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DATELINE NEW YORK: Images of Ukraine

by Helen Smindak

Andriy Khomyk's enchanting reverse-glass paintings of life in Ukraine finally made it to New York. The Lviv artist had been scheduled to show his work at the Ukrainian Mission to the United Nations three years ago, when he was a finalist in a statewide competition in Syracuse — but a conflict of events interfered.

Thanks in large part to Plast's Pershi Stezhi sorority and its president, Martha Kebalo, Mr. Khomyk's work was exhibited recently at the Mayana Gallery in New York, with the artist himself on hand to greet guests and to explain and discuss the procedure of painting on glass. Later, the exhibit enjoyed successful showings in Chicago and Detroit, under the sponsorship of local Pershi Stezhi chapters.

Mr. Khomyk's jewel-like paintings first came to my attention at the 1992 Lemko Festival in the town of Zdynia, in southeastern Poland. Strolling through the bazaar area with my husband, I spotted a group of young people seated on a grassy slope; near them, set out in neat rows on the ground, were small framed glass paintings with depictions of Ukrainian folk scenes.

As I picked up a portrait of a Kozak and his tearful sweetheart for scrutiny, a young man detached himself from the group and identified himself as the artist. The price, he said, would be \$13 (U.S.); my husband handed over the required amount and I tucked the newspaper-wrapped painting inside my shoulder bag, elated to add another attractive piece of Ukrainian art (and what a bargain.) to the Smindak's collection. The back of the reverse-glass painting bore the artist's name and the title of the piece in Ukrainian: Andriy Khomyk, 1992 "Kozak vidyidzhaie, divchynonka plache" (As the Kozak departs for battle, his sweetheart weeps).

Revisiting the Lemko Festival in 1996, I came across Mr. Khomyk again, this time with his father, resettled Lemko poet/folklorist Vasyl Khomyk, now a resident of Lviv. The artist was showing a delightful series of 10 scenes portraying Ukrainian wedding customs — courtship, betrothal, preparation of the korovai (the traditional braided wedding bread) and so on. I was tempted to buy on the spot, but knowing it would be folly to tote glass as I traipsed through Poland and Slovakia before entering Ukraine, I made arrangements to meet the artist in this hometown at the end of my journey.

Seven weeks later, Mr. Khomyk proudly showed off his work — some of it on display at the Sheptytsky Gallery in Lviv's Old Town section, the rest at his home/workshop near Shevchenkivskyi Hai (Lviv's outdoor folk museum). His wife, Svitlana, served up a light repast, including some of the most delicious borsch I have ever tasted, before I was allowed to feast my eyes on Mr. Khomyk's masterpieces. This time, mindful of a family wedding in the offing, I selected two paintings from the wedding series as a gift for the bride-to-be, my daughter.

Both the wedding scenes and the Kozak tableau were among the 72 works shown at the Mayana Gallery to many admiring visitors and buyers. It was satisfying to note that other spectators also were drawn to the painting of the Kozak and his girlfriend.

Against a background of undulating green hills and valleys and a cloud-speckled blue sky stands the brooding Kozak, one arm around a demure young woman who leans her head on his shoulder, a tear glinting on her cheek. Next to them, the tops of a plaited twig fence hold upside-down crocks set out to dry and the Kozak's red-tasseled fur hat. A striped grey cat nuzzles up playfully to the couple, while the Kozak's horse drinks from a bucket beside the well near a thatched-roofed cottage. It is traditional realism, but with contemporary touches — the smoke rising from the cottage chimney and the smoke from the Kozak's pipe swirl upward in plumes that merge in mid-air, perhaps carried by the same breeze that propels the arms of a distant windmill.

Unlike the glass paintings of American-born artist Yaroslava Surmach Mills, whose remarkable work emphasizes fine lines and rich detail, and the happy, cartoon-like characters drawn by Lviv artists Ihor and Eleonora Bilinsky, Mr. Khomyk's work focuses on bold lines and forms, glossing over the finer points of facial features and extremities. The Kozak's face, for instance, is defined by two black triangles (his eyebrows) and a black oblong denoting his thick mustache; these two dark areas are joined by a thin straight line that delineates his nose. The wavy lines on his forehead and a downturned semi-circle below the mustache convey his sadness. The girl's face, shown (surprisingly) both in profile and in a partial frontal views, has no eyes, only downcast eyelashes on one side. The fingers of her hand, like those of her lover, and the paws of the kitten beside them are drawn in contour, without exact delineation.



Andriy Khomyk poses in front of his exhibit at the Mayana Gallery with Martha Kebalo (left) of the Pershi Stezhi Plast sorority and his wife, Svitlana.

Mr. Khomyk likes to give attention to the exactness of settings and costumes, and to the subtleties and bravura of color. Lines and forms appear to be his forte; with these he interprets depth and feeling so that the viewer instantly grasp the mood and meaning of a scene, as, for example, in "Taina Vecheria" (The Last Supper) and "Rusalky" (The Mermaids).

Although he holds degrees in decorative and applied arts, Mr. Khomyk has been painting almost exclusively on glass since discovering this medium during group expeditions to Carpathian villages in 1990. Because the centuries-old art form of painting in reverse on glass nearly perished during the Soviet era, it is his ambition to restore it. He says glass painting is an intriguing medium to work in as it is "unforgiving to error."

His philosophy is to find beauty despite man's seeming destruction of his soul and his environment. By utilizing a modern approach, he hopes to show unity and harmony where there is sadness, indifference and emptiness.

Mr. Khomyk works as a book illustrator and a teacher in a children's art school in Lviv, devoting his remaining time to painting on glass. His turnout is prodigious. In addition to his very popular folkloric paintings, he has come up with complete series devoted to such themes as people and their professions (musicians, tavern keeper, carter, shoemaker), Ukrainian religious traditions (Sviat Vechir, Easter, the Nativity), the Kozaks of the Zaporozhian Sich, Ukrainian demonology (devils, demons of water and mud), Lemko traditions and sayings, and Ukrainian sur-

names that derive from occupations (Kravchuk — tailor, Tkachuk — weaver, Kovalenko — blacksmith).

Mr. Khomyk has a special fondness for scenes of Lviv that passed by before he was born — known as "retro" Lviv, scenes from the 1920s and 1930s. In scenes of this era, his style becomes more contemporary, taking on an Art Deco look characterized by bold outlines and streamlined, rectilinear forms. This method is evident in such paintings as "Night Bar," "Last Tango" and "Red Light District."

Colors match the spirit and the setting of every Khomyk work — warm golds dominate a harvest scene, dark hues with radiant halos are used for the figures in "The Last Supper," Carpathian russets and browns stand out in the Hutsul scene "The Baptism," while luminescent blues and greens highlight "The Mermaids." Deeper, brighter colors, however, appear in paintings that reflect the 1920s period.

Apart from the small paintings with Ukrainian folklore motifs, priced at \$85, most of the works in the show (some of them as large as 30 by 60 inches or 40 by 50 inches) carried price tags ranging from \$200 to \$1,200.

Mr. Khomyk has had several one-man exhibitions and has participated in a large number of international and national exhibitions. His works can be found in private collections in Ukraine, Poland, Germany, France, Canada and the U.S., and a number have been purchased by Ukraine's Ministry of Culture. Harkening to his roots, as he has in the past, the artist and his work will undoubtedly be present at the next Lemko Festival in Zdynia in July.

Textile designs

Zoriana Sokhatska-Atlantova delights in enriching and embellishing various textile surfaces with designs applied by means of paint and batik work.

Ms. Sokhatska's skill in this specialized field was displayed here during a one-day exhibit at the Selfreliance Center on Second Avenue, sponsored by Branch 83 of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America.

The freelance artist showed a variety of art in this medium that included wall hangings, scarves and dresses. For good measure, she also exhibited some watercolors and beadwork. All that was missing from her supply were the monumental decorative works she has created in Ukraine.

Her paintings on fabric included a floral work done in the exuberant manner of Petrykivka, the village in eastern Ukraine that epitomizes stylized floral and plant motifs for wall and furniture decoration.

Paint and batik (she employs both hot and cold wax in the resist-work method) were combined on cotton for an impressive work titled "Easter Motifs," recreating images of Hutsul churches and dwellings.

Ms. Sokhatska's expertise in batik art was evident in a number of abstract- and floral-print dresses and scarves (most of them snapped up by gallery visitors) and in wool tapestry hangings.

An unusual framed work brought pysanky into play: decorated Easter eggs were mounted inside a woven



A batik work by Zoriana Sokhatska-Atlantova titled "Easter Bells."

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