

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Miniature Sketches

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SKETCH 1: a woman with a young boy walking past the roadside monument carrying a bag of food and a jug of water. Ivan Kuchmak, Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.

The Fine Arts collection in our Museum is regularly enriched by the works of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian artists. Some time ago, our Museum received three miniature sketches of the noted Ukrainian artist Ivan Kuchmak (1899-1977), which he produced in 1950. These watercolor drawings were part of the private collection of Ursula and Ostap

Balaban and were bequeathed to our museum in accordance with their testament.

Ursula and Ostap Balaban were known for their collection of, devotion to, and generous patronage of Ukrainian fine arts. During their lives the Balabans amassed a substantial and representative collection of works of noted Ukrainian artists. They were also diligent-

ly engaged in the cultural activities and projects of the Ukrainian community in America, especially in the New York area, many of which they generously supported and sponsored. Their last will and testament contained guidelines as to the distribution of their collection to individual museums and cultural institutions. The Balabans bequeathed to our

museum their collection of icons, the works of Butovych, Hryshchenko, as well as other items and the three miniature watercolor etchings of Ivan Kuchmak.

The First world War interrupted Kuchmak's art studies. He joined the Sichovi Striltsi, the Ukrainian National Army, and participated in the struggle for the freedom of Ukraine. In

the course of his military service and later in the POW camps, he continuously made miniature sketches of what he saw and lived through. Eventually these miniature drawings served as material for his large oil paintings. Many of his works were dedicated to the depictions of battle scenes, tragic war time moments as well as scenes of heroism and



SKETCH 2: a hay mower whetting his scythe after hours of cutting grass and a woman raking and turning the mowed grass. Ivan Kuchmak, Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.

sacrifice.

After the war and his release from the POW camps, Kuchmak continued his art studies in Cracow, which he completed in 1925, and in 1926 he emigrated to Canada and then to the United States in the 1930s. In America, he worked in commercial art firms and was a stage and film art decorator. He also worked as an iconographer and painted a number of Ukrainian churches.

The three miniature sketches in question do not depict war-time episodes, but illustrate Ukrainian folk traditions during the harvest season. For what

purpose the artist prepared these sketches, we can only make the following supposition. He had either planned to create large oil paintings depicting harvest time activities or create large stage decoration for an intended play.

Harvest season for an agrarian society, a feature of Ukrainian life style, was one of the most important and labor-intensive activities. An abundant harvest successfully reaped and gathered was essential for the wellbeing and preservation of life of both men and animals. It aided in the prosperous development of the homestead

etc. During Harvest time, all members of the family took part from the youngest to the oldest. Every participant had an assigned duty to perform which was strictly adhered to.

Ivan Kuchmak, in the three miniature sketches, illustrates numerous aspects of harvest work and traditions. In one drawing (*Sketch 1*), we see a woman with a young boy walking past the roadside monument carrying a bag of food and a jug of water intended for the harvesters. They walk past a group of reapers who already managed to gather some grain, tie it in bundles, then sheaves

and stack them into tent-like shocks for drying. Some sheaves are left lying flat in the field surrounding the harvesters who sat down to have their first harvest day meal. Tradition required the first harvest meal to be eaten surrounded by wheat sheaves to ensure future successful harvests. In another sketch (*Sketch 2*), we see a hay mower whetting his scythe after hours of cutting grass and a woman raking and turning the mowed grass. A group of young boys are resting and a young mother is nursing her infant in the shade of a large wheat stack. The following sketch is divided

into three scenes. In each scene there is some activity. One part (*Sketch 3.1*) shows young boys in the reaped field burning stubble and baking potatoes in the hot ashes. This was a favorite pastime during harvest days. The second vignette (*Sketch 3.2*) shows the village teacher chatting to a group of boys. In the third scene (*Sketch 3.3*) we see a woman raking and tossing the mowed grass into high hay stacks.

Three miniature etchings and what a wealth of information we can gather from them about a traditional Ukrainian harvest season.



SKETCH 3.1: young boys in the reaped field burning stubble and baking potatoes in the hot ashes. Ivan Kuchmak, Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.



SKETCH 3.2: the village teacher chatting to a group of boys. Ivan Kuchmak, Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.



SKETCH 3.3: young boys in the reaped field burning stubble and baking potatoes in the hot ashes. Ivan Kuchmak, Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.

For more information about The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, please, visit www.ukrainianmuseumlibrary.org, call 203-324-0499 or 203-323-8866. We are located at: 161 Glenbrook Road, Stamford, CT 06902.