

## Kilim Exhibition Opens at Shevchenko Museum

On a cool November 1 afternoon, visitors to the Taras Shevchenko Museum in Toronto, attending a reception opening the Ukrainian Folk Tapestry Exhibit, found a sense of warmth among the beautiful artifacts on display.

Sixty-eight pieces grace the collection, including such varied items as carpets, rugs, furniture covers, bench covers, runners, towels, bags, sashes and much more.

Museum Board Member Bernardine Dobrowolsky was the Master of Ceremonies. Sharing her enthusiasm with the visitors, she prepared everyone for the speeches and an



Board Member Bernardine Dobrowolsky was MC.

enjoyable afternoon, which even included an opportunity to try tapestry weaving with Bozena Hrycyna, a textile artist.

Liudmyla Davydovych, the Acting Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto addressed the visitors in Ukrainian. Speaking from her heart, she conveyed a sense of delight as she marvelled at the pieces on display. She expressed her sincere appreciation to the organizers for hosting an exhibit of such magnitude, which is of historical and cultural significance to the Ukrainian people.

Larissa Stavroff, the guest speaker and a co-curator of the exhibition, was a captivating orator. She wove a fascinating history about the evolution of Ukrainian folk tapes-

— Story Photos: Jerry Dobrowolsky



Larissa Stavroff was the main speaker at the opening of the exhibit.



KalynDar members Anastasia Baczynskyj, Christina Dashko, Danya Hrycyna and Lyudmyla Pogoryelova entertained.

try through the ages. Passed on from generation to generation, the art of weaving, one of the oldest-known forms of textile production, was widely practised among Ukrainians.

Using the word *kilim*, (which means ‘carpet’/‘rug’ in Ukrainian) as a broad term to mean ‘tapestry’, Ms Stavroff contextualized it: “The term ‘*kilim*’ is of Turkic origin and denotes an ornamental tapestry woven on a vertical or horizontal loom to cover floors or adorn walls. The warp threads, which run parallel to the length of the textile, are set up under tension, and the weft threads which are parallel to the width are passed back and forth across the warp and pushed tightly down to create a flat surface with no pile. In this way, the warp strands become hidden by the weft threads which carry the visible design and colour, and all one sees is pattern and ornamentation.”

Among the highlights of Ms. Stavroff’s presentation was her discussion of symbols and their meaning:

“The three most prevalent symbolic motifs in Ukrainian folk art are the Tree of Life, the Sun, and the Goddess (which) can be found on woven textiles, woodwork, metalwork, ceramics and Easter eggs. In folk-tapestry weaving, the symbols are still used to this day but over the many years have lost their original meaning and now serve simply as ornamentation. However, at one time, the incorporation of sacred motifs symbolizing the Sun, the Tree of Life and the Goddess woven into the pattern of a *kilim* invested it with magical powers. In ancient times, these symbols had deep cosmic, religious, magical, and ritualistic significance and each one represented something sacred and carried a message or communicated a mystery.”

For example, “The image of the Tree of Life, an ancient symbol in many cultures, represented some of the following: regeneration, a source of life and fertility, a source of wisdom and knowledge and a giver of healing and nourishment. It symbolized feminine powers of life-giving and fertility and became an object of worship. Thus, the cult of the tree was linked to the pagan cult of the goddess. And this becomes particularly evident in the similarity between the highly-stylized, symbolic depictions of the tree and the goddess in Ukrainian folk art where these symbols can be read as a tree, a goddess or both.”

With depictions of the Sun, “A straight horizontal line represented the earth, a wavy line represented water, a cross represented fire or the four corners of the earth, and a circle or a square symbolized the



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heavenly fire, which was the sun. Ancient Ukrainians worshipped the sun and associated it with the life-giving force and the earth’s cycles.”

With regard to the Goddess, Ms Stavroff said that, the goddess Rozhanytsia “was the creative life force, the bearer of life, and so we see numerous fertility and birth symbols representing her.”

Ms. Stavroff said that the goddess Berehynia “was the protectress of crops and animals”, and Mokosha “was the goddess of life-giving moisture.”

Distinct regional styles were also highlighted:

“Ukrainian *kilims* can be divided for the most part into two groups according to ornamental elements – floral or geometric. More typical of Kyiv and Poltava provinces in Central and Eastern Ukraine are floral patterns of stylized roses, tulips, carnations and floral bouquets. Western Ukraine, including Halychyna, Bukovyna, Polissia and Transcarpathia, produced geometric-patterned kilims which varied in complexity from simple stripes to intricate arrangements of motifs such as triangles, diamonds, stars and rosettes.”

Emphasizing that Ukrainian folk tapestry is a great source of national pride for the Ukrainian people, Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, Director of the Taras Shevchenko Museum and a co-curator of the exhibit, was inspired to showcase the treasures which are from the early to middle 20th century, so as to share their richness with the public. The idea of such an exhibition had been on her mind for several years

and planning began in September, 2015. “We had all these beautiful tapestry pieces stored in the basement and nobody had a chance to see them,” she explained.

When they finally emerged from the dark and into the light, the response was very positive. Visitor Natalka Buchok viewed the exhibit with a look of wonderment. She said, “I have a tremendous amount of appreciation for the time the women took to make the pieces. The most astounding thing is they were made by seemingly ordinary people, who were clearly very creative. This has instilled a desire in me to learn the craft. It’s a marriage of the practical and beautiful.”

Indeed, Ms. Stavroff highlighted this in her speech. “Woven tapestries – objects of incomparable beauty – served to enhance people’s everyday lives by performing numerous utilitarian, ritual and decorative functions. *Kilims* embellished and insulated the interior of the home, figured prominently in birth, marriage and funeral rites, denoted social standing and protected the user from the elements as well as from evil spirits.”

Following the formalities, the reception continued with a performance by a quartet from KalynDar – Ukrainian Village Voices, an intergenerational choir of approximately 11 singers when at full strength.

Weaving intricately designed Ukrainian folk costumes, Anastasia Baczynskyj, Christina Dashko, Danya Hrycyna and Lyudmyla Pogoryelova entertained with hearty songs with themes ranging from lust to love and loss. After each song, a appreciative applause filled the museum.

Ms. Davydovych shared her overall impressions of the day. “In our homeland,” she said, “tapestries are of great significance and they’re connected to a story, so they carry sentimental value. The singing of traditional songs was also very beautiful. It was a marvellous afternoon and I felt at home.”

The *kilim* exhibit will continue until Tuesday, December 15, 2015.

— Ayah Victoria McKhail



A textile artist was available to give weaving lessons on a small loom.

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