

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

TREASURES AT THE UKRAINIAN MUSEUM AND LIBRARY OF STAMFORD by Curator Lubow Wolynetz

Meet Vasyl Devdiuk - A Hutsul Wood Carver - (1873-1951)



In the museum's collection we have one item by Vasyl Devdiuk—a carved book cover done probably in the 1920s. Vasyl Devdiuk was born in Staryi Kosiv into a poor peasant family. Already as a young boy he loved to carve, but it was not to his father's liking. At age twelve he runs away from home to learn the wood carving craft from the then best known carver Yurii Shkribliak and later he goes to learn metal casting and metal carving from a folk artist in that field, Dmytro Dutchak. It was quickly evident that Vasyl surpassed his teachers in the quality and artistic designs of his works. From the age of 16 and on he participates in folk art exhibitions, industrial craft shows, county exhibitions where for his works he receives

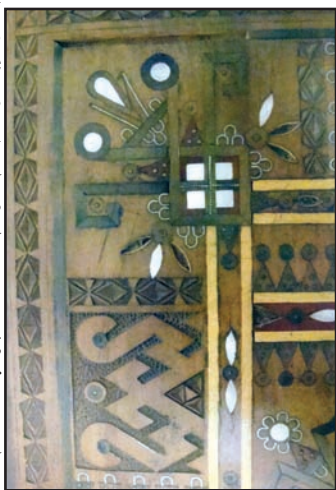
medals, special recognition, money prizes, etc. A Household-Industry Society in Kolomyia, recognizing the artistic talents of Vasyl, made arrangements for him to go to Vienna and take craft and art courses there in 1904. After his return he works as an instructor at the Vyzhnytsia Folk Art School until 1918. After World War I he opens up his own folk art school in Kosiv, specializing in metal casting and metal and wood carving. He was a very strict and demanding teacher, but he taught his students everything he knew and always said "after I teach my students everything I know, let each one of

them go along his own path". Devdiuk was constantly in search of new and innovative ways in the embellishment of his wood carved items. He decorated his works with incrustation and was one of the first to utilize different colored wood, metal (copper) wires and mother of pearl. For this type of inlaid work the artist developed a number of new decorative motifs which he skillfully combined into varied ornamental compositions.

A good example of his woodcarving style can be seen in the book cover we are fortunate to have in the museum's collection. In it we clearly see the compositional organization of his ornamentation, the inlaid work of colored wood, copper wire and mother of pearl. The motif in the central field is most complex and intricate, but integrally in unison with the smaller side motifs.

Some works of this remarkable and prominent folk artist can be found in the museums in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Kolomyia but not many. Apparently a good number of his works are in private hands outside of Ukraine, one of which is in our museum.

Among the many examples of Ukrainian folk art—wood carving occupies a distinct place. The wood carvings of the Hutsuls evoke special interest due to their original, highly artistic, and intricate designs. In the museum's collection we have several examples of wood carved items by Hutsul artisans who were renowned not only for their singular artistic talent, but also for being instrumental in applying novel methods into their works within the framework of a traditional and ancient craft.



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