

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

POSTERS – THE ART OF MAKING A MOTIVATING STATEMENT

by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

For ages, people have used posters in public places for the purpose of communicating various forms of information. Centuries ago, posters – also known as placards or posted bills – were mostly textual. The development of printing and various lithographic techniques, especially the innovative use of color, enabled mass production of posters and in-

of Ukrainians in the diaspora became quite ambivalent as to teaching and speaking Ukrainian to and with their children and grandchildren. To counteract this apathy and to make the community more mindful of this fact, one youth organization in New York commissioned a poster from the

heritage. One poster in our collection depicts the palms of worn and tired hands tenderly, lovingly, and protectively holding a few colorful *pysanky*. The message on the poster says *Safeguarding the Future*. The Ukrainian *pysanka* – an ancient symbol of rebirth and harboring life within is so aptly used in this poster which was produced at the mod-

song which he disseminates and protects. Legends about him and his symbolic meaning were so important and popular that almost every household had a painting of him. The artist in this poster depicts him in the traditional pose as seen in the many folk paintings. As a wandering singing minstrel, his objective is to recount to the audience the glorious historic past, to teach them to appreciate the significance of culture, and to



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make them aware that support is needed for the preservation of this cultural heritage.

The final poster that I chose from our Library is only a small reproduction of the original. This particular work is part of a large collection of posters created in the late 1980s entitled: *Holodomor Through the Eyes*

fluenced their stylistic transformation. The practical usefulness of posters in quickly reaching wide masses with desired information made it a very popular means of communication and a worldwide phenomenon. In time, the textual part of the poster became minimal, and the pictorial and decorative aspects were and are of essence. The creative trends and styles of the art world played a dominant role in the development and character of the poster.

The widest use of posters was for commercial purposes: to sell a product or to advertise events such as concerts, exhibitions, films, and rallies. Posters had to be skillfully produced, cleverly worded, and artistically appealing to make an impact and to be persuasive. This ability of the poster to persuade, motivate, and awake awareness in the onlooker is what made it a valuable tool for civic leaders and politicians during critical moments in history, during times when society needed to be mindful and to take measures, to act.

Our Museum and Library has a good collection of posters ranging from the early 20th century to the present. From these I have chosen to write about a few of them, primarily because of the relevance they had when they were produced and because they are even more relevant at present.

In the early 1980s it became quite evident that a considerable number

Pevny (1931-2007). This artist, used an idea from a popular American recruitment poster depicting Uncle Sam pointing at the onlooker and saying I Want You. In his poster Pevny has a depiction of Taras Shevchenko pointing at us and saying *Do Your Children Speak My Language?* This poster made its way not only to Ukrainian communities in America, but also all over the world wherever Ukrainians resided. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, this poster made its way to Ukraine and became extremely popular and widespread, and even a huge billboard was made from it. The irony in this is that while Ukrainians in the diaspora preferred to speak the language of the country in which they lived, the Ukrainians in many areas in Ukraine, especially in eastern Ukraine, because of Soviet propaganda, preferred to speak Russian. Pevny's poster made an impact both here and there. Many onlookers paid heed to the message that the poster presented and acted accordingly, at least for a while.

During the first years of Ukrainian independence, from 1991 and on, much attention was given to the manifestation, appreciation, and preservation of our cultural heritage which was purposely trivialized, neglected, demeaned, and partially destroyed during the Soviet days. Independence and freedom brought about the production of posters dealing with many subjects, but especially those with topics of culture and

– individuals who protected and saved our heritage in very adverse situations in order to pass it on to new generations.

The Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments produced a poster, also in the early 1990s, depicting an open folk dowry chest from which emerges an array of traditional wedding folk costumes. The message on the poster says: *One should preserve the beautiful, take it as a model, reveal oneself through it, even if it is "aged"*. This was to teach Ukrainians to acknowledge and be proud of their roots, cherish their folk culture, respect it, pay homage to it, and mostly do not discard it because it is "aged".

Another poster produced during the early years of independence depicts a Cossack, known in Ukrainian historical legends as *Kozak Mamai*, sitting cross-legged and playing on the *kobza*. In front of him are scattered a few coins with a written message next to them "For Culture". *Kozak Mamai*, a legendary figure in Ukrainian history, was known for his many exploits and heroic deeds in battles during the Cossack days. Legends say that at times he would disappear and then reappear just in the nick of time during a crucial moment and save the day. He is a symbol of the eternal defender of freedom. The *kobza* or *bandura* on which he is playing and singing symbolizes the historical and cultural memory of Ukraine preserved in

of Ukrainian Artists. The trustee of the original posters is Morgan Williams. He made small format reproductions of the whole collection and sent one set to our Library. On the poster we see a black, evil-looking crow, pulling out threads of an embroidery design from a ritual cloth (*rushnyk*). The written comment reads: *And We Were Watching and Kept Silent*. Artist unknown. Although the poster was created to commemorate the Holodomor, it has a much deeper and further reaching meaning. For Ukrainians, the *rushnyk* has served for many centuries as an object imbued with protective powers. According to an ancient belief, the *rushnyk* sanctified and safeguarded its surroundings, and it had the power to protect. The intricate designs incorporated into the *rushnyk* were considered magical and potent symbols of life, and embodied the wishes for a productive future, good fortune, and happiness. In this simple drawing, the artist shows us the horrific tragedy not only of the Holodomor, but also of the staggering catastrophe Ukraine has lived through while the black crow attempted to destroy all. The poster also gives us hope, because in the drawing the crow did not pull out all of the design on the *rushnyk*. And, the situation in Ukraine right now is such that "we are watching" but we are "no longer keeping silent" about the crow's evil deeds and plans. We are now speaking out!

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