

U of A promotes preservation of Ukrainian folklore and culture

MARIA KOTOVYCH
News Staff

Scholars of world-class Ukrainian folklore research at the University of Alberta are promoting international collaboration.

On 27 February, Lubow Wolynetz, curator of the Ukrainian Folk Art Collection at the Ukrainian Museum in New York City, spoke at the Royal Alberta Museum, and followed up with a 1 March presentation at the U of A. Her presentations discussed the role of the Ukrainian Museum in preserving and promoting Ukrainian folklore, and also of the role of folklore itself in preserving Ukrainian ethnic identity.

Since its opening in 1976, the museum has featured displays of many Ukrainian folk items, including folk dress and embroidery, breads, Easter eggs (*pysanky*) and wood carvings. The museum also offers workshops and other educational programs, with the *pysanka*-making workshop being the most popular, Wolynetz said.

Dr Natalie Kononenko from the U of A's Peter & Doris Kule Centre for Ukrainian and Canadian Folklore said that Alberta has become a leader in the promotion and study of Ukrainian folklore.

"Edmonton and its museums and the University of Alberta [have] the biggest Ukrainian folklore centre in all of North America," Kononenko, who is the Kule Chair of Ukrainian Ethnography at the Centre, said.

Additionally, she noted that Alberta in general is rich with Ukrainian folklore, ranging from dance to *pysanky* to embroidery.

She described the importance of folk culture in creating ethnic identity.

"[Folk culture has] wide appeal, [not only with] those of Ukrainian descent, who are no longer Ukrainian speakers ... [but it] can also appeal to the larger community," Kononenko said. "The emphasis [of folklore is] on this more common, artistic expression that appeals to every person. That pleasure of beauty elevates the spirit to such an extent—you go to a museum and you say, 'That is



MICHALMLYNARZ

MORE THAN FANCY EGGS Wolynetz promotes richness of Ukrainian culture.

really gorgeous."

For Ukrainians whose families have been in Canada for several generations, cultural items, like *pysanky*, are important, because enjoying them does not rely on the native language, something that may have been lost through the generations living in Canada. It's for this precise reason that museums are so important in transmitting and depicting folk culture, Kononenko said.

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DR NATALIE KONONENKO

During her presentation, Wolynetz also talked about the importance of symbols in Ukrainian folklore, which are displayed at the Ukrainian Museum. For instance, the Ukrainian Easter bread, the *paska*, harkens back to pre-Christian days. The bread and its decorations are baked in the shape of a sun. The ritual surrounding *paska*-making was always a

significant part of Ukrainian culture.

"*Paska*-baking was a very important activity for the mistress of the house. It has to be a successful *paska*, otherwise she would be very embarrassed to go to church and have all the neighbours see that it didn't come out right. Sometimes women would have to bake it two or three times but it has to look well," Wolynetz said with a laugh.

Wolynetz mentioned that when the Ukrainian Museum first opened, it received very good reviews from local newspapers, along with a strong positive reaction from the general American public.

She noted that the majority of people attending the different educational workshops aren't of Ukrainian descent. These workshops continue to be very popular in the New York museum; here at the U of A, The Kule Centre will be offering a *pysanka*-making workshop on 16 March as well.

"One of the things that Western Canada has done has been to not fall into the trap of not ignoring the folk stuff, and I think that's a real, real plus in terms of what happens at the University of Alberta and in Edmonton as well, that they won't look down at the folk art, that they will say, 'Hey, I'm proud of making *pysanky*,'" Kononenko said.

NEWS BRIEF

U OF A UKRAINIAN HISTORY EXPERT RECRUITED BY HARVARD UNIVERSITY

After scouting from among hundreds of top scholars of Ukrainian history, Harvard University chose a University of Alberta professor last month to join its faculty.

Dr Serhii Plokhii from the Department of History, and Director of the Research Program on Religion and Culture at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), will begin his work at Harvard in the fall.

Plokhii explained that Harvard's Ukrainian Research Institute has a long history of collaboration with scholars at the U of A.

"The fact that someone from here, from this Institute from the U of A, will hold a position at Harvard will help with this co-operation," Plokhii said.

Plokhii has worked on different projects for the U of A, including editing several volumes of the English translation of Mykhailo Hrushevsky's ten-volume *History of Ukraine-Rus'*. He has also conducted research on how icons reflect the history of the Cossacks (Ukrainian freedom fighters of the 16th to the early 20th century)



JOSH NAULT

BOSTON IN THE FALL Plokhii says he will help further academic collaboration.

and the role of churches in creating an ethnic identity among Ukrainian-Canadians.

"It's kind of a rock ... other institutions get created, some of them disappear, but the church stays," Plokhii said. "It's not only religion, it's tradition, it's culture that is preserved and that is passed on to the next generation."

CIUS is a leading centre of Ukrainian studies, which sponsors a diversity of publications

and research programs, scholarly and student exchanges, and the Ukrainian Language Education Centre.

In May, CIUS and St Petersburg University will co-sponsor a speaker from St Petersburg, who will be in Edmonton to speak about recently found documents about Ivan Mazepa, Cossack leader from 1687–1709. The documents had previously been presumed missing, but were found in archives in St Petersburg.

Maria Kotovych, News Staff

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