



In the Year of 1933 by Ivan Novobranets, Poltava, Ukraine. Oil on canvas, 70 x 110, 1988.

Maryna GUDZEVATA talks to E. Morgan Williams, Founder & Trustee of the collection of artworks dedicated to Holodomor. He is the director of government affairs, Washington office, for the SigmaBleyzer private equity investment management group. He serves as president of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council. In 2007 he was presented a state award, the Distinguished Services Order, by President Viktor Yushchenko. Mr Williams does not have any Ukrainian background — his family hails from Wales.



Center: 75th Commemoration by Irene Popovych Bojkewycz, Chicago, USA. Left and right: Year 1933 by Victor Cymbal, New York, USA. Original: 475 x 158, charcoal on paper, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, South Bound Brook, New Jersey.

HOLODOMOR: THROUGH THE EYES OF UKRAINIAN ARTISTS

Mr Williams, when did the idea of collecting artworks dedicated to Holodomor come to you?

Holodomor, genocide by starvation directed against Ukrainians in the Soviet Union during 1932–1933, was one of the most covered up, denied, and hidden major human tragedies in history. The Soviets used all of their many and severe repressive powers, from 1932 to 1998, to deny and cover up the Holodomor. In the Soviet Union the news media and artistic community were totally repressed in terms of writing about or creating artwork about the Holodomor. It was not until the late 1990s that the silence was finally broken in Ukraine.

In 1997 I started having discussions with Dr. James Mace, noted Holodomor researcher and scholar, about the Holodomor and what could be done to inform the world about the great tragedy that the Ukrainians suffered under Stalin. We both knew it was important to have the best scholarship and research but it was also important to show such human suffering visually.

Almost no photographs existed that could be documented to have been taken in Ukraine in 1932–1933. Most of the photographs used to depict the Holodomor in books and other materials in the past were actually taken in Russia during the famine of 1921–1923.

Only around 20 photographs taken in Kharkiv have been documented. Jim and I knew that many Ukrainian artists had been murdered, sent to the GULAG or severely repressed during the Soviet era. The fear of creating any art, music, literature, etc., related to the crimes of the Soviet Union was strong and real — artists were just afraid to deal with this subject. Jim mentioned that even as late as in 1997 most artists in Ukraine would not deal with such controversial subjects. ♦

From left to right: Morgan Williams, Dr. Deborah Taylor, Marta Kolomayets, William Taylor (U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine). The three Holodomor paintings in the background are by Anatoliy Kolomayets, father of Marta Kolomayets.





One Cannot Forget by Vira Kuleba-Barynova, Kyiv, Ukraine. Oil on canvas, 90 x 120, 2008.



Great Famine in Ukraine 1932-33 by Victor Zaretsky, Kyiv, Ukraine. Oil on canvas, 130 x 130, 1989.

So in late 1997 I began a search in Ukraine to look for any artworks about the Holodomor that existed and for artists who would be willing, out of their family memory and artistic souls, to deal with the Holodomor and other Soviet crimes.

How did you learn about the Holodomor?

I first came to Ukraine in the early 1990s. I was not aware of the Holodomor at that time. During my later visits — I worked in agricultural and agri-business development — various people started telling me about the Holodomor and I became very interested in the events of the early 1930s.

What artworks were the first in your collection?

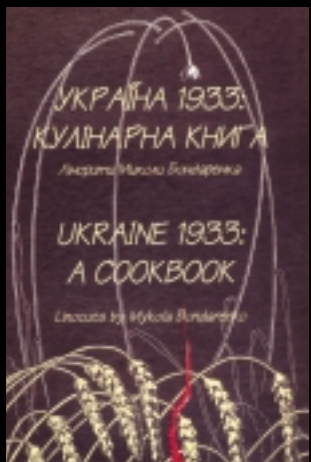
The first Holodomor artworks I found in Kyiv were 15 outstanding original posters (tempera on board) created from 1989 to 1993 by poster and graphic artists who had been trained in Soviet times but were now willing to break out of the restrictions of the past. Poster art is a great medium for depicting political and governmental crimes. The posters were created for poster exhibitions put on by the artists themselves, not by the government. ▶

1932-1933 And the Sun is Risen... by Valeriy Viter, Kyiv, Ukraine. Tempera on board, 70 x 100, 1999.





In My House. Ukraine 1933: A Cookbook. Linocut # 84 by Mykola Bondarenko, Dmytrivka, Sumy region, Ukraine. 60 x 50, 2003.



The posters had been collected by two young artists, Volodymyr and Irena Veshtak. They were poster and graphics artists in the late 1980's and were among those who started doing posters about Soviet crimes, Chernobyl, destruction of culture and so forth. These 15 were the first artworks purchased for the collection and are still among the very best artwork in the collection today.

Are there any outstanding works that you consider to be the pride of your collection?

There are now 6 artworks by Vira Kuleba in the collection. These are really outstanding works. There is one artwork by Victor Andresky created shortly before he died in 1990. He and his wife Alla Horska were dissidents in the 1950's and she was murdered under mysterious circumstances. Her death was thought to have been the work of the KGB.

Tell us more about your search for artworks and about artists that you've met.

The search continued and soon more poster art was found and also oil-on-canvas works and pencil-on-paper graphics. Finally a few artists were found, who because of what they had been told about their family members who had died in the Holodomor, were willing to consider creating new Holodomor related artworks.



Where Did You Hide Grain? by Mykhailo Ivanchenko. Husakovo village, Cherkasy Oblast, Ukraine. Ink on paper, 40 x 60, 2004.

Valeriy Viter, a Kyiv poster artist, has created nine very outstanding poster artworks about the Holodomor.

I found one graphics artist, Volodymyr Kutkin, who as a young art student in Kyiv, had been sent to the GULAG for five years. During the last 12 years of his life he created 120 pencil-on-paper artworks about his personal experiences during the Holodomor and in the GULAG. All of these original artworks are now in the collection.

Another graphics (linocut) artist who designed bookplates, Mykola Bondarenko, from Sumy Oblast, became very interested in the stories of Holodomor survivors. From 1988 to 1993 he created one artwork for every item he was told someone tried to eat.

Mykola has created over 80 artworks dedicated to Holodomor and my collection contains copies of all of Mykola's artwork.

In 1999 we found Nina Marchenko, an artist from Kyiv who grew up in Poltava Oblast. Nina had suffered a lot under the Soviet regime and she really wanted to create some artworks to show what happened to women during the Holodomor. From 1999 to 2001 Nina created four large outstanding monumental artworks in the style of "Socialist Realism" about suffering and death in 1932-33.

In 2005 I met another artist who grew up in Poltava Oblast, now an artist and art professor in Kyiv, Vira Kuleba. Vira's grandfather and grandmother died in the 1933 and Vira personally experienced the famine that occurred after WWII. She said her paintings express deeply her personal experiences as a child and her love for Ukraine.

Vira told me she had painted three artworks about what happened to her family during the Holodomor. Since then Vira has created three more such artworks. They come from Vira's strong feelings, her passion, her love for Ukraine, her very soul.

Were there any problems you faced in looking for artworks or publicly displaying your collection?

Our first Holodomor artwork exhibition was held in November 2000 at the Teachers' House in Kyiv. We displayed some anti-Stalin works that some people told us should not be displayed as we might have trouble. A Ukrainian labor union used the Teachers House for a meeting during the exhibition and they demanded the exhibition be taken down as it all represented something that did not happen. The head of the Teachers' House refused to take the Exhibition down.

Since then several more exhibitions at the Ukrainian House have been held in Ukraine. The Mi-



nistry of Culture used the artwork from the collection in exhibitions around Ukraine in 2006 and 2007. Most of the collection was on display at the Holodomor 75th Commemoration Exhibition at the Ukrainian House in Kyiv in November, 2008.

Holodomor artwork has been very hard to find. Most artists do not deal with this subject. To put the collection together has taken considerable effort over the past 12 years.

Were there any reviews of the collection?

Most of the reviews that I have read were in English and they were positive. But still there are some people who question whether the Holodomor actually took the lives of several million people and whether it was a genocidal action against Ukrainians.

Which countries have already seen the collection?

The Holodomor artworks have mainly been shown in Ukraine in 2006 and 2007 under a program sponsored by the Ministry of Culture. 50 sets of poster reproductions were distributed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ukrainian Embassies around the world in 2007. A Ukrainian Museum in Chicago displayed reproductions of 50 works in November of this year. Fifty Holodomor posters from the collection were displayed in the House of Parliament in London this year.

What is the most important message of the collection?

The most important message of the collection is the story of what happened in Ukraine in the early

1930s...about those who were murdered by starvation and about the governmental system and leaders who caused the death of so many.

The Holodomor: Through The Eyes of Ukrainians Artists collection now contains over 350 original artworks. The search for new artworks continues. We want to thank all those who have donated funds to the collection, so that additional artworks can be purchased and exhibitions can be set up. All funds are donated through the Ukrainian Federation of America in Philadelphia.

We are now working with museums, libraries, universities, authors, teachers, and others who want to use copies of the artworks. Those who are interested in the collection and possibly use of the artworks should contact me at morganw@patriot.net. We welcome those who wish to use the artworks in the collection to tell the world about the Holodomor.

The basic collection is now being expanded to include other crimes against the Ukrainian people. The next part of the collection is called: *GULAG: Through the Eyes of Ukrainian Artists*. Artists in Ukraine who have or are willing to deal with the subject of the Ukrainians who were sent to the GULAG are much harder to find than Holodomor artists. We have only found one artist in Ukraine who created many artworks on this subject. This artist spent 5 years in the GULAG in the early 1950s. We hope to create a GULAG Exhibition in Kyiv during 2009. ■

Mother of the Year '33 by Nina Marchenko, Kyiv, Ukraine. Oil on canvas, 180 x 220, 1998-2000.

Famine — 1933 by Volodymyr Kutkin, Kyiv, Ukraine. Pencil on paper, 85 x 60, 1988.

