

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

The Ukrainian Cossack Theme in Art

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

The fine arts collection of our Ukrainian Museum and Library consists of works of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian artists whose creations encompass a variety of art genres. During the latter decades of the 19th and early years of the 20th centuries, a group of Slavic artists devoted their art work to the depiction of significant historical events, battle scenes, and especially the warriors engaged in these exploits, namely the Ukrainian Cossacks. Among these artists, just to name a few, were the Ukrainian born, Russian artist Illia Repin, 1844-1930; the Polish artist Jozef Brandt, 1841-1915; Juliusz Kossak, 1824-1899; as well as a number of Ukrainian artists, foremost among which was Mykola Ivasiuk, 1865-1937. These were also the years when the Ukrainian Cossack theme in painting among both Polish and Russian artists, notwithstanding the Ukrainian artists, was very popular. Some of the Polish and Russian artists traveled through Ukraine, lived in Ukraine, and developed an attachment to the Ukrainian land, its people, its history, and especially to the years of the Ukrainian Cossack days and their military traditions, bravery, and heroic deeds.

Of the considerable number of paintings devoted to the Ukrainian Cossack theme in our collection, I will write about two of them. One is a painting by Mykola Ivasiuk done in 1921 in Vienna; and the second one is done by a non-Ukrainian artist, whose style is very much like Jozef Brandt's, but the signature on the canvas is undecipherable. Jozef Brandt, a renown Polish artist, studied art in Munich where he later opened his own studio, and an art school, and generously helped young artists,

artistically and financially. Together with Juliusz Kossak he first visited Ukraine and Podillia in the 1860s, and became fascinated with the countryside, its people and history. During his lifetime he visited Ukraine on many occasions. The painting in our collection, which might be attributed to Brandt, depicts a Ukrainian Cossack riding leisurely through the steppe on his horse with a kobza in hand, playing and singing. He is dressed in the traditional Cossack garb, with a lance attached to his spur, a musket on his back, a leather pouch with gun powder, etc. A comparable genre painting by Mykola Ivasiuk depicts two Cossack horsemen riding full speed ahead through the steppe. They also are dressed in the traditional Cossack attire and armed with muskets and lances. One Cossack holds his

lance ready for attack. From the saddle bag hangs a leather flask filled with water which is essential, especially during the dry season in the steppe.

Mykola Ivasiuk was born in Bukovyna. On the basis of his exceptional artistic talent he was accepted to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and later he continued his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. It is in Munich that Ivasiuk met Brandt, who introduced him to Illia Repin and the nobleman Volodyslav Fedorovych in Ternopil, who had a magnificent collection of historical and folk artifacts. By closely examining these artifacts, artists like Brandt and Ivasiuk, were able to make historically accurate illustrations. Early on in his studies Ivasiuk decided to be a history painter. After his studies, from 1899 he lived in

Chernivtsi where he tried to help talented, but impoverished students by establishing a school for them. Here he also opened an icon painting workshop. But, it was in Chernivtsi that he actually began work on his best-known historical painting, *The Entrance of Bobdan Kbmelnytsky to Kyiv*, which he completed in 1912 in Vienna. Print copies of this painting were and still are popular. Almost every home, institutional and organizational headquarters, and business offices had it hanging on their walls. During the Ukrainian Revolution he was commissioned to do a set of postage stamps by the Directorate government of Ukraine. A few years after the Soviet government of Ukraine was established, Ivasiuk was invited by the Soviet People's Commissariat to become a professor at the Kyiv

Art Institute. Friends, suspecting danger, tried to dissuade him from going there; nevertheless, he went to Kyiv with his family at the end of the 1920s. During the first years he was treated well but soon, at first minor and then severe criticism of his work began to be stirred up for bourgeois tendencies and the like. The years of Stalin's terrible purges began. In 1937 Ivasiuk was arrested, accused, and convicted on fabricated charges of being a terrorist and a German intelligence agent. Ivasiuk pleaded his innocence to these charges and stood firm in this, even under torture. That same year, the 72-year-old artist Mykola Ivasiuk was executed by a firing squad. Many of his works were destroyed. His paintings, which were in the Ukrainian National Art Museum in Kyiv, were placed in a special so called "spets fond" (special collection) and by Soviet regulations were destined for destruction or disintegration for lack of care. Ivasiuk's painting *The Entrance of Bobdan Kbmelnytsky to Kyiv* was placed in such isolation in the underground vaults of the museum. However, through the efforts of a few museum workers, and at their own risk, the painting was saved. Finally, in 1972 it was restored and is now on permanent exhibit in the museum's exhibition gallery.

The above story is another example of how foreign domination and its heinous political system has for centuries tried to destroy the Ukrainian nation, Ukrainian identity, and Ukrainian culture. Our Museum and Library is totally dedicated to the preservation of our Ukrainian heritage for generations to come. Please support us in our noble commitment! ❖



Cossacks by M. Ivasiuk,
Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford



Cossack by J. Brandt,
Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford

Book Review by Museum Director

Msgr. John Terlecky

Stamford.

To say that Serhii Zhadan is a very interesting character would really be an understatement. He is a relatively young author (44 years old) of Ukrainian prose and poetry from the war-torn area of Eastern Ukraine and whose home base is the city of Kharkiv. He also is the lead singer of his own band, presently called "Zhadan and his dogs". He is a person who presents a revealing portrait of life in present war-torn Ukraine. He grew up under the Soviet-dominated region of Luhansk and his psyche was totally transformed by the profreedom of Ukraine that was exposed to the world by the Euro-Maidan protests of 2014. He has been called by some "the bard of Eastern Ukraine" and been compared even to Taras Shevchenko for his lust for freedom under whatever yoke a people and nation finds itself.

Both the author and the rock star have a base in the United States, particularly in the New York area. He has had poetry/prose readings and concerts through the Ukrainian studies program at Columbia University and at the New York Ukrainian Museum.

He is an author that has won many European book awards for his novels and poetry. While three of his novels have been translated into English, this collection of poetry is the first such work in English (individual poems have been published in journals and literary anthologies).

What We Live For, What We Die For consists of free verse poetry selected by the translators from Ukrainian published works during the years of 2001-2015. I found his poems to be quite earthy in their content – his characters who hunger for real freedom at great sacrifice.

No element of society is overlooked in his symbolic overtones and moral reflections. His characters are described as "common people from everyday life" whose lives are affected through revolutionary changes in the very fabric of their existence. A few of his poems read like prayers to heaven; yet he does not shy from the vulgar elements of street Ukrainian. This latter approach clearly points out what values are at stake in war-torn Ukraine.

Many may prefer to read his works in their original Ukrainian-language editions. For those who appreciate the creative dynamism of poetry to speak to the heart and who do not know Ukrainian, this book might serve as a potent amulet of naked reality in the lives of everyday people yearning for the cause that engenders hope. A reading of his poem entitled "Contraband" might just do that! ❖

Anniversary



This year Msgr. John Terlecky celebrates the 25th Anniversary as Mitered Archpriest, a special honor bestowed upon him by the late Major Archbishop Myroslav Cardinal Lubachivskyy (the Head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church) in 1994 for his dedication and many years of service.

Axios!



What We Live For, What We Die For: Selected Poems by Serhii Zhadan, translated from the Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019, \$18).

I came across this book totally by chance while scrolling under the "Ukraine" subject heading on my Amazon account. I recognized the name immediately because I have catalogued four of his books in their original Ukrainian language within the collection of our Ukrainian Museum and Library in