

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Ceramic Works of Serhii Lytvynenko

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



Kumanets. Serhii Lytvynenko. Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.

The fine arts collection of our Museum and Library prides itself on the wide range of art works by numerous prominent Ukrainian artists. The collection encompasses works of artists who not only lived and worked in Ukraine, but also those who, as a result of the post World War II political situation and the Soviet occupation of Ukraine, they later emigrated to countries such as the United States, Canada, South America, Australia, or remained in western European countries like France, Germany, England, etc.

At this time, our collection is regularly enriched by the works of contemporary Ukrainian artists living and working in Ukraine or outside of their native land.

A Ukrainian artist who lived and worked in Lviv between the two world wars, emigrated to America in the late 1940s, and devoted his life and work to art, was the noted sculptor Serhii Lytvynenko, 1899-1964. In the June 26, 2017 issue of the Sower I wrote about him briefly in conjunction with our Museum's 80th anniversary. In our collec-

tion we have a considerable number of Lytvynenko's sculptures. In addition to these works, we also have a few of his ceramic pieces and it is this aspect of his lesser known creative output which I will address in this article.

Serhii Lytvynenko was born in the Poltava region of Ukraine. He participated in the fight for Ukrainian Independence in the 1917-1923 years by serving in the Ukrainian National Army. After the war and after his internment in the POW camps he went to study at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts (1924-1929) and Paris (1930). After completing his studies, he decided to stay in Western Ukraine and settled in Lviv where he pursued his artistic career.

Notwithstanding uncertain economic conditions, Lytvynenko boldly opened an art studio and with all his energy, enthusiasm, and determination embarked upon creating a successful enterprise. Life for Ukrainians in the post war years of western Ukraine was quite arduous, economically, socially, and politically. In time, Galician society aroused itself from inertia and the oppressive atmosphere and a powerful national revival ensued. One of the many ways the national revival manifested itself was the erection of monuments honoring prominent persons and significant events in Ukrainian history. This gave Lytvynenko an opportunity to create a number of monuments dedicated to heroic events and noteworthy personages, including busts and sculpted portraits of distinguished cultural, social, and religious leaders. Among these works are some well known pieces such as the Ivan Franko monument "Kameniar" (The Stone Breakers) on Lychakiv cemetery, or the Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky sculpture, depicting the Metropolitan sitting in a chair. It stood in front of the National Museum in Lviv, which the Metropolitan founded. This sculpture was destroyed sometime in 1947.

In addition to sculptures, Lytvynenko was actively involved in the production of ceramics. He wished to introduce a new type of ceramic artifact by incorporating into the Galician pottery stylized Poltava and Kyievan motifs. In Lviv, he opened a ceramic studio and, according to Yuri Biliulov in his work *Galician Sculpture (Halytska skulptura)*, we learn that Lytvynenko was director of a ceramic co-op "OKO" from 1933-1937. This establishment produced decorative vases, wine-glasses, plates, miniature sculpture forms, etc. by employing traditional folk pottery shapes and Poltava folk motifs. When towards the end of World War II the Soviet Army was approaching Western Ukraine, Lytvynenko, as well as many other Ukrainians trying to escape Soviet occupation, emi-



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grated to Western Europe. Most of the Ukrainian refugees lived for a few years in the Camps for Displaced Persons. At first, Lytvynenko lived in a camp in Karlsfeld and then later in Berchtesgaden. Despite the unfavorable, limited, and challenging conditions, Lytvynenko managed to organize an art studio, conduct classes and create sculptures and ceramic artifacts.

We are fortunate to have a few samples of Lytvynenko's ceramic works in our museum. The items in question are: a vase done in Lviv in the late 1930s-early 1940s, two beverage flasks called "kumanets" (plural "kumantsi", a traditional shape of a Poltava ceramic beverage flask) and two miniature ceramic sculptures of a group of children caroling. The *kumantsi* and the miniature sculptures are signed by the artist and were done in the DP camp in Berchtesgaden in 1949. They were donated to our Museum by the artist. The vase and the *kumantsi* are decorated with styl-

ized Poltava floral motifs.

The vase was donated by Motria Holowinsky. It belonged to her parents Lesia and Lev Yatskevych who were personal friends of the artist. In their exodus from Ukraine during the war, they were detained (as were most refugees who were trying to escape the Soviets), in a transit camp in the town of Strasshof, Austria. There they were robbed of their belongings, which were packed in several trunks. Only one trunk was left untouched. In it, besides personal belongings, was the vase. They kept the vase with them throughout their travels and brought it with them to the United States.

We are grateful for Motria Holowinsky in donating this unique ceramic artifact representing the work of a noted sculptor and cultural activist Serhii Lytvynenko, to our museum. Not only does it enrich our fine arts collection but it also illustrates a lesser-known aspect of the artist's works. ❖



Miniature ceramic sculptures. Serhii Lytvynenko. Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford.



Vase. Serhii Lytvynenko. 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.