

# The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

## ICONS ON GLASS part 2 by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



Just last week, I had a pleasant and rewarding surprise from two readers of an article which I had submitted to the monthly Sower on the topic of the treasures at our Museum and Library.

Dr. Jurij Rybak and his wife Anna Ortynskij are ardent collectors of Ukrainian art. Their home is a veritable private museum with numerous paintings of different Ukrainian artists as well as many artifacts of Ukrainian culture. Upon reading my article about Ukrainian folk icons on glass as contained in our Museum collection, they decided to donate to our Museum four icons on glass from Bukovyna, which had been in their possession for many years. As Dr. Jurij said, "These icons belong in a museum to be seen and appreciated by many".

We are exceedingly grateful for the decision which Dr. Jurij and Anna made in donating these icons to our Museum. Gifts of this nature come only once in a while and are really extraordinary. This act of giving not only exemplifies their generosity but

also tells us about their profound understanding of the significance and importance of preserving Ukrainian cultural artifacts, and of sharing and making them available for many to see and truly appreciate.

The aforementioned icons illustrate four different biblical and religious themes in an original interpretation by an anonymous folk artist.



In the first icon we see, on a blue background, the Holy Family as a natural or earthly

Holy Family with Joseph, Mary and the youthful Jesus in the center. At the same time we observe the supernatural Blessed Trinity with God the Father hovering high above them. Below Him, in a circle of gold, is the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove from which a bright golden shaft of light flows down and envelopes the youthful Jesus. All of the figures are placed into a rectangular archway. Above the archway are the domes of five churches. The would-be empty space around the archway is filled with exotic floral motifs of pink and red color with green leaves, a typical and traditional example of folk iconography.

Since icons on glass are painted in reverse, the artist made one mistake; he placed the staff (the walking stick) in Mary's hand and the palm branch in Joseph's hand.

The second icon, on a green background, depicts a crowned Our Lady the Protectress (Pokrov). She is also placed in an archway of which only the top part is visible. The sides and bottom are filled with exotic floral blooms of red and pink with green foliage. Again, above the archway are the domes of five churches. Our Lady has a pink rose on her right and left shoulder, and the interior of her crown is filled with a pink color. This suggests that the artist wanted to render, in his own way, the belief that she was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ. On canonically-traditional icons, this is shown by stars placed on the shoulders and forehead of Our Lady.



On the third icon we see, on a blue background and in an archway, the figure of a youthful Jesus. In His right hand Jesus holds the Orb (the world) which rests on a pillow and is encircled by a crown of thorns. In his left hand He holds the Cross of His Crucifixion which is leaning on his shoulder. By

using all these symbolic signs the artist, presumably, wanted to depict the events to follow, namely the Passion according to the Scriptures. The space around the archway is filled with large floral motifs in red, pink, and blue colors with green foliage.

The fourth icon, on a blue background and placed in an archway, is the figure of Our Lady of the Immaculate Heart. In her right hand she holds a lily symbol of her purity and virginity. On her breast, on a gold background, is her heart aflame encircled with a wreath of flowers (roses and lilies, symbolizing heavenly joy and purity). Depictions of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows were very popular in the western churches. The artist might have seen this and wanted to give his own artistic interpretation. In western icons of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, we observe seven swords piercing the heart of Mary. The space around the archway is filled with exotic blooms of white and red colors connected to each other with a winding green and white ivy-like branch and green leaves. Above the archway are the domes of five churches.

All of the four icons have wooden frames which are decorated with engraved, wavy linear motifs.

These four icons are significant and treasured additions to our Museum. Again, we thank Dr. Jurij Rybak and Anna Ortynskij for their thoughtfulness, kindness, and generosity!



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