

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Serhii Hladky – A Forgotten Ukrainian Artist

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



Illustration "To Ukrainian Museum" by S. Hladky, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Our Library holdings contain a very fine collection of art books. Among them there are some unique and rare publications. One of these rare examples is a book entitled *Ukrainski Vzirtsy* (Ukrainian Designs) by the artist Serhii Hladky (Serge Gladky).

In 1939 the artist Serhii Hladky donated to our Museum his latest publication whose full title was *Ukrainski Vzirtsy, Slavianska seriya* (Ukrainian Designs, Slavic series). This book consists of 20 color plates of illustrations done by the artist using the *Pochoir* (hand

stenciling) printing technique. This technique is extremely painstaking, since colors are applied separately to each stencil by hand. Each plate might need as many as thirty stencils to produce one image. One of the color plates in this book with a specific and appropriate ornamental motif, the artist dedicated to our Museum. It has the following inscription: "To Ukrainian Museum in USNA. With feelings of deep esteem I'm sending you my last work. January 31, 1939". (signed) S. Hladky.

Who was the artist Serhii Hladky (Serge

Gladky), and what is special about his art works? From the scattered and scant data gathered from various sources, we managed to reconstruct, although only partially, his life and artistic output.

Serhii Hladky was born in the Poltava region in about the 1880s. The exact date of his birth is not known. He was an architect, designer, stage costume designer, and a graphic artist. He studied at the Institute of Civil Engineering in St. Petersburg. According to one source, Hladky traveled extensively throughout Asia (Tibet, Mongolia) and Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Dalmatia). In his travels he apparently paid special attention to the architecture and folk art of the particular regions.

After World War I, Hladky immigrated to Czechoslovakia where in the 1920s (1924-1926) he published a magazine *Umeni Slovanu* (Slavic Art). He then moved to Paris where an exhibit of his works in 1929 received wide attention and favorable reviews by French art critics. His art works were a combination of constructivist and cubist style, incorporating abstract designs, geometric motifs, symbolic shapes, etc. His works were a major influence in the development of ART DECO and modern abstract art. He was considered to be a precursor of modern abstract art whose works influenced fashion, design, and archi-

ecture. Hladky published his works using the *Pochoir* technique, as a result of which only a limited number of copies were printed for each publication. The most notable of his works were *Fleurs* (1929) (only 350 copies were printed), *Nouvelles Compositions Decoratives* (1929), *Point de Vue* (1932), and others.

In the 1920s and early 1930s there were other Ukrainian artists studying art in Paris. Upon their return to western Ukraine they founded the Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists and organized art exhibits in Lviv from 1932 to 1939, in order to acquaint the Ukrainian public with new, modern trends in art. Apparently, Hladky was in contact with this group of artists because for the 1932 exhibit in Lviv he sent 18 pieces of his art works from his album *Point de Vue*.

During or just before World War II, the artist returned to Ukraine. After this his fate is unknown. Why had he returned to his homeland during these dangerous wartime days? During the Bolshevik occupation of western Ukraine? What awaited him there? Imprisonment, slave labor camps in Siberia? This was a fate which so many Ukrainian artists, intellectuals, social activists had lived through, or died prematurely.

The afore mentioned Serhii Hladky's book also includes an introductory panel in which the artist illuminates his understand-

ing of art:

"In a foreign land, January 1939,

Ukrainian folk Art and monuments of antiquity were the basis of my paintings in this collection. The majority of my works were based on the art of the Slavic people. My aim was not only to find a resolution to art problems, but also to systematize the very foundations of decorative compositions. My approach was also pedagogical. I also took into consideration all that the new dynamic age gave me, and not only in art, because a separate art cannot exist without a connection with the constant progress of humanity. My thoughts, in the form of these compositions with which I'm beginning the Slavic series

of decorative motifs, I bequeath as an offering, with sincere greetings and wishes to my Ukrainian nation". Serhii Hladky.

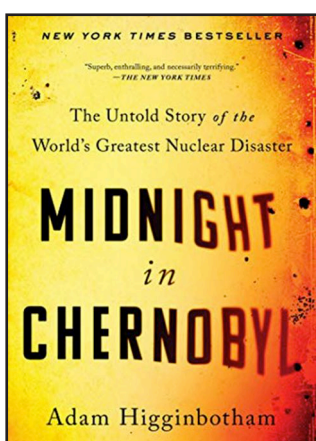
The life and works of Serhii Hladky is another striking example of a talented and innovative Ukrainian artist who greatly contributed to and was a major influence in the development of abstract art and especially ART DECO, but who is little known among Ukrainians. The book of his decorative motifs, which he donated to our Museum in 1939, is a fascinating example of his work and possibly the only copy in existence. Truly a valuable addition to our institution! ❖



Illustration by S. Hladky, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Book Review by Museum Director

Msgr. John Terlecky



Midnight in Chernobyl: the untold story of the world's greatest nuclear disaster by Adam Higginbotham. (New York : Simon & Schuster, 2019, \$29.95)

It has been thirty-three years since the terrible nuclear disaster at Chornobyl, Ukraine occurred. Yet, the event even more has captured the undivided attention of the media world. The triangular zone of the nuclear plant, as well as its residence city Prypiat is the number one tourist demand for those visiting Kyiv. HBO has begun airing its cable series *Chernobyl*. Less than one year apart, two major books have been published: the first one was written by Dr.

Serhii Ploky, the director of the Harvard Research Institute, entitled *Chernobyl: the history of the natural disaster*; and this second book which I am currently enjoying.

Both books reveal the literary style of their authors. Dr. Ploky is an academic professor of history who has written a number of books on Eastern Europe, while Adam Higginbotham is a free-lance journalist, most noted for frequent contributions to such periodicals as *"The New Yorker"*, *"GQ"* (Gentleman's Quarterly) and *"Smithsonian"*.

There are some sections of *Midnight in Chernobyl* that are so enthralling as a fictional spy thriller; yet we know that the disaster at Chernobyl in 1986 is a reality. My heart was pounding as I read the mid-section of the book describing the tragic event almost minute-by-minute. It is a very good read that keeps you wanting to get to the next hour in the chain of moments leading up to during that historical tragedy. The narrative style of the book produces a number of errors that occurred in the building of this nuclear plant, and the cloud of secrecy that

enveloped it due to Soviet philosophy of protecting the image of the state above all other factors. Particularly moving are the individual stories of real living heroes and villains. I felt the pain of wives living in darkness—trying to find out what happened to their husbands, and at the same evacuating their apartment buildings with meager possessions for an unpublished notice.

I found the first part of the book to be too technical for my understanding. It tries to explain legitimate Soviet thinking for promoting their development of "nuclear energy," as if it was something similar as a "race to be the first to land on the moon". A number of scientific models and the actual building of nuclear reactors Soviet-style are revealed as overlooking basic principles and construction methods all for the sake of Soviet pre-eminence. Such philosophy usually has elements of incompetence causing tragedy, and the Chernobyl story is definitely a horrendous tragedy!

The author follows up the morning hours of April 26, 1986 with an attempt to

present the Soviet attitude in the hours, days and weeks following the incident. His insightful journalistic style unveils a contest of Soviet minds: should openness or *glasnost* be employed in presenting this incident to the world, or is the state to be protected at a cost of lives and confusion. The latter, regrettably, is what authorities in charge chose to do.

This is a book for adult readers. The author's description of radiation poisoning and the helplessness of the residents of Prypiat is quite explicit. Imagine one day enjoying the benefits of living in a model Soviet city and then forced to abandon it without any fitting explanation. There are some pages in the book that may require a strong stomach or sympathy for so much that was abandoned and lost.

The book is well researched and contains a number of personal interviews from those affected by this sudden cataclysm of events. However one feels about the causes and effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, this is a book that should be read! ❖