

**Robert B. KLYMASZ (ed.), *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (Ottawa, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991, pp. 80, ISBN 0-660-12910-8)**

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## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

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Robert B. KLYMASZ (ed.), *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (Ottawa, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991, pp. 80, ISBN 0-660-12910-8).

This slim, nicely produced book is published in conjunction with the Canadian Museum of Civilization exhibition of the same name, mounted to salute the Ukrainian-Canadian centenary (1891-1991). Perhaps it is designed to be purchased by exhibition visitors at the museum shop after having been inspired by the experience. The scholarly apparatus is limited primarily to a brief bibliography at the end, as well as to a listing of artists whose works are found in the exhibition. The print is large, and the paper is glossy. The book is studded with visuals from the exhibition, many in beautiful colour.

In the brief curator's statement, Robert B. Klymasz introduces the exhibition and the five articles in the book. He notes that the articles involve "a variety of approaches to understanding the subject matter". Differences in methodology and perspective, indeed, are one of the most striking features of the book. Frances Swyrypa writes as a historian. Wsevolod Isajiw defines categories of "ethnic art" as a sociologist. Dmytro Stepovyk expresses the sentiments of a traditional art historian and a Ukrainian patriot on his first visit to Canada. Michael Owen Jones writes in the tradition of North American folklorists. Zenon Pohorecky contributes a simple descriptive ethnography.

This diversity in approaches suggests a use for the book as a sampler of methodologies for students. Ideally, such a collection would contain treatments of the same material from a variety of perspectives. In this particular book, however, the scope, breadth, and specific subject matter of the articles vary substantially, so the students would be comparing apples and oranges to a degree. If I were using it as a sampler, I might add additional perspectives: a survey of the diverse media; a diachronic study; a comparative analysis; and possibly others. The chapter "Ukrainian Art in Canada," in *Visible Symbols: Cultural Expression Among Canada's Ukrainians* (ed. M. Lupul, Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1984, p. 25-46) might be a good complement to this material, because it is written mostly from the perspective of the artists themselves.

The article by Isajiw is very brief and almost simplistic. He subdivides "ethnic art" into "folk art," "naive art," "professional art," and "souvenir art," and supplements his definitions with examples from Ukrainian

Canadian works. In spite of its plainness, this phenomenology underscores the amazing diversity of objects and images represented in the exhibition and in the book. The categories are convincing and useful.

It is interesting to note the great difference between this classification and others, such as that of Blake McKendry in his *Folk Art: Primitive and Naïve Art in Canada* (Toronto: Methuen, 1983, p. 18-22). McKendry defines "ethnic art" as "characterized by the cultural, religious, or linguistic traditions of a people or country," then identifies it as a subset of "naïve art," which in turn is a subset of "folk art." The striking contrast between these two conceptual models arises from differences in their respective starting points and problems of terminology, but also illustrates that the folklorist's perspective has not yet penetrated deeply into the consciousness of the general public, nor even of folk art scholars. The term that's most problematic is "ethnic." From a folklorist's point of view, the problem is that all art is "characterized by the cultural, religious, or linguistic traditions of a people or country." Perhaps McKendry really meant "traditions of non-native people" in Canada, though saying so explicitly might not have been politically correct.

Starting from the perspective of one of the specific cultural groups — turning the argument on its head — turns out to be a valuable exercise. Indeed, Klymasz' book demonstrates unquestionably that the portrayed objects and images are Ukrainian and that they are Canadian. Perhaps a new definition of "ethnic" art can be proposed. Maybe we should see ethnic art as "characterized by the traditions of two peoples or countries at the same time". Of course, when you really look at it, all objects are the result of the interaction of multiple traditions, but the point is that ethnic art is perceived to straddle two traditions. That perception may exist in the eyes of the artist and/or the audience.

Swyrypa addresses both sides of the hyphen in the "Ukrainian-Canadian" experience. I appreciated her argument that both the Ukrainian and the Canadian identity of the pioneer settlers formed in approximately the same time, and both aspects developed and increased together in Canada through the twentieth century. This concept is particularly useful in juxtaposition with the simplistic assimilationist model that Canadianness should increase and ethnic identity should decrease as time passes since immigration.

Jones contributes the second of the two most substantial articles. His depiction places the objects squarely in their Canadian context. On the one hand, much of Ukrainian Canadian art can be seen as a degeneration or distortion of the European prototype. Easter eggs (*pysanky*), for example, have generally lost their original ritual significance. They are created in many forms and variations uncharacteristic of their original context. Much

of the traditional meaning and symbolism is lost. On the other hand, *pysanka* traditions in Canada have developed many positive attributes as well. The intricate, sometimes virtuosic technical characteristics reflect Canadian aesthetic sensibilities. The objects are highly prized for evoking memories, as well as for marking cultural identity. Both of these functions are new or heightened specifically in the Canadian context.

The highlight of the book, however, remains the collection of images selected by Klymasz to enhance the articles and give an impression of the exhibition. The works speak most eloquently of the issues discussed above. I very much look forward to the exhibition's tour, and to treatments of other aspects of Canada's culture in the same vein.

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Stephen STERN and John Allen CICALA (eds.), *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1991, pp. xx+242, ISBN 0-87421-148-4).

When I requested a review copy of Stern and Cicala's *Creative Ethnicity*, I fully intended to assign this collection of original essays elsewhere. However, on the book's arrival, I found myself reading through it, marking it with comments, and noting statements I might want to quote in my own writing on ethnicity, or in lectures and seminars on the topic. That I chose to review this book myself rather than sending it to someone else is testimony to its interest and importance. While it is not without flaws, it is a very useful work.

Looking at the Preface, I was impressed by the writers' opening critical stance toward "prevailing academic models of ethnicity, both those which characterize ethnicity as abstract group processes and those which view ethnicity as emerging in small networks of interaction" (p. ix). These approaches, the authors contend, "restricted folklorists to thinking about ethnicity in terms of specific stereotypes, identity complexes, values, and bodies of tradition" (*ibid.*). It is difficult not to agree that ethnicity needs a more