

## The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

### FOLK ART SOURCES – DIGITIZED AND ORIGINAL FORM

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Of all the technological innovations that we are currently using, the digitizing of a diverse range of records (i.e., documents, photographs, maps, postcards, manuscripts, music scores, etc.) for preservation and for making them

accessible online is of foremost importance, especially for institutions that house such records, above all libraries. On January 6, 2016 the New York Public Library announced that it has “enhanced access to all public domain items in digital collections so that everyone has the freedom to enjoy and reuse these materials in almost limitless ways”. Someone, naturally a Ukrainian, checked out this availability, and lo and behold found that ethnographic photographs from a publication on folk art of the Zakarpattia region were actually digitized and are now accessible online. This person immediately send me a link and asked me what I know about this publication.

This gave me a good opportunity to boast about our Museum and Library and the treasures that are housed herein and preserved. Not only do we have the book in question, but we also have four separate and individual editions of the book which were published in Prague by Plamja publishers, within a year of each other, in four languages – English, French, Slovak, and Russian, and limited to only 300 numbered copies in each of the languages. The titles are as follows: **Peasant Art of Subcarpathian Russia**, 1926; **L'Art Populaire en Russie Subcarpathique**, 1926; **Lidové Umění Podkrpatské Rusi**, 1925; and **Narodnoe Iskusstvo Pokarpatskoi Rusy**, 1925. All

four have the same explanatory text written by Sergey Makovsky, 1877-1962. They include various aspects of folk art such as carving, ceramics, costume and personal decorations, weaving and embroidery, created in the Zakarpattia region, adhered to, and preserved up to the 20th century by the Carpathian Ukrainian populace. Each edition also has 100 black and white photographs and ten color plates. The translator of the English edition in the title incorrectly used the designation **Subcarpathian Russia**, instead of **Rus** or **Ruthenia** – the actual name of that area at that time. Also, each edition has minor but distinct additions. The English edition has an introduction by a J. Gordon who extolls the beauty and artistic creativity of the peasant artisan and underscores the fact that finally folk art “has won its right to serious consideration... respect from the, so-called art lover”. He maintains that we should “welcome



a famous painting by Volodymyr Makovsky (uncle of the author of the book in question) "Maiden's Eve"

all volumes such as this which enlarge our acquaintance with and our knowledge of little known areas of characteristic art”. He bemoans the fact that “modern deluge of manufactured ugliness... has already submerged many of the peasant arts of Europe” which he states is caused by two factors “the loss of tradition and the loss of leisure”. (By leisure he means the long winter months when the farmer was free from work in the field and could indulge in creativity by producing utilitarian items for his personal needs which were never devoid of artistic ornamentation). In other words, wintertime was when both the farmer and the shepherd devoted his time to home industries. The French edition has an introductory article by Denis Roche which gives detailed information about the author of the work - Sergey Makovsky. The Slovak and the Russian editions have explanatory research notes and an annotated bibliography of best known works on Ukrainian and Slavic folk art.

The author Sergey Makovsky was a Russian poet and art critic. He was the son of Kon-



stantin Makovsky, 1839-1915, who with his brothers Volodymyr Makovsky, 1846-1920, and Mykola Makovsky, 1844-1886 were renowned Russian artists. The father and his brothers traveled many times throughout Ukraine. In their paintings they masterly depicted magnificent Ukrainian landscapes and Ukrainian folk mode of life, e.g., **Maiden's Eve**, **Market Day in Ukraine**, etc. While living in St. Petersburg, Sergey Makovsky, as a leading art critic and an authority on art, organized exhibitions, edited and published an art magazine **Appolon**, and contributed articles to various art magazines.

After the Bolshevik revolution he went into exile and in 1920 settled for a while in Czechoslovakia, mainly in Prague but later lived in Paris. Historically, Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But after World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the peace talks at which the winning side redrew the map of Europe, new nations were created along with new political boundaries. As a result of this, Czechoslovakia came into existence as an independent nation in 1918 and was comprised of Czech and Slovak lands and the lands of Carpathian Ruthenia and its populace. In 1924 the educational section of Uzhhorod (capital of Carpathian Ukraine or present day Zakarpattia) namely the Municipal Council organized an exhibition in Prague entitled **Art and Life of Sub-Carpathian Russia (sic Rus)**.

Sergey Makovsky as an authority on art and an “expert on peasant art” was made the Director of this project. To collect artifacts, to learn about the folklore and folklife of the people, and to photograph the people in their traditional milieu, he traveled throughout the Carpathian area for over six months, mostly on foot. As he describes “passing from one village to another” because it is in the “isolated dwellings and settlements, nestling in the foothills of the Carpathians in the heart of primeval forests, where there are the best repositories of the traditional art”. The result of his travels was the exhibition in Prague and the eventual publication. The author amassed a wealth of documented material, artifacts, and images which serves as

an invaluable source of information for scholars today. He supplied detailed descriptions, analyses, observations, and commentaries about, at that time, the little known Carpathian region, the people and their culture which he found to be still in its pristine state, miraculously preserved to the early 20s, and soon inevitably to disappear.

Sergey Makovsky made an interesting comment about the steadfast adherence of the populace to their national dress. “The persistence of the national dress may be attributed... to the depth of the national feeling. Whether under the rule of Hungarians, Swabians, or Poles, the Ruthenians kept to their... dress, which was a sort of ensign. And this showed a healthy instinct; the national costume was an efficient protection against spiritual absorption by foreign elements. And, if after centuries of every type of enslavement, the Sub-Carpathian peasant says ‘I’m Ruthenian’, has not forgotten his native language and has preserved his orthodoxy within the Uniate faith, he must thank for this the national dress of his forefathers”.

This observation by Sergey Makovsky made in the 1920s can readily be applied to Ukrainians today. Whenever necessity arises for Ukrainians to make a national, political, patriotic statement, or a resolute statement of protest we wear our national dress or an embroidered shirt. The inheritance of this centuries-old tradition of our forefathers, this wearing of an embroidered item of national dress has united us, made us strong, and resistant to destruction in the past. Let us therefore consistently bequeath this tradition to our present and future generations!

#### PEASANT ART OF SUBCARPATHIAN RUSSIA



PLAMJA EDITION PRAGUE



Explore and Experience Our Past