

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

LESSER KNOWN, BUT TRULY DEDICATED, UKRAINIAN HEROES

by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



Lieutenant Harasym Nesterenko

As a common tradition, we faithfully commemorate the anniversaries of certain events and notable individuals to underscore their importance in our history, in our national past, and in the building of our nation. Ukrainians in the Diaspora have been conscientiously doing this for decades, especially in the years when Ukraine was under Soviet domination, when any patriotic or national display was not only forbidden, but, punishable by harsh sentencing to detention camps in the Gulag. As a result, Ukrainians in the Diaspora felt it incumbent upon them to keep the memory of their heroic past alive, and not allow it to be forgotten. Let the world know the truth about Ukrainians!

During such commemorative times we review and refresh our memory with facts pertinent to the topic and try to inform every new generation, as well as non-Ukrainians, about the significance which these events and the historic persons have had in our national development. In the month of November, we especially focus our attention on the various aspects of our struggle to gain national independence in the years 1917-1921. Special yearly gatherings commemorating events of those years give us an opportunity to do the following: to carefully analyze newly found archival material, to reflect again upon it, to present a new point of view, to reevaluate and even to highlight events/individuals



President Andrii Livytsky

which have not as yet received proper or just recognition.

One historic person, not only underappreciated and forgotten for decades until recent years, is Yuri Mahalevsky, 1876-1935 – artist, soldier, educator, civic leader, and archivist. The fine arts collection at our Museum and Library has four small oil portraits by this artist depicting activists in the struggle for independence, soldiers of the Ukrainian Army and/or officials of the newly formed Ukrainian government. All four portraits are of uniform size

(6 1/2 x 9 1/2“) painted on cardboard. The artist Yuri Mahalevsky was born in the eastern Podillia region. He studied at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts under the renown artist Ilya Repin, 1844-1930, whose artistic method he followed. On returning to Ukraine from his studies, he became fully absorbed in the social and political life in his native Podillia region. He held numerous organizational positions in various southeastern Ukrainian cities, as an educational commissar, a principal of a high school in the city of Katerynoslav (today Dnipro). He also worked with a Ukrainian publishing company in the same city and supplied it with illustrations for the publication of children's books, collection of fairy tales, etc. With the formation of the Ukrainian National Republic in 1917, he joined the Ukrainian Army. As

a soldier he fought in many battles not only with his rifle on his shoulder, but also, (as his contemporaries claim), with his artist's brush, paints, pen, and notebook in his knapsack. Undoubtedly, Mahalevsky had a keen understanding of the importance of noting, documenting, collecting, and of preserving cultural and historical artifacts, which were endangered during the turbulent years of revolution and war. Furthermore, many churches, libraries, museums, and schools underwent major destruction committed by roaming partisan bands, by Russian army deserters and defectors, by bands of robbers, etc. Mahalevsky was a witness to this destruction and felt that as much as possible it should be documented. Every piece of material dealing with episodes, deeds of army leaders and government officials during those war time days should be written down and preserved. With these concerns he approached the Minister of Education of the UNR – Petro Kholodny (the elder), 1876-1930 (who was also a noted artist, best known for his stained glass windows in the Church of Dormition in Lviv) to, as he himself said “delegate me into our active army ranks to collect historical and cultural material and record ongoing events”. The Minister of Education agreed and supported this project and issued appropriate di-

rectives to the Army authorities regarding these matters. Mahalevsky documented as much as he could by painting and recording in writing. He produced over 150 paintings which consisted of portraits of government and army leaders, and depictions of cultural artifacts. Much later he deposited them in the University of Kamianets-Podilskyi. The fate of these works is still unknown. When the government of the Ukrainian National Republic moved to the city of Tarnow in Poland, Mahalevsky went with it. Remnants of the Ukrainian Army was interned in Tarnow. Mahalevsky then decided to document the life and work of the leaders of the government, as well as of the commanders and officers of the Ukrainian army. This he did by painting their portraits and writing pertinent information about them. On the back of the of the portrait which he painted, he wrote the story of the individuals depicted by giving their names, dates, titles occupations, achievements, and the role they played in the struggle for Ukrainian independence. He worked on this from 1919 to 1921 and created over 50 portraits. After being freed from Polish internment Mahalevsky settled in Lviv. He participated in a group exhibit in Lviv in 1921 to which he submitted some of the portraits which he did in Tarnow. Based on the reviews about this exhibit, we know about some of his works. Art critics were cruel in their review of his works.



Major General Mykola Koval-Medvedsky

The major reason for this was that at that time Lviv society and the young generation of artists were enthralled by modernistic and avant-garde trends in art, and Mahalevsky's style was academic and realistic. Only now can we fully appreciate their value as historic documents. Some of his Tarnow portraits he donated to individual acquaintances, but others he eventually gave to the National Museum in Lviv. Their fate is also unknown. In the

1950s when the Soviet government began the destruction of most of the works of artists deemed nationalistic and anti-communist, Mahalevsky's portraits were among those branded as “portraits of nationalistic character” and thus should have been destroyed.

The portraits which we have in our Museum's collection are as follows:

1. A portrait of Andrii Livytsky, 1879-1954. He held various posts in the Government of the Ukrainian National Republic: Minister of Justice, Prime Minister of the UNR government, and Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After Symon Petliura's death in 1926, he headed the UNR government in exile. This portrait was painted by Mahalevsky in Tarnow, in March 1921.

2. A portrait is of Evhen Arkhipenko, 1884 - 1940s, older brother of the world famous modernist sculptor Oleksander Arkhipenko, 1887-1964. He also held

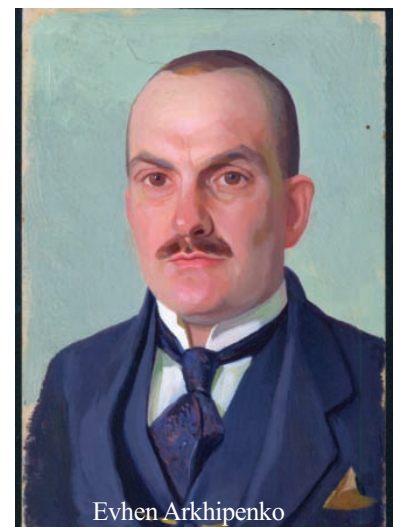
various ministerial positions in the independent governments of Ukraine, the last one being Minister of National Economy. This portrait was painted on December 15, 1920.

3. A portrait of Major-General Mykola Koval-Medvedsky, 1868-1929. He held the position of Director of the Geodesy Board (Land Surveying) and served as a member of the Ministry of Army Council of the UNR. This portrait was done in Tarnow, on October, 20, 1921.

4. A portrait of Lieutenant Harasym Nesterenko, 1890-? He was born in the Kherson region, where he worked at the ukrainization of the russified populace. He formed the so-called battalion of Free Cossacks (Vilne kozatstvo) and constantly fought battles with the enemies of Ukraine. He was a lieutenant in the Zaporizhzhia Division. At some point he joined Colonel Andrii Hulym-Hulenko, 1866-?, a leader of an insurgent battalion in the Kherson region. This portrait Mahalevsky painted in Tarnow on November 8, 1920.

Yuri Mahalevsky devoted himself entirely to visual documentation of historic events of which he was a witness, and to the portrayal of participants in these events with whom he had met and with whom he had worked. This is a remarkable testimony as to what a person with deep conviction in the necessity and expediency of completing an assignment can, with devotion and hard work do for the benefit of his people and country. The good example of this person should awaken in us a keen interest in our past and in the necessity of preserving it for future generations.

Finally, we frequently like to emphasize that the main objective of our Ukrainian Museum and Library is the preservation of our cultural heritage for posterity. And we always appreciate your generous support!



Evhen Arkhipenko

Explore and Experience Our Past