporary art."²³ Ukraine's attempts to decentralize institutions since 1991 have been met with the monopolization of private enterprise and corruption in public institutions, including state museums. The outcome of these changes has meant that private galleries far outpace state funding for independent arts initiatives, and the structure of old elites still maintains a grip over talent acquisition and access to resources. For the rural, working-class, young, women, and minorities the situation for arts mirrors broader inequities in labor relations across the professions. A few words on feminist activism are in order if we are to fully understand the landscape not only of Husar and Khomenko's biographies as artists on different sides of the ocean, but the extent to which their work depicting women in Ukraine is subversive (and in a not unimportant sense "contemporary" with regard to global movements for feminist and LGBTQ rights reaching a peak in the mid-2000s and continuing today).

Arts and media production in Ukraine have become an important resource for discussions concerned with a range of feminist issues from the #ЯнеБоюсьСказати / #IaNeBoiuisSkazaty (I'm not afraid to say) campaign against domestic violence (a counterpart to the #MeToo movement), to wikis, blogs, and publishing portals.²⁴ Human rights discourse in education, communications, and civic inclusion aim to counter social stigmas in wider society, including where false attitudes toward women and other gender minorities as vulnerable subjects serves to marginalize. Recent feminist art initiatives in Ukraine converge with these efforts. For example, a large retrospective exhibit in 2018 in Kyiv, called *A Space of One's Own*, in reference to Virginia Woolf. Spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and co-curated by Tatiana Kochubinska and Tetiana Zhmurko, the exhibit featured works by hundreds of women artists past and present. The public program included scholars and an anthology of contemporary texts and images by and about women artists and authors, edited by Kateryna Iakovlenko, titled *Chomu v ukrains'komu mystetstvi ie velyki khudozhnytsi* (Why There Are Great Women Artists in Ukrainian Art).²⁵ Ukraine's activists who identify as women and/or

²³ Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy," *e-flux Journal*, no. 21 (December 2010), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/> (accessed 12 November 2021).

²⁴ Tamara Martsenyuk and Sarah D. Phillips, "Talking about Sexual Violence in Post-Maidan Ukraine: Analysis of the Online Campaign #IamNotAfraidToSayIt," *Sexuality & Culture* 24, no. 3 (2020), 1-20.

²⁵ Kateryna Iakovlenko, ed., *Chomu v ukrains'komu mystetstvi ie velyki khudozhnytsi* (Kyiv: PinchukArtCentre, 2019).

feminists do not ascribe to a single unified strand of feminism and are as diverse as are the mediums and topics of its creative communities.

Museums and other exhibit spaces provide rare opportunities for researchers and the public to engage difficult and controversial subjects both at home and abroad. In recent years, the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-14, the occupation of Crimea, and ongoing war in Donbas have had a profound effect on the arts. An example is *At the Front Line: Ukrainian Art 2013-2019*, curated by Svitlana Biedarieva and Ania Deikun, exhibited in 2019 in Mexico City and in 2020 in Winnipeg, Canada, which included seminars, talks, guided tours, and an academic anthology.²⁶ Artifacts and pieces in the exhibit were by artists who have been engaged in activism and research for several years in East Ukraine. Participants addressed the role of art exchanges in the face of war and how to protect the voices and works of artists in exile from the occupied territories.

Ukrainian art has gained wide visibility both domestically and abroad since the Maidan Revolution of Dignity in 2013-14, which provides additional opportunities for education in facing gendered, ethnic, and social differences in processes of assimilation/rejection of memories of the Soviet past. Examples of mutual tolerance and solidarity-building across national lines within creative communities include authors who publish in both Ukrainian and Russian; individuals who exhibit with members of the Russian, Belarusian, and Polish feminist movements; and Ukrainian professional artists who boycott funding or speak Ukrainian in virtual invitations from Russian state-backed museums, including the prestigious Garage Museum, of which its partnerships include institutions based in the West.²⁷ More projects that bring together artists, activists, and scholars dedicated to cultivating critical perspectives on women's lived experiences can shed light on Ukraine's dual challenges of restoring sovereignty in Donbas and Crimea, while pressuring lawmakers to respond to social demands in protecting civic rights.

On 14 April 2021, President Volodymyr Zelensky enacted a National Human Rights Strategy (Decree No. 119/2021). The law includes "prevention and countering discrimination" and "ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men," along with military veterans and internally displaced persons.²⁸ The law aims to uphold treaties within the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in order to "contribute to the implementation of Ukraine's UN

²⁶ Svitlana Biedarieva, ed., *Contemporary Ukrainian and Baltic Art: Political and Social Perspectives, 1991-2021* (Hanover: Ibidem Press, 2021).

²⁷ For an example, see Nikita Kadan, "Buduvaty ruiny," artist's talk, Lviv Municipal Art Centre with Garage Museum Moscow, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb3KeqqDEQO> (accessed 17 November 2021).

²⁸ "President of Ukraine Approves the National Human Rights Strategy," *Sluha narodu*, 20 April 2021, <https://sluga-narodu.com/en/president-of-ukraine-approves-the-national-human-rights-strategy/> (accessed 17 November 2021).

Sustainable Development Goals until 2030, and improve the position of Ukraine in international human rights rankings.”²⁹ Since 2010, international human rights monitoring groups have traced a regression in the implementation and reinforcement of laws protecting women by measuring, among other indicators, rising rates of domestic violence in Ukraine.³⁰ The severity of this problem has been made more acute in recent years due to more than 1.5 million displaced from the Ukraine-Russia conflict zone and separatist-occupied territories.

Despite these difficulties, or, possibly because of them, women’s and LGBTQ movements in Ukraine continue to grow; for example, the 8 March 2020 Women’s March and Kyiv Pride March now each draw more than two thousand participants annually, compared with a few dozen when they began a decade ago. Several studies document these changes in the context of the mixed reception of feminism in wider society in Ukraine.³¹ Recent gains include the signing of an Anti-Discrimination Law adopted in 2012 and amended in 2014. The law was again revisited in 2016, after the Maidan Revolution of Dignity, in the context of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner.³² The law was expanded and included schedules for implementing a future National Human Rights Strategy. This led to some progress toward pluralizing Ukrainian society, but new challenges have appeared including in the form of disinformation campaigns, many stemming from the Russian Federation, as well as online organizing of “anti-gender” and

²⁹ “President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky Signed Decree No. 119/2021 to Enact the National Human Rights Strategy,” *Ukrinform*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/3214900-zelensky-enacts-national-human-rights-strategy.html> (accessed 17 November 2021).

³⁰ Tamara Martsenyuk, *Hender dlia vsikh: vyklyk stereotypam* (Kyiv: Osnovy, 2017).

³¹ Oksana Kis, “Ukrainian Women Reclaiming the Feminist Meaning of International Women’s Day: A Report About Recent Feminist Activism,” *Aspasia* 6, no. 1 (March 2012): 219-32. Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova, eds., *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012). Tamara Martsenyuk, *Chomu ne varto boiatysia feminizmu* (Kyiv: Komora, 2018). Annual Report 2019-2020, *UN Women*,

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/annual-report> (accessed 17 November 2021). Olga Plakhotnik and Maria Mayerchuk, “Ukrainian

Feminisms and the Issue of Coloniality,” University of Alberta, 11 December 2020. Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women: Feminism, Art, and Revolution in Twenty-First Century Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

³² UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: The Report of Ukraine,” 12 August 2016, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20370&LangID=E> (accessed 17 November 2021).

“anti-feminist” campaigns by far-right groups in Ukraine, the EU, and globally.³³

Lesia Khomenko’s artistic response to the demonstrations that took place on the Maidan starting from 1 December 2013 involved drawing portraits of passersby on individual sheets of paper placed over black carbon paper. She described the tent city of the Maidan encampment as a “small scale new model of a utopian state,” noting how all services there operated twenty-four hours a day, on a volunteer basis, and everything was free of charge. She writes: “I decided to test whether the artist may be a part of this exchange? And if the artist is needed at all in this situation.”³⁴ Further to her response, which she links to “historical consciousness and mythologizing,” she decided to make portraits of “members of Maidan” offering to give them away as gifts. Visiting the Maidan daily, she made 171 portraits, giving some away and retaining others. The outcome was exhibited in Ukraine along with the carbon copies, which are a palimpsest collage of faces. The “ghost” of history peers through the layers and layers of pages, leaving their trace in a composite that is androgynous and collective — there is nobody here, only the face of an unknown future. Walter Benjamin’s angel of history descends upon the revolution of the twenty-first century, terrifying with unknowns: as Ukraine’s future would soon collide into a war with Russia, upon Putin’s invasion and occupation of Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk.

The “contemporary” marks time. Here in Khomenko’s drawings time appears out-of-joint in the visage of the collective anonymous. Like the dead artists’ paints of a century ago, the pencil captures images of individuals who can be assumed neither alive nor dead.

³³ Atlantic Council, “Meeting the Moment: Shaping the Future: 2018/2019 Annual Report,” <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Atlantic-Council-Annual-Report-2018%E2%80%932019.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2021). Human Rights Watch, “Ukraine: Events of 2019,” <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/ukraine#> (accessed 17 November 2021). Amnesty International, “Annual Report 2019: Eastern Europe and Central Asia,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/04/air2019-eeca/> (accessed 17 November 2021). Jessica Zychowicz, “Ukraine Hosts Most Successful LGBTQ Event in the Nation’s History, but New Challenges Appear,” *Wilson Center. Kennan Institute. Ukraine Focus Blog*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ukraine-hosts-most-successful-lgbtq-event-the-nations-history-new-challenges-appear> (accessed 17 November 2021).

³⁴ Lesia Khomenko website, <https://www.lesiakhomenko.com/drawing-on-maidan> (accessed 17 November 2021).



06: Lesia Khomenko, *Drawing on Maidan Series*, 2013-2014.

Husar's poet-companion's text composed in the same place, half a decade earlier in 2007, reread in the context of the events of 2013-14, appears just as relevant — indeed “contemporary” of both moments. The prognosis offers no easy end. There are no heroes. There are no identifiable traces of us/them, here/there, yesterday/today. Maidan as universal chronotope. Every revolution in this place and time encompasses all previous and future revolutions, everywhere:

The Eyes of Maidan³⁵

That photograph of an old woman,
 her face a map worn through at the creases,
 her mouth a whole alphabet of pain
 and patience. Anonymous, snapped
 at one of the vigils, day or night, to keep
 pressure on the powers-that-be, to keep
 world's pale eyes trained where, any moment,
 tanks might spell out their mandate
 in a mash of blood and bone.

...

What is it turned to, face
 Rough as hemp, eyes
 Deep-dug as graves? Who
 Looks back at her?
 Who sees?

The only person left in the poem is the viewer, whose only way out of repetition is in vigilance in daring to see the repetition, not only of others, of themselves, but of Ukraine and its ghosts, *as never before*.

³⁵ Kulyk Keefer notes that in the original publication of the poem this is the title of a photograph from Kyiv by Vasyl Artiushenko.

I more than ever live through what's going on around me. And how I want to turn off the television when they broadcast the regular sessions of parliament! It's hard to bear when, before our eyes, everything's lurching to the right. I see it and understand it clearly, but at the same time I sense the mood around me or feel irritated by the indifference of others. Besides, in writing these letters about what's going on, I am doomed to thinking always the same thoughts: Why is it like this? What for? And what next?

-- Solomea Pavlychko, 4 December 1991, Kyiv³⁶

³⁶ Solomea Pavlychko, *Letters from Kiev*, ed. Bohdan Krawchenko, trans. Myrna Kostash (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992), 136.

Естетика буденного й урочистого у живописі Андрія Харини

Галина Костюк

Андрій Харина, помітний художник у сучасному канадському мистецтві, де не бракує оригінальних талантів, вирізняється зосередженістю на живописі - ніколи він не робив нічого іншого. Змалку малював, але не так, як це зазвичай роблять діти, - для розваги - мистецтво було єдиним заняттям, яке його цікавило. Навіть дитячі рисунки Харини привертала увагу рівнем виконання вчителів і фахових художників, зокрема, його діда - Петра Холодного молодшого. І будучи дорослим, Харина дуже дорожив думкою свого діда, котрий і сьогодні залишається для нього найбільшим авторитетом у мистецтві.

Харина народився у німецькому місті Карлсруе 5 лютого 1951 року у родині священника Михайла Харини і піаністки Іди Холодної. Через два роки молода сім'я переїхала до Мюнхену. Коли Андрійкові було вісім років, Харини перебралися до Нью-Йорку, де на той час мешкали батько й мати Іди - художник Петро Холодний молодший і поетка Наталя Лівіцька-Холодна. Андрієві Харині пощастило народитися у династії вийняtkово важливих для української історії та культури людей, до якої належали не тільки художники і письменники, а й історичні діячі, політики, вчені. Молода родина замешкала з батьками. Іда Харина привезла малюнки Андрія, котрі зберігала дбайливо, багато розповідала йому про діда і його мистецтво, тому малий хлопець нетерпеливо чекав на зустріч. На Петра Холодного малюнки онука справили велике враження. Настільки, що він створив його портрет на тлі тих малюнків, в яких побачив не дитячі спроби, а великий потенціал.

До школи Харина ходив у Йонкерс. Учителі відразу помітили його здібності до малювання і повсякчас залучали до всіляких проєктів. У четвертому класі вперше взяв участь у виставці у Музеї Ріки Гудзону, куди відібрали кращі роботи школярів.

Творчий доробок Харини тематично і стилістично розмаїтий. Мистець малює портрети, натюрморти, краєвиди, жанрові картини. Працює у техніках олії, яєчної темпері, акрилу. Упродовж кар'єри переходив через різні стилі - реалізму, сюрреалізму, кубізму, напіваабстрактности. Прикметно, що жоден із цих стилів не захопив його цілковито - завжди художник залишався на дорозі до пошуку свого власного почерку.

На думку Крістін Стайлс, "Уява, котра малює, досліджує і прагне зайнятися перетворенням усієї субстанції, належить алхімічному розуму науковця і митця, котрі обидва підступають до філософського каменя. Художники і науковці діють на перехресті між природним і

сконструйованим”.¹ Реалістичність багатьох композицій Харини на перший погляд може схилити до думки про цілковиту “природність” безпосередньо скопійованих готових предметів. Та уважніше придивившись, стає очевидним, що художник використовує різні об’єкти як привід поміркувати про значно важливіші речі філософської та естетичної природи, зображаючи буденні ситуації і предмети, заглибитись у суть буття. Якщо Стайлс говорить про штучні предметні конструкції, яких немає у природі, то Харині передусім ідеться про творення естетичних зв’язків між речами і людьми, між природним і духовним началами. Будь-які процеси, місця чи речі, що привернули увагу художника, можуть стати поштовхом до глибинного осмислення важливих філософських питань, що його на цей час хвилюють. Французький філософ та естет П’єр Соване вказує на те, що ми не можемо звести твір мистецтва до його матеріального втілення.² Це твердження знаходить яскравий вияв у творчості Андрія Харини. Довкілля - предмети, краєвиди, люди - є лише першопоштовхом до його міркувань про вічне. До чого б не звертався художник, усе є приводом заглибитись у духовний світ, без якого матеріальний нічого не означає.

Елснер зауважив занепад виразного стилю із занепокоєнням знавця мистецтва: “Культура стає все більше постмодерною і багатоетнічною, ми ризикуємо втратити сенс історії стосовно речей, які ми робимо, способи, якими ми їх робимо, предмети, які ми цінуємо. Стиль з його дуже специфічним і глибоким минулим...колись був Майстром, згодом був зневажений, тепер виконує меншу роль солом’яної людини будучи майже забутим”.³

Справді, виробити власний стиль і вдосконалювати його - справа непроста, тому художники, які досягли цього, привертають увагу і шанувальників мистецтва, і дослідників. Харина, сформувавши один стиль, розпочинав працю над іншим, ніколи не задовільнявся досягнутим. Риса, котра єднає всі твори художника незалежно від жанрів і предметів зображення, - увага до деталей, серйозний підхід до кожного удару пензля. Це особливо помітно у його іконописі. Харина не раз мав нагоду спостерігати, як працює над іконами його дід, і завжди уважно прислухався до його порад і думок. У 1970 році Харина намалював першу ікону олією. Петро Холодний був захоплений. Цю роботу побачив кардинал Йосиф Сліпий і хотів її купити. Це була цілком самостійна робота - і композицію, і техніку молодий художник опрацьовував без сторонньої

¹ Kristine Stiles, “Art and Technology,” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 384.

² Pierre Sauvanet, *Éléments d’esthétique* (Paris: Ellipses Édition Marketing S.A., 2014), 146-47.

³ Jaś Elsner, “Style,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 108.

допомоги. Наступного року приїхав Холодний, привіз фарбу у порошок і золото і показав, як працювати темперою та ґрунтувати дошку.



Оранта 1988

“Оранта” зберігається в українській католицькій церкві Пресвятої Трійці у Кергонксоні. Із каноном цей образ єднають лише підняті догори руки Богородиці і площинність зображення. Решта - колорит, пластика, просторове вирішення - риси індивідуального стилю художника. Тут синій колір не просто домінує - він є єдиним для цілої композиції. На думку Гете, синій колір містить суперечність: він є водночас подразливим і заспокійливим. Нам подобається вдивлятися в нього не тому, що він змушує до цього, а через те, що притягає погляд.⁴ Вікторія Фінли вказує на те, що митці використовують синій колір для творення простору у своїх картинах.⁵ У Харини ясно-голубе тло символізує небо і є тим безмежним космічним простором - символом Усесвіту - на якому зображена його Цариця. Палітра “Оранти” не відзначається широтою кольорового спектру, як, наприклад, “Святий Юрій”, але скупість барв не збіднює естетики образу, навпаки - зосереджує увагу на одухотвореному обличчі Богоматері. Тут відчувається традиція старих європейських майстрів - у сині шати Діви Марію одягали на Заході, для Сходу більш поширеним був червоний колір її убрання. Хоча й для Заходу ця традиція не була незмінною. Вікторія Фінли зауважує, що художники повсякчас користувалися для одягу Цариці Неба тією барвою, котра була найбільш рідкісною і найдорожчою на ринку та той час, коли писався образ.⁶ Традиція вживати синій колір для шат Богоматері з’явилася у тринадцятому столітті, коли на ринок Італії прибув ультрамарин. Він коштував найбільше за всі пігменти, його привозили з Афганістану - неймовірна відстань на той час, і художники не могли його купити через високу ціну, отримували завжди від заможних меценатів. У шістнадцятому столітті папа Піюс П’ятий усталив літургійний кольоровий код, і відтоді синій був призначений винятково для Діви Марії. У палітрі “Оранти” присутній також білий (у вигляді акцентів) - символ чистоти, невинності, досконалості. Лише цими двома кольорами та тонко нюансованими їхніми відтінками Харина створив синтетичну цілісність і незвичайну гармонію святого образу. Досконала композиція, лад постаті і стримана палітра надають іконі монументальності у кращих традиціях візантинізму.

Стилістично “Оранта” Харини близька до Оранти із Софії Київської, хоча живописно цілком переосмислена. Художник створив не лише величний, винятково духовний і змістовний образ, а також - атмосферу глибокого спокою, умиротворення. Простір композиції означений, але не обмежений двома колонами, за якими - не стіна, а безкрай простір неба - престіл Божої Матері. У цьому теж простежується близькість митця до

⁴ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Theory of Colours* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1970), 310.

⁵ Victoria Finlay, *Colour: Travels through the Paintbox* (London: The Folio Society, 2009), 271.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 277-78.

західноєвропейської традиції - поєднання образу із краєвидом. Однак, незважаючи на певну близькість до канону і традиції, відображену передусім у позі Діви Марії, "Оранта" Харини все ж виражає духовний світ художника, його трактування нашої Небесної Матері свідчить про глибину його душі і любов до власної матері. Чисті лінії і делікатний відтінок бездоганного одухотвореного обличчя Пресвятої Діви творять не абстрактний образ віддаленої мешканки неба, а близьку, найдорожчу людину - матір, яку художник глибоко любив і поважав; у майстерно стилізованому універсальному образі кожен може побачити дорогі риси власної матері. Статика жіночої пози розбивається ритмом округлих і прямих ліній: від обличчя концентричними колами розходяться шість досконалих круглих ліній, які, зімкнувшись із піднятими руками, творять символ сонця - джерела світла. Паралельні бганки на хітоні Богородиці хвилями спадають вниз, урівноважуючи кола верхньої частини композиції. Лінійний ритм не є одноманітним - овальні і круглі протиставлені прямим вертикальним лініям, що не тільки збагачує назагал ритміку зображення, а й порушує статику, надає енергії і динамізму цілій композиції.

Надзвичайно цікавим і цілком оригінальним є спосіб аплікації обидвох кольорів - вони чергуються один з одним: біла підлога - синє вбрання, - хоч і не є одноманітним, та все ж перебивається білою хусткою на талії - синій плащ - за білою хустиною на голові слідує синє покриття, далі - тонка біла лінія німбу розтинає синяву неба. Останньою у кольоровому ритмі є біла лінія-арка, що з'єднує дві колони. Варто зазначити, що синій у Харини - далеко не одноманітний. Його спектр є дуже широким: від ясно-голубого, що зливається з білим, до темного, аж чорного. Колір тут виконує ще одну важливу естетичну функцію: тонко виписані градації синього органічно вплітають постать Богоматері у небесну сферу, позбавляють плотської чуттєвості і роблять образ максимально одухотвореним. Ця виїняткові краси ікона - естетично гармонійна і творить особливу молитовну атмосферу. "Оранта" є досконалим зразком чистої краси. Філософ мистецтва Шеффер зазначив, що "На думку Гегеля, насолода - це те, що залишається від мистецтва, коли воно втрачає всі історично-спекулятивні функції: таким чином, у період уповні зреалізованої філософської науки твір зведений до вироблення насолоди".⁷ Йдеться про найвищий вияв естетичної насолоди, яку дарує твір мистецтва як, наприклад, "Оранта" Харини.

Незвичними для української традиції є його ікони із зображенням самої Богородиці, без Дитини. В них відчувається особлива таємничість і безмірна духовна глибина Діви Марії. Художник майстерно передає безмежний смуток і страждання Матері від втрати Сина (тут варто мати на увазі, що мистець не уточнює хронологію: ми не знаємо достеменно (і це неважливо), в який саме період життя зображена Богородиця: до народження Христа чи після його смерті) через напружену динаміку

⁷ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 298.

постаті: похилена голова, притиснута до серця права рука з намаганням затамувати біль, у той час, як ліва долоня спрямована догори на знак покори волі Божій, проникливий погляд виразних очей. У цій іконі Харину цікавить динаміка співвідношення кольорів. Хоч палітра твору досить лаконічна, все ж вона за тональністю багатша і тепліша за палітру “Оранти”. Оксамитова текстура розкішного синього убрання Богородиці виграє відтінками дорогого ультрамарину і чітко вирізняється на яскравому золотому тлі. Як і в “Оранті”, тло Самотньої Богородиці - неоднорідне: найближче до постаті й особливо довкола голови жовтий - найясніший, майже прозорий, - творить німб. Чимдалі від фігури жовтий стає насиченішим, глибшим, густішим, як перші язички полум'я, і близько до рами переходить у червоний відтінок, котрий гармонійно перегукується із фрагментом червоної хустки, двома червоними зірками на голові і нижче плеча Діви Марії та яскравим рум'янцем, що зраджує глибокі переживання Богородиці. Змінюється також фактура тла: чим ближче до рами, тим воно стає щільнішим, менше гладким, напруженішим. Настільки подібно вирішені колорит і тло в іконі “Христос-Пантократор”, що ці два твори можна назвати парними. Харина пам'ятав науку діда, котрий казав, що лінії повинні бути ритмічними і повторюватись, як основна мелодія симфонії. Справді, лінії на його іконі хоч і рухаються у різних напрямках, але разом становлять гармонію, як у музичному творі. Фронтальна постать візуально виходить на передній план і домінує композицію. Цікаво, що на полотні старого майстра шістнадцятого століття Ніклауса М. Дойча “Святий Лука малює Діву Марію” (1515) постає подібна композиція святого образу: на мольберті перед Євангелистом Лукою - майже закінчена робота: постать Матері Божої у синіх шатах на жовтому тлі; а на палітрі - лише дві фарби: жовта і синя. Ця ікона композиційно близька до “Богоматері з Дитиною” Петра Холодного молодшого, а також до “Богородиці Милування” Андрія Харини (до цього сюжету він звертався не раз).

Оригінально потрактований Хариною образ Архангела Михаїла. Молодий атлетичний чоловік стискає у правій руці піднятий меч - приготований до бою, а лівою обхопив щит, на якому зображений Христос-Пантократор. Рукави, засувані поза лікті, демонструють рішучість Архангела щомиті вступити у рукопашний бій. Його розкішний убір скидається на обладунок римського центуріона - стильний і функціональний. Композиція ікони не перевантажена інформацією, фігура - динамічна, палітра - експресивна, хоч і складається лише з трьох базових кольорів (червоного, синього, жовтого) та їхніх відтінків. Червоний колір тут має геральдичний характер - символізує владу, могутність, воєнну міць. Синій підсилює червоний значенням слави, краси і величі. Для тла мистець образ темніший відтінок синього - таким чином фігура Архангела візуально виходить на передній план і наче подається вперед, підкреслюючи рішучість стати до бою зі злом. У його волосся вплетена зелена стрічка - символ життя і миру, які захищає Святий. Унікальним є його німб: на яскраво-жовтому тлі проступають червоні акценти, наче відблиски вогню під час битви; крім того, німб окреслений тонкою

червоною лінією (таку ж лінію знаходимо лише довкола німбу Христа). Паралельні горизонтальні лінії на крилах і лаштунках підсилюють динамізм композиції, а круглі й овальні - гармонізують її.

Особливістю іконопису Харини є його позірна статика, глибокий спокій, лаконізм композиції. Та придивившись уважніше, бачимо внутрішню віброуючу енергію, динамізм композиції, експресію кольорів, духовну напругу образів, постійний рух, що є тим промовистішими, чим стриманіші живописні засоби їхнього естетичного вираження.

Серед "світських" жанрів у творчості Харини помітне місце посідають портрети, і, як і всі його роботи, виходять далеко за межі жанру. Мистець не клопочеться лише передачею зовнішньої подібності і навіть не зупиняється тільки на дослідженні внутрішнього світу портретованої особи. Справа тут набагато складніша. Через обличчя, постать людини художник прагне поставити естетичні і філософські питання про сенс буття, про добро і зло, про покликання людини у світі і ставлення до інших довкола себе. Часто художник творить складний філософсько-психологічний наратив, у якому, наприклад, птахам чи комахам, відводиться роля не менш важлива, ніж людям.

У 1980 році Харина написав "Автопортрет із серпиком місяця", у якому відчувається захоплення Дюрером. Однак, ця робота показує досвідчену руку вправного майстра, котрий не наслідує відомого художника, а йде власним шляхом. Живопис цього твору надзвичайно вишуканий: кожен мазок пензля якнайточніше відтворює тонкі риси обличчя молодого чоловіка, артистичні руки із гнучкими пальцями, густі кучері. Він дивиться спідлоба на глядача, готовий ставити не завжди зручні запитання собі і світові. Відповідно до традицій західноєвропейського портретного живопису Харина помістив протагоніста (себе) перед відчиненим вікном, за яким - спокійна ніч, місяць тонким серпиком злегка протинає густу темряву. Настрій картини - мінорний, що видно не лише з виразу обличчя молодого чоловіка, а підкреслено колоритом, у якому домінують темні барви. Важкий настрій не спроможні розвіяти дві світлі плями - обличчя і руки, які лиш підсилюють напружений психологічний стан цілої композиції. Про що б не йшлося творчій особистості, вона завжди говорить про себе - цей відомий постулат уповні стосується і Харини. Тим то він часто звертається до автопортрету чи портретів близьких людей, навіть у жанрові картини поміщає себе й осіб зі свого життя. Такі завдання він отримував під час навчання в Онтарійському коледжі мистецтва і дизайну: студентам давали вправи - піти до кав'ярні навпроти і намалювати жанрову сцену, включивши себе до неї.

"Пісня ворони" (1991) - ще одне важливе полотно у творчості Харини. Це - багатосемантичний автопортрет зі складною символікою. Композиція розділена безлистим деревом по вертикалі на дві нерівні частини. По одному боці від дерева - ворона, по другому - чоловік. Вони сидять на протилежних боках лавки у засніженому парку, чоловік, поглинутий думками, дивиться перед собою, а ворона оглядає його. Взаємодії між ними

немає, та все ж у глядача складається враження, що чоловік свідомий присутності ворони, відчуває її пильний погляд. Він також здає собі справу зі складних багатосемантчних культурних конотацій, пов'язаних із цим птахом. Ворона символізує зміни, перетворення (головно - емоційні, духовні). Наділена потужною здатністю до передбачення, вона є уважною і спостережливою. Аборигени Північної Америки шанують ворону як символ творіння і духовної сили. Саме так трактує цю пташу мистець - із повагою. Ворона і художник-наратор сидять поруч, але не близько - шанують особистий простір одне одного.



Пісня ворони

Важливе місце у доробку Харини посідають портрети Катерини (і жанрові композиції, у центрі яких вона є) - коханої дівчини і багаторічної моделі художника. Портрет "Катерина" (1984) представляє молоду вродливу дівчину, тепло одягнену у зимову куртку і вовняний берет. На перший погляд видається, що вона сидить спокійно, але спокій цей - ілюзорний. Щось її турбує. Катерина дивиться напружено і незмигнано перед собою. Важкий зимовий одяг і розпущене волосся обрамляють її ніжне бліде обличчя і слугують контрастом до його тонких делікатних рис. Харина

любить зіставляти протилежності: гострі й округлі форми, горизонтальні і вертикальні лінії, важкі і легкі предмети, теплі і холодні кольори. У протистоянні несхожих між собою форм, предметів і барв народжується енергія, вогонь, який, наче вулкан, клекоче і палахкотить під живописною поверхнею, загрожуючи вихлюпнутися назовні і змести усталені норми і канони.

Символізм (часом із домішками містики і песимізму) є важливим для образотворення Харини. Немає значення, чи він досягається використанням певного кольору, чи знакового предмету, чи поєднанням різних об'єктів так, що разом вони оповідають історію мовою усталених символів, які художник тлумачить по-своєму. Жоден знак чи символ не залишається у своєму первісному вигляді - художник обов'язково додає свою інтерпретацію. Можливо, часом це трапляється підсвідомо, як, наприклад, у портреті "Жужана". Молоду красиву жінку Харина зобразив на фіолетовому тлі, що разом з рудим волоссям і насиченим рожевим кольором щік творить теплу оптимістичну гаму і гармонує з глибокими почуттями любови майстра до дружини-моделі. У Харини немає нічого випадкового. Ось і в цьому портреті вибір кольору тла відіграє таке ж глибоке символічне значення, як і семантика самого кольору. Говорячи про фіолетовий пігмент, Вікторія Фінли стверджує, що "Упродовж тисячі років це був один з найцінніших товарів і вважався символом як небесного світу, так і всього найкращого у світі земному".⁸ Крім того, "Фіолетовий - останній колір веселки, символізує кінець відомого і початок невідомого".⁹ Психологічна атмосфера твору досить складна і багатогранна: у час написання портрету пара переживала певні труднощі. Звичайно, глядач цього не знає. Зате відомо, що довгі століття фіолетовий був кольором жалоби у Європі. До того ж Харина так написав тло, що воно викликає в уяві сутінки чи захід сонця. Ліричний настрої поглиблюється передчуттям змін, не конче позитивних. Тому що цей пігмент був дуже дорогий і важкодоступний, одягатися у фіолетове вбрання могли тільки вийняткові заможні люди - королі і найвищі церковні ієрархи. У Римі і Візантії фіолетові шати були доступні тільки імператорам і членам їхніх родин, та найбагатшим церковнослужителям. Тож обравши для тла портрету дорогої людини колір настільки глибоко символічний і з такою давньою історією, мистець підкреслив її значущість і важливість у його житті, підніс її до титулу імператриці свого серця.

Надзвичайно цікаві у Харини портрети дітей - двох дівчаток. З дітьми працювати важко - вони непосидючі - і художникові доводиться бути дуже винахідливим, щоб схилити їх до терпеливого позування. Він створив без перебільшення шедеври за стилістикою, гармонійною композицією і кольоровим ладом. "Дівчинка з ляльками" наводить певні алюзії до стилістики наївного портрету фронтальною позою, розведеними в різні боки ступнями ніг, прямим незмигним поглядом в "об'єктив" - просто

⁸ Finlay, *Colour*, 342.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

на художника. Але на тому подібність закінчується. Було би помилкою вважати цю роботу простою чи наївною. Вона відзначається чітко продуманим і бездоганно виконаним кожним деталем - особливо майстерно виписані іграшки дитини - чудово зроблені і гарно вбрані ляльки. Можна також добачити естетичну спорідненість картини з дитячими портретами Гойї, в яких виразно проступає безпосередність і внутрішня чистота дітей. Харина докладно передає свіжість кольорів квіток на комірці і сукні дівчинки, що є кольоровими акцентами на тлі бездоганної білизни підлоги і стіни та блідо-голубого неба за вікном. Червона тканина крісла перегукується з червоними і рожевими плямами на убранні дитини і ляльок. Постаць “Дівчинки з зайцем”, з іншого боку, - динамічна, рухлива, усміхнена. Композиція поділена вікном на дві частини, і дитина майже повністю знаходиться зліва, навпроти стіни. Палітра спокійна, почасти приглушена; єдиною яскравою плямою виступають червоні шати Богородиці - ікони на стіні. За вікном, яке займає майже половину площі полотна, - темна ніч з тонким серпиком блілого місяця - перегук із західноєвропейською традицією портретного живопису поєднання обличчя особи з краєвидом.

Професійну виставкову діяльність Харина розпочав у 1982 році, коли Українська Асоціація Мистців Америки показала його твори разом з тими полотнами, які вдалося зібрати Петра Холодного Старшого і Петра Холодного Молодшого. Наступного, 1983 року на груповій виставці студентів Онтарійського коледжу мистецтва і дизайну картина Харини здобула Почесну згадку. У 1988 році мистець узяв участь у тематичній виставці “Ікони і релігійний живопис” у Канадсько-Українській мистецькій фундації. На осінній ArtFest Juried Art Show у 1994 році Харина отримав нагороду Best of Show Award. На цій же виставці 1999 року був нагороджений двома відзнаками - Best of Show Award and People’s Choice Award. Наступною важливою подією у його мистецькій кар’єрі стала виставка “Три покоління Холодних” в Українському Музеї Нью-Йорку 2001 року. Зусиллями меценатів був випущений каталог цієї виставки. Чергова нагорода - Golden Artist Colours, Inc. Award - надійшла у 2005 році на SCA 38th Open Juried Art Exhibition у Торонто. Щороку художник брав активну участь у виставках і мистецькому житті Торонта, а в 2010 році дістав Antoinette Stevens Award for Best Painting in the Show. Через два роки успішно відбулася виставка Харини у Leonardo Galleries у Торонто. Від 2008 по 2017 роки щоліта брав участь у виставках у Grazhda Gallery, St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, Hunter, NY. Мистець мав також чотири персональних виставки: у Публічній бібліотеці Торонта (Runnymede branch - 1998, 2000), “Quidditas” (Leonardo Galleries - 2013), “Eye of the Beholder” (KUMF Gallery - 2015). Детальніше про цю виставку можна прочитати у тижневику *Новий шлях/New Pathway*.¹⁰

¹⁰ Halyna Kostyuk, “Andrew Charyna at KUMF Gallery,” *New Pathway*, 22 May 2015.

У своїх натюрмортах, символічно-містичних картинах і навіть краєвидах мистець сприймає звичайні, повсякденні предмети зовсім не так, як функціональні речі. На його полотнах парасолі, лампи, груші, цитрини і т.п. набувають нового естетичного значення і слугують не для побутових потреб, а несподівано опиняються в епіцентрі філософських розмислів про питання вічні, неперебутні.¹¹ Часто художник не обмежує полотно кордонами рами, даючи глядачам простір для думання. Гаррісон вважає, що “Пересічна картина знаходиться у межах рами. Справді, частково функцією рами є керувати стосунками між картиною й оточуючим світом - некартинним - таким чином, щоб наголосити на самодостатності живописної роботи”.¹² Та полотнам Харини не перешкоджає відсутність обмежень, навпаки, - образи, символи, знаки розмикають простір і творять відкриту концепцію для повнішого розкриття задуму художника.

Напіваабстрактні роботи Харини показують, чого можна досягти, коли послуговуватися тільки формами. Ті жуки, які так точно і досконало виписував Петро Холодний Молодший і яких онук допомагав йому ловити, на полотні Харини постають цілковито інакшими. Вони радше нагадують якихось футуристичних істот зі світу наукової фантастики, сконструйованих з металевих частин, таких собі жуків-роботів. Так само виглядає і вовк - зібраний до купи (як конструктор) з чорних і сірих площин, наче листове залізо. Образи розміщені на тлі теж сірих і чорних квадратів і прямокутників. Прикметно, що зображення - не спотворені, у них виразно помітна гармонія композиції і своєрідна краса, а ритмічні лінії і вишукані форми площин за відсутності кольорової гами привертають увагу чіткістю, злагодженістю, гармонійною єдністю.

Оригінально виглядає душа по смерті людини в інтерпретації Харини: біла стилізована постать, що неначе зійшла з якогось дорожнього знаку, зупинилась перед несподіваною перешкодою - двома грубими чорними перехрещеними шлагбаумами. Куди її не пускають? Чи, може, пускають, але після перевірки? Багато запитань, але відповіді мистець не пропонує, залишає глядача на самоті з думками. Це - одна з визначальних рис живопису Андрія Харини: він не полегшує глядачеві роботу, а спонукає пройти самостійно шлях пізнання прекрасного.

¹¹ Halyna Kostiuik, “Andrew Charyna’s ‘Portrait of a Lemon’ Art Exhibit,” *New Pathway*, 27 May 2013.

¹² Charles Harrison, “Conceptual Art, the Aesthetic and the End(s) of Art,” in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, ed. Gill Perry and Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 63.



Це не кінець (Парасоля № 2)



Гене́за

Interview with Prim-Rose Diakiw

Chrystia Chomiak

The following interview was taped in the fall of 1980 in Edmonton. It reflects the then current development of Ukrainian Canadian visual art. The conversation covered a number of topics, all returning to and focusing on art, ethnicity, and Prim-Rose Diakiw's creative process and influences. Prim-Rose also discussed one of her signature portraits entitled *Marusya*.

Diakiw: This talk is very important to me. I've been so desperately alone in the wilderness and have nobody to relate to and talk about the things that are in my heart. I really need to share a cup of water with someone who understands my work.

Chomiak: This is also very important to me as well because I often feel like I am completely out to lunch in my ideas about art and ethnicity.

Diakiw: No, you're not out to lunch or we're both out to lunch together. Art – current normal visual art has become so universal, it has removed all the edges of everything, become very sophisticated. And is that really art or has it become a technical end? This universality thing has made us dehumanized as artists, and we are human. We should be able to reflect on what has happened to us as individuals – it should be part of our personal calligraphy.

Chomiak: I find it useful, in understanding ethnicity and art, to make a distinction between the creative and what I call the interpretive arts. Most Ukrainian Canadian arts are interpretive – the mainstay of our culture – the embroidery, the *pysanky*, the cooking, the folk dancing, much of the music. They are a way to transmit culture from one generation to the next. While every generation interprets them differently, brings in changes -- which are what gives them life -- they remain rooted within the specific craft and symbols. Some more so than others have a great deal of formalism in them which is not that interesting to me.

But in the creative process, in creative art, it is so exciting to see the effect of ethnicity because it is creating something new on the basis of your ethnic experience and images, and in your case spirituality. Seeing things in a completely different context and from another point of view. I think that this is where the real excitement lies, where the depth occurs.

Diakiw: I think that that is really amazing because it opens a lot of doors for me. You know, I don't think you're just interviewing me, I'm interviewing you also -- we're educating each other. We are looking at Ukrainian Canadian art from both sides.

Art is usually described within the universal – not the specific, not within ethnicity for sure. Western art has not acknowledged ethnicity as an important thing. At this moment, art is very dehumanizing in its formalism, in the sense of what is an acceptable type of expression. If you rely on grants and you need Canada Council's approval, you're going to get very little money if you not doing the right things. I don't paint for the art establishment.

Also, I am not trying to be accepted by the Ukrainian [Canadian] people, to sell to them. What I am doing is trying to show them what is beautiful about being Ukrainian. Because it is so easy to do a bunch of ethnic-type themed things, illustrative things, like a little church in the middle of a field. I'll only do that if I feel that it is very important. Then I will do a whole exhibition of it. But it will be something large, like *Marusya*. If I am going to do a church it will be 10 ft by 4 ft and no one will be able to hang it in their living room. I mean it's gonna be something that hangs in a gallery and when you walk in and see it – you will be struck. The church definitely made an engraving on your soul and that is the feeling that I would want to give it.

When I drove through the prairies, the first time, it just struck me so much that I felt I was in Ukraine. I love to go to Andrew and the Shandro country, and up around the Star area. Star was the first place where they dropped off the Ukrainian immigrants. There is nothing there now, but I wanted to go there because this is from where they got scattered -- innocently not knowing what was going to happen. This is where they came and it was important for me to look at the land and know that this is where they were shipped, not knowing what was going to happen next.

I visited Ukraine and saw the *selo* (village) structure – a mile or two from the next village, closely knit, and everyone knows each other. When the priest went to bless the houses with holy water, he just went down the street to everybody and it was done. It was not feasible to do that here. You have a parish of twenty families and ten miles between each family. How do you relate to that space? Yet we had to evolve some kind of custom to do it. You can't do it physically, otherwise that is all the priest would be doing from one Feast of Jordan to the next. How do we deal with that kind of thing, how do we deal with having a house blessed every five years? We managed to do to it with blessings sent with a card, or somehow your blessings were sent metaphysically.

Chomiak: Let's talk about the relationship between ethnicity, feeling, and the creative process for many artists and especially in your work. When you create, you feel it first. You understand what you are painting in an intuitive sense and in an intellectual sense. Understanding ethnicity's place and motivation in your art can give it meaning and depth other viewers may not be aware of. While I don't have a mystical understanding of Ukrainian consciousness, as you do, I do see ethnicity's emotional and spiritual components in your work. I feel it.

Diakiw: I see that there is a similarity of soul in Ukrainians – this is what defines us as a nation. As an artist I'm creating Ukrainian Canadian art -- the artist is creating it -- and it's important that it goes beyond the 1920s calcification that happened to the people when they came over here, and with the immigrants who came in the late '40s and who all of a sudden wanted to keep what they had for fear that they would lose everything.

My point is that to bring out ethnicity – not just Ukrainian ethnicity but ethnicity in general – is to give an element for others who are not aware of that kind of flavor or color of their own personalities to observe through their own pools of consciousness. It brings in the edges of things, for the world as a whole. We have a certain light from the Ukrainian thing, but I can't just sit in that alone; as an artist and philosopher and humanist, all these broader scopes come into play.

I observe the one drop of water separately and also the ocean which the drop of water is part of. We as Ukrainian Canadian artists can stand as lights for reference to the rest of the world too. If we stay in our own regional concepts we are going to die. We have to reach out. If I can teach my friend next door to make varenyky, not just eat them, but make them on their own, they become aware of a certain kind of preciseness and respect that is part of our Ukrainian consciousness. This happens on the varenyky level but goes through all of Ukrainian consciousness. We have a respect for resourcefulness.

I started doing little tiny icons because people threw out scraps of solid hardwood. I took these little pieces of wood and sanded them and prepared them properly, and I've not only done a work of art but also used up material that was being wasted. We are a consuming nation – we waste a lot of things. I acted out of mere practicality -- just as we make varenyky. How did the varenyky evolve? If someone had a bowl of potatoes left and it wasn't enough for a whole meal, you added something else to it – maybe a little cheese, leftover whatever – and you made varenyky. You saved all your crumbs and you sautéed them in butter and that is what you put over the top, that was their garnish. That kind of feeling, respect for things – I do this in my work too.

What I have to say is also a result of using these things. I did not arrive at a beautiful feeling, at a romantic concept of Ukraine. It was more than that. I actually lived on a farm, walked through the fields and watched the wind blow through the wheat, and I could see the dances. I could see Ukrainian choreography. I could see this movement relating. The dance did not evolve from nothing; it was not an isolated development. It came from a lifestyle, from simply living and observing things. Even if they were illiterate, they were intelligent and poured themselves into expressing themselves visually through embroideries, through *pysanky*, through dancing, customs, everything which said more than they could read in a lot of books.

My work also relies a lot on *pysanky* – there is philosophy and calligraphy and symbolism in them. For someone who is ill you had a certain symbol for hope and for well-being and health in the new year, or if somebody was wanting to have a child and she was barren you sent the fertility symbol or to newlyweds or whatever.

Chomiak: Do you see a similarity between the culture and symbols of, say, First Nations and Ukrainians?

Diakiw: No matter what nation or what background you come from, there's a certain consciousness that emanates through. This weaving that I got from southern Mexico or this jacket from Afghanistan. This jacket could make you think that this was Ukrainian, even the embroidery. People thought I had embroidered it and got a little bit modern about it. You know: men in sheepskin coats? I bought it because I identified with it, it had the same kind of ethnicity about it that I could identify as part of my image of being a Ukrainian Canadian. I like to wear it and feel it. The whole thing, with sheepskin inside, lets me relate to the *Hutsuly*. I collect from all sorts of nations and people. Really, if you look at some of the embroidery from Afghanistan and Western Ukraine, the black *nyzynka* designs and the key designs, the cross-stitch designs – they are very similar to Ukrainian. And the color combination was very similar. So, I thought it has something of the same kind of consciousness about it.

I don't know that much about what happened historically, but I can assume that there was a kind of movement of trade that went through Turkey and Afghanistan and Ukraine. Back and forth. Where did it come from? I found that there is something in common there. Whichever way it went, it made our own culture stronger, because we were able to take certain elements and make it our own.

I don't see a lot of similarity with First-Nation culture, but between Celtic and Ukrainian – yes.

Chomiak: Your work is specifically rooted within a profound search for understanding of your roots. Another concern in your art is the female experience, concern for the feel of an article – the tactility of things, for the making of things – the traditional female realm. Having an understanding of your femaleness comes through strongly in your art. In this piece – *Marusya* – in particular.



01: Prim-Rose Diakiw, *Marusya*, Acrylics.

Diakiw: In this work especially, I identify with Marusya. I mean I'm a mother of three children. I'll come back to that later.

What I'd like to talk about is my search. All my life I've searched for something. I couldn't claim [Ukrainian] ethnicity; I just searched intuitively, on my own, for answers to things I didn't understand. The roots story. Later you can label it as ethnicity, or ethnic origin, or whatever. I was searching for my soul's identity, as an intuitive thing. I didn't fit where I was. I was born in an English-speaking community and I felt like a fish out of water. But why? I thought maybe it's because I'm eccentric or this or that, but I was yearning -- looking -- but for what I wasn't sure. But then when certain little things came up along the way, seventeen years ago, it made me think: well maybe it is in this area of Ukrainianism. And one thing led to another and here I am today finding that I am Ukrainian, feeling it before, but taking seventeen years to find it.¹ Maybe because of my deep interest in knowing my own identity and then searching this out for myself; because I've lost a lot of time, it comes out very profoundly.

You know, Shevchenko reached me when he was talking to Ukrainians born and dead and yet unborn; he was talking to me. Little did he know that a lot of Ukrainians, that are yet unborn, would be reached as he reached me -- me -- out of the woodwork. And I thought: how can I feel so strong about this Ukrainian thing -- I have to be part Ukrainian! My soul has to have Ukrainian consciousness, or ethnic consciousness, or actually have roots that really are Ukrainian. Am I simply sympathetic because Shevchenko is a phenomenon, a fantastic source of information culturally and ethnically, or who am I really? So, in my search, it turned out to be both.

I thought that Ukrainian art was a fantastic source of information to use as an artist. Visually. I thought why haven't I heard about it? In the faculty of fine arts, Ukrainian art is not heard of. We study about Chinese, Japanese, and Mayan and Greek, whatever, but the Ukrainian element was never considered nor the Russian element. That whole area was never considered. Ethnicity was never part of the artistic experience, artistic search, or evolution.

Chomiak: Well, someone like Chagall was very centered in his ethnicity and time and place. Others, like Kandinsky, were influenced by their spirituality, their religion, and mystical experiences. He was based in Russian Orthodoxy. That was integral to his aesthetic, the roots of his creativity.

Diakiw: But it wasn't focussed on in art analysis; art historians don't take that as being an important part of an artists' work.

Chomiak: Yes, they looked at what made him more universal, international. When artists lost the specificity of where they came from, the universal was considered as important, not where they were rooted. But there has been a

¹ See above, xx. -- Ed.

shift for sure. What is important now is where you are and where you come from. Western Canadian literature for instance is rooted in time and place and gender, and because it does not deny that specificity, it becomes universal.

Diakiw: Yes – look at someone like Mary Pratt, Christopher Pratt’s wife. Finally, after years of looking after their four or five sons, she got back into painting herself. And what does she paint but four or five trout lying on the counter thawing out. Very precise realism. She was not just taking the visual elements of what was happening in the field modern art but taking something that meant something to her. What was wrong with just the immediate thing sitting there in front of her? Talking about a feminist approach to art: practicality -- instead of going out and having to set up something, just using and reflecting on what was in your immediate environment. There is nothing wrong with that. I really respected that.

I identified with this painting [*Marusya*], with the pregnant woman because I know what that feels like. If I were a man, the father of the child in *Marusya*, that's a different motive. That's a different feeling towards her. I don't love her, she's my friend. She's expecting a child. I am going to be the godmother of whatever she's going to have -- a girl or a boy. I've been pregnant myself so I feel like I can do it. I'm a sculptor and a lot of my work when I was pregnant became very pregnant itself. It's not just as an observation, but something that I drew out of myself; it's a portrait partially of me too.

Chomiak: I would like to talk about the relationship of Byzantine art and icon painting in *Marusya*. When did you start painting icons?

Diakiw: I started painting icons way back in '72, and it just didn't become something I really felt I wanted to do, but it was always something I was intrigued by. The thing about iconography is that I had to search the strict rules of composing an icon in terms of canonical law. The drapery and how it folds as opposed to its treatment in the Italian Renaissance. So, I had to search the visual language of drapery. It took a long time to feel sort of good about understanding how to write in a [Byzantine] iconic form and it's really not until 1976 and '77 that I started doing more of it. Basically, it was because I used to work for a Ukrainian priest, and I did all his Easter and Christmas bulletins, and we always wanted to do something religious-themed, but within the Byzantine style. That was my idea, so I was forced into doing it several times a year, and I thought -- I spend all this time illustrating the bulletin when I could actually do an icon. So, it started to grow. I was doing my landscapes, doing portraits, doing fields, and every once in a while, I was forced into doing an icon illustration, and it got so that I liked it more and more. I was lecturing about it, analyzing it, and it became part of me more consciously. But actually to understand the language of icons, one has to do a lot of serious copying, copying to the point that you know the structure of it, the philosophy.

When I started, there was nothing in English to instruct me. I didn't have Olimpieri from the twelfth century to tell me how to do it and show me the

mechanics of how the drapery is done this way, and why. So, I had to start it from a very intellectual point. I don't know any icon painters either, so I just did it as an individual search. I think, theologically speaking, that you really have to have a calling to it, a vocation, and God and the Spirit really taught me how to paint icons. It may have taken a longer time but it was definitely a real, if slow, development, but an honest one.

I felt it. I felt the lines just like you feel them as you're drawing a *pysanka*. You feel those lines, they mean something. I mean, I can say I started doing icons in 1970 but the development between then and now has been long. I was self-taught and I'm doing a lot of other things, and I had other artists laugh at my work, so you hide it away but keep doing it.

There is a certain amount of discipline and feeling that comes with icon painting. Just even preparing the wood -- ten layers of gesso and sanding. Finally, last year, I learned a technique of varnishing. There are about eight layers of varnish on my icons that give it a shimmer. We're working now in acrylic; we are not working in egg tempera; we're not working with alabaster or a combination of alabaster and gesso. Then the egg tempera soaked into the wood -- it dried quickly and then you added layers of varnish on top, and then your resins, and then your wax. Nobody knows those techniques now. Now we are working with acrylic, and we are working on wood that is different from linden wood. I found birch to be the best I could find here. Through experiments, through accidents. Oak is okay in church, but it has its problems because the gesso doesn't soak into the wood enough, and the gesso becomes hardened so that the paint lies on top. There are all sorts of technical things I had to find on my own.

What I am trying to do is create icons in the twentieth century that are different because of the kind of wood I work on, the kind of paint I use, etc. I had to search out answers to the technical problems, answers that made sense to me.

Chomiak: When I look at *Marusya*, I see that the folds are lines; they do not give depth to the painting. The patterns on the shawl and the pattern on the dress, are flat. There is pattern in the window; only the chair has some depth. But all the other lines are flat -- purposely so. Are these the folds you are talking about in Byzantine art? Are the patterns and folds the influence of Byzantine art?

Diakiw: The folds have the same kind of flatness and there is no shade. I'm talking in purest forms. I look at the what's happening in Western Canadian iconography, and you have a Byzantine hybrid painting here that is trying for a sort of canonical resemblance, and yet they add a lot of shading. This isn't how it was traditionally. There was a kind of shading but not in terms of realism. There was a fight, a hybrid, between realism and Byzantine flatness -- a juxtaposition of both -- sort of like what I've done here. My lines are different here than when I do a formal icon. But in other ways there is a similarity in that I have reduced it down to a certain kind of symbolism. I've taken a certain

simplicity of line to draw sculpturally but flat. But I've also given you the idea that she is really wearing the shawl. It is wrapped around her. Yet it is flat. It's very, very flat. My composition is a play upon the density of color and design, which happens in an icon too. You work through the shawl, bits of fringe, the shape of the dress because the shape is a big part of her -- the biggest part of her. Also it's a symmetrical composition. She is in the middle of the piece of work, which is a part of Byzantine imagery. And this gives it a feeling of solidity and strength and peace. All of those things are very much part of an icon, the abstract parts of an icon. There is not a spiritual tension except for a visual tension between the shapes and the details. You have this delineation of line around shapes, that you have in icons. Like I say, there is flatness but there is a depth. Byzantine imagery has a kind of definite flatness that has a vibrating depth.

One of the ways to make this happen was through the use of gold leaf, to create a golden shimmering mystical experience that actually evoked a visual experience. It was not only within you (you get that internal experience through the liturgy), but you experienced it visually. You know, you put on the lights in the church, and the choir is singing, and the priest is loading the incense into the space -- so you have this mystical kind of feeling. All you have to do is come, and if you hadn't eaten breakfast then you really got into a beautiful feeling.

When you talk about the Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople and the number of candles that hung in the candelabra -- that was really heaven on earth when those were lit and you had this gold leaf and tiles and Byzantine saints around the whole church. Every square inch was covered with design. It was to give the person a feeling of heaven, to transcend human suffering and to be with God. The icon gives you that -- it is an implement through which God comes to you and you reach out to him. It is a kind of vehicle. It is a lot more than its historical value. It speaks to God. It comes through the eyes of *Matir Bozha*, the Mother of God, to your eyes and to your soul, and back. You are praying to her because you need her intervention: I need your protection, give me inspiration for today, or my friends are giving me a rotten time, or help me deal with it. It, the icon, gives you that kind of rapport and dialogue with God.

People were illiterate so we wrote the icons. The history of the church and the saints and Christ's dialogue with the disciples, the various events around the time that he was with them. This is all recorded, not only to look at, but each part of the liturgical year is a development, a step above a particular part of our consciousness, and we go through it like we do the seasons of the year or day and night. There is somehow, you know, this respect back to pre-Christian times, the respect of nature, life, night and day, the seasons; they were all brought in. It was very easy to say your prayers in the morning and in the evening as the sun rose and the sun set. Then all this stuff around the Epiphany and the blessing of the *didukh* brought nature to the church. While in the West it's like God up there and we're here, in Ukrainian life God is really with us all the time. You made the sign of the cross before you did your work and sprinkled your bread with holy water before you shoved it into the oven and all sorts of things you did privately. There was a dialogue there.

Chomiak: What comes out in *Marusya* is its spirituality, the soul of the sitter, the search for understanding. That's what remains with me, when I leave the painting. Yet when I return to it, I see all the patterns and design, the face, the background. I see that first. When I leave it, I remember the search of the woman – which is so profound -- her search to come to terms with having a child, her role in life, through God. It is not a negative search; it is a very positive one, very contemplative.

Diakiw: There is a lot more in it. Its like if you went to St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv -- just imagine what it was like when new. Or Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in Turkey, you could never absorb it all at one time, there's always something more to look at it, to open up to you. It's the same thing with this painting. For instance, you didn't think of the symbolism involved with the window and the landscape out there. I mean take the greenness out there. We're talking about spirituality, but we are also talking about life and nature and nature coming through the window too. We are talking about the spiritual and the physical. When we talk about icons, we talk about Christ who was both human and divine. So, I'm bringing the duality of the existence of the human and the divine, the spirituality and actual terrestrial part of life. There is a lot more in there, and I would never have brought that part up but I think the depth of value to a piece of work is how long you can be intrigued by it and learn from it. Certainly, you will not see it in one look or even ten times seeing it.

Chomiak: Why is your window all green and there is no blue sky?

Diakiw: There is something basic about this. It was spring, and that is what I saw through my second floor studio window: trees, nothing else but huge trees. So, I took exactly what I saw outside my window and didn't change it. There is enough information there to tell you it's a window. That's what I mean by the nuance of things.

Chomiak: You related that there was some aspect of *pysanka* painting in this work as well, in terms of your use of line. Can you talk about that?

Diakiw: Yes. It gives it lines, description. You notice the fish net pattern that happens in *pysanky* -- the triangle has the fish net pattern, symbolizing the sifting out of good and evil. When I was painting this work, I was thinking of a pattern, I was thinking of *pysanky* – the little crosshatch that happens on the Easter eggs. There are those kinds of associations obviously, but you know – you start off with a line, and then it's waxed out. The first lines are the white lines; then you fill in with color because the rest of the egg exposes the first color. Well, I draw that way. I may paint the other part in and come back and give it a depth to line later, but really if you saw the way I work it's like making

a *pysanka*. I just fill in and fill in, a state of reduction from one to another to another and build up build up like the layers of the wax.

Chomiak: Is this the same approach you used when you painted in an abstract expressionist way in the 1960s?

Diakiw: I painted the way I depict the trees in the window, with color. That is part of my past.

For years I was just wrapped up with looking after the children, and after graduating I did the odd piece of work. But I was so wrapped up emotionally with the children and in survival because, honestly, economically it was a very, very hard struggle. I didn't paint in sequence, regularly. It would be a couple weeks here and nothing for six months. So, I got involved in a lot of other things just for survival. In 1969 I started again and then I stopped painting again for a little while. I mean I couldn't do much with the children around. I got back at it in 1972. I got a studio and I started painting. My first few paintings were abstract expressionist, but I was working with trees. I didn't know what to do after four years of not painting at all. I can't start talking intellectual concepts or what ideology I should have or whatever. I had the studio on the second floor, the studio where *Marusya* is set, and out the studio window were the trees. That is what I painted. There is one painting that is very iconic, very flat, and yet it was the trees, and behind them was a gold background instead of the blue sky. It was a gold iconic color background and a field of dandelions in front of it, which was a break from my abstract painting. I did an impressionist kind of tree, because I didn't know where to begin. Just to do something. The first three paintings were like that, and then boom came this imagery through the trees. Because I was driving up to Edmonton a lot then too and I got into the landscape thing. It was kind of a religious experience because I looked at it and saw that this was also very simple. I could reduce it down to a certain iconic symbolism and within it evoke a kind of religious feeling like you do in an icon -- very much easier than this painting of *Marusya*. *Marusya* was very much an intuitive thing that happened when I was painting landscapes. All of a sudden, the light was given to me, and I understood I could use the same iconic approach where the face is not of a specific human face but the face of the Mother of God, the face of all women, of motherhood, of the divine and the universal.

Sowing the Seeds of Dialogue: Sandra Semchuk and Kalyna Somchynsky on Creating, Learning, and Growing with One Another

Kalyna Somchynsky

Somchynsky: Tell me a bit about yourself. How did you get into photography? Do you remember a moment that really inspired you to pick up a camera or did you perhaps start in other mediums? Were there some mentors along the way who influenced you or artists whose work inspired you?

Semchuk: Yes. I was born in Northern Saskatchewan, in a town called Meadow Lake. Our home was above the grocery store and as a little girl, I always worked in the grocery store. I was very good at dusting all the cans. By the time I was seven, my dad encouraged me to start painting. He used to paint on the windows for the grocery store, create signs with these very beautiful sable brushes.

He encouraged me to start painting on the windows of Main Street, particularly for the Meadow Lake Stampede. I did that until I was about twenty-three years old. It was a really important source of income for me as a child. Then later, as I went to university, it continued to be an important source of income. My dad and my Uncle Graham, who was next door in the menswear store, and my Auntie Elsie, who was in the women's store across the road, really encouraged me to be an artist. A number of townspeople supported me to be an artist too. When I went into higher grades, they used to bring these green boxes that had books in them to the schools. They were a traveling library. There were books in there, for example, of Rembrandt's work. Sometimes you found books of photographs, and I was very, very interested in that. When I was ten, my dad gave me a camera because he loved photography and did a lot of photography, and I photographed my niece, Kelly. That was the turning point: Kelly.

Somchynsky: What kind of photos would you take? Candid photos?

Semchuk: They were candid photographs at that time. Sometimes I put some flowers beside her. I think right from the very beginning, what drew me to the photographic image had to do with seeing someone else and the way that the camera affected how people saw themselves.

Somchynsky: Did that propel your early photographic series? I noticed many of them are documentary. You photographed family members, your Baba, townspeople, and many different sites throughout Meadow Lake.

Semchuk: When I went to university, I studied art in the broader field, except for the last year when I took a class in photography with Hans Dommasch, and really got involved in the work of documentary photographers. The main one was Dorothea Lange, from the Farm Security Administration. Dorothea Lange had this societal care-taking framework that she brought to her photography.

There is a sense of reciprocity and connection with the people that she photographed -- it was really caring. I think of the internment work that she did with the Japanese, her work with the migrant workers. She brought together image and text in ways that took you into a broader context of the events of the day to understand who these people were. There was a connection with the people that she was photographing. There was this sense of recognition of the really important issues.

My dad was a socialist and helped bring in Medicare. He was a member of the legislature at the time. He and Tommy Douglas were friends. I traveled with dad when he would go and spend time with farmers.

In 1970, I was just finishing my four-year BFA. I was the first one in our nuclear family to go to university -- that opportunity was a very big deal in our family. At this point, I'd taken this one class on photography and my boyfriend was Richard Holden. We were friends with people like James Lisitza and Sylvia Lisitza. Suddenly, I become a photographer. I can't explain it. It's like one minute, you're not a photographer, and the next, you're a photographer. Suddenly, there's this commitment to the medium, but also a way of committing oneself to the world, in the sense of participating in the world in an engaged and productive way.

The four of us were very close, and we began to hatch a scheme to create a space where photographers could get together and share resources, exhibit work, and exchange ideas and methods. A number of other people got involved with us such as Kent Martens, John and Jo Nansen, and others. We called it at first The Group Photographers and later, The Photographers Gallery. What we had done was create a community space for ourselves where we could feel like we belonged. We'd had exhibits in the community, for example, in the windows of the Eaton's building because there was no place for photographers to show at the time. It was through the Photographers Gallery that we became connected with the National Film Board Stills Division and with other photographers across Canada. As soon as we started showing their work, they in turn were excited and wanted to show our work. It was a reciprocal relationship and mutually challenging.

Somchynsky: What motivates you to create art? Under what circumstances do you create your most effective work? What challenges do you encounter and how do you overcome them?

I really loved how you talked about care — the care in taking the image of somebody or something and that relationship to the world that

comes through the process. Is there anything else that really motivates you or drives you?

Semchuk: I'm just listening to your language because I like your language, and I'd like to come back to that and go a little bit closer. I have hindsight now. It's very different than when you're totally inside of an experience. Why is it so important to have this connection with people and dialogue with people?

Now I know that dialogue is the basis for recognition of one another; I know that recognition is crucial to the ongoing negotiation of identity.

Somchynsky: That's a very profound statement.

Semchuk: We have to consider the historical roots of our own people when looking at the definition of identity formation by Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher. Consider what it meant that Ukrainians in Canada came out of World War I refusing to tell the story of the internment camps, the story of house arrest, and of having to carry identity cards throughout World War I up until 1920.

They came out of a nation, Ukraine, which wasn't Ukraine all the time because it was occupied by others for multiple periods. They came out of feudalism, to which my great grandfather was in such close proximity. They were still very much indentured to overlords. They had to pay taxes, they had to pay for their wood. It was more money than what they had, and they had so little land. They were still very much treated like slaves and looked down upon.

The degradation that people experience as a result of being looked down upon, as a result of being entrapped within very contained and controlled spaces – these things are being played out all over the world, and we see it.

I didn't know any of this.

I'm this young, fresh twenty-year-old who doesn't know this history, but I'm a part of this history and their intergenerational effects. I'm drawn very early to people who are suffering from social injustices and I'm trying to understand. I see now that trying to understand is like creating a counter situation so you can learn to see what has affected you as well as what has affected them. Does that make sense to you?

Somchynsky: Yes, absolutely. In the sense that when you look at someone else, you also see them looking back at you. It forces you to look back at yourself. Correct?

Semchuk: I really like that because what you've talked about is seeing as a reciprocal act, but also one which takes time. The thoughtfulness and presence is informing both of you. It's silence in a way, the seeing that you're talking about. That's really at the core of what drew me to photography. That silent seeing. It ties in with photographing trees, to the wider-than-human experience.

Somchynsky: Exactly. There's something about looking at something that you don't imagine having eyes but imagining that you're other to it as well. It knows you're there. Every time you walk, the world around you is aware of your presence and you start affecting it even though you're not thinking that you are.

Semchuk: I think you're right.

When we think of containment and control, which is the basis of colonization, and what you've just said, it's good to imagine yourself out of your specific body. There are so many implications in what you've said in terms of how trauma is stored in the body. When you have that ability to navigate a much larger context of the world or to imagine ourselves in other places, it eases the constraints that become internalized.

Somchynsky: It's being able to find comfort in the discomfort that has the potential to take you places you never thought of before.

Semchuk: That also says a lot for me in terms of order -- the difference between the order we create in our homes and the way we order our thoughts and narratives. We have an order in which we create reality, but the wider-than-human disrupts all of that and opens it up to other kinds of orders that are not predictable, and not necessarily safe either. It goes back to our first words about the weather and how we have to be on our toes when we live in a place where there's snow and great winds. It changes us, doesn't it?

Somchynsky: It does, quite a bit. It really makes you realize how resilient we are, but also how resilient the world is and that it will keep on going with or without us. We're this tiny little component in the world, but the more-than-human will always find a way to overcome and continue on. It will always adapt.

Speaking of adapting, when you are working, are there any challenges that you frequently encounter, and how do you overcome them?

Semchuk: I think at every stage there were challenges, and the challenges are dependent on the body of work. The biggest challenge is myself: my ego, my own narcissism. I was thinking about that in terms of what you have just said, that perhaps humans are narcissistic, that we are so self-centered. That's part of the test -- that we work to try to get past that.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges that we have is to learn, to engage the other in a compassionate, seeing, and caring way. I have to say something about my Baba here because maybe everything I did was to learn to be like my Baba, my grandmother. My Baba had a grade-one education in Ukraine, but she had the capacity for unconditional love. It's an extraordinary thing when you think about it, that a person with that history can find a way to raise themselves up in such a way that they are capable of unconditional love. Maybe my biggest challenge has been to become more like my Baba.

It's a lot about what we're coming to know, how we're coming to know, with whom we're coming to know, where we're coming to know, and in a sense how authentic those structures are to ourselves. This is often problematic in the university system.

Somchynsky: We're talking about completely different epistemologies that are outside of academia, but I often find that this is also where you discover the most authentic ways of being in the world. Does that make sense?

Semchuk: I really agree with that and I think that's the biggest struggle through all the work. I think about my dad's struggle, his putting on that male masquerade. When he had a heart attack, those masks came down. Part of that body of work and the challenge of that body of work was to be able to see my dad in a way that I had not previously been able to see him: as a human being with vulnerabilities, with his own journey and his own path.

In the body of work I'm doing now, I'm working with the forest. Just this week, I went back into the forest and I had a phrase in my mind: "the hold of gravity is a gentle one." I had been photographing plants in the house and I wanted to be able to take that sensibility into the forest.

Yes, each body of work has its own set of challenges. How do I overcome myself in this body of work? How do I overcome my sense of superiority as colonizer of plants? How do I overcome my sense of superiority over the smallest of plants, over the smallest of insects? I had the privilege of doing a piece involving a house plant that I was very close to. I decided to tell the house plant a story.

I set up a video on a stand and the plant was on the stand. I came in on my knees. I was at the same height as the plant so that I was speaking to the plant as an equal. I told the plant a story, to explain some of my ideas and to apologize for the way that we are as humans.

I told her the story of a chipmunk. I had gone down to the lake in Saskatchewan where my dad built a cabin. I was lying on the dock looking upwards when I felt a presence moving around the shape of my body. It was quite a remarkable experience. I looked up at my feet, which were bare, and a chipmunk was standing there, staring me straight in the eye as an equal. Maybe, I thought, it was a little bit superior. It was very hard to discern. Then, just to assert something, the chipmunk placed its mouth over my big toe.

I went "Phhhhhh" and the chipmunk was gone. I told that story to the plant because I knew that that chipmunk, no matter what its size, saw me at least as an equal. Maybe the teaching there and the challenge is to learn to see the flora and the fauna as maybe a bit superior to compensate for my arrogance.

These are big challenges for me. I began dreaming about the bear when I was ten. The big challenge for me came when I reached my forties: I wanted to photograph the bear. Growing up in Northern Saskatchewan, we were taught to fear the bear so that we were scared to go into the forest on our own.

The challenges were to overcome my fear of bears and recognize that I didn't know how to see the bear, that I only saw the bear through a projection that I was taught culturally. This projection was very unfair in terms of our sense of equality and in terms of the reality for the bear, where it lived and under what conditions.

One time, there was a sign that said, "Don't go in there. There's bears in there." Of course, I went. I swam in the lake, a glacial lake, not far from Banff. I swam and it was kind of like flying over the water. When I got out, there was clarity. You have this kind of clarity from swimming and from very clean, very cold water. I'm looking at the forest and I can't see the forest. I'm seeing my projections, it's like a screen. And this has been the continual frustration in all of my work, in all of my experience in life: the frustration of how thought changes seeing, changes our ability to really see another sentence. It's been a lifetime challenge.

Dialogue and recognition. "Recognition is the basis of negotiation, of identity formation that is always in flux" -- Charles Taylor. It's ongoing, that challenge.

Somchynsky: The challenge that you mentioned--the sense of always being aware that your thoughts are affecting how you see, how you think, and how you're always your own obstacle--is perhaps the greatest challenge we all have to face.

I think our conversation has naturally progressed to James Nicholas's and your current retrospective exhibition at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, *Ithin-eh-wuk – We Place Ourselves at the Center*. Now, would you like to talk about this exhibition and how meaningful it is to you?

Semchuk: That's Rock Cree from the Rock Cree Nation of Nelson House in Northern Manitoba. It is James' text. Why is this work meaningful to me? Well, I will talk around that question and begin by going back to my dad and my great grandfather, Andrew, who were really concerned about issues of justice.

My great grandfather Andrew would hold meetings in the root cellar to try to overthrow the overlords. His wife, Katrina, was not very pleased about this, as you could imagine. My dad continued his grandfather's work in his own way. I had the privilege of learning from my dad, being with him, and going into nature with him.

He had a vision. He saw a winter road to Uranium City when he was looking down from a plane. He then followed through with other businessmen in Meadow Lake and they decided to build this road. They worked with Cree and Dene workers on the road. As far as I know and understand, the Dene and Cree workers had to retrain my father entirely to make this trip possible because he knew nothing. I have to say that this taught me how to know nothing, how to be okay with not knowing anything, and to be accepting of my own ignorance.

James and I met. He was from Northern Manitoba. He's a Cree speaker, using a particular Cree dialect, with a "th" in it. He comes from a family who are medicine people. His mom was too. She helped give birth to a hundred children, maybe more.

He came out of a very strong spiritual tradition, and he had been working as a liaison between governments for a long time, about sixteen years. He liaised between the provincial government, the federal government, and his own nation. He burned out and gave away everything. We met just as he had done this giveaway.

Simultaneously, I was also doing a giveaway and part of it involved going to a mutual friend's where he was staying, Kim Soo Goodtrack.

When we met, we were simultaneously letting go of some of our stories. That's a bigger giveaway, isn't it? We were questioning our foundation stories. I was already questioning the foundation story of Canada and nation-building, questioning capitalism and the notion of urbanization. I had a profound appreciation for rural people, for their resilience, their innovation, and their abilities to raise families and raise food.

Growing up in Northern Saskatchewan, I had some experience with First Nations as neighbors, friends, and family. I had also participated in systemic racism. The reserve was on the other side of town. Racism was normalized. I saw my dad work actively against that. Moving out of denial is not a simple process. Your identity is structurally informed as a participant. You can have someone that you love dearly who is kind and generous and good to others, but who is a racist and is horribly cruel to particular groups of people.

Bert Hellinger, father of Family Constellations Therapy, talks about it this way: "You can do in good conscience to those who are outside of your group that which you could never do to those that are inside of your group." You can't trust conscience. At this point, I'm struggling to become a human being and to understand what it means to be a good woman or a good man. How do I live my life? How do I have a future?

James came into the picture of my life and we adopted each other as family. That happened quite quickly and we liked to be together. We simply liked to be together in the same way as I had watched how some Babas and Didos and old people liked to be together. I used to stare at them because I loved their presence so much as a child.

James was a spontaneous performance artist. His dad would write poems on the water pail in the early morning before going out on the trapline, so that through the day, as the water melted, they would disappear. The Cree language itself is like poetry, so big, expansive, layered, and complex. So much about that broader, wider- than-human world. It has more than a hundred words about love.

James was drawn to artists who did performance work, to people like Dana Claxton for example. She did some video work with him. I had been doing spontaneous performance work with my daughter and with my dad. Then James comes in, and he knows how to move to create language with his body.

We would find ourselves in situations where the history of Canada would become visible in the land or in the events occurring. James would engage that situation in something of a performative way, with spontaneity. I had to start to be very, very fast with the camera. The other thing was that text was always involved. One would be always writing down notes.

Sometimes I felt terrible guilt for my nation. "We have put First Nations down and kept them down as best we could. We have failed and will continue to fail," my dad said. Having those experiences with James got through my own shells, my own projections -- somehow there was a penetration so that I'd see just a little bit.

I consider the idea that I have a PhD in denial. I am very good at it and I am becoming less good at it. It's been a hard and fraught process, but this work has enabled me to gain insight.

Somchynsky: I love how you describe how this work came together in an organic, spontaneous, and very ephemeral way. You had to be so quick with the camera and quick to write things down because it was just occurring. You were just out living. Is that correct?

Semchuk: Yes, and the words immediacy and experience are really important. Experience, being present to the moment, and having presence in the moment go back to the seeing.

[silence]



01 & 02: *in control*, James Nicholas and Sandra Semchuk with Walter Semchuk, Salmon Arm, BC, 2004.

Somchynsky: There is a work that's part of this exhibition that I would love to hear you talk about a little bit more, and that's *Pocketed Seeds*. There was something you just said that struck me how in Cree there are hundreds of words for love. The plant that you talk about in the little poem that accompanies the series is *liubystok*, which is lovage. The root word in both Ukrainian and English is love.

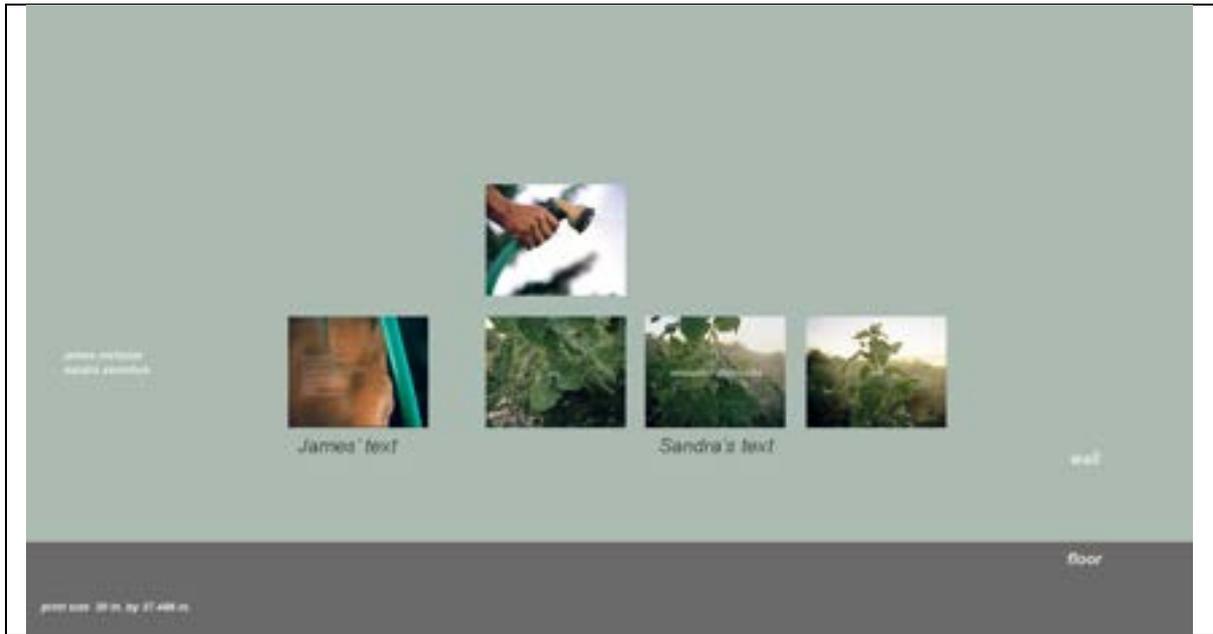
Semchuk: Really?

Somchynsky: Yes. I thought that was such a neat little coincidence. Coincidentally, when my parents bought their house, there was a lovage plant. It grows very large very quickly. You can't kill it, it's the most resilient plant in the garden.

Semchuk: I was told the wrong name for the plant. The plant really is a Lubida. The plant that we had was a Lubida but I decided not to change the name because that's what my elder told me it was. I want to be respectful of my elder because our language is slipping from me. I don't want to be disrespectful to the plant, but I wanted to be respectful to my elder and what she said. I like what you've said that I can just name the plant love.

Somchynsky: I think the phrase that runs throughout the images in *Pocketed Seeds* is so powerful. The phrase "My relocation dislocates you," resonated with me, especially how you brought it down to plants.

It made me reflect on the relationship between Ukrainians and the land in Canada. I came to realize that my grandparents came here and prospered, but they prospered because the Canadian government wanted to keep Indigenous communities off the fertile land. They wanted to keep them contained on reserves where you could not benefit from the land economically in the same way as immigrants. We were allowed to prosper on the suffering of Indigenous communities. Part of the immigration story has that dark underbelly of cultural genocide. I found that *Pocketed Seeds* really captured that relationship. But I'd like to hear you speak about it.



03: *pocketed seeds*, James Nicholas and Sandra Semchuk, 2004
5 lightjet photographs, 76.2 x 96.3 cm each.

Semchuk: I was thinking of something that John Gregorovich said. I think it's in the book, *The Stories Were Not Told*. He was one of the people that formed the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association. He said that the government was trying to get the land occupied because of other kinds of threats as well.

For example, the threat from the south, from Americans. Canada tried to establish the nation by having the land occupied. Those notions of occupation of the land also had to do with altering the land and making it viable. This is a particular mindset in relationship to the wider-than-human world, right?

The other thing I'm thinking is how many nations use displacement -- and I'm including war in this -- often to bring in people who are quite similar to those being displaced, who may have quite a similar status in some way or similar belief systems. I think it's not quite as simple as you and I make it out to be, and I think you're right to put your finger on this moment of movement.

There is an echo in Canada of these structures of intercultural violence. These structures get normalized in terms of ideas of progress. I think we were pawns in the process, to begin with. I don't know to what degree Ukrainians who came to Canada knew that they were displacing First Nations people, but they would learn that over time. You think of the communication systems that were not there, the kind of issues that Ukrainian people were facing in these isolated conditions without too many resources.

Often, First Nations people were compelled to support Ukrainian people because they felt so sorry for them, that they were facing starvation, that their babies were dying.

James wrote this text: "Leaving Ukraine, Baba wore three skirts. In the middle one she sewed, pocketed envelopes invisible to the new world. Seed of *lubestrok* from her *Hnalechki* for the new land thinking, *Kakissiskachewhac*." That is the Cree word that James understood was the basis for the word Saskatchewan. It means the bend in the river where there's swiftly moving water. He's inserting his language into this story about my grandmother.

My great grandmother was scared as she was leaving Ukraine. She was doing something she shouldn't have been doing -- keeping seeds. She was hiding them in the second of three skirts for her very survival. You can see this plant would be very helpful. James and I found this plant on one of my family's homesteads, my grandfather's, and it's where his mom and dad had lived too. The seeds that are here were taken from the original seeds that my great-grandmother brought in the early 1900s. James looked after this plant, and it grew so big. We were able to take seeds from it, and we still have those seeds.

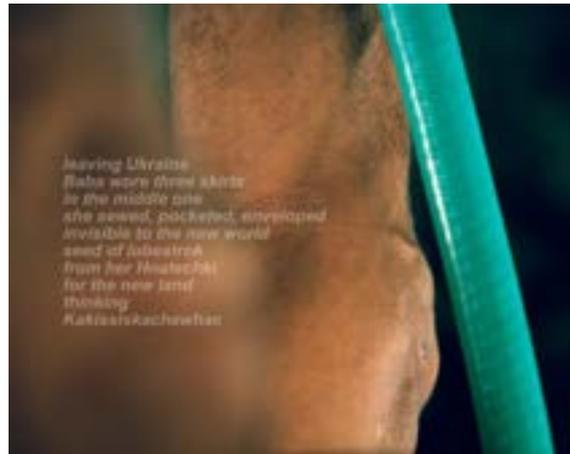
There's a dialogue happening. There's a caring conversation going on as well as this dark undertone. James never tried to make me feel guilty. He never called me White, he never thought of Ukrainian people as White. We were not thought of as White. There's a kind of parallel happening here at the same time. As Ukrainians in Canada, we are beginning to take responsibility, seeing and understanding the systemic racism of which we are a part and are complicit. This is really important. It's a complex set of knots.

I think what makes it more complex is that cultivating the land has probably changed the provinces that we live in more than just about any other place on Earth because the land was so vast and so was the extent of cultivation. People did that with nothing, with very rudimentary tools to begin with, and then it became bigger and bigger and bigger. As it grew bigger and bigger, it fell into oppressive systems, like systems that Ukrainians were fleeing from.

I like the gentleness of this spinach-like plant and the fact that it's so prolific. It makes me very sad that the cycle of violence continues, that we haven't learned how to stop it, because this is a horrific kind of violence -- the displacement of people. Especially because the displacement affects people who are so profoundly interwoven with the land, with the wider-than-human forces. Ukrainian peoples and First Nations peoples, who both work with medicines and plants, both have that connection.

We've been assimilated, so many of us Ukrainian-Canadians. We've been assimilated into this notion of progress, accepting a hierarchy of being that has to do with material progress. I'm very ashamed of it, but I think it's important to manage that shame.

Somchynsky: It is very much so. You have to acknowledge and face it.



04-07: *pocketed seeds*, James Nicholas and Sandra Semchuk, 2004
5 lightjet photographs, 76.2 x 96.3 cm each.

Semchuk: You have to acknowledge it, and you have to actively work to stop the racism and to make sure that opportunities are created for First Nations people that have been taken away. Tell me about your husband.

Somchynsky: My husband is Inuvialuk and his family is from Ulukhaktok in the Northwest Territories. His great-grandfather, Natkusiak, was a renowned guide for several Swedish explorers in the Arctic. His grandfather and great aunts were printmakers in the community. My husband was raised in Inuvik until he was about five or six.

His parents decided to raise their family in Leduc, Central Alberta. He didn't grow up with a very close relationship to his culture, but as he got older, he really began to explore this. To travel from Edmonton to Ulukhaktok is very, very expensive. He didn't visit his community until his father passed; he met his relatives and got to know that land. He built a

relationship with his culture by teaching himself how to hunt. He hunts grouse, deer, and hare. Sometimes I go out with him and our dog. This has been a really important process for him. It encouraged him to begin painting again. He now is working as an artist. For the last year, he's been working as an artist.

Semchuk : How do you feel as Ukrainian-Canadian, a member of an immigrant or settler population, in relationship to First Nation's people?

Somchynsky: I remember a conversation that Kyle and I had very early on in our relationship. I was talking about my Baba, and how when she went to school, they would scold them for speaking Ukrainian. Then Kyle told me about his father's experience in Residential School. For me, that just compounded that small similarity, but also magnified the assimilation and violence my father-in-law experienced.

I struggle to put our relationship and experience learning about one another into words. I've been encouraged to write something for a Ukrainian audience, but I have shied away from it almost completely because I feel like most people will still misunderstand in some way. I've been very cognizant of that tense relationship between immigrants and Indigenous people.

There can be so many resonances, and places of collisions and similarities. I think it is important to think about the teachings and knowledge we had in Ukraine that were passed on but got lost in the generations that were living here in Canada.

Semchuk: I need to come back to talking about the work with James and that notion of dialogue as part of the process of recognizing our different histories and the negotiation of our own identities that are always in flux. We call these love stories because our marriage, the learning experiences that we had, were an articulation of those colonial structures and trying to learn how to see them and move past them.

I think it was also a way to move deeper into compassion and unconditional love. It's like trying to get past those cultural shells that we have within ourselves, which might be a cultural shell of guilt, and penetrate that to see underneath. There are so many layers that we're trying to penetrate here: the specificity of our own histories, the specificities of our own families, the specificities of the land that we're on, and the histories that happened within this land.

For example, we did a piece called *Drought* that looks at what happened in 2004. The lake pulled back its skirts, and what it revealed were hundreds and hundreds of bison bones. We realized that where we were had been a buffalo jump.

That began a piece where we looked at that notion of drought as a kind of articulation of what it meant for James as a First Nations person to not be able to express that deep sorrow, the deep pain, that so many feel has to be suppressed. Each piece has its own foundation in experiences of the past in the present.

understoryoverstory is an important piece because of the layering of stories in the land. The road was built over Cree trails, and then dad's roads were built over. The cycle keeps on occurring.

Somchynsky: When you were talking about your house plant, I felt compelled to tell you this story. I have a dear house plant. I consider this plant my great-grandmother because my great-grandmother found this myrtle.

Myrtles don't grow here. She found a myrtle in a pot near a dumpster in Lamont. She brought it home and brought it back to life. We have kept this myrtle in the family and have taken cuttings off it for probably ninety years now. I have a cutting of this plant. During my BA, I wrote a paper in art history about this plant, and the knowledge we can receive from plants and their resilience. It's my happiest houseplant. It thrives the best. It's huge, it's turning into this lovely bush that grew from this one cutting.

Semchuk: That's amazing, it's such a big teaching. I agree with you about the resilience. Plants really teach it, don't they?

Somchynsky: I had a last question and it's a big question because it's something that I'm grappling with within this volume: what is Ukrainian Canadian art and what does the title Ukrainian Canadian mean? I was wondering if you had any reflections on that question?

Semchuk: What is Ukrainian Canadian art? I don't think that has been established. I don't think we've established a history of that. I just don't think the work has been done.

What does the title mean to me? I think it means the recognition of our history, the recognition of my family, and those kind of inherent ways of being that come from the old country to the new country. I remember I asked my dad, "I don't know the language or the stories or the culture of my people. What have I brought forward that keeps that which you value, dad?" He looked at the work that I had done and said, "Everything, just everything." I still reflect on what he could have meant.

Somchynsky: I think what you do is break that title wide open. I think that's what's really important.

Semchuk: We're a whole range of people.

Somchynsky: A whole range of experiences.

Semchuk: A whole range of histories. Experience is the basis for storytelling.

Somchynsky: Let's talk about the importance of storytelling in your work.

Semchuk: Ukrainian stories came to Canada and were told orally and in songs. I think of someone like Danny Evanishen who's done a series of

books collecting folk stories and humorous stories from Ukrainian pioneers in Canada, a remarkable translation of Marko Vovchok's Ukrainian folk stories, and Beverly Dobrinsky's work of collecting and regenerating Ukrainian songs in Canada.¹ And I have so much respect for the stories that have been kept and told and valued, for the transmission of stories.

I've always noticed the humility, humor, the trickster figure, and the simpleton who always ends up doing things the right way unexpectedly in the end in Ukrainian stories I have heard or read. There's a lot of similarity to Cree stories, for example. There's a sensibility in those stories that doesn't see life as a kind of straight, narrow linear path, but there's all these divergences, and what might appear to be really bad can end up being good.

The way animals are sentient in the stories, the way that the land and the waters are so important, but mainly, I think the humility. That's part of why the Cree culture resonates for me so much is the humility there. When you see somebody who's a humble person, you know that that person knows how to cultivate real power. Life itself, James would say, "*pimatisiwin*" is the most important thing -- being able to build that life within yourself and to share that life with others, to be someone who gives other people life. It's really important that you can raise people up. That's what the stories do. Walter Benjamin in a piece called *The Storyteller* says that "in order to give counsel, in order to tell stories, you have to be able to be seeking counsel." In the telling of the story, you yourself have to be open to learning.

In the dialogue that James and I had, which was an exchange of stories in our own way, each of us was open to our own counsel as well as to the counsel of the other. Within that, hopefully, the generations before us had the opportunity to speak. There's a possibility for energy to be there that gives us direction, that points us to taking the next step forward, however small that step might be.

Experience is the basis of stories -- sharing experiences with others, sharing as a free gesture, and listening to others and hearing the stories that come back. In the visual world creative activity of looking at work is as important as the creative activity of doing it.

Somchynsky: Exactly. Do you find that there's something about expressing stories and communicating through artwork that allows nuances and relationships that evade words to find form and resonance with people? Is it a form of communication that you can't do with language?

Semchuk: Oh, it does, and that's why I collaborate. That's really precise language. That's exactly why I collaborate -- It's that exchange of subtle ways of being and doing, the presence and exchange of life itself in the moment. It's being so completely in the moment, not contained and controlled because we tend to control and contain our own nature. Paying attention and being attentive to what is really happening in the moment

¹ Danny Evanishen: <http://www.ethnic.bc.ca/project.html> (accessed 7 April 2022). Marko Vovchok, *Ukrainian Folk Stories*, trans. N. Pedan-Popil, ed. H.B. Timothy (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983). Beverly Dobrinsky: <https://beverlydobrinsky.com/> (accessed 7 April 2022).

between two people, between oneself and the land, and between oneself and history. Engaging in the moment of all of these processes opens up into something vast and often subtle and missed.

Somchynsky: Do you think art has the capacity to change the world?

Semchuk: Chief Seattle said that it would, and Louis Riel said it would, that it would be the artists who would help people wake up. As I was saying, I have my PhD in denial, but step by step, one moves toward that goal, one begins to be able to see. I think that's how James would say it.

The question is, "How do we become more human?" On the planet right now, there are people who are more human than others. We're learning from them. Artists are part of that. It's one way of communicating. Music does it too. There are many different ways in which we wake up. Art is one of them. It's a good one.

Somchynsky: That, in essence, everything is art. There are artists at work, even if they're not conscious of themselves being artists.

Semchuk: For sure. One of the things that James said was, "In Cree, we have no word for art," that life itself is art. I think that's what we aspire to. We learn to be in the world in that way that has that possibility of keeping us engaged, present, and authentically articulate in our movements. That's how you think about working with gesture with the camera. It's a recognition that how we move is a part of the art of who we are. My Baba would cook the meals with such love; she was a real artist in her cooking, there's no doubt about it. That love gets transferred.

Somchynsky: I was wondering if there's anything else you'd like to touch on that I have not asked you about or that we haven't covered in the interview?

Semchuk: I would say my biggest teacher was my daughter, Rowenna, because it was through her that I learned that her spontaneous performances in nature were such a profound articulation of what it is to be human in the wider context of flora and fauna, sky and waters. I'd also like to acknowledge Chin Shek Lam who taught me that Chinese calligraphy was an articulation of disposition in the moment and that in the gesture that I was using with the camera, I could find something of that substance or something of that presence in the moment.

As a practice, it was important for me to learn how to be in the moment. Cross-cultural learning has been really important. It's been one of the privileges of being a settler, the great privilege of having very fine and generous teachers from around the world.

I think of my elders, the late Pearl Balych and Alec Balych of North Battleford, and the fearlessness of how they shared things with me, and my dad, his fearlessness and how he shared things with me, as did my auntie Olga and auntie Elsie. All those people in my hometown, who were brave, I really thank them.

The elders who have been so amazing and sharing, Cree elders like, Smith Atimoyoo and Ernest Tootoosis, Eric Tootoosis, and my sister-in-law, Madeline Spence. You think about all the gratitude that you have for all those people that have helped you to learn and that helped my dad to learn, who helped me to learn.

A special honour to my Uncle Walter Wozny. My family could not have survived without that love that he gave to the family. That makes me really humble and really makes me grateful.

Somchynsky: Thank you so much for sharing with me today.

Working With and Against the Grain: A Conversation with Multimedia Artist Svitlana Kravchuk

Kalyna Somchynsky

Art historian Kalyna Somchynsky sat down to interview artist Svitlana Kravchuk in the winter of 2021. At the time, Kravchuk’s work was exhibited alongside textile artist Elena Scharabun’s work in the exhibition *Material Fables* at The Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts, Edmonton. In the interview below, Kravchuk references another series of artworks that she was in the process of creating. These artworks were later exhibited alongside artist Lana Whiskeyjack’s paintings in the exhibition *Nohkom Tipiskaw Pisim; Місяць Жінка: Artistic Exploration of Lunar Cycles through Nehiyawêwin and Ukrainian Worldviews* at The Whiskeyjack Art House, Edmonton, in fall 2021.

Somchynsky: To begin, tell me about yourself: how did you fall in love with making art?

Kravchuk: I always thought I was an artist when I was little. It wasn’t something that I became interested in at a certain age, it was something that was always in me. When I was in kindergarten in Ukraine, they would give us paints to play with. As a kid, you just mix a bunch of colors and it’s brown, but I remember thinking, “Man, I really like doing this. How come the teacher is not noticing my talent?”

I was always a very active child; doing art was the only thing that would make me sit and focus. I would get into making series: I had a period where I would only draw different types of dogs. The first series I remember doing was drawing queens from the deck of cards. In my childhood you would have decks of cards everywhere! That’s the only thing people would do because we didn’t have a TV in Ukraine in the ‘90s. When I was about seven, I had this phase where I began a series of abstracts. I remember talking about it to my parents and other adults stating, “I want to do art.” Of course, at that time, it wasn’t super welcomed in Ukraine after the Soviet crash. Being creative was just not something that people thought about — it was more about survival.

Art was always something that I wanted to do. Coming to an older age where I had an opportunity to come to Canada and study here, I was really interested in the fact that you could do a double degree: two majors or a major and a minor. I grew up in Ukraine, but I also spent seven years of my life on and off in the Middle East — Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt. When I came here, I was really interested in studying two things: first International Relations, because as I mentioned, I lived in different countries, and in Art. I

ended up studying book and media studies which is basically like journalism, but also the study of books, physical objects, and historical art objects. My other degree was in visual studies. I came to Canada almost twelve years ago, to Toronto.

Somchynsky: What brought you to Edmonton from Toronto?

Kravchuk: We moved to Edmonton almost six years ago. Toronto was super, super busy. We were burning out. I was also diagnosed with cancer at that time. I went through all the procedures and was in recovery. Then serendipitously, we met somebody from Edmonton and kept in touch. They invited us to visit them in Edmonton. We went to Jasper, and we were like, “Oh, my god, mountains are so beautiful – Let’s move here.” We packed up a U-Haul, drove across the country, and settled here.

Somchynsky: How do you approach your art-making process? How do you choose what medium you’re going to work in? Are there some media you like working in more than others? Describe your decision-making process?

Kravchuk: I think when it comes to my art, concept is more important than the medium. I use what I have on hand to explore what I want to explore. I like to be creative with the materials available to me. I’ve always been a painter, and I have done quite a bit of performance art.

Working on the book *Fable Me: Love Stories With Echo in the Spirit*, I used painting mixed with works on paper, at a smaller scale, and more colorful. It was a little bit different for me because I usually tend to work in large-scale monochromatic canvases.

Woodburning is something I wasn’t planning to get into. I had an art residency through Simons – the clothing store. It was specifically to create art programming with youth who live in the city at Youth Empowerment Support Services. I wanted to bring in different artists to showcase their techniques and diversity, and I invited somebody who does woodburning.

It just so happened that they didn’t come. I thought, “Okay, I don’t have a choice, I have to do this.” I was put in this position where I actually had to learn woodburning to teach the youth. This is where I created my first piece. It was for the series that I am working on right now of each month in Ukrainian.

Somchynsky: Could you tell me a little bit about your performance-based practice? I am always really interested in performance art because I think it can be so powerful. I find it can be difficult for people to grasp, but if you let yourself embrace it, can be so moving.

Kravchuk: I wouldn’t call myself a performance artist, I’ve just done some performance pieces. Three of them were shadow plays. I would use a screen and then manipulate lights and my body to tell a story. At the last two, one of them I did at Nextfest a couple of years ago, I was paired up with acapella singers, the Bearhead Sisters. They were singing songs and I was telling a story on the screen. The one before that I did at Mile Zero Dance where they

have a space called Spazio Performativo. I did one with a live string viola player, Edmonton based-artist Caitlin Sian Richards.

I was behind the screen, and she was outside of the screen playing viola. I was also telling a story that we both worked out. With that performance, which was my favorite performance, I was talking about body and illness. I projected different objects on a large screen using different lighting. I think with performance, any art really, people can look at it and just take away from it what they see. If they know you or they know something about you, they can make up a story about you which might be accurate, or not.

Now that I'm talking about it, I'm wondering if I'm doing shadow plays and shadow performances because they almost feel safer, because it's your shadow and you're not really face-to-face with an audience.

Somchynsky: It almost lets you become your form instead of being constricted to your identity. Although you can still explore your identity through the form.

Kravchuk: Yes.

Somchynsky: We've been talking about the body and your recent series on the months of the year. I'm wondering why you decided to explore the months of the year or women in Ukrainian literature in your pieces such as *Kateryna Ivana Kupala*, *Rusalka*, and *Zozulya*? What drew you to these themes?

Kravchuk: I think with art everybody has a journey to arrive at a thing that they want to explore. For me, I came to this idea that I really enjoy working on large-scale monochromatic pieces probably over ten years ago.

For one of my classes, we had an assignment to do with transformation. The assignment was under Ed Pien — who is a Canadian artist with an international reputation — someone I really love and respect. I ended up looking into Ukrainian folklore and I created a triptych. It was composed of three really large paintings, and in two of them women are turning into trees. I had synthetic hair on them, so they're multimedia paintings. It *was* a triptych, because the middle one actually got damaged in the metro in Toronto. I put it out in the street and then some person took it. Since then, it's been a diptych.

This was the first piece where I starting looking into Ukrainian folk traditions and Ukrainian pagan traditions. I remember when I was creating that piece, it really, really, really, really struck me, like I could feel it in my body and in my stomach. It was so important to me because it was such a completely physical, emotional, spiritual, mental experience that I was like, "This is it. This is really what I want to look into." I created those pieces and after that I created *Kateryna*. I realized that these pieces had quite a big impact specifically on women. Not only the story but also if you're a female and you see a female body going through some sort of transformation, you can naturally relate to that.

Since then, when doing research for my work—reading something, looking into something, or talking to my family—I realize just how much history and tradition we have. Basically, you need to uncover. It’s been something I’ve been working on for ten years now and I’m still looking into anything new to me, especially creatures. One of the most recent discoveries through my research was a creature called “*Maika*” that is related to “*Mavka*” but is a different type of female spirit that can “marry” humans and live with them. It is very exciting to keep on learning new things.

Specifically for the Ukrainian months, it is something that I wanted to do because I always had trouble remembering the names when I was a kid. English is my third language, my first language is Ukrainian, and my second language is Russian. We were moving so much and the scene in Ukraine was so fluid all the time politically, so I learned how to speak three languages at the same time.

I also started becoming very interested in the names of the months in Ukrainian because they are linguistically unrelated to any Latin names. They are so representational of the environment. Before the months were standardized in Ukrainian, they varied region to region depending on how people formed a relationship to the environment. In the beginning, I was thinking they were solely representational of the environment and things that are going on in nature. But then, when I started looking into it, I saw it is connected to tradition, and tradition is connected to belief, and belief is connected to spirituality. That’s very social.

My husband is Mushkego (Indigenous), and he speaks the Omaškêkowak language; in English this would be Swampy Cree. In Omaškêkowak, the names of the months are also very descriptive of the environment. I just found that a very interesting concept for me. I was talking to a really good friend of mine who’s also an artist, Lana Whiskeyjack, and we decided to explore months. She would explore the names of the months in Nehiyawawin — that’s the language of her Nehiyaw nation. For me, it would be in Ukrainian. We decided to create parallel works. It’s a bit of a collaboration because we talk about it together. At some point, we want a show together.

Specifically, you were mentioning the female body being present. I would say that I don’t know how else I can explore the months in Ukrainian because I’m not interested in specifically depicting nature. I don’t do landscape or nature scenes. Also, I’m a female: anything I experience I’m going to perceive as a female. In Ukrainian the word for nature, *pryroda*, is female, and winter, *zyna*, is also female. To me, I would see it as a female depiction.



01: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Lucmonad (lystopad) - November*, Woodburning, 2019.



02: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Грудень (Hruden') - December*, Woodburning, 2019.

Somchynsky: When you paint the female body, you're almost thinking about your own body and how you're relating to the subject matter, not even necessarily through your femininity, but through your subjectivity.

Kravchuk: Yes, I would say not specifically through body and not through femininity, but just more so through subjectivity. For example, the work *Zozulya* was really inspired by two women I met at work; and then the story of the cuckoo birds and their significance to folk belief really resonated with those two women. I would say: sure, personal female experience, but also the social female experience.

As to the depiction of the months, I'm always thinking about what I'm going to do with my next piece. Sometimes it's influenced by what's going on in the world, what comes and goes, but definitely through the female body, just because that's what I mostly relate to.



03: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Зозуля - Zozulia*, Acrylics and Mountain-Ash Berry on Canvas, 2016.

Somchynsky: Can you elaborate on something you just said, how you relate the pieces to what's going on in the world? Could you give me an example of one of the pieces and how those two parts came together?

Kravchuk: Yes, it's not specifically illustrating what's going on. I don't do that, but, like any person, I obviously get affected by whatever I see on the news, what I see around me, or what my friends or my family are experiencing. In that way, it's affecting me. For example, the name of the month *liutyi* which is February, means furious. This is the last month of winter and this is when winter is really, really mad that she has to end and the spring is coming, but it's also the time when it's really cold.

In the beginning, when I was thinking about creating that piece, I was imagining something super fierce and aggressive. February was about a month after I had my baby, and it was right before the pandemic hit. For my life, having a child was a huge change. I was thinking about being fierce and vulnerable. The expression of vulnerability is just not often seen to be courageous, fierce, and brave.

To me, I found doing a piece with a person who is showcasing their vulnerability, who is curled up, really furious and fierce because it's all interconnected.



04: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Лютий (Liutiy) - February*, Woodburning, 2020.

Somchynsky: That's really neat. I like the way that you describe that process of how whatever's going on in the world makes its way into the artwork, even though it's not necessarily overt; it can be coded, it can be in your own relationship to the practice.

Kravchuk: Totally. I think that it's always subconscious.

Somchynsky: When you started exploring these themes from folklore and the months of the year, did you think back to how you were taught about some of these stories? For example, if you had to read Taras Shevchenko when you were a kid and then revisited it as an adult, did you read him with new eyes?

Kravchuk: I think the work of Taras Shevchenko is so incredibly extensive, and it's also almost created for different age groups; in a way you learn gradually. When you're in grade five, you learn *Meni trynadtsiatyi mynalo*. Then as you grow older, you get into heavier pieces. As an adult, I didn't have a shock because I was exposed to his work gradually.

When I used to exhibit *Rusalka*, I exhibited it with the poem that he wrote by that name and with an English translation. I think that one hit me because it's so representational of the time Shevchenko lived -- the slavery and serfdom. I think that poem is so good in showcasing a situation of a common woman and the dilemmas that she has, but it also ties in spirituality, belief, and Christianity and the merging of paganism and Christianity. With folklore, I think stories that you hear as a kid are edited — they may have less traumatic detail that you learn about later on as an adult.

In Ukraine, if you hear a cuckoo bird, you would ask it a question, most of the time like, “How many years do I have left?” Then the cuckoo bird is going to cuckoo, and then you'd be like, “Oh, my God, I'm going to die in seven years, or twenty-five.” It's just something that you always know as a kid. It's like a joke, a game. It's not really super serious. Then of course, when I was doing research on *zozuli* and their significance, I found out why they tell the future. It was just interesting.



05: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Русалка - Rusalka*, Acrylics and Thread on Canvas, 2015.

Somchynsky: I found those words really compelling because I grew up here in Edmonton and I went to a Ukrainian school called *Kursy Ukrainoznavstva* on Saturday mornings. It was really intense Ukrainian education. We had to memorize *Kateryna* when we were probably thirteen. No one memorized it because it's a long poem. After that point, I finished *Kursy* and I forgot about everything. As an adult, I was listening to a lecture, and they brought up the story of *Kateryna*. Then I saw your artwork.

It made me want to investigate it and read it again. As an adult, I understood the piece in a way that I didn't as a teenager. You don't understand the context, or you can't relate to *Kateryna* in the same way when you're thirteen as when you're an adult woman and you empathize with her struggle.

Kravchuk: I think that's a good point. I'm sure if we went to read poetry that we read in grade five because school made us, we're going to look at it differently for sure. My piece for *Kateryna*, I call it *Kateryna Ivana Kupala* because there's also the future telling. In the beginning, when I created the piece, I was looking at the idea of this woman who was kicked out by her family and the entire village and in the end went through this terrible journey. Then she saw the father of her child, and the guy is like, "I don't know who you are." This is just the reality of love, or lack of love, the reality of life. These rituals that we have about telling the future: they're fun and games, and they're full of hope. I was juxtaposing these themes. Recently, when I was putting these pieces up at ACUA, I thought, "I'm just going to call it *Kateryna Ivana Kupala*." I decided to also talk about how historically in Ukraine, especially with Christianization, women have been put into subservient positions to men. As the title suggests "Kateryna is washing Ivan." We glorify stories by Shevchenko, and we talk about women, but we don't really talk about them.

People really pull from those stories whatever they want to pull, but it's never really the realistic stuff, it's never really the painful stuff, it's never really the stuff that doesn't make you feel very good, and it's not really the stuff that embarrasses you. At the same time, when we talk about *Ivana Kupala*, the whole festival seems to be just super lovely fun and games, which it is, but it's also very edited.

Because of the continual colonization that Ukraine has been through, the place of women hasn't ever been super lovely and nice. You're right, through time, going back, the outlook does change.



06: Svitana Kravchuk, *Катерина Івана Купала - Kateryna Ivana Kupala*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2013.

Somchynsky: I was recently at the antique mall and found English translated volumes of the works of *Ukraine's Great Women Poets* such as Olha Kobylianska and Lesya Ukrainka. I started reading some of their short stories, and they're really horrible. They're about women's experiences, and especially women's experiences in the village, but they in no way glorify what women went through. In a lot of them I was quite shocked to find that they were about domestic abuse and disability.

Kravchuk: You know what? Now that you mention it, my mom sent me years ago my childhood books that I used to read. One of them was *Ukrains'ki narodni kazky*—normal stories, fables. *Narodni kazky* means they are stories passed down through generations and they're very well known. It's fiction, but it's not a fiction piece written by a specific author. It's rather stories that people gathered and passed on, which means that they come from reality, told as a teaching. When I read them at twenty-five, I was shocked, like, "Wow, I read this as a kid and didn't think anything about it."

Are we so desensitized as children in Ukraine already? Then traveling and moving to the West, reframing my mind, and reading those stories again, I thought, "Wow, that's a big shock." The stories told were about domestic abuse, rape, suicide, violence, and slavery in very graphic detail.

I also noticed the difference between stories that we were told in Ukraine versus stories that are being told in Canada by settlers of Ukrainian

heritage. From what I have observed, I feel people like to hold on to the very positive memories.

I can't relate to the feeling of being unsure about identity, but I can see how people who immigrated or whose families have immigrated a long time ago, having a certain heritage and growing up in a different country, find it hard to grasp onto pieces of identity. I understand how they would want to grasp onto the pieces that are most empowering rather than the reality which is oftentimes harsh.

Somchynsky: Definitely. That's something that I often speak with my Babusia about because she grew up in Canada, but she was born in Ukraine. She reflects on how hard the pioneer experience was for women.

When I went back to Ukraine a couple of years ago and was visiting my relatives, I experienced something similar. I questioned my own understanding as a Ukrainian-Canadian; I thought, "You don't think about people's lived experience and how difficult it can be, you only hold these romanticized views." As you said, it makes sense to hold on to the happy parts, what's pleasant, what you can celebrate, but if you don't recognize both aspects, you end up living in a false reality.

Kravchuk: Yes, absolutely. I think it would be a delusion to glorify only what you think is pretty or nice. I find I clash culturally with Canadian people who have Ukrainian heritage, just because their attitudes are so different. They might have an idea of what they're going to see in Ukraine, but I think they have difficulties because the country is so different from what they imagine.

Somchynsky: It was interesting for me because I was studying feminism in Ukraine. Of course, the research I did prior to going prepared me not to go in with rose-tinted glasses because we're talking about struggles with gender equality. It was good because I was prepared to hear about the struggles, but then also had the opportunity to be pleasantly surprised by the resilience and creativity in the face of struggle.

Do you want to talk about your experiences in the Ukrainian-Canadian community here and the differences that you have noticed? I'm interested because even though I grew up in the Ukrainian-Canadian community, I often find many points of tension about where I might sit within that community.

Kravchuk: I've been in Canada for almost twelve years. I can't say that I'm an expert on this topic because my interaction with Canadians who have Ukrainian heritage is very limited. I also am very careful not to place myself and surround myself specifically with just one community. I think the cultural differences come from the idea, "We're from different countries. You're from Canada and I'm from Ukraine." We've lived different lives and we have different privileges and different stories.

I think the reality of going through the Soviet era and then going through the Soviet crash has created a huge difference; Canadians with Ukrainian heritage here just don't have that experience. Because of that, the

way the language formed or the outlook on religion are different. The culture here, apart from just becoming assimilated and super westernized, developed differently. The language was influenced in a different way, the food, the culture, everything. Traditions grew and became their own thing. While in Ukraine things happened in their own way as well. It's two separate cultures that come from a similar background.

When we talk about Ukraine, I think it's important to realize that Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe. It's huge and it's so diverse. It's Eastern Europe, it's Central Europe, and it's the Mediterranean. It's different in different regions.

Take language, for example. Both of my parents are from the Kyiv region, but they come from two different localities, and they have different dialects -- it's regional.

I think even when we talk about Ukrainian culture or about Ukrainian culture in Canada, it's very important to realize that most of the people who had a chance to immigrate to Canada were from western Ukraine, not from central, southern, or eastern Ukraine. There were great obstacles to immigrating from eastern Ukraine; sometimes you could die trying. Canadians of Ukrainian heritage are representative of a small regional pocket. Not only have the cultures in Canada and Ukraine developed differently, but they were also different to start with, coming from two different places in Ukraine.

Somchynsky: Those are really important points that often get overlooked. We often homogenize and condense Ukraine — its immensity, diversity, and richness — into this one little thing.

Kravchuk: I found that Ukrainian art would often be reduced to *pysanky*. It's great that people are interested in them; and it blew my mind that people are making *pysanky* in schools, and every child here, no matter what background they come from, knows about them. That's so cool, but there's so much more to Ukrainian culture than that. Not to mention that the relationship with *pysanky* in Ukraine is different than it is here.

I've also had some frustrations with seeing what I would call the effect of intergenerational trauma and maybe even a little bit of lateral violence in the community. People are trying to hold on to this identity, yet I imagine it would be hard when you, your parents, and likely your grandparents were born here. I've overheard and witnessed so many conversations like, "Oh, do you do Ukrainian dancing? Oh, you don't. Are you really Ukrainian?" or, "Do you eat this and that?" I was like, "Oh my God. That's not cool." I found such scenes frustrating, but I also understand that there is a valid reason behind that mentality. Of course, that mentality comes from trauma. That mentality comes from oppression and trying to feel better about yourself because you've been oppressed.

Somchynsky: Thank you very much for thinking about it in that way.

My mom often reminds me that so many people of her generation and my dad's generation, whose parents left Ukraine when it was Soviet, were worried that the Ukrainian culture would be lost, so they had felt this need

to hold on. My mom will explain that people are overcompensating on this need to hold on without acknowledging the fact that Ukrainian culture never left.

Kravchuk: Yes, exactly. I think it's very common human nature to try to find validation in society and prove yourself. Everybody does that. I do it. But it does become a problem when you start having expectations of other people based on your own trauma response. You can't project that, but even so it just becomes a social norm.

Somchynsky: Definitely. You mentioned *pysanky* are created differently in Ukraine to how you perceive people make *pysanky* here. Recently, I was reading more about *pysanky* because there's this artist, Maria Kulikovska, who I interviewed when I was doing my thesis. She created casts of her vagina and called them *pysanky*.

I started researching how only women were supposed to make *pysanky*. It could only be certain women in the community, and it was linked with, I think, the phases of the moon. There was so much ritual around it. Recently, I saw this music video by Alyona Alyona and Alina Pash for the song *Padlo*. In the video there are all these women in a workshop and they're making *pysanky*, and it has this really old pagan vibe.

Kravchuk: I think I know what you're talking about. It's almost like a dystopian field where women are witches and that kind of thing.

Somchynsky: Yes.

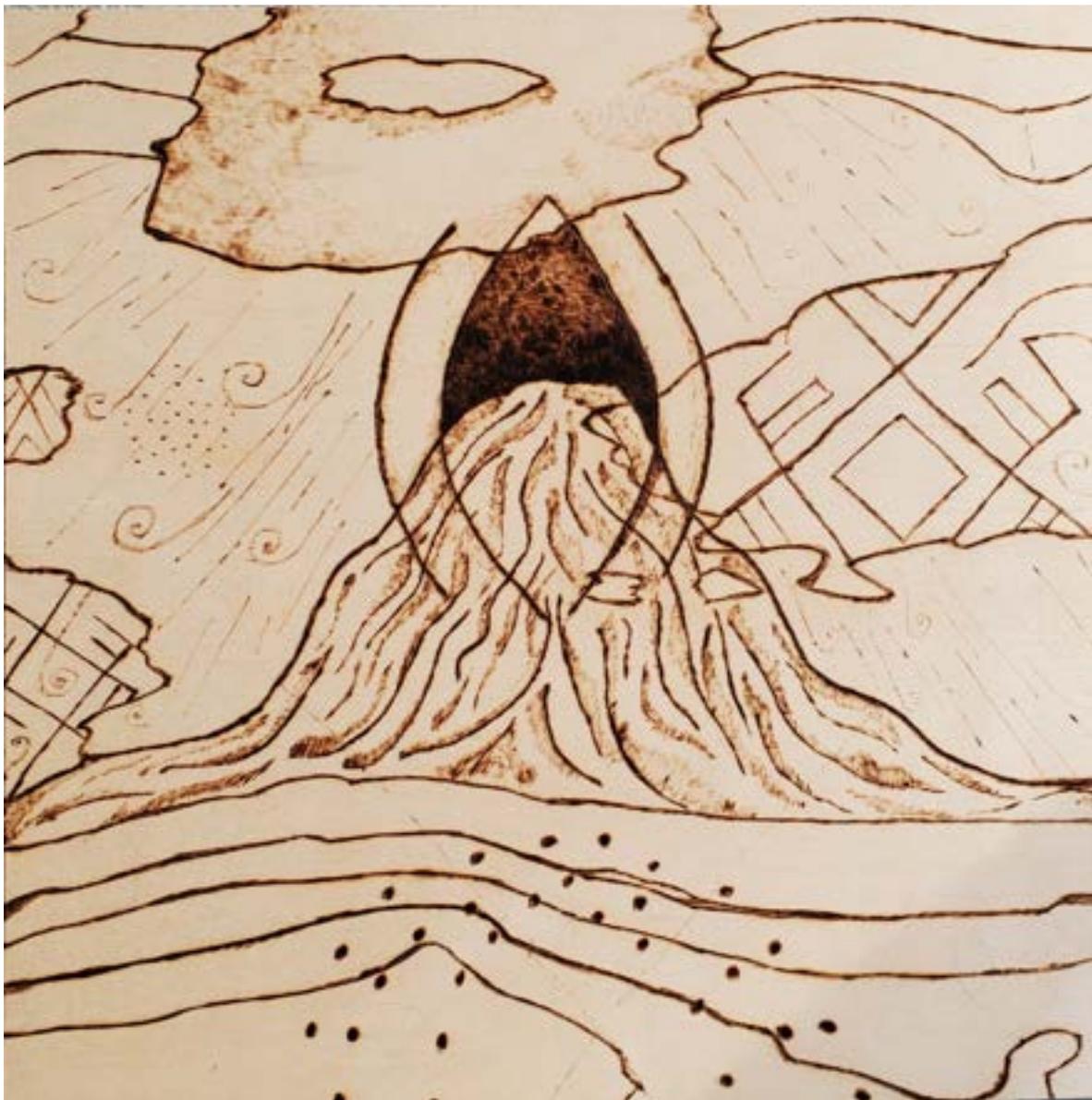
Kravchuk: I know that video. I don't come from a family, or a line, who preserve the teachings and knowledge about *pysanky*. Back home, it's not something that everybody does. Yes, it does have roots in our spirituality before Christianization. Of course, everything in Ukrainian culture is doubled with our traditional beliefs. Everything has a specific symbolism, and those very sacred teachings don't belong to every single person, even though they're passed down in communities. Having traditional knowledge of *pysanky* is very special; it is considered to be sacred knowledge. It is knowledge and a skill that is passed down directly, and people who make *pysanky* hold a venerable place in the community. It is something that needs to be taken seriously.

The way *pysanky* are done in Ukraine is different from how they are done here. I don't want to say it's a bad thing that they're done here, it's great, but I think it's important to realize that when you say, "Oh, I'm making Ukrainian Easter eggs," it's more like, "I'm making Canadian Ukrainian Easter eggs." It's different because it's a different culture with its own tradition.

Somchynsky: I want to hear you talk about your piece for *sichen'*, January. When I first saw it, I interpreted the piece as rebirth and the entry into life. I saw it as a vulvic sign for the beginning of the year. I was wondering if that was intentional?

Kravchuk: Yes, super intentional. I was pregnant at that time when I was making the piece. Obviously, everything in my world was around my body, my child, and carrying a life into this world. When I was working on that month, I read about how even that early in the winter people start preparing the earth for harvest, partly through ritual.

There are some lines on the piece that had to do with preparing the actual soil. The practice is called *pidsichno-vohneve zemlerobstvo* — a form of controlled burn used to promote new growth. [Called slash and burn agriculture in English. – Ed.] The name *sichen'* is based on a word meaning to cut and it also has to do with the wind, because the wind is so cold that it cuts you. It's totally like vulva, the beginning of new life, and new water — it's a relationship to earth and soil that give you life.



07: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Січень (Seechen')* - January, Woodburning, 2020.

Somchynsky: The geometric designs that are on either side of, I'm going to call it "the womb of the earth" for the sake of our discussion, they remind me of *hrabli*, rakes.

Kravchuk: Oh, yes. I was looking into tools that were used to prepare the earth.

That specific symbol on the image's left side is a plant. It's a burdock plant -- *budiak*. It's something that is important in Ukrainian traditional spirituality. It's linked to female power and to life-giving. It's also one of the most common symbols in Ukrainian embroidery, but it's just a super simplified, geometric shape. Some people wear it as a necklace and use it as a talisman. The symbol of burdock is quite cross-cultural and worn as protection.

In the lines on the very bottom, I was following the grain. I was thinking about the earth because even that early in the middle of winter, the earth was being prepared through rituals for harvest and breaking of the ground. I see it like water flowing and ice breaking, even though it's winter. I don't see the year as winter when everything is dead and spring when things are becoming alive. I see the seasons as all connected, a process. Nothing is really dead or stagnant in winter; things are still working together for a greater reason, breathing, thinking, and digesting — to make sure that nature regenerates.

Somchynsky: I like that. Your series make us cognizant of the underlying mechanics of our natural world and ourselves. At all times, there's something in motion preparing itself for the next step.

Kravchuk: I don't think my intention is to include this specific idea in every piece, but rather to follow what the Ukrainian name suggests. Like *bereza*, at the root of *berezen'*, the Ukrainian word for March, means birch tree, and birch trees are one of the first trees to wake up. Birches are the first ones to take up water.

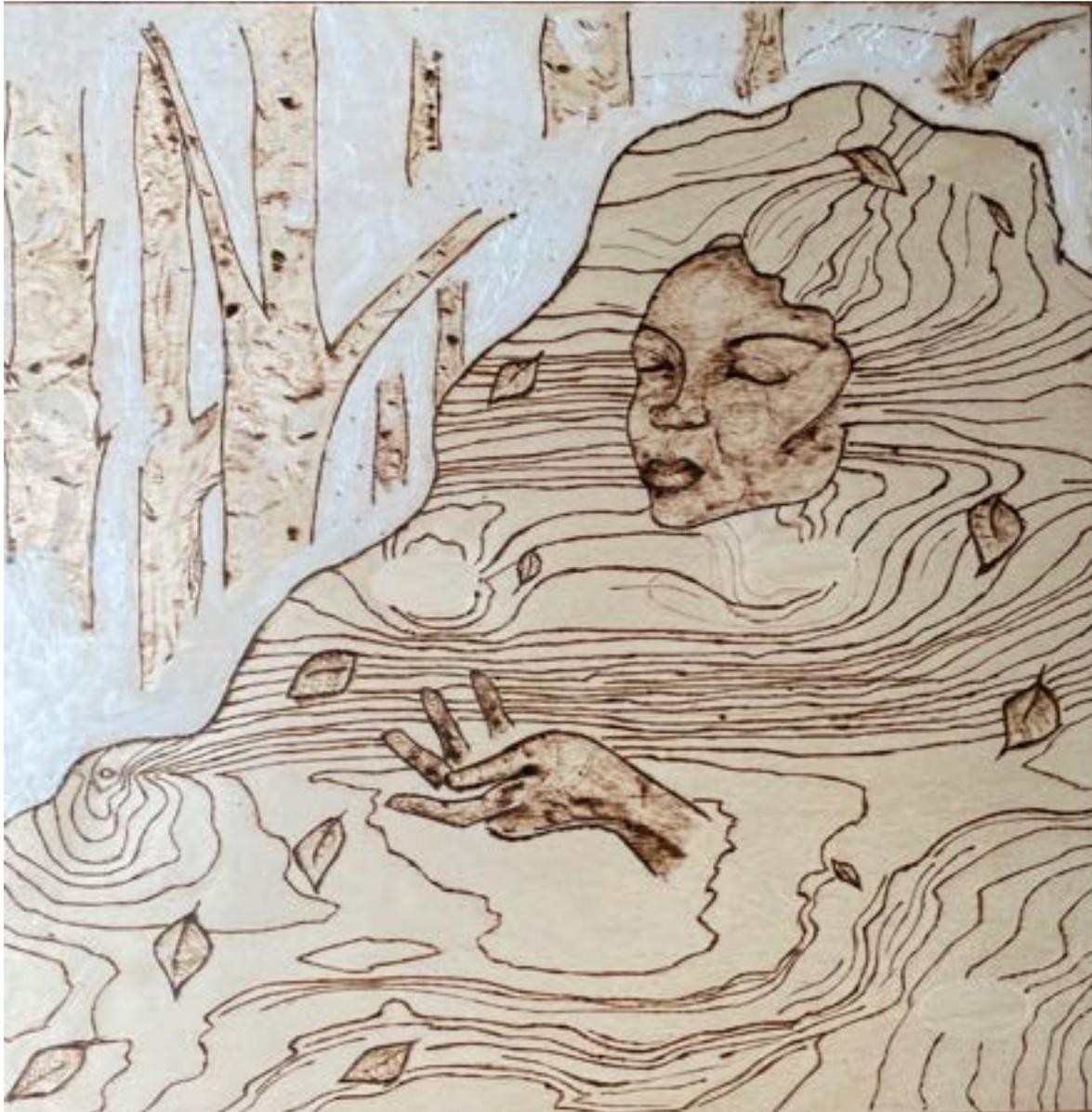
Somchynsky: Like the first ones to bloom.

Kravchuk: Yes. The birches wake up in March, which is right now. This is when you can actually tap the birches. Birches are the very first trees to start pulling water from the earth. It's spring, vernal water, and they fill themselves up with it, carrying it to the branches and leaves. There's a very small window when you can collect birch juice. We drink that in Ukraine. People do that here, mostly Indigenous people.

On that birch piece there is also a woman, as well as birches. I'm following the grain of the wood for that one quite a bit. It's inevitable, I think, for some of the pieces to relate to what's happening in the world, nature.

Somchynsky: You capture it so well in that connection between the tree, the tree trunk, and the water by following the grain of the wood. The grain has that fluidity of water where it can signify both images simultaneously.

Kravchuk: Yes. Thank you.



08: Svitlana Kravchuk, *Березень (Berezen') - March*, Woodburning and Acrylics, 2020.

Somchynsky: You mentioned in our correspondence that this was one of the hardest pieces for you to finish. In what way?

Kravchuk: I think it's always an artist's dilemma – the piece is either not finished or it's overworked. It's hard for every piece. With that one specifically, it was just taking me a long time because woodburning is a new technique for me. It's so different from painting; as a painter I am very fast. I'm used to having that explosion of energy and getting it all out. Sometimes

I would not do anything until I'd finish a piece. I wouldn't sleep, I wouldn't eat. It's almost like when you're having an argument, you want to get through it and have a resolution, so it is done and you're not carrying it over for another day.

When I start a piece, I want to finish it as soon as possible. I'll be obsessing about it until I'm done. Woodburning is different because it is so time-consuming and labor-intensive. You have to go over the lines many times until they're deep enough and dark enough. It's also very different because I'm not using color and shading. I'm literally just using heat to burn a piece of wood.

Usually when I'm working on a piece, I put it somewhere visible so when I'm not physically working on it, I'm still working on it. I'm watching, let's say, TV with one eye and then with the other, I am looking at the piece and thinking about what I want to do to it.

I was lost on what to do, and then finally I just came to this idea that, "Okay, I'm going to use paint," which I originally did not want to do because it was a different, new medium. But I did use paint to level and balance out some of the composition and the tones. I'm really happy that I made that decision. I opened something new for myself, combining different mediums, even though I'm still primarily concentrated on woodburning.

For that one, I followed the grain of the wood for where the woman is and her hair. All of it entirely is the wood grain, none of those lines are mine. Then in the background where you have birch trees and the white, that's where I used the paints.

Somchynsky: That's neat how you built your piece around the wood grain. Do you do that with every piece?

Kravchuk: Not in every piece, but I do really like the wood grain. Whenever I see a part that I really like, I still try to incorporate it, but that one in particular, I wanted to have focused on the wood grain and the fluidity of all the lines. It comes out supernatural. This is a tree, but it looks like water. The water in the actual birch trees – that's what the month is for me.

Somchynsky: Do you have any plans *for kviten'* (April)?

Kravchuk: Yes, I've started the piece. A lot of times the challenges that I face are technical. I'm not concerned about figures being realistic, but they do need to convey what I want them to convey. For this piece I'm just using a board I found in the garage. A lot of the wood that I'm using is reclaimed. I've started sketching it out but not burning it yet.

That's why it's taking me a while. It's been two years. And it's also because I was pregnant and then had a baby. I find it stressful that it's taking me much longer to finish work than I'm used to.

Somchynsky: Have you found that there are particular challenges to being a woman artist in our society?

Kravchuk: I think being a female in society, no matter where, is a challenge. We like to talk about how far society has come. It hasn't really. The world we live in is in horrible shape, and being a female, in general, is a challenge. Maybe I can rephrase it. I guess being a female challenges the rest of the world.

Specifically, as an artist, that's a whole other layer, because there was a time when women were not allowed to be artists, when women were not allowed to use oil paints or show in galleries. Even though, of course, this has changed, the challenges remain.

If you go to art school and take art history, which I did not do thankfully, most of your semesters you're going to be learning about old white men painting naked females. I think there is definitely that challenge as well. Whenever any women artists talk about the struggles they face because of who they are, I think it's very important to understand that it's also intersectional. What I face is very different from somebody who has less privilege than I do. It's important to remember that.

Becoming a mom, I had a crisis as an artist. I had this idea that while I was going to be pregnant and when I had a baby, I'd have all this time to do art, I'd just focus on my projects, and it would be so lovely. Of course, I had no clue that life is totally different when you have a human depending on you. I knew this, but it's different when you actually experience it yourself. I had this crisis because I hadn't produced as much as I had wanted to for a year and a half. I thought every artist questions whether they are really an artist if they haven't been doing their artistic work. I had taken what I consider to be too long a break. And this is especially true for the female mentality because throughout history, we're built to be as productive as possible, and when we're not, we have this internal guilt, which is an outcome of trauma and depression.

I had a couple of really good conversations with other female artists and other women. I realized that when male artists take breaks, it's because they're taking a break. It's so normalized. For females, it's just so different. Then a friend told me, "Okay, the world can wait for a couple of months or a year while you breastfeed and nurture your baby." I thought, "Yes, I don't owe anything to anyone. I can produce things at my own pace." We have this pressure that, as women, we have to prove ourselves in male-dominated circles, in male-dominated industries like art.

As a female artist, you have to be worried about constantly proving yourself. Taking a break because I was doing something that was important to me and to my family and to my life, this was something I should be defending. I shouldn't need to defend having time for myself. It was a really big shift in my thinking that I'm working at my own pace. This is how it should be.

Somchynsky: I think those are really important things to think about. I often think about labor in terms of art, not necessarily equating labor with just what we get paid to do or something that's professional, but the labor that we do throughout our lives in various capacities and how as women we do so many different kinds of labor. Starting a family is a whole other form of labor!

Outside of the home, there's still this expectation that if you want to be successful in your career, you have to do both with equal vigor. You have to be a mother with the same vigor that you put into your job, and it's not sustainable. Most people can't do that.

Kravchuk: Oh, yes, absolutely. The benchmarks are different for male and female artists and academics. I was talking to a friend who was working on her PhD in Toronto, and she was saying how she was finding challenges in getting opportunities in the academic field because she was starting a family. A male colleague starting a family was seen as like, "Oh, we need to make sure we give him opportunities because he has a family to take care of as a breadwinner of the family," but for a female it's like, "Oh, we shouldn't give her opportunities, because she's going to have a baby so she should be at home." Right?

Somchynsky: Yes.

Kravchuk: The inequality is always there and thriving. As I mentioned before too, when I'm talking about my experiences, I think it's very important to be cognizant that my experience does not reflect the reality of other people's experiences. A lot of these other experiences are even worse.

Somchynsky: Yes. When we talk about women's labor, there's so often the risk of homogenizing the experience.

Kravchuk: Oh, yes. Totally.

Somchynsky: We've had a really lovely conversation.

On Memory and Belonging: A Conversation with Alina Senchenko

Vita Yakovlyeva

What follows is a redacted and edited version of a conversation with the prolific emerging artist Alina Senchenko. Senchenko is originally from Ukraine and currently resides in Western Canada. Her works are framed by ongoing reflection on subjects and expressions of belonging that manifest in public memories, habits, myths, topographies, media, and elsewhere. Belonging herself to a generation born and raised in independent Ukraine, Alina explores the past as an outsider — an inquisitive receiver of social memory and history. She was trained as an artist at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, and her work is influenced by the revival of Ukrainian literature, art, and culture that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and solidified throughout the 2000s. She positions this in contrast to the public memory of Ukraine’s Soviet past, combined with effects of globalization and colonization worldwide. While thematically complex, Alina’s work is hopeful and encourages viewers to personally explore the subjects considered in her artistic practice.

Yakovlyeva: Please, introduce yourself in any way you want to be described to the audience.

Senchenko: I am a Ukrainian artist working and living in Vancouver on the unceded land of Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and the Squamish peoples. My work deals with diaspora, immigration, memories, belonging, globalization, and displacement, in the Ukrainian and global context. My medium is usually lens based, but I also work with text archives, media footage, and video.

Yakovlyeva: What are your influences? What has been especially inspirational for your work, here, in Western Canada, in Ukraine, and elsewhere?

Senchenko: As an artist, I am inspired by books more than images, by artists’ stories, and by people. I would not pinpoint just one place. My influences are the experiences that I have accumulated that grew on me in some ways. But in my early age, books were an important part of my life, forming my imagination. I was reading a lot of classical Ukrainian and contemporary Ukrainian writers.

I think in the 1990s literature was a little bit different. Even in movies, you can see there is a period of rebellion from Soviet traditions. Then in the 2000s, there is almost a different discourse, where we are talking about our experiences living in contemporary Ukraine, which I find very interesting. The

2000s were a particular moment in the history of contemporary Ukrainian literature. It was in some ways a rebellion. Women writers were writing more, and writing more poetic things, which I really enjoy. I am still curious about what is going on in terms of contemporary literature and it is really interesting to see the progression of it. Later, I moved to Cherkasy, and we have quite a good theater there. It was cool to go to the theater with my friends. It was an exposure for me, and I really appreciated it. Something that stuck for me for a long time was *Lenin Love. Stalin Love* – Andriy Zholdak’s adaptation of Vasyl Barka’s novel *The Yellow Prince* [portraying a peasant family’s devastation and survival during the Holodomor famine – VY]. It was very powerful.

I was born in 1991 when Ukraine became independent, but I was still living in the discourse of the post-Soviet and the slowly forming independent Ukraine. It is very interesting to me, especially as a member of the younger generation, to observe that evolution in literature, it is almost a generational thing to see what people were interested in. I find it quite amazing.

Then I moved to Canada to study at Emily Carr University. I was exposed more to visual artists and to filmmakers. People like Chantal Akerman, Kira Muratova, Andrei Tarkovsky, in terms of moving images, were also a great visual influence for me.

Yakovlyeva: The subject matter of your artwork as represented on your website (Figure 1), weaves together an interesting narrative: *Dislocation; Everything Moves, Everything Turning, and There Is No End; Turning and Turning; Out of Order; Home Is Elsewhere; Traces/In Between*. Together, these works create a mood of wandering, seeking, of migration, and problematize the notion of belonging. For example, your installation *Home is Elsewhere* explores loss and connection to the space that people occupy. I find it particularly interesting because the “sense of home” that you explore seems to involve an action of *making* a home. Once a person is removed from their actual home, a physical place of permanent belonging, as a migrant or an immigrant would, developing a sense of home elsewhere anew requires an active position. At the same time, the search for home seems ongoing, never-ending.

As you have been creatively exploring these subjects in your art for years, I would like to ask you if you found any answers, any bits of wisdom or reflections on your experience and understanding of searching for home?

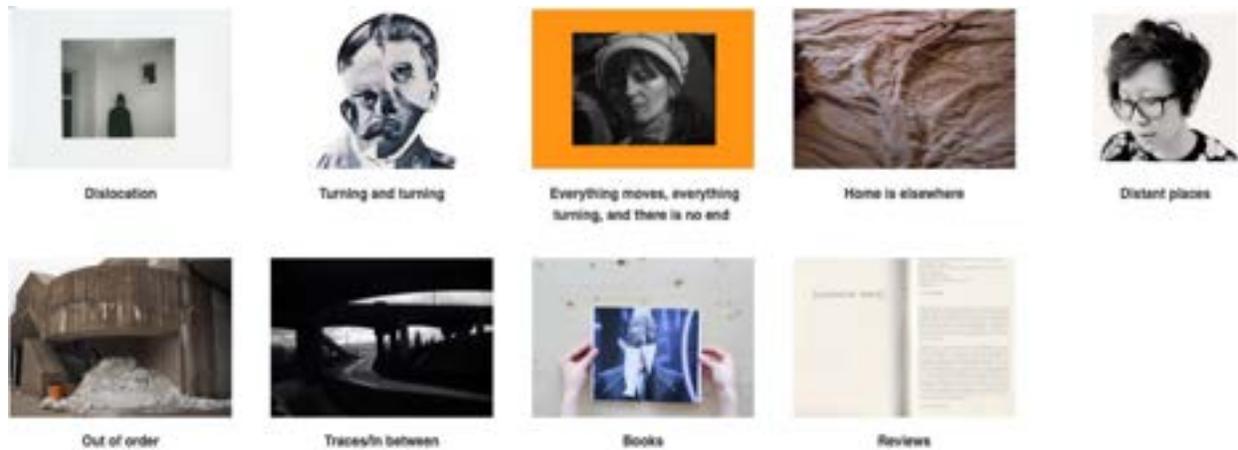


Figure 1

Senchenko: *Home Elsewhere* was inspired by Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space*. It was my early work and it is about the duality of being an immigrant. Growing up in Ukraine and having all the influences there, and then coming to Canada when I was already an adult and beginning my education – I have led almost two separate lives. It was an attempt to understand what home means for me. The house that I grew up in, in a village in the Poltava region, was sold when I was in Canada so my parents could help me with my education here. It is a longing for that house, and not having the opportunity to reconcile and say goodbye to those memories and that period. That project was definitely a way to deal with separation.

Yakovlyeva: Memories. Home remains in memories somehow, especially childhood memories. Your project *Distant Places* (Figure 2) explores attachments in the world somewhat outside of home. Can you tell me more about this project?



when i was sad after my piano lessons
me and my grandpa would go to the park
I would swing on the swing
that was made out of old tires

Figure 2

Senchenko: A lot of immigrants are situated in an in-between space. I ask myself: Where do I find home and how do I create it now? Being here, you are changed and influenced by this culture. And when I come back to Ukraine, I feel as if I am a tourist in my own country. So, there is also that: it is like a space in between. With this work, I was interested in this feeling of fleeting memories and the ability to reach them. Some places exist only in your imagination or memories. For me, childhood memories are very strong. It really influenced my artistic practice.

Yakovlyeva: I am interested to hear your perspective on the concept of emptiness, absence, and vacant space, based on how it is created and experienced in your work *Home is Elsewhere* (Figure 3).



Figure 3

Senchenko: Creating emptiness [in artistic practice] was about negative space. I try to leave it to the viewer to decide what it is and what they can project onto it. And as you said, Ukraine has a very traumatic history. And even today we continue living a traumatic history. The idea of borders, Ukraine, and the Ukrainians is very limited and unfortunately usually very stereotyped and rather dark. There are a lot of interesting things, interesting people around my childhood. I would never exchange it for anything else. I am thankful for having one. If I could have anything else – no – I would still choose my childhood. And I feel like we do need hope. We do need something else. We do need people that we can look up to, I mean successful stories of Ukrainians. I am trying to encourage the viewer to open up their views about this experience of displacement – Ukrainian or immigrant.

Yakovlyeva: I am interested in your work within the genre of photography and how you explore the limits of its representation, specifically in your project *Everything Moves, Everything Turning, and There Is No End*. The subject matter is a collective action of protest, a revolution. Can you talk more about this work? (Figure 4).



Figure 4

Senchenko: Yes. When the revolution started in Ukraine in 2014, at first, I was trying to explore this position of a witness — as a Ukrainian witnessing a second revolution abroad. Witnessing it from overseas was very, very hard – the inability to be there, and help, and know what was going on. But this also gave me some distance to look at it from a different perspective. Being here, I observed how Western media presented it. It was usually just crowds. And I was very curious to break it down to individuals; to why those people came there. My parents were there, and all those people came with their stories, and all came with reasons why they wanted to be there.

I also was curious about the effectiveness of revolutions in the twenty-first century. I started looking at the color revolutions in the post-Soviet countries and trying to learn from their experience and see what revolutions really do. It is almost a search for hope, for Ukraine. Again, what is it that a revolution does, what is that revolution really? So, I created banners with different colors representing different revolutions, but in the same way, it functioned as an anti-banner because their message does not tell you to just go. They portray people in very different states: wandering or looking, looking away, and almost looking inside. The slogans were about the aftermath of the events.

Then, the project expanded in looking at how the media presented it, and photography and its limitations. How can photography be used in a way that is deceiving? I started layering many images, and the action itself became very important because of the inability to be there, but also because photography can not truly represent the revolution. It is a very layered and complex work of me trying to understand what the revolution is and whether it is working, a way of processing what it means for Ukraine or for any other revolution. What steps should we take in order to get to a better place? For example, when the 2004 revolution happened, we saw that not much happened afterwards. So, it's very interesting—the whole concept of revolution itself in the contemporary world.

Having lived in post-Soviet contemporary Ukraine, and having [seen] different generations feel differently about the past, I ask “What was Soviet ideology? It is still expressed in almost a contradiction of “old and new,” but there is also a repetition of history. In 1991, we already saw the fall of Lenin statues, but decades later they were still there, in hundreds. I was curious and confused. Why do we still have these statues, these monuments? What is happening? I think the action of tearing them down and looking at them lying there was visually very interesting. I find it almost uncanny, an eerie feeling—empty monuments. Maybe we should think about what we are *really* putting on pedestals? What do we really need?

Yakovlyeva: *Turning and Turning* resonates with specific coordinates in history, namely Ukraine after the Euromaidan, during decommunization (Figure 5). It also stands out in its medium — the use of cyanotype (a photographic printing process that produces a cyan-blue print) for portrayal of historic-looking photographs. Can you please talk more about this work,

especially in relation to Ukraine and your point of view on it from where you are in space and time?



Figure 5

Senchenko: I think I chose cyanotype in contrast to red.

It was very interesting to see different generations in my city react to the unfolding of decommunization. Once, I saw when the statue had fallen down, an older gentleman knelt down and was crying. For the people of the older generation that was their history. Maybe they had a different relationship with the past, and in some sense, they maybe were happy there, and they are nostalgic for that time. The blue, the color of cyanotype, is a way to question why we should be nostalgic for this? Not making it monochrome to look more historical but – contemporary. I was just trying to understand the tension. I was also influenced by reading the book by Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time*. It was very beautiful and eye-opening to understand the history and what it meant for people after the fall of the Soviet Union. For the younger generation, it's different. For me, I only saw it as an instant. But for the older generation, it was very interesting to consider what it meant for them and why. For me, it was a question of why do we still have statues of Lenin? I do not

know; I cannot relate to them at all. And they also represent such a painful history for Ukrainians, yet there is still another part where for some people it represents something different. So, I was interested in the underlying tension of almost different histories for different people in different generations. I feel it was also a very layered work because I do not want to tell anyone what to think. That is what it is, that is history, but it is you who can open it up and think about it.



Figure 6

Yakovlyeva: Roots, your most recent work (Figure 6, a screen shot from a three-channel video installation *До землі [To the Ground]*), takes an interesting look at our relationship with the land, and how it translates into human interpersonal relations. Tell me about this project, what inspired it, and what it represents.

Senchenko: It was a year-long mentorship with Sandra Semchuk that started my interest in the relationship between Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians with the land, plants, and memories. I was drawing this inspiration from my grandmother, who taught me a lot about plants and gardening. In Ukraine, growing up, there was a very tender relationship with plants and I was very aware of my surroundings. In a city, people usually do not really know much about plants. So, it was a tipping point for me to explore that, especially in a time when ecosystems are disappearing due to climate change. I find it very important for us to look at what it is that we might lose very, very soon. For this work, I went to Saskatchewan, and I was documenting different plants and

familiarizing myself with what was native to the land. I was interested in Ukrainian traditional medicine practices and how they still translate in Canada. What was used in Canada? Did they find the same plants? Did they use different plants that they found here? Was there a change for communities? I decided to pair visuals of the plants and interviews with people to make it more abstract. Again, it is still very personal work because I really love plants, and I am always curious about plants. Ukrainian folklore and literature are so saturated with plants and symbolism. In some ways, this connection was always there. In this work, I was curious to explore where it came from. I interviewed Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainians, trying to bridge the gap between generations and bring the two continents together. I was also looking at Canada and engaging with the Ukrainian Canadian community here. This work became a bigger project – weaving relationships between memory and family.

Video is very new to me. This work was a learning experience and it still has not been shown. It is very new and fresh, and I am hoping that I can show each of the triptych images/videos in quite a large scale. Usually, we do not pay attention to plants and consider many of them as weeds. But actually, they have very powerful medicinal properties or other properties – something that we usually overlook in our everyday life. In my family, if there are little signs of illness, you will first turn to plant-based medicine, and then you would go to the doctor and use actual medicine. It is an interesting relationship. And where does the medicine actually come from? It opened up different dialogues within, such as global issues of environment and our relationship to it as well as the power of plants and their healing properties not only in Ukrainian Canadian communities but so many other communities locally and internationally.

Yakovlyeva: This question is about the ethnographic value of artistic work. How do you see yourself and your work in the process of documenting life (and history)?

Senchenko: I received my knowledge about plants from my grandmother. I find that lately there has not been much of this transfer of knowledge from older generations to younger generations. I was honored to receive this knowledge. Knowledge is also about that specific person that shared the knowledge. How do we preserve this knowledge and keep passing it on? How can I pass this knowledge to my kids? There is the lived experience of older generations; they have already lived through some experiences that we might be living through right now. I find it important to be able to connect to the Ukrainian Canadian community, just being an observer and a listener. I think my work is recreating the experience of an exchange of knowledge, which nowadays we see less and less frequently. I would really like to have more of it because that knowledge is already disappearing. The knowledge about plants, medicinal plants, and how to use them in traditional medicine is fleeting. How can we still relate to it? And in twenty years will it be important? All of those questions are interesting to

me, and, in some sense, I am afraid to think – will we be interested in plants in twenty years? Will we be interested in this knowledge?

The relationship to the land is something that we should pay attention to and be aware of. Do you know the old saying: when you go abroad, take a little pinch of soil with you from your land? It is an idea of not forgetting where you come from. I want to tell the stories, my stories, but also stories of my people. It is interesting how many times those stories were told by other people and usually by Western people looking at us, investigating us. I feel like for me it is important actually to tell our stories, and to have a voice because for years we did not have a voice. Now, it is a good time to actually talk to each other through an exchange of knowledge and have our voice tell our stories.

digital files that exist in a more nebulous realm. Curators and archivists typically interact with their collected items long after they were created and complete their tasks within specific physical spaces – architectural structures that are assigned the task of storage. The major focus is to preserve in a way that captures original, unmodified attributes.

The artist, on the other hand, tends to document and preserve in the moment, with a different emphasis, and on a unique scale. Whether it is a realistic or abstract interpretation, the artwork (written, sung, painted, staged) embodies information on multiple levels. Generally, artworks document and preserve the less tangible, such as feelings, to invoke memories, stir emotions, or capture a specific moment. The artist's creation is in itself the storage vessel; the metadata attached to it is most often symbolic. Attributes such as texture, color, patterns, sounds, and movement become the language that explains the narrative. From this perspective, artists can be grouped with curators and archivists to form a cohort – each complementing the other in the task of preserving tangible and intangible knowledge of the past and present, to be used for future reference.

As the Ukrainian Canadian community has grown and evolved, it has produced a wealth of information and artifacts created by individuals and organizations; so much so that our archives, museums, and galleries are overwhelmed with material culture from the past. As a result, “gatekeeping”¹ has become a process justified by sustainability as each institution deals with financial and physical constraints. Whether conscious or unconscious, the acquisition process involves sorting and prioritizing items to be saved and preserved. Collectors become “god” – they determine what will become the most memorable stories from the past to share with future generations. Difficult questions to consider include: Is there enough storage space? Are atmospheric conditions suitable for preservation? Are there funds to hire staff to process each donation? How well does the item represent the era of creation? Not all pieces get the green light. Materials that fall outside designated parameters are typically ignored or discarded, hence devalued, and in many cases erased from memory.

Artists experience similar dilemmas when expressing a historic moment or exploring a technique. Common thoughts include: Which moment in time should be recorded on the canvas? How much visual detail should be included? Is the writer duty-bound to quote word for word – can they abridge or translate? Is the choreographer obligated to mimic movement exactly? Is “mixed-media” an abomination of the traditional process? In this light, we can see how recording, preserving, and sharing knowledge are difficult tasks. Be it

¹ The earliest “gatekeeping” model was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1947, when studying the manipulation of media messages to entice consumer spending during World War II. Gatekeeping theory has since become more sophisticated as researchers consider wider ranges of external pressures on communication and cultural institutions (Shoemaker and Vos).

an artist, archivist, or curator, each is often faced with the desire to “save it all,” “tell it all,” and include all metadata related to each piece that is created, documented, and/or exhibited. As a result, deciding what the future needs to know is a reality that often produces stress, friction, and debate among individuals and the community. This type of tension became very evident during the summer of 2018, when the decision was made to permanently close Trident Press in Winnipeg.

Originally established in 1910 as Ukrainian National Publishers, the printer/publisher was later renamed Trident Press, and took on the responsibility of capturing and sharing moments in time within the Ukrainian Canadian community (Danyliuk, 21). Although affiliated at arms length with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada and the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League, the publisher and printing house prided itself on producing material that had broad appeal and was read by a huge portion of the Ukrainian diaspora in North America and beyond (25-27). Its leading publication, *Ukrainian Voice*, covered the events and lives of people and institutions, and shared the opinions of learned scholars and journalists. Other publications printed under the Trident Press name documented the thoughts, folklore, and history of Ukrainians in Canada and abroad (30-31).

Like most publishers, Trident Press faced many challenges. Financial growing pains, censorship during the internment, the Depression, two world wars, as well as religious and secular divisions in the community were just some of the hurdles they managed to overcome. And yet, its circulation grew to over twenty thousand national subscribers in the 1960s (Winnipeg Free Press). However, by the mid-1970s, subscriptions sharply declined. As noted by the twelfth and last editor, Bill Strus, “...slow erosion of the language, along with the evolution of Ukrainian-Canadian identity in third-generation Canadians and beyond, began to chip at *The Ukrainian Voice’s* reach. Slowly but surely, the paper ebbed away” (Winnipeg Free Press). Equally dramatic, and in retrospect the most damaging, was the change in print technology. Expenses related to moving the printing process into digital format also contributed to the company’s demise.

In the last few months before the doors closed, there entered a parade of people who represented various institutions; each took an interest in salvaging some of the Trident Press artifacts for posterity. Orest Martynovych (Oseredok), James Kominowski (University of Manitoba Dafoe Special Collections), Roman Yereniuk (St. Andrew’s College), and Leonard Krawchuk (Ukrainian Museum of Canada - Winnipeg) were key figures. Other interested individuals, including myself, all volunteered to sort through what remained. Historically valuable items included: the equipment (lead type and printing press), thousands of work dockets (which itemized each job ever printed), hundreds and hundreds of copies of every publication that had ever passed through those doors, as well as the majority of the old printing blocks that were used to print the images in all publications between the mid 1920s and 1980s. Ideally we would have liked to hermetically seal the building, thus storing all of its components, all of the artifacts, archives, and embodied memories. But it was not physically possible.

Thankfully, copies of each book and periodical were saved for future digitization by Oseredok and the University of Manitoba. Much of the equipment and all the lead type was sold. However, not one institution could financially or physically accommodate the remaining items (predominantly docketts and printing blocks) and a dumpster bin was brought on site to dispose of what was left.



Figure 2 – (L-R) The basement of Trident Press; Boxes of image blocks from *Traditional Ukrainian Cookery* (Stechishin 1957) and *Ukrainian Embroidery Designs and Stitches* (Ruryk); Sorting the printing blocks for storage and shipment to Edmonton, AB.

As an artist, I shuddered. As much as I appreciated the printed texts, and the docketts that listed the artists, photographers, and authors of each publication, what was most valuable to me, a printmaking graduate, were the thousands of printing blocks that lined the south wall in the basement (Figure 2). They represented the images of the past — handmade, created by artisans whose skill and expertise had vanished with the analog era. Eminent cultural theorist Stuart Hall noted, “the production and exchange of meaning between members of a society or group is the very essence of culture.” These printing blocks were invaluable in that they represented how Ukrainian Canadians disseminated their views as immigrants and contributors to life in Canada. You could say that the books and periodicals, produced within the walls of Trident Press, journaled the visual and physical history of the Ukrainian Press in North America. I contend that the images serve as windows to the past and “must be considered living things” (Mitchell). To dispose of the blocks would be equivalent to muting our ancestors, masking not so much what they said but how they went about sharing and facilitating an open community dialogue that stretched from the past into the future. Whereas the bards of the past had banduras, twentieth-century newsmakers had printing blocks to illuminate their stories.

Arguably, to research the past you could choose to read old publications and look at the printed photos. However, the blocks have deeper significance. Not only visual relics of the Ukrainian language press, these printing blocks also represent the biggest and possibly the best-preserved examples of the advancement of print technology in any print language in Canada. When reviewed by faculty members of the University of Alberta Printmaking

Program,² comments dwelled on how well the collection represents each step in the evolution of the commercial printing process in North America and how the associated knowledge is disappearing. Each block was born from an industry standard 7/8-inch-thick wooden base, originally cut from oak, fir, or walnut, and later less expensive spruce wood. An image was then mounted onto the top surface. The oldest images would have been hand carved into the wood. Unfortunately, none were found in this collection and it is assumed that they were destroyed or repurposed. However, a handful of small blocks remain that represent the next era of block production which involved hand carved linocuts (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Linocut printing blocks used to print page 44 in *Mystets'ki skarby ukrains'kyh vyshyvok* (Stechishin 1950).

Each era of twentieth-century printing block production is represented in this collection. Throughout the initial cataloguing process, we found linocuts, etched copper and zinc plates (nailed to the base), etched plastic plates (nailed or glued to the base), and photo-etched zinc plates (glued to the base). There are also examples of a variety of photo emulsions – each color defines a specific manufacturer and era. Clear, gold, black, and royal blue emulsions are the most prevalent. No other existing collection is known to span that century of time. Aside from the physical attributes, the blocks also document the craftsmanship related to the process of block creation.

A notable characteristic of this collection is photojournalism. Most articles were accompanied by images submitted by contributing authors/photographers from across Canada. Group photos dominate the collection, including pioneer congregations, community organizations, concerts, festivals, church services, banquets, and family photos. There are also many photos that capture the lives of individuals, as well as artifacts and

² An initial consult re: the collection of printing blocks acquired from Trident Press took place on 28 May 2021 with Dr. Sean Caulfield, Centennial Professor, Department of Art and Design, University of Alberta, and later viewed in person on 16 June 2021 by Luke Johnson, Printmaking Instructor, and Steven Dixon, Senior Letterpress Technician, University of Alberta Printmaking Program.

architecture unique to Ukrainian Canadian culture. Images captured by independent photographers are rarely credited; however, photos by Walter Bartko and Nick Ochotta in Edmonton and by Dubchak's Studio in Winnipeg are identifiable (Figure 4).



Figure 4 – Photographs from across Canada (L-R) Pianist Luba Sluzar, Toronto (*Promin'* cover, June 1966); contemporary dancer, Nadia Pavlychenko Buchan, Saskatoon/Toronto (Woycenko, 8); Lesia Ewasiuk modeling Lesia Ukrainka's traditional clothing, Edmonton (*Promin'*, December 1953, 12); Bukovinian Embroidery Pattern submitted to *Promin'* from Manitoba (*Promin'*, October 1969, 31); St. Mary's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Walley-Surrey, BC.

Almost every publication printed by Trident Press also involved input from a graphic artist. Examples of layout and cover design, original font creation, and hand drawn illustrations can be found in popular Trident Press titles such as *Traditional Ukrainian Cookery* (Stechishin 1957) and *Ukrainian Embroidery Designs and Stitches* (Ruryk), both illustrated by Wadym Dobrolige; *Ukrains'ka zhinka v khoreohrafii* (Ukrainian Women in Choreography) (Pasternakova) cover design by Myron Levytsky; and reprints of children's books illustrated by Mykhailo Fartukh in Lviv, Ukraine (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – (L-R) Knahynia Olha illustrated by Mykhailo Fartukh (*Istoriia Ukrainy dlia ditei*, Hoverlia, 1962, 19); Illustration by Wadym Dobrolige (Stechishin 1957); Illustration by Wadym Dobrolige (Stechishin, 1950); cover design by Myron Levytsky (Pasternakova); Holodomor commemorative image by Myron Levytsky.

Publications from Trident Press also reflect the importance of fine art in Ukrainian culture. Of significance is the periodical *Promin'*. A piece of art was featured on the cover of more than four hundred of the over five hundred issues that were printed by Trident Press between 1960 and 1996; and many Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada (UWAC) publications were also graced with artwork commissioned for each specific project. For example, works by Sophia Korbut, Heorhiii Yakutovych, Olena Kulchytska, Jacques Hnizdowsky, Edward (Ted) Drahanchuk, and Maria Styranka, to name just a few, are all found in this collection. Unfortunately, although most of the blocks were numbered and catalogued by Trident Press prior to printing, the ledger/catalogue was misplaced. At the time this article was published, research to identify and recatalogue the source of each image is still ongoing; therefore the source of all blocks has not yet been determined.



Figure 6 – Fine art images. (L-R) Wood block print *Zhinka z snopom* (Woman with a Sheaf of Wheat) by Olena Kulchytska (*Promin'* cover, October 1975); icon (print source yet to be determined), oil painting of flowers in a vase by Maria Styranka (*Promin'* cover, May 1979); fashion design by Lubov Panchenko (*Promin'* cover, October 1973); block print of Hutsul woodcutters by Sophia Karaffa-Corbut (print source yet to be determined).

But if so significant, why were the printing blocks slated for disposal? The collection consists of approximately 6200 printing blocks, weighing over 3100 lbs. When packed, they are stored in 92 banker's boxes that occupy over 1100 linear feet of storage space. Knowing these details, the three main reasons that impeded the decision to archive the artifacts become obvious: the size of the collection, the financial cost to process (catalogue) each piece, and the ongoing expense to store and conserve the collection are all overwhelming. In 2018, not one institution that was approached was willing to commit to such an undertaking. Several years previously, a similar fate befell the printing blocks from *Novyi Shliakh* (New Pathway). Unfortunately, they were all discarded. By throwing the blocks out, access to stories that were originally meant for public circulation become restricted to browsing the old publications stored in archives with limited exposure and accessibility. It became obvious to both Dr. Yereniuk and me that disposing of the blocks would destroy the artifacts and effectively mute the stories that went with them. The solution to this gatekeeping would have to be a creative adaptation of traditional conservation protocols. Hence, we salvaged the blocks and, together with

mosaic artist Theodora Harasymiw, archivist Eric Fincham, volunteers from the community, and support from the Shevchenko Foundation, Kule Folklore Centre, and SUS Foundation, the project turned to research-creation and remediation to create a legacy mosaic as a way to preserve the stories and images from the past and connect them with a contemporary audience.

Research-creation is a process whereby theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of research are practiced in tandem to engage critical thought and inspire innovative problem solving.³ Whereas visual and auditory sources can equally stimulate curiosity, evoke emotions, validate information, and facilitate knowledge retention, through research-creation the sharing of knowledge can be extended beyond written text. Within academic circles, research-creation is an emergent methodology that “speaks to contemporary media experiences and modes of knowing” (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012, 5). It is a research method that embraces a multidisciplinary perspective and acknowledges that different methodological literacies create different “species of output”; and because different forms can tell a story in different ways they may need to be shared in a variety of formats (Loveless 2019, 30). The “making” is also a form of research practice that can become a collaborative process whereby researchers and participants learn through interaction and can ultimately become co-producers of knowledge (Chapman and Sawchuk 2015, 50).

Remediation is the process whereby a new medium refashions a prior medium form (Bolter and Grusin). For example, the contemporary Canadian story of Scott Pilgrim⁴ was first a graphic novel, and later released as a movie, and remediated as an online computer game; and the popular Ukrainian opera *Natalka Poltavka* was created for the stage and later remediated by Vasyl Avramenko into a Hollywood feature-length movie (Martynovych, 80-96). In the case of the printing blocks, we intend to remediate blocks that were originally used to create images in printed publication, and turn them into tesserae in a mosaic. Whereas remediation has a range of narrative applications such as the addition of hypertext to a story to facilitate interactivity (Ryan 2004, 31-33), we intend to take advantage of digital applications and further extend the process of remediation to transform each block into a scannable hyperlink within an online, digitally interactive image of the final mosaic. The link would trigger a pop-up window with information specific to the block including original source, date of publication, and photographer.

³ <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx> (accessed 21 December 2021).

⁴ Scott Pilgrim is a series of graphic novels by Canadian author and comic book artist Bryan Lee O'Malley. The series consists of six digest-size black-and-white volumes released between August 2004 and July 2010 by Portland-based independent comic book publisher Oni Press. The author/illustrator later chose to widen his audience by creating a movie and video game.

As established artists, Theo Harasymiw⁵ and I have embraced creative imagery to archive memories and connect the past with current and future generations (Figures 7 and 8). By applying research-creation as our methodology, via remediation we intend to explore the adaptation and narrativization of the memories embodied in each printing block found at Trident Press. There are several reasons why a mosaic is the medium of choice for our project. First, by definition, in the world of art, a mosaic is a pattern of pieces. It is typically a picture produced by arranging small colored pieces of hard material, such as stone, tile, or glass. These tesserae are primarily chosen for their physicality (color, texture, luminescence). In some cases, the individual pieces also carry deeper, symbolic meanings which could be related to the source of the materials or the artisan responsible for the work. Historically, mosaics often form a narrative that captures the folklore of a time and a place. Stories that represent the past, present, and future can be found on the walls, floors, and ceilings of architectural spaces around the world. Famous examples are: a) the Alexander Mosaic, a Roman floor mosaic originally from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, and b) the story of Noah's ark from the fifth-century synagogue at Huqoq, in northern Israel. Within the Ukrainian artistic context, mosaic imagery has been prevalent for centuries, with examples dating back to Byzantine mosaics that grace the walls and ceiling of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, the bus stop shelters that lined the roads in Soviet-era Ukraine, and more recently, smaller works by artist David Wasylyshen⁶ found in many Ukrainian Canadian homes.

In the case of the Trident Press printing blocks, they will become tesserae within a greater visual narrative. The role of each piece will be multipurpose. It will a) represent an isolated story that took place somewhere within the Canadian and broader Ukrainian community; b) expose the craftsmanship of early pressmen; and c) ultimately contribute to a stunning, prominently displayed, visual composition that connects a contemporary audience with the past. To date, working together with archivist Eric Fincham and volunteers in the community, each block has been numbered and catalogued. Captured metadata include: notation of the size, materials, and description of the image. When possible, we have also determined the date(s) of publication and printed source with page number, as well as associated author, artist, and photographer (Figure 9).

⁵ Theo Harasymiw is an Edmonton-based Ukrainian Canadian mosaic artist whose work is community inspired. Working together with the members of the congregation, her largest piece to date is a mosaic installation that commemorates the hundredth anniversary of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Edmonton, AB (2021).

⁶ David Wasylyshen is a Winnipeg-based artist of Ukrainian descent who has honed the art of creating *pysanka* mosaics from pieces of Ukrainian Easter eggs, stained glass, and polymers.



Figure 7 – Project in Progress (6’h x 24’w). The first eight of twelve panels for the mosaic created by Theodora Harasymiw commemorating the hundredth anniversary of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Edmonton, AB (2021). Photograph courtesy of Tatiana Martchenko.



Figure 8 – “An Ensemble of Colour” (4’h x 16’w) Watercolor by Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn representing forty years of wardrobe and repertoire. Commissioned by Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Ensemble for their fortieth anniversary in 2010.



Figure 9 - Cataloguing and cross referencing each image. (L-R) Archivist Eric Fincham and volunteers: Elena Sharabun, Stefka Lytwyn, Olena Hartsula.

From the artists’ perspective, when composing the final image, the creative options available are infinite. Considerations include, but are not limited to:

1. How to physically treat each block to expose the image and preserve it?
2. Is inking the blocks a possible way to introduce color?
3. Should the mosaic entertain a geographic composition, i.e. east to west across Canada?
4. Alternately, could the mosaic be arranged as a timeline?
5. Are there related graphic motifs, imagery, or materials that could be incorporated?
6. Should some of the pieces be reserved for a print run?

In preparation for the mosaic, the blocks will be cleaned of excess old ink and paper backing. In several cases, the image on the block has become so badly oxidized it has become unrecognizable. Rather than cull it from the collection, a viable option could be to flip it over and expose the beauty of the wood that made the technology possible (Figure 10). It is important to keep in mind that, ultimately, the project's goal is to save the stories and connect them with a contemporary audience. Therefore, a digital interface with the mosaic will be introduced allowing an in-person connection with a cellphone or a remote link with a computer, whereby viewers will be able to scan each block to an online link featuring the related publication and story.



Figure 10 – (L-R) Experimental mosaic sketch using the uncleaned printing blocks combined with wooden backs to create a contrast between images; Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn with Luke Johnson at University of Alberta graduate print studio; Experimental mosaic - -alternate arrangement; Theodora Harasymiw exploring various compositions with the blocks, November 2021.

As a whole, the mosaic will become a unique narrative of photo journalism and visual art that reflects the cultural, political, and social activities of Ukrainian Canadiana; essentially capturing contemporary Ukrainian folklore associated with Ukrainian immigration, integration, and assimilation throughout the twentieth century. The end product, a “Ukrainian Press Legacy Mosaic” will become an aesthetically pleasing piece that not only acknowledges the achievements of Trident Press, but will also serve as an accessible, educational installation that archives many of the stories, memories, and tangible attributes of Ukrainian life in Canada.

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Afterword

Myrna Kostash

In their Introduction, the editors invite us to ask, “What can be discerned, revealed, or come into focus about Ukrainian Canadian art when examined as part of the history of Ukrainians in Canada and their relationship with Ukraine?” The question arises for us in 2022 in the immediate context of the invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces (at this writing, the war has entered its seventh month). The context also includes the 131st anniversary of the settlement of Ukrainians (Galicians and Bukovynians) in (Western) Canada, a history that includes several other anniversaries – of churches and labor organizations, of newspapers and publishers, of academic programs and cultural associations, and so on.

And, to be personal and memoiristic, I ask the question forty-five years after the publication in 1977 of *All of Baba’s Children*. In 1977, firmly replanted in Edmonton (from Toronto) and having joined up with cultural activists of my generation, I would have enumerated a short inventory of creative figures familiar across Canada, some of whom are recalled in this volume. Our demographic as Ukrainian Canadians only eighty-six years after settlement was still relatively small so that we all knew each other or at least had heard of each other. And so we/I knew of William Kurelek, George Ryga, and Vera Lysenko, say, already established in their respective genres who were also figures on the Canadian scene. But there were many others, especially emerging within my generation (grandchildren of the first settlers) who were becoming known and celebrated on another kind of national stage, that of multiculturalism.



Kiss me I'm Ukrainian.

<https://www.amazon.com/Designs-Unisex-Ukrainian-Pinback-Button/dp/B00MQ5ZEX0>

I want to make a bold claim about the third generation – and it is provoked by reading the essays in *Ukrainian Canadian Visual Art*: that we were ethnics before we were Ukrainian Canadians. In our view, our grandparents

were uncomplicated homesteaders, our parents were equivocal hybrids – Canadians in public, Ukrainian in private – while we, (mostly) confident psychologically and socially, and poster children of official multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s loudly proclaimed our “otherness” in a Canada dominated across sectors by an Anglo-Celtic mainstream.

It is important that I claim this solely for those of us who grew up in the three provinces where the homesteaders had settled: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Our ethnicity was powerfully bonded with these territories. And I recognize this in those essays in which artists’ “epiphanies” are expressed as “prairie,” where our “roots” were planted two generations earlier in a “settlement,” where we have formed a “tender relationship” with plants (viz. gardens) not to say with the soil itself, a kind of rhapsody in the furrows left by the blades of our machines.

This was nostalgia: our artists were already educated, mobile, urban, anglophone, several rungs up the Vertical Ladder, a much more dynamic configuration of communities than the glued-in-place tesserae of the multicultural Mosaic.

As I read along through these marvelous essays and referred to the illustrations, and as I made notes that were roughly thematic in organization, a second theme emerged after “ethnicity”: “Ukrainian Canadian.” A striking number of Ukrainian-born artists had joined our community after the Second World War, the Displaced Persons (colloquially, Delayed Pioneers), refugees from the battle zones of Eastern Europe. Suddenly, sketchbooks and canvasses filled with references to *Ukrainian* history, literature, and folklore that had been lived and not just performed in Heritage festivals. Tellingly, these new arrivals were welcomed by those Canadian-born men and women who were patriots embedded in Canada’s anti-communist and anti-Soviet milieu and were themselves as evasive about darker events of the war fought on Ukrainian territory as were the Ukrainian Canadian apologists for the Soviet Union. But as artists the new arrivals made an emphatic impression, as European modernists and surrealists, on the Canadian scene: not as ethnics within a minority enclave but as transplanted, sometimes traumatized, Ukrainians. And this is how my generation learned the meaning of diaspora – dispersed, scattered – as compared to us rooted-ones, with our homeland right under our feet. “We happen to be Ukrainian,” we declared, acknowledging our genealogy; while the children of the DPs, even as artists, inherited the ancestral memory of that other motherland, “martyred Ukraine.”

Independent and sovereign, post-Soviet Ukraine becomes a project of reclamation for Ukrainian Canadian artists who are free to travel “back” to meet Ukraine as though for the first time – and sift through the dregs of “sorealism” *in memoriam*. And to reflect on our “ethnicity” as historically a regional identity inherited from forebears who called themselves Ruthenians and were Austrians on their passports.

And here the essays bring this reader to a new place: of the “startling relationship” between two kinds of youthful postmoderns (as I use the word), the globalized photographer from Toronto, say, and the emerging postcolonial

performative artist, say, in Lviv, sometimes literally in the same exhibition space. As the invigorated reader, I am open to yet another meaning of Ukrainian Canadian identity, as contingent, fortuitous, uncertain, conditional – an artist is born here but works there, or vice versa; is educated there, works here; goes back there to join a new artists’ collective: the “freedom” of instability. The Ukrainian/Canadian artist is: one who makes a Land Acknowledgement as a new kind of settler, who “witnesses” the cataclysms of the birth country from abroad, who voluntarily places herself inside, or displaces herself outside, an increasingly inclusive community, who, coming from mixed heritage or adopted into it lays claim to Ukrainian/Canadian identity as an act of volition, not through a certificate of blood quantum.

So, how can Ukrainian/Canadian art as a production of such twenty-first century contingency be community? When community may now be “transnational” - framing something larger, imaginatively more capacious than the unitary national homeland – and “transcultural” – incorporating or confronting more than one cultural or ethnic reference or practice – there is no particular “privilege” that attaches to Ukrainian Canadian experience. We recall that that experience is now understood to be only a local expression within the totality of twenty-first century Ukrainianisms.

The artist’s expressed “sense of place” is put into question. When she leaves such a material and physical place, does she leave Ukrainian Canadian identity behind as an anachronism or does she take it with her as a state of mind, a kind of postcolonial repurposing where she stands outside the mainstream, any mainstream? What might be emerging from the fading adherence to a geopolitical and historic site is the *ideology* of such a place: it has become a *lieu de mémoire*, that symbolically signifies the heritage of collective, communal memory, saturated with significance, tangible and intangible, and reproduced not only in easel painting but in photography, textiles, multimedia, comics, screen-prints, and performance: there is more than one way to skin this cat.

My notes also point to certain themes largely absent, those of gender and class, or to the potentially fruitful overlap of current Ukrainian Canadian practices with Queer Studies or with Métis Studies. Lightly touched upon is the rising consciousness of settler generations (not just Ukrainian Canadians), that they are embedded in land (literally, earth) that was bequeathed them by the terms of the colonial instrument, a treaty, negotiated between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples. In the case of Ukrainian Canadians, settlement is mythologized as foundational to the communal narrative. Treaty 6 is not mentioned.

But a list of what’s-not-there really serves to call upon the esteemed editors and writers of this volume to produce volume two, a continuation of what has begun here, a bravura performance of a community’s self-re-examination in terms of its expressive imagery.



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