

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

HOLIDAY GREETING CARDS BY ONE NOTED ARTIST

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Greeting Card

Christmas season generally evokes nostalgic musings, feelings of wondrous expectations, a desire to share with and bestow upon family and friends good tidings, an intention to envelope all with warmth and good cheer by expressing best wishes. The tradition of sending greeting cards conveying holiday wishes had been and still is a popular means of communicating with family and friends regardless of their location – close by or far away. In view of this, the production of holiday cards has always been immense, although nowadays it has been slightly diminished, because of the introduction of electronic and virtual greeting cards. In selecting a holiday greeting card one usually chooses cards with images which one feels to be appropriate, meaningful, inspiring, aesthetic and having artistic value.



Greeting Card

Greeting card production and usage gained great popularity in Ukraine from the beginning of the 20th century. Ukrainians in the Diaspora, primarily

after the communist takeover of Ukraine, produced their own holiday greeting cards. Ukrainians in Ukraine and in the Diaspora were particularly mindful of the images on holiday cards. In addition to written greetings and wishes, singular images on holiday cards often stirred up even deeper emotions, musings, remembrances of the past, of what once was. Pre-World War

II greeting cards in western Ukraine and especially cards produced in the Diaspora depicting the religious aspect of the holiday, always included some specifically Ukrainian features. For example, the Holy Family would be dressed in Ukrainian folk garb, the three kings would be depicted as significant historical figures, and children would be dressed in their folk costumes when going caroling, etc. For the people of Ukraine and for Ukrainian immigrants around the world, such features on greeting cards were an essential part of their identity, as reminders of their traditions and heritage.

Among the dozen or so of recently acquired greeting cards by our Museum and Library are two Christmas cards, the works of the noted artist Osyp Kurylas, 1870-1951. They were printed in Lviv in the late 1920s. On one card there is a Christmas Eve Supper scene taking place in a Hutsul home. Three generations of family members, festively dressed are sitting around a table covered with a white tablecloth under which some hay is visible. The table is laden with traditional food, Christmas bread – a kolach and a lit candle. The second card by the same artist depicts a group of carolers (young and old) with musical instruments – a shepherd's flute, a horn, and a saxophone. The youngest caroler is holding a bright star. All are dressed in

heavy winter coats. Some have warm fur hats; others, have army caps of the *Sichovi Striltsi* (Sharp Shooters).

The artist Osyp Kurylas was a graduate of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts. He specialized in portraiture and genre paintings, and was especially fond of depicting the daily life and work of the Hutsuls. Once his artistic talents became known and appreciated, he was given various commissions, one of which was to prepare illustrations for Mykola



Kurylas' illustration for the army humorist magazine *Samokhotnyk* (around 1915-17)

Arkas's *History of Ukraine*. He also illustrated the popular children's magazine *Child's World*, as well as many literary works. Due to the popular demand for cards, Kurylas produced many, not only holiday greeting cards, but also cards depicting historical themes, portraits of noted Ukrainian cultural leaders, etc. In 1910, Kurylas produced two religious paintings of Our Lady and of Jesus Christ. In these works, for the first time in religious paintings, Ukrainian elements were added. Our Lady and Jesus Christ are both dressed in embroidered shirts. Art critics consider Kurylas to be one of the first to introduce Ukrainian elements into religious painting. These two works the artist was commissioned to do for Ukrainians in America, for the Ukrainian Church in Syracuse, NY. With the blessing of Metropolitan Sheptytsky both paintings were reproduced and made available as prints for wider usage. Some of us might be familiar with them, since they could be found in practically every home. Our Museum also has copies of these prints. During World War I, Kurylas joined the *Sichovi Striltsi* and was assigned to the Army Press Headquarters. Here his duty was also to produce artwork by supplying illustrations for various Army publications. One such publication was the humorist magazine



Kurylas painting portraits of Sichovi Striltsi

Samokhotnyk (which we have in our Library) for which he supplied caricatures, comical sketches, and satirical poems. Later, he supplied many illustrations for the annual almanac *Chervona Kalyna*. After the War he settled in Lviv. Here he continued to illustrate various magazines and publications, as well as to produce religious paintings for various churches in western Ukraine.

Most, if not all of his holiday greeting cards, illustrate a religious holiday within the context of Ukrainian traditions and culture. It is precisely these holiday greeting cards that renew in us spiritual gladness, fill us with warm emotions, and evoke sentimental memories of the past. They certainly remind us who we are, and teach us to cherish and be mindful of our Ukrainian heritage.



Religious picture Kurylas did for St. John the Baptist Church in Syracuse, NY.



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