

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

TREASURES AT THE UKRAINIAN MUSEUM AND LIBRARY OF STAMFORD by Curator Lubow Wolynetz

THE ART DECO WORKS OF SERHII HLADKY

Our Library holdings contain a large collection of art books. Among them there is one publication that is quite unique and rare.

In 1939 the artist Serhii Hladky (Serge Gladky) donated to the library his newest publication entitled *Ukrainski vzirtsy. Slovianska seriya. (Ukrainian designs. Slavic series)*. The book consists of 20 color plates of illustrations done by the artist using the



POCHOIR (Stenciling) technique. One color plate with an ornamental motif also



has a dedication written by the artist especially for the Museum, signed by him and dated January 31, 1939.

Who was the artist Serhii Hladky (Serge Gladky) and why is this

work important? Serhii Hladky was born in Poltava region around 1880s. The exact date of his birth is not known. He was an architect, designer and a graphic artist. He studied at the Institute of Civil Engineering in St. Petersburg. After World War I he immigrated to Czechoslovakia where in the 1920s (1924-1926) he published a magazine *Umeni Slovanu (Slavic Art)*. He then moved to Paris where an exhibit of his works in 1929 received

wide attention of and favorable reviews by French art critics. His art works were a combination of constructivist and cubist style incorporating abstract designs and were a major influence in the development of Art Deco and modern abstract art. In his works he used the pochoir technique which is stenciling - a process which used from 20 to 250 different stencils because each color had to be applied by hand separately through the use of numerous cut out stencils. He was considered to be a precursor of modern abstract art. Hladky published his works using this technique as a result of which a limited number of copies were printed of each publication. The most notable of his works were *Fleurs (1929)* (only 350



copies printed), *Compositions Ornamentales (1926)*, *Nouvelles Compositions Decoratives (1929)*, *Point de Vue (1932, 1937)* and others. During or just before World War II the artist returned to Ukraine. After this his fate is unknown. Prior to his return to Ukraine he sent us his publication *Ukrainski vzirtsy*. The dedication page reads: To the Ukrainian Museum in US of North America With feelings of deep esteem I'm sending you my last work. January 31,

1939. (Українському Музею у США. З почуттям глибокої до Вас пошани посилаю Вам свою останню працю. 31 січня 1939 С. Гладкий)

In the introduction to this work he writes:

"Ukrainian Folk Art and monuments of antiquity were the basis of my paintings in this collection. The majority of my works were based on the art of the Slavic people. My aim was not only to find a resolution to art problems but also to systematize the very foundations of decorative compositions. I also took into consideration all that the new dynamic age gave me, because a separate art cannot exist without a connection with the constant progress of humanity... My ideas, in the form

of these compositions with which I'm beginning the Slavic series of decorative motifs, I bequeath as an offering, with sincere greetings, to my Ukrainian nation."

The life and works of Serhii Hladky is another striking example of a talented and innovative Ukrainian artist who greatly contributed to and was a major influence in the development of abstract art and especially Art Deco, but who is little known among Ukrainians and whose fate after his return to

Ukraine is unknown. The book of his decorative motifs which he donated to the Museum in 1939 is a fascinating example of his work and possibly the only copy in existence.

