

## The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

### A NEW GIFT FOR THE UKRAINIAN MUSEUM AND LIBRARY OF STAMFORD -- Ceramics by Yurii Kulchytsky by: Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

The creation and production of earthenware pottery was a highly developed craft in Ukraine, reaching as far back as the Trypillian culture of the Neolithic period all the way to the twentieth century. Ceramic wares were used for eating, cooking, and storing of food. Notwithstanding modern utensil innovations, the usage of ceramic wares was preserved by the Ukrainian village populace until the early part of the twentieth century. In the villages there were folk artisans, some with great artistic ability and esthetic taste, who produced and thus supplied the necessary earthenware items for the populace.

Although the primary use of folk ceramic wares was utilitarian, its decorative aspect was just as important both for the creator and the consumer. The decorative designs of some potters was so exceptional that it became known outside their isolated villages, in fact, it reached such a height of popularity that town and city inhabitants purchased these items for the decoration of their homes.

Traditional Ukrainian folk art, including folk ceramics, had a significant influence on professional artists. Most great Ukrainian artists acknowledge the influence folk art had upon their creative spirit. Beginning with the first half of the 20th century until the present a number of professional artists became interested in ceramics and thus began the development of professional ceramic art. One such artist was Yurii Kulchytsky, whose ceramic set of dining pieces our Museum just recently received as gifts.

Yurii Kulchytsky, 1912-1993, was born in the village of Pidbuzhi, near the city of Drohobych. After graduating from the Sambir



high school, he went on to study art at the Cracow Academy of Art (1933-1938). In those years at the Cracow Academy of Art there were quite a few Ukrainian students, who later became noted artists. They organized their own art society, to which Kulchytsky belonged. Already during his art studies Kulchytsky became especially interested in graphic art and devoted his creative talents to this medium. He participated in a number of group exhibits in the cities of Cracow, Lviv, and Sambir where his works were displayed. During World War II Kulchytsky conducted drawing classes in various schools in the Sambir area. The end of the war found him in Austria. Here he was active in organizing Ukrainian displaced artists into a cohesive unit, in order to participate in The International Art Exhibit in the cities of Bregenz, Feldkirch, Zalzburg, Baden-Baden, etc. His graphic works were displayed in these exhibits and received positive reviews. In 1948 Kulchytsky moved to Paris.

While in Paris he developed an interest in ceramics, to which he paid more and more attention, studied and learned ceramic technique, and finally devoted most of his creative time to it. The production of ceramics requires a specific work-



shop and kilns. Kulchytsky managed to organize such a workshop together with the artist Ivanna Nyzhnyk-Vynnykiv, 1912-1993, in the city of Mougins, in the south of France. Ivanna was a talented and well-known artist in her own right. She studied art at the Novakivsky Art School. Her works which were exhibited in Lviv before the war received high

acclaim. During the war, to escape Soviet occupation, she emigrated to Paris. Most of her early works, those which were housed in the National Museum of Lviv, were wantonly destroyed in 1952 by Soviet authorities, along with the works of other noted Ukrainian artists, deemed by the Soviet authorities to be anti-communist and controversial.

In their studio-workshop, both Yurii and Ivanna, produced ceramic art. Ivanna fashioned mainly ceramic figures: lions, chicks, birds, owls, etc., which were reminiscent of folk ceramic toys, but of a much higher sophisticated artistic expression. Yurii, on the other hand, created more utilitarian items: candlesticks, vases, a vessel for holy water, tiles, and ceramic dishes,



plates, bowls, platters, etc. In his ceramic pieces he introduced new and modern forms. The ornamental motifs with which Yuri embellished his ceramic pieces, although reminiscent of folk motifs, were not their copies, but his own original decorative style and composition. He applied a different type of drawing and color as compared with folk tradition. He used highly stylized depictions of fish, birds, flowers. His colors were soft and muted.

The ceramics of Yurii and Ivanna were displayed in many exhibits in Paris and major cities throughout France and gained wide popularity among French society. Their works can also be found in private collections, at the Ukrainian Church in Paris, at the Nina Fedenko Gallery in Paris, at the Shevchenko Scientific Society Headquarters in Sarcelles, France, etc.

The ceramic set of dishes by Yurii Kulchytsky was donated to our Museum by Dr. Michael

and Mrs. Roxolana Yarymovych. My sister Roxolana and her husband Michael Yarymovych resided in Paris with their two children for three years between 1970 and 1973.



Dr. Yarymovych was the Director of AGARD, a NATO Research and Development Group based in Paris. As happens with all Ukrainians wherever they go, they meet other Ukrainians. One of their best friends was a Ukrainian activist in Paris by the name of Aristide Wirsta. He introduced them to a number of talented Ukrainians living in France. During the summer months everyone in France travels to the south; so did the Yarymovych Family. There they met the Ukrainian artists Yurii Kulchytsky and Ivanna Nyzhnyk-Vynnykiv. Both artists lived and created their art in Mougins, in Volodymyr Vynnychenko's former home-stead, called *Zakoutok* (The Nook), which they converted into a ceramic studio workshop. In the *Zakoutok* the Yarymovych Family found a prodigious amount of beautifully-executed ceramic dishes, and they thus acquired a full set for use on festive occasions such as Christmas Eve Supper. Recently they decided to donate the set to our Museum to be preserved for posterity, and for visitors to view and admire the highly artistic work of talented Ukrainian artists.

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